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THE EVOLVING SECURITY POLICY OF JAPAN AND THE ADHERENCE TO ANTIMILITARISM CULTURE

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Abstract
This article seeks to examine the shift in Japanese security policy and potential shift in antimilitaristic strategic culture. Based on the rational proposition that despite the continuous change, Japan has never changed its strategic culture because of continuous debate in domestic politics arena which plays vital role in shaping Japan’s perceptions and security policy. The changing security practices are thus seen as a logical response to the current international security dynamics. Therefore, within this period of time remain, it would be unlikely that Shinzo Abe’s government would achieved its goal of reforming the constitution in terms of security policy.

Keywords
Strategic Culture, Security Identity, Antimilitarism, Japan, Security Policy

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of Japan’s security practices has stirred a debate among scholars whether the strategic culture of Japan is changing. The defeat of Japan in the World War II has shaped a dominant strategic culture of Japan as an “antimilitarist” country for decades. It replaced the “militarist” strategic culture in which the Japanese imperialism sought to expand their power by conquering territories in the region. It demonstrates that Japan had experienced a significant shift in their strategic culture and thus another shift will always seem plausible. Alan Bloomfield on “Time to Move On: Re-conceptualizing the Strategic Culture Debate” argues that there are ranges of strategic options or subcultures. There will be competition between the subcultures to dominate. Hence, the concept of strategic culture does not need to assume too much continuity and coherence to the preceding strategic culture.

The security policy of Japan is showing an incremental change. Japan tends to increase its military role in the International environment. Japan did several
reinterpretation of the article 9, which becomes the fundamental constitution for its antimilitarist culture. On July 2014, the Abe administration successfully passed the reinterpretation on the clause of collective self-defence. The collective self-defence was justified as a minimalist countermeasure to the rising threat from China and North Korea (Pempel, 2014).

The current condition of domestic and International politics actually creates more opportunities for Abe to push for an amendment of the article 9. On July 2016, the LDP successfully secured a supermajority in upper house elections that it opens up opportunities for the Abe administration to proceed the revision of article 9. The campaign of President-elect Trump that presumably will put US-Japan alliance in the brink could also trigger the revision of article 9. During his campaign, Trump criticized Japan for its “cheap ride” on US and would like to demand more contributions from Japan. Abe could use this as a justification to leave out the pacifist policies of Japan because they can no longer only rely on the US protection.

The changes of existing security policy and International security environment arouse questions whether the strategic culture of antimilitarism has been changed. Hence, this paper would like to examine: “Has Japan altered the antimilitarism strategic culture?” This paper argues that despite the continuity of incremental change in Japanese security policy, it remains unlikely for Japan to completely alter its antimilitarism culture by amending the article 9. The changes of existing security policy are natural responses of Japan to the shifting condition at International level. Yet, these changes do not imply to a shift of strategic culture. The strategic culture of antimilitarism remains strong, there is no single words within the clause of article 9 have been amended as it is the solid foundation of antimilitarism culture. This paper seeks to analyze this by firstly elaborating the theory of strategic culture and security identity. Secondly, it will assess the changing international security environment and Japan’s responses. Thirdly, it will analyze the adjustment on US-Japan alliance and the institutional plus fiscal constraints that would not allow for a complete shift to a militaristic cooperation. The following sections will analyze the most critical element within the security identity of Japan, the elite decision makers. Although the revisionist successfully conquered two third majority seats in the upper house, it remains unlikely to reach a consensus between the ruling party’s coalition to amend article 9.
Strategic culture and security identity are inexorably connected to identify the security policy of a state. MacMillan, Booth, & Trood (1999) define strategic culture as “… a distinctive and lasting set of beliefs, values and habits regarding the threat and use of force, which have their roots in such fundamental influences in geopolitical setting, history, and political culture.” There is also a narrow definition of strategic culture in which it is a distinct set of beliefs shared by dominant policy elites that inform specific practices related to military security (Oros, 2014). This narrow definition shows that strategic cultures is merely a perspective of political elites and does not represent the public perspective. Yet, Alan Bloomfield (2012, p. 453) argues strategic culture contains of different subcultures or contradictive elements and they are competing for dominance. Thus, the strategic culture model does not assume too much continuity or too much coherent.

Andrew L. Oros argues in the context of democratic countries such as Japan, the concept of security identity is needed as a complementary element in identifying its strategic culture. In a democratic country, public opinion matters and influences the decision of political elites. Security identity offers a wider perspective from the public. The public opinion demonstrates the dominant views within a state and the constraints embark to a new strategic culture. Security identity is a resilient identity that is politically negotiated and comprises a widely accepted set of principles on the acceptable scope of state practices in the realm of national security (Oros, 2014, p. 229). It is important to understand the security identity in order to understand the strategic culture and the level of resilience of the strategic culture.

Security identity is determined by material and non-material factors in domestic and International level. At the domestic level, the material factors include geo-strategic position, territory, and population size. Whereas, the non-material factors include the historical, political, social and cultural contexts that state is embedded in (Singh, 2013, p. 42). The elite decision makers play important roles in translating the current condition at the regional and International level to state’s security policy. At the International level, the state identity’s is shaped by its position and interactions with other actors in International system. Identity informs states who they are, who others are and how they are related in a particular context (Singh, 2013, p. 52). The interplay between the logic of anarchy and social/ideational element shaped the International system. The social
elements define the structure “based on actors” ideas about the nature and roles of Self and Other’ (Singh, 2013, p. 46). These factors influence the identity, behavior, and policy of a state. Hence, it is important to identify the conditions, both at International and domestic level.

**Existing Studies on Japan’s Strategic Culture and Security Identity**

The antimilitarism strategic culture of Japan is embedded in the Yoshida Doctrine, which is the basic course of Japan’s security policy in the post-cold war period. There have been several literatures that discussed Japan’s security policy changes and these changes might have violated the core tenets of antimilitarism in the Yoshida Doctrine. The core tenets define the security identity of Japan and demonstrate the antimilitarism culture. The three core tenets that will be further discussed are: (1) No Traditional armed forces involved in domestic policy making, (2) There will be no use of force by Japan to resolve International disputes, except in self-defence, (3) There will be no Japanese participation in foreign wars.

The military transformation and the involvement of military officers in domestic politics remarked a few of violations to the first core tenet. Japan has been developing military technologies, such as Ballistic Missile Defenses (BMD) as a response to North Korea missile’s capabilities. Japan decided to join the US-led BMD system. Along with the development and acquisitions of military equipment, it also needs an adaptation within the military organization and doctrine. Hence, the distinction between SDF and the military forces of other states is becoming less clear (Oros, 2014, p. 233). In 2007, Japan Defence Agency (JDA) transformed into Ministry of Defence (MOD) and it opened up opportunities for the uniformed members of SDF to involve in the debates and coordination of defence policies (Oros, 2014, p. 242).

Whereas for the violation of the second tenet had been done by one of the political elites. The political leader Ichiro Ozawa, shortly before becoming the president of opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), delivered a public statement which implicitly threatened China with Japan’s nuclear capabilities (Oros, 2008, p. 216). In April 2002, he suggested it might be necessary for Japan to exploit its vast stockpile of plutonium to develop nuclear weapons as a response to China’s aggression (Campbell, Einhorn, & Reiss, 2004, p. 233). Although it was not an explicit statement, it clearly indicated that there is a possibility for political elites to abandon this core tenet.
The limited deployment of SDF in US-led foreign wars in Afghanistan and Iraq slightly indicated the violation to the third tenet. Although the SDF emphasized that their activities were limited to humanitarian assistance, there was an indication of the violation. Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) activities in the Indian Ocean to refuel warships and Air Self-Defence Forces (ASDF) resupply activities from Kuwait inclined to violation of the core tenets (Oros, 2008, p. 20).

Despite these changes, the literatures also discussed that the antimilitarism culture still exists. First, the SDF and MOD’s role in defence policy might be increasing but the security policymaking process in the post-Cold War period still needs consensus between parties (Singh, 2013, p. 151). There were Japan Socialist Party (JSP) and DPJ that limits the initiative of LDP members who sought for the remilitarization of Japan. The New Komei Party as an alliance of LDP also acted as a moderating party (Oros, 2008, p. 79). In case for Ichiro Ozawa, he was asked to clarify and downplay his statement once it was widely reported (Oros, 2008, p. 216). Whilst, the SDF participation in UN Peace Keeping Operation (UNPKO) underlined their main duty in the humanitarian assistance and strongly emphasized that they did not have any combat roles for this deployment. These illustrates the antimilitarism culture that still remains dominant in Japan and the majority also remain reluctant to shift from this culture.

These literature reviews helped in understanding the security policy changes in Japan yet tend to adhere to the antimilitarism culture. They also explained the importance of political structure in Japan to shape security policy. These political structures limited the ambition to remilitarize Japan. Nevertheless, the literature reviews have yet covered the current development in Japan, such as the success of LDP in securing two third majorities in upper house and the bill that was passed in 2015 regarding the participation of Japan in collective self-defense. This new developments need to be covered as it also indicates an opportunity for remilitarization and high violation of the core tenets of Japan.

**DISCUSSIONS**

The Changing International Security Environment

The security policy in Japan has been showing incremental changes, especially in the past two decades after the Soviet Union collapsed. The threat perception is changing and the responses as well. In the latest Japan’s Defense White Paper 2016, Japan stressed the growing assertiveness of China and its military build-up in the Asia Pacific region (Gady, 2016). The conflict between Japan and China is not a new issue, but the growing tension in regards to the Chinese ambition in the region and territorial dispute between
them had driven Japan to specifically emphasize on the growing threat from China on its defence white paper.

The territorial dispute at the Senkaku/Diaoyou Island was one of the key issues on the Defence White Paper. Japan’s Defence White Paper (2016) also listed various China’s incursion to Japan’s territorial around the Senkaku Island. It highlighted the incursion of a Jingkai I-class frigate and Dongdiao-class intelligence collection vessels of the Chinese Navy entered into the contagious zone of Senkaku Island (Basu, 2016). The Defence White Paper also noted during the fiscal year 2015, the Japan Air-Self Defence Forces (JASDF) had to scramble fighter aircrafts 571 times against Chinese jets.

In response to China’s incursion to the area of disputed island, Japan planned to invest more to secure Senkaku. The $44 billion (5.1 trillion yen) Defense Ministry budget would be focusing on defending Senkaku. Japan planned to procure six new submarines with highly improved sensor technology to defend against China (Lendon, 2016). The government of Japan would also increase coastguard budget for the new fiscal year started in 2017. The budget is expected to exceed $1.8 Billion (210 billion Yen) to procure five new large patrol ships and increase the law enforcement agency’s personnel by more than 200 (Channel News Asia, 2016).

In 2016, Japan had already deployed the necessary means to defend Senkaku Island and focused on positioning units, intensifying intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) in peacetime and acquiring maritime and air superiority. Japan focused on deploying aircraft and coast observation unit in the southwestern region. In January, they deployed F-15 fighter squadrons at Naha Air Base. Subsequently in March, a coast observation unit was instituted at Yonaguni.

Besides stressing on the growing threat from China, the latest Defence White Paper also addressed the threat from North Korea. It was the first time for a Defence White Paper officially published an analysis on the recent launched missiles (Asia News Network, 2016). It indicated the use of a three-stage missile in February 2016 was derived from a Taepodong-2 long-range ballistic missile. It also addressed the second missile launched in June, Mussudan missiles. Japan considered the development of missile program in North Korea is progressing further.

With regard to the ballistic-missile threat from North Korea, Japan relied on its three pillars of military response: Ballistic Missile Defence, civil defence, and extended nuclear deterrence provided by the US. In 2003, Japan made decision to procure BMD system and they started deploying BMD units in the SDF in 2007 (Michishita, 2012). The
North Korea’s threat to Japan increased Japan’s awareness for the necessity of civil defense measures. In 2004, they enacted the Law concerning the Measures for Protection of the People in Armed Attack Situations or Civil Protection Law. It became a guideline for the national and local government for evacuation and relief operations and take necessary measures in response to armed attacks (Michishita, p. 104). In addition to strengthening missile defense and civil defence capabilities, Japan had been working together with US and relied on their nuclear weapons capabilities to deter North Korea.

Aside from the three pillars, the latest Defence white paper noted Japan’s readiness to acquire technologies to response to the threat. Japan would advance its capabilities in intercepting and defending against ballistic missiles. Japan engaged with US in a joint research to develop a modified system of SM-3 interceptors and PAC-3 surface-to-air anti-ballistic missiles. The final stage of SM-3 Block IIA will be finished by 2017 (Basu, 2016).

Yet, it remains unlikely for Japan to develop its nuclear weapons in response to China and North Korea’s threats. Japan recognized the potential instability in the region if it attempts to develop the nuclear weapons. The Japanese policymakers believed that the acquisition of nuclear weapons would cause an arms race in the region and undermine the alliance with US. Japan remained consistent in its stance to rely on the US capabilities to counter the threat. Moreover, Japan could not afford the cost of developing nuclear weapons despite the vast number of plutonium stockpiles. The great expense for the development would cause domestic instability as there would be an intense debate for the budget allocation (Hughes, 2005, p. 94).

**US-Japan Alliance**

The changing International security environment also affected the US-Japan alliance in which US started demanding for Japan to contribute more. The asymmetric alliance between Japan and US is not sufficient. The Abe administration recognized the importance of adjusting the alliance into a more equal cooperation between the two countries and thus the US would not abandon Japan from the alliance.

The Abe Administration implemented three fundamental changes for Japan’s security posture to adjust to the demand from US. First, the Abe administration successfully pushed for the reinterpretation of article 9. Abe initiated the reinterpretation of collective self-defence that would allow Japan to exercise the unrestricted right for collective self-defence (Hoff, 2016, p. 7). Abe sought to send messages for the allies and
adversaries that Japan has a willingness to be proactive in maintaining the regional and global security. The reinterpretation reassured the US that Japan is actually a reliable ally. The reinterpretation was approved by Abe’s cabinet in July 2014. Second, Japan and US announced the first update of the bilateral Guidelines for Defence Cooperation in April 2015. It was the first update after twenty years. It provides a new roadmap for the alliance. There is an operationalization of the reinterpretation of the collective self-defence in which it expands the role of Japan within the alliance. Therefore, there is a greater burden-sharing among the two countries and it is no longer highly asymmetric cooperation. Lastly, the Abe administration successfully passed the new security legislation about the mechanism for exercising collective self-defence. On September 2015, the legislature passed the bill, which has provided greater flexibility for the SDF to plan, train, and operate with US forces.

Nonetheless, the Japan-US alliance is still restricted because of the existing constitution and fiscal constraint. The new security legislation will not allow SDF for a combat role in the front lines. The direct participation of SDF is unconstitutional unless there is a threat to Japan’s existence (Chanlett-Avery & Rinehart, 2016). In terms of the fiscal constraint, Japan is tied to the ceiling of 1% of GDP for defence budget and also the rising cost of social safety net and the high gross public debt which makes it politically impossible for Japan to significantly increase the defence spending. It would be difficult for Japan to afford a more expensive alliance with US.

The Perpetual Debate of Political Parties

The dynamics between security policy making elites become an important element in shaping the direction of Japan’s security policy and strategic culture. In the Cold War period, the bureaucratic system in Japan created significant barriers for the revisionist who sought for Japan’s rearmament. The security policy making process was centralized within the civilian officials, including Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI), Ministry of Finance (MOF), and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA). The JDA and SDF officers had limited access to the security policymaking process (Singh, 2013, p. 137).

However, the political structure in Japan gradually changed and inclines to a top-down approach in which it becomes more beneficial for the revisionist to pursue their objectives for the rearmament of Japan. The reformation was implemented in 2001, the Prime Minister (PM) and the Prime Minister’s official residence (Kantei) are given more
authority in the decision making process and it eliminated the complicated bureaucratic process (Singh, 2013, p. 145). JDA was also transformed into MOD in 2007 and increasingly become more involved and integrated in the security policy making.

Despite the institutional reforms that benefit the revisionist, there are still significant impediments from the political parties. The perpetual debates within the LDP factions and between the ruling parties and oppositions make it hard for a complete shift from antimilitarism culture. The on-going debates between the parties show that there is only a small possibility of Japan to depart from the current strategic culture.

In mid-2016, LDP and Komeito secured the two third majority seats in the upper house, yet both parties seem reluctant to bring up issues about revision to secure popular public support. In order to maintain the support for their survival, the parties needed to make sure not to bring such a sensitive issue during the campaign that might downplay their popularity. Abe himself avoided bringing up issues on the revision of article 9 during his campaign in 2016 and instead he focused more on the economic issues (Reynolds & Nobuhiro, 2016). A few months before the election day, Abe and his counterparts at LDP frequently trumpeted the term “Abenomics” to gain the support from people (Duo, 2016). Therefore, the victory of LDP in mid-2016 was a result of people’s support for their campaign on economic issues.

Yet, some argue that the absence of revision rhetoric on the Abe’s campaign was simply a mask for the sake of winning the election. LDP always had hidden agenda behind their rhetoric on economic campaign. On December 2012, LDP recaptured the lower house by highlighting the importance of quick response to the earthquake and nuclear meltdown. Afterwards, they continuously pushed for a secret law bill. It also happened in the 2013 election in which they constantly pushed for a security bill to raise Japan’s military profile (Duo, 2016).

Nonetheless, the LDP recognized that there was no positive prospect of having the revision of article 9. The LDP vice chief, Masahiko Komura, expressed a negative view about revising the article 9. He told that the majority of LDP strongly believes the needs of revising article 9. But, he also realized it would not be possible to do so and they would not do what they could not do (Osaki, 2016). LDP has conquered the two third majority in the upper house, but their major ally, Komeito is still cautious on this issue (Osaki, 2016).

As mentioned by Komura, Komeito seemed not going to support for a revision of article 9. They adhere to the antimilitarism culture embedded in the article 9. In order to
survive as a political party, they need to accommodate the voice of their supporters who strongly against the revision of article 9. The supporters of Komeito are personally engaged in various peace-related activities, and their own philosophy and practice of Nichiren Buddhism is about living that considers the interest of other (Fisker-Nielsen, 2016, p. 18). The option of rearmament is not appealing to their supporters. The President of Komeito, Natsuo Yamaguchi, made an official statement on a TV programme that there was no need to revise Article 9 immediately and the bottom line was to maintain Article 9 (Fisker-Nielsen, 2016, p. 22). This statement clearly indicated Yamaguchi wanted to convince his supporters that Komeito did not have any intention to shift from the antimilitarism culture.

Komeito’s position on their adherence to article 9 also makes the initial process for a revision is difficult. Before the voting procedure, there must be a draft proposal of the revision. To make a draft proposal, the MPs from each party must agree on the final version of the draft proposal. The process to push this draft proposal to be voted in the Diet is such a long and difficult process because the Komeito party strongly opposes for a revision (Fisker-Nielsen, 2016, p. 22).

Besides the debates within the ruling party, the ruling parties also encountered barriers from the opposition parties. One should not forget the opposition parties, such as Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and Japan Communist Party (JCP). DPJ placed on the second place on the July 2016 Diet upper house election and became the main opposition of Abe’s determination for rearmament. DPJ opposed the LDP-initiated bills to send Japanese troops to the Indian Ocean and Iraq (Cantir, 2016, p. 65). They opposed the details in the bills, they did this to win over supports in the elections. Their strong opposition is also stated by The DPJ former leader, Katsuya Okada. In 2015, he announced that he firmly opposed Abe’s proposal for SDF law changed and considered it as a “dangerous” attempt by the current administration. He also highlighted that he would refuse for a further discussion regarding the constitutional revision (Harner, 2015).

The newly elected leader of DPJ, Renho Murata, also stated that the national security legislation passed in 2015 was unconstitutional. She planned proposing an alternative bill from the DPJ to govern the “gray zone” situation when Japan could respond to the direct attack (Asian Nikkei Review, 2016). She claimed she would be participating in any discussion about the amendments to prevent the ruling party speeding through the discussion. She would do these as she promised to defend the article 9.
The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) came in fourth in the election in 2016 and had been trumpeting their oppositions for the amendment of article 9. The JCP leader, Kazuo Shii, said that a vote for LDP was a vote to destroy the article 9. He said Abe was trying to create a country that fights overseas by pushing for amendments and they should not allow this (Reynolds & Nobuhiro, 2016). In line with the party leader, all of the candidates from JCP who run for the election in 2016 strongly disagreed with any changes in the article 9 (Mainichi Japan, 2016).

The popular public opinion might also influence the political party position on the amendment of article 9. The two leading news agencies, Yomiuri and Asahi conducted a poll in 2016 regarding people’s opinions on the revision of article 9. According to the two polls, the vast majority of Japanese did not want to revise the article 9. Asahi reported 68 percent of people against revising the article 9 and only 27 percent would revise it (Smith & Teraoka, 2016). Yomiuri conducted a more detailed poll in which 82 percent would not revise the article 9’s first paragraph that commits Japanese position not to use force in International disputes. Yet, people’s opinion regarding the revision of the second paragraph showed a more balance number. About 48 percent were interested in revising it, while the other 48 percent against.

CONCLUSION

Japan shows incremental changes in its security policy, yet the strategic culture remains unchanged. The security policy changes were the responses to the changing International security environment in the Post-Cold War period. Japan recognized the importance to adjust its security policy to encounter the challenges within the regions, including the growing threat from China and North Korea. Moreover, Japan also needs to readdress the Japan-US security alliance to provide a more equal partnership and thus convince the US that Japan is still a reliable ally.

Yet, these changes do not completely alter the strategic culture of antimilitarism in Japan. Despite the opportunity of the ruling parties to proceed the revision of article 9, the debates between the political parties would not allow for a complete shift from the antimilitarism culture. It becomes the greatest barriers for Abe’s ambition for a constitutional reform. In addition, Japan would not take assertive actions that would undermine US-Japan alliance and caused instability within Japan and in the region.
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