

# Japanese Militarization and the Bush Doctrine

**Richard Tanter**

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*by Richard Tanter*

### Introduction

Japan is proceeding towards full security normalization, moving closer to throwing off all the externally and self-imposed restraints which for half a century produced a disjuncture between its economic status as the world's second largest national economy and its restricted status in the security realm. In the existing world system, normalization of this kind necessarily means militarization, and that is precisely what Japan has undertaken, a process that can be titled "Heisei militarization." The Bush Doctrine has accelerated but did not cause this process.

On the contrary, the effects and reception of the Bush Doctrine in Japan have to be seen in the light of a long-drawn-out and now quickening series of domestic legal, political, legislative and force-structure changes in Japanese security policy. In essence, the Bush Doctrine has been welcomed for the cover and opportunities it affords to accelerate already existing planning preferences.

### Heisei militarization

The reign name of the present emperor, Heisei, beginning in 1989, provides a useful periodization for these endogenous changes in the security policy of a democratic Japan under the heading of "Heisei militarization" and a useful contrast to the premises of the earlier "Showa militarism."

Heisei militarization includes a continual and growing government-sponsored hollowing-out of the meaning of Article IX of the constitution, and abandonment of the concept of "defensive defense." It also connotes expanded military budgets, comprehensive upgrading and expansion of military capacities, legitimation and legalization of use of military force abroad, willingness to rely on military solutions to international problems, and expansion of the domestic coercive powers of the government. The process evokes growing public discussion of the possibility of the Japanese military acquiring strategic offensive weapons and weapons of mass destruction -- possibly within the US alliance.

A pattern of Heisei militarization can be seen in a tide of legislation (21 major pieces of legislation since 1992, including 9 in 2004). Japanese defense planners have effectively abandoned the concept of "defensive defense" as the foundation of security planning, and adopted instead the view that overseas combat operations capacities are normal and essential.

### Heisei militarization and the Bush doctrine

Japan has taken up the Bush Doctrine in a number of ways, including:

- participation in multilateral coalitions to increase international police and intelligence cooperation, border and movement controls, and domestic security;
- a claim of a right of regional pre-emptive attack;
- deployment of air and sea forces in support of the Afghanistan war;
- participation in the Proliferation Security

Initiative;

- deployment of GSDF troops to Iraq, and ASDF and MSDF forces to the Persian Gulf; and
- commitment to deploy US-built lower- and upper-tier missile defenses.

### **Missile defense: structural antagonism to China**

Of these, both the Iraq and missile defense decisions impose long-term costs and risks, as well as increased strategic uncertainty. The possible domestic and foreign consequences of the Iraq deployment are already crystal clear. However, the missile defense decision poses even more serious long-term strategic consequences.

Commonly mentioned problems include the almost open-ended budget demands implicit in the decisions, the legality of exporting missile defense technology beyond the US; and the question of control over launching.

However the most important consequences derive from the political implications of the technologies involved. The upper-tier sea-based missile defense system by its nature will be dependent on the provision of real-time data concerning target missile launch, trajectory and identification. This data will be partly provided by Japan's Marine Self Defense Force's Aegis systems, but primarily by the still-evolving suite of ground- and satellite-based radar and infra-red surveillance systems planned for the US National Missile Defense System.

This interlocking leaves Japan both dependent on US technological support in time of crisis and it implicates it in how US missile defense systems are used against Japan's regional neighbors. This dependence reinforces the perception by China that Japanese and American missile defenses are inseparable and virtually ensures that Japanese missile defense will cause long-term structural antagonism

between Japan and China, a relationship that is already charged with tension.

These missile defense plans also imply a modification in the mode of alliance binding within the hierarchical US-Japan alliance. Instead of the material dimension of control exercised by the United States via a large number of US military bases spread throughout the archipelago, supplemented by the promise of extended nuclear deterrence, the architecture of missile defense may become the main ties that bind. At the same time, Japan's continued non-nuclear status is publicly and regularly questioned, on both sides of the Pacific.

### **The nuclear options and the normal state**

Since 1967 Japanese nuclear policy has been limited by the three "non-nuclear principles -- though not as a matter of binding law. The US, despite five decades of pressure on Japan to re-militarize, has consistently opposed Japanese development of a nuclear weapons capacity.

Heisei militarization is compatible with both a nuclear and a non-nuclear Japan. However, the nuclear option is now more open and more attractive than ever before. Moreover, there is a new possibility: that a nuclear-armed Japan could emerge within the US alliance.

The shifts in the balance of strategic incentives and disincentives for medium-sized states to acquire nuclear weapons in an era of proliferation are well understood and apply equally to Japan as to India, Iran or Israel. Less well known is the diminishing influence of once powerful domestic Japanese institutional and cultural constraints on Japanese militarization in general and nuclear weapons acquisition in particular. From the 1950s to the late eighties, powerful peace movements backed by cross-generational public opinion and articulated by substantial opinion in the Diet, constrained Japan's nuclear option. These factors are now

weak. The climate of mainstream public discussion -- what is sayable in "respectable" political circles -- has widened dramatically in the past decade. Whereas public calls for nuclear armament were once deeply shocking to the great majority of Japanese citizens, they are now almost commonplace. A slew of public comments and alleged "slips of the tongue" by senior Japanese politicians have opened the way. None of these statements expressed government policy. But their utterance in Japan's symbolically charged political force field has rendered legitimate open discussion of nuclear weapons in the mainstream of Japanese politics.

Concurrently, four decades of firm non-proliferation policy in the US has been eroded in recent years by remarks by senior US policymakers and influential journalists which have been widely reported in Japan.

In March 2003, Vice-President Dick Cheney raised the possibility of a nuclear-armed Japan as one consequence of a nuclear-armed North Korea. Secondly, in a visit to Tokyo the immediate past Secretary of Defense, William Cohen, asked Japanese politicians if they would consider taking that path if North Korea did in fact get nuclear weapons. Senator John McCain, went one step further, and directly warned China that if it did not prevent North Korean nuclear armament, then it was inevitable that Japan would acquire its own nuclear weapons.

Prominent journalists and academics took the next step. Darling of the Bush establishment, Charles Krauthammer, argued in January 2003 that the US should warn a "recalcitrant" China that, unless it blocked a nuclear North Korea, the US would not only allow Japan to go nuclear but give it the missiles to do so. "If our nightmare is a nuclear North Korea, China's is a nuclear Japan. It's time to share nightmares." Charles Pena argued for replacing the US nuclear umbrella over Japan with "two nuclear-

armed democratic nations (both with vibrant economies)": Japan and South Korea.

Again, while none of these statements represented US government policy or even a significant trend in US policy circles, many Japanese leaders perceived them to reverse the near-absolute US opposition to Japanese nuclear armament over the previous half century. These American loose lips have shaken many Japanese and thereby transformed the climate of discussion on both sides. This perception was reinforced in Japan by the application of an American double standard to other regional proliferators, some of whom (Israel) were regarded favorably, some of whom were frowned upon but ultimately accepted (Pakistan and India), and some of whom remained highly constrained by American pressure (Taiwan, South Korea). When this perception is joined with the American failure to halt North Korean proliferation, many Japanese leaders feel obliged to entertain the possibility that American-extended nuclear deterrence is a dead letter, along with the prospect that Japan may have to "go-it-alone" on global nuclear security issues.

At the same time, Japan's technical capacity to develop and deploy effective nuclear weapons has grown rapidly in the 1990s. By 2004 Japan's combination of fission and breeder reactors and reprocessing facilities provided undoubted massive and reliable capacity for advanced thermonuclear weapons. With the addition of the powerful H-II and H-IIA rockets, in-flight re-fuelling for fighter-bombers, and military-grade surveillance satellites, Japan now has the undoubted capacity to satisfy all three core requirements for a usable nuclear weapon: a weaponized nuclear device, a sufficiently accurate targeting system, and at least one adequate delivery system. What it lacks -- and this may be an important restraint in the short-term -- are delivery platforms such as submarines to support a secure retaliatory

force that would dissuade a nuclear adversary from launching a pre-emptive strike against these hypothetical strategic weapons that would be land-based and vulnerable.

The combination of shifts in the balance of strategic incentives and disincentives, the diminishing of once-powerful domestic restraints, increasingly unclear US non-proliferation policy, and heightened technical capacity renders the move from increasingly common and reputable public policy discussion of Japanese nuclear weapons to policy commitment more feasible and more likely than ever before. The emergence of the possibility that the US may not oppose a nuclear-armed Japanese ally -- like its British, Pakistani and Israeli allies -- heightens that likelihood still more.

**With eyes wide shut: Japan as a normal state in a militarized world**

The manifold political, legal and military-technical processes of Heisei militarization also promote an autonomous foreign and security policy beyond the existing US alliance. Japan is likely to become more militarized to meet its own perceived security needs, regardless of what Washington demands or wants from its erstwhile ally. Like France and Britain, Japan is likely to intervene militarily overseas to protect citizens and crucial economic interests deemed threatened by existing conflicts. The Malacca Straits, Aceh and the Philippines come to mind as possibilities under certain circumstances.

If, the likelihood of Japan moving from latent to actual nuclear armament is now greater than a decade ago, such an undesirable outcome of Heisei militarization would not be a reversion to the old stereotype of Japan as addicted to militarism, but rather the common and dangerous behavior of a normal medium-sized state in a militarized world.

Not surprisingly, given the degree of

incoherence and even irrationality of US policy under the Bush administration, the acceleration of the process of Heisei militarization by the Bush Doctrine has diminished rather than increased Japanese security. Japan has become technologically implicated in any American conflict with China through missile defense -- the Taiwan Straits and Korea leap to mind.

And the enthusiastic participation of the Koizumi cabinet in the ongoing war of occupation in Iraq will very likely lead not only to the first Japanese deaths in a foreign war since 1945, but also to the first killing of foreigners by Japanese troops in five decades. Two Foreign Ministry officials on a scoping tour of Iraq prior to the SDF deployment were killed by insurgents. To date, the GSDF deployment at Samawa has been involved in only very restricted activities off base, and has neither taken part in serious combat operations nor suffered casualties. But with no end insight to the repeated and apparently indefinite extension of the Japanese deployment, and as the situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate, the symbolic threshold of a GSDF soldier killing an Iraqi insurgent becomes almost inevitable. And with that will come not only a return of the repressed Japanese traumatic past for its citizens, but equally importantly, a re-assessment of Japan's strategic intentions and capacities by all countries, especially its neighbors.

Table 1  
Japanese security-related legislation  
1992-2004\*

1992	International Peace Cooperation Law (Peace Keeping Operations Law)
1992	Law to Amend Part of the Law Concerning the Dispatch of Japan Disaster Relief Teams
1999	Rear-Area Support Act
1999	Agreement to Amend the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing (ACSA) Agreement Between Japan and the United States
1999	Law to Amend the Self-Defense Law
1999	Law Concerning Measures to Ensure the Peace and Security of Japan in Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan
1999	Communications Interception Law
2000	Ship Inspection Operations Law
2001	Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law
2001	Law to Amend the Maritime Safety Agency Act
2003	Law Concerning Measures to Ensure National Independence and Security in as Situation of Armed Attack (Armed Attack Response Law)

2003	Law to Amend the Self-Defense Forces Law
2003	Law to Amend the Security Council Establishment Law
2003	Iraq Reconstruction Special Measures Law
2004	Revision to the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law
2004	Law to refuse port calls by North Korean ships*
2004	Law to protect citizens
2004	Law on the use of designated public transport and communications facilities.
2004	Law to facilitate smoother operations of US military forces
2004	Law for revision of the Self-Defense Force Law (revision of ACSA)
2004	Law to permit the interdiction of military equipment on foreign ships on the high seas
2004	Law to penalize violations of international humanitarian law.
2004	Law on the treatment of prisoners of war

\* Note: A bill to authorize refusal of entry to North Korean ships was submitted to the Diet on April 6.

*This essay was adapted for Japan Focus from Richard Tanter, "With Eyes Wide Shut: Japan, Heisei Militarization, and the Bush Doctrine", in [Confronting the Bush Doctrine: Critical Views from the Asia-Pacific](#) edited by Peter Van Ness and Mel Gurtov, (RoutledgeCurzon, 2005). Tanter is Senior Research Associate at Nautilus Institute ([www.nautilus.org](http://www.nautilus.org)). Posted February 15, 2005.*