

In the aftermath of the US election

Discussion intensifies in Japan over remilitarisation

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Japanese prime minister Yoshiro Mori utilised his New Years' Day address to foreshadow a greater emphasis on developing Japan's independent military capabilities. Describing East Asia as a region where security did not yet exist, Mori declared that Japan, as well as engaging in dialogue with other East Asian nations, had to make preparations for the "worst".

Mori's statements reflect a broader foreign policy discussion in Japan in the lead-up to the installation of George W. Bush as the next United States president. Within the Japanese political establishment a consensus is emerging that a Bush Republican administration will provoke conflict in East Asia, particularly with China.

The conservative Japanese daily *Yomuri Shimbun* editorialised on December 15, just hours after the US Supreme Court delivered the US election to Bush, that "US diplomacy may turn hawkish".

"On the diplomatic and security front, the Republican Party has defined China as a 'strategic competitor'... In addition, Republicans have criticised Clinton for his approach to North Korea's suspected development of nuclear weapons and its missile program. Give all this, there are reasons to presume that the new president may change his nation's foreign policy in a manner that could affect Japan's security."

Hisahiko Okazaki, the head of a leading Japanese foreign policy think-tank, the Okazaki Institute, wrote in *Sankei Shimbun* on December 21 that, in the view of leading Bush advisors, "China is a communist country and should be treated as such".

Condoleezza Rice, who will be Bush's National Security Advisor, is known for her unambiguous anti-China stance. Last February Rice wrote in *Foreign Affairs* magazine: "Even if there is an argument for economic interaction with Beijing, China is still a potential threat to stability in the Asia-Pacific region. Its military power is currently no match for that of the United States. But that condition is not necessarily permanent. What we do know is that China is a great power with unresolved vital interests, particularly concerning Taiwan and the South China Sea. China resents the role of the United States

in the Asia-Pacific region. This means that China is not a 'status quo' power but one that would like to alter Asia's balance of power in its own favour".

The Bush presidency is also likely to be heavily swayed by the so-called Blue Team—an informal grouping of extreme right-wing Republican congressmen, ex-military officers, journalists and academics who consider war with China likely and regularly accused the Clinton administration of "appeasement". The Blue Team claims responsibility for the Cox investigation into alleged Chinese spying in the US and the formulation of the Taiwan Security Enhancement Act, which sought to provocatively bolster US military assistance to Taiwan.

Discussion in Japan has focused on a US Institute for National Strategic Studies report co-authored by one of Bush's main Asia policy advisors, former Reagan Assistant Secretary of Defence Richard Armitage, and the former Democrat Assistant Secretary of Defence Joseph Nye. Published in October, the report has been taken in Japanese ruling circles as the most likely direction US policy will take under the new administration due to Armitage's standing with Bush.

Entitled "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," the Armitage-Nye report stated that the possibility of a war in Asia was "far from remote", citing the Korean peninsula, conflict over Taiwan, a disintegration of Indonesia and a clash between India and Pakistan as potential flashpoints. An essential, if unstated, theme of the report is that the US and Japan have mutual interests in blocking China's emergence as a rival to their regional hegemony in Asia.

One of the report's conclusions is that Japan has to remilitarise so that it can play a more prominent role in Asia on behalf of the US. It calls for greater US-Japanese military cooperation and, most controversially in Japan, the removal of the constitutional obstacles to the use of the Japanese armed forces overseas.

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, imposed by the US-led occupation authority in 1947, states that 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". Since the end of World War II, Japan has not

committed its armed forces in combat and its military does not have offensive capabilities such as aircraft carriers or long-range bombers.

Half a century later, the Armitage-Nye report declares: “Japan's prohibition against collective defence is a constraint on alliance cooperation”.

The *Mainichi Shimbun* editorialised on December 17 that the demands of the Armitage-Nye report “go to the heart of the Constitutional amendment debate, and Japan can be expected to be asked to bear a bigger military burden. A major change in America's relations with China and Russia is unlikely, but Japan will be put to the test to follow through as America's biggest East Asian ally in dealings with China, Taiwan and the Korean peninsula.”

The perception that the US will demand Japan play a far greater military role is already influencing government defence policy. The latest defence plan unveiled by the Mori administration on December 15 outlays 25.16 trillion yen—or some \$US224 billion—on the military over the next five years. Though still tiny compared to the US, Japan's military spending is now among the largest in the world and far in excess of China's.

The budget allocates \$US35 billion to new purchases and upgraded equipment. Among the items on the military shopping list are two helicopter-carriers, two new destroyers, upgraded jet fighters and air-refueling planes to enable the warplanes to operate at greater range.

Kaoru Murakami, a leading defence analyst, told *Agence France Presse*: “The current defence budget reflects the view of the Defence Agency that it has to realistically face up to calls to revise the constitution. This may mean the use of force and weapons overseas, if that is what is required by the international community”. Another analyst, Haruo Fujii, declared that the budget marked a “turning point” in Japanese defence policy. “The shape of the nation's defences is starting to change”.

The most significant feature of the current debate in Japan, however, is how the probable stance of the next US administration is being exploited to advance the long held desire of substantial layers of the Japanese political establishment to overturn the post-war pacifist constitution.

Within the main political party of post-war Japanese capitalism, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and split-offs from it such as Ichiro Ozawa's Liberal Party, the curtailment of Japan's military has always been viewed as an obstacle to the assertion of Japan's strategic and economic interests.

Such sentiment has grown in the 1990s, during which the Japanese ruling class has repeatedly found itself at odds with the United States over trade and regional issues. In 1997-98, the Japanese government could do little as the International Monetary Fund and the Clinton administration imposed economic restructuring throughout Asia that severely affected Japanese corporate and financial interests. More generally,

Japanese corporations are competing for access to the markets and resources opening up in China and Central Asia—a struggle in which the ability to project military power inevitably comes into play.

One of the most vocal advocates of Japanese rearmament, Tokyo governor Shintaro Ishihara, told the *Japan Weekly Post* last month: “Japan could be a country that other countries are intimidated by if it wanted, however, Japan did not select that direction. Japan has been looked down on. Japan has been described as a ‘country of soft soil’, a Chinese expression which means that it can be moved by the hands of everyone. Any country can scoop up Japan.”

In perhaps the clearest sign that the political climate is shifting toward remilitarisation, Yukio Hatoyama, the leader of the largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which opposes constitutional change, publicly declared his support for revising Article 9 on December 15. He only withdrew his remarks after elements of his own party threatened to move against his leadership. The votes of DPJ legislators would provide the LDP government with the necessary two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament to alter the constitution.

Until now mainstream politicians in Japan have been cautious about advocating constitutional change out of fear both of the possible adverse reaction in the US and Asia, and also from the working class which has a long tradition of opposition to militarism. Calls for the repeal of Article 9 have been associated with the extreme right-wing of Japanese politics and its nostalgia for the pre-war imperial state.

Now, paralleling the falsehoods used to justify German involvement in the US-NATO war on Yugoslavia, politicians and the media in Japan are presenting constitutional change and the build-up of the military as Japan's responsibility to assist the US preserve stability and human rights in Asia.



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