

# Evolving Japanese civil-military relations during the Prime Ministerships of Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe

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### Abstract

This study examines Japanese civil-military relations during the prime ministerships of Shinzo Abe and Junichiro Koizumi to discern the impact of administrative and legislative reforms. The goal is to see how legislative and administrative changes of the respective regimes affected military autonomy and decision-making procedures in Japan as well as interactions between leadership initiatives, constitutional restraints, and ensuing changes in civil-military relations. Data was drawn from the historical foundations of Japan's pacifist constitution and limitations placed on Self-Defence Forces (SDF) by Article 9. The findings contribute to the discussion of military governance in postwar Japan, emphasizing the critical role of administrative procedures and reforms in determining the nature of national defence policy.

**Keywords:** civil-military relations, legislative reforms, administrative changes, *Kantei*, defense governance.

## 1. Introduction

The post-World War II events and the subsequent reinterpretation of security paradigms have had a significant impact on the evolution of civil-military relations in Japan. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Allies oversaw a period of transformation that resulted in the creation of a pacifist constitution in 1947. Japan was not allowed to keep traditional military forces or use force to settle foreign problems by this constitution, especially Article 9, which rejected war as a sovereign right. Japan's unique approach to defence and civil-military interactions was made possible by this constitutional structure (Schwenke, 2020). Japan, without a permanent armed force, formed the Self-defence Forces (SDF) in 1954. The SDF, which is tasked with working under the boundaries of Article 9, was created mainly for defensive purposes, protecting Japan's internal security and sovereignty without taking any measures that would be considered offensive or in conflict with pacifist beliefs. By establishing the SDF, Japan was able to maintain its pacifist principles while addressing security problems in a nuanced manner. Talks about the extent and constraints of the SDF within the constitutional framework continued throughout time, especially in light of changing security environments, regional conflicts, and global developments. These discussions led to the re-evaluation of the SDF's function while abiding Article 9's restrictions, particularly in international security missions (Schwenke, 2020).

Among Japan's prime ministers, the terms of Shinzo Abe and Junichiro Koizumi stood out as having a big influence on relations between the military and the civilian population. Both leaders implemented significant administrative and legislative changes that altered Japan's defence strategies and clarified the SDF's functions within the framework of the pacifist constitution. During his tenure as prime minister from 2001 to 2006, Junichiro Koizumi enacted legislative revisions that gave the SDF greater authority in foreign peacekeeping missions. His administration enacted legislation permitting the deployment of the SDF for missions overseas, extending their involvement beyond conventional national defence and deviating from earlier understandings of their responsibilities (Pence, 2006).

When it came to reinterpreting Japan's constitutional restrictions on military operations, especially concerning the SDF's capacity for collective self-defence, Shinzo Abe skilfully negotiated legislative amendments throughout his tenure from 2006 to 2007 and subsequently from 2012 to 2020. To provide the SDF with a more assertive role in collective defence

operations with partners, Abe sought to reinterpret Article 9 through legislation. Strengthening Japan's security partnerships, these reforms navigated constitutional constraints by reshaping decision-making procedures and expanding the legal framework (Liff, 2018). Both Koizumi and Abe reinterpreted the SDF's missions, increasing their capabilities and having a big impact on civil-military relations by using legislative and administrative mechanisms. Under their leadership, Japan's defence policies underwent revolutionary shifts that brought to light the complex interactions between legislative changes, constitutional limitations, and the effects these had on civil-military relations. Under Koizumi and Abe's leadership, the SDF's functions and engagements were significantly shaped by legislative changes, which also reflected the changing nature of Japan's civil-military interactions. The paper will examine how these reforms demonstrated a considerable improvement in Japan's institutional structure and defence strategies, highlighting the importance of interactions between the military and the civilian population.

## **2. Historical overview of Japan's Security Policy**

Japan's civil-military relations have been influenced by the aftermath of World War II and the evolving dynamics of U.S.-Japan security relations. The formation of US-Japan Security relations started from the signing of US-Japan security treaty in 1951 same day as the signing of San Francisco Peace Treaty. The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty of 1951, also known as the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan, was a pivotal agreement that solidified the security alliance between the two countries. It was signed in San Francisco on September 8, 1951, and came into effect on April 28, 1952, concurrently with the peace treaty that formally ended World War II with Japan (Nakajima, 2016).

The previous Security Treaty between Japan and the United States is widely recognized as having been unfair to Japan. One of its key aspects, known as the "Far East article," obligated Japan to provide military bases to the United States. However, the treaty only stated that U.S. forces in Japan "may be utilized" for Japan's defence, without making it a definite obligation. Additionally, the treaty allowed for the mobilization of U.S. forces in Japan upon Japan's request during internal disturbances, which was viewed unfavourably. Unlike typical treaties with defined validity periods, this treaty lacked such a provision. Furthermore, it did not require the United States to consult Japan on significant military movements or equipment changes at U.S. bases in Japan. In essence, the treaty's terms reflected unequal status between the signing parties (Nakajima, 2016).

Critics expressed dissatisfaction with the National Police Reserve's structure, which was established in August 1950. This dissatisfaction stemmed from the decision to replace former career military officers with former police officials in senior positions. The organization and training methods of the National Police Reserve were modelled after the U.S. Forces, with U.S. instructors providing guidance. Critics argued that this arrangement led to perceptions of the National Police Reserve as a mercenary force working for the U.S. Forces. PM Yoshida Shigeru, the first PM of Post war Japan, focused more on revitalising the economy and for security concerns relied on the security provided by US under the US-JAPAN Security umbrella. (Nakajima, 2016).

On the contrary, Ichiro Hatoyama, who re-entered politics in 1952, held a different view on security matters compared to Yoshida. He considered external powers as a significant threat. Hatoyama opposed the gradual rearmament strategy of the Yoshida government, which aimed to rearm without amending the Constitution, labelling it as deceptive. He advocated for the creation of a self-defence force and the implementation of conscription after amending the Constitution. Furthermore, he criticized the National Police Reserve for being seen as a mercenary force for the U.S. Forces and deemed it ineffective. In this context, Hatoyama expressed the following. Following the signing of the peace treaty, "The post-WWII strategic thought is premised on Japan participating actively in the defence mechanism created by democratic nations and playing a role in joint defence." "This does not mean Japan is entrusting national defence to other countries; it means Japan will build up defence capabilities and organize a joint formation with the troops of other countries. Accordingly, Japan needs to rearm itself after gaining independence." (Nakajima, 2016).

The government of Nobusuke Kishi sought to revise the security treaty, proposing that while Japan would allow the U.S. to retain military bases for the security of the Far East, Japan's newly established Self-Defence Forces (formed in 1954) would handle national security until U.S. or UN assistance was necessary. Although this adjustment to the U.S.-Japan alliance might seem reasonable today, it was highly controversial at the time due to Japan's pacifist sentiments. Massive demonstrations erupted on the streets of Tokyo before the treaty was approved by the Japanese Diet (National Legislature) in 1960. These protests led to the cancellation of a planned visit by U.S. President Eisenhower and ultimately compelled Kishi to resign as Prime Minister. His successor, Hayato Ikeda, swiftly shifted focus by pledging to double Japan's national income within ten years. He achieved this goal in just five years, which temporarily quelled the controversy surrounding Japan's alliance with the U.S. (Green, 2007).

In 1967, the Japanese government, led by the Sato Cabinet, established the Three Principles of Arms Exports, which prohibited arms exports to: (1) communist countries; (2) nations under UN sanctions; and (3) countries engaged in or likely to be involved in conflicts. In 1976, the Miki Cabinet further tightened this restriction, deciding that Japan should refrain from exporting arms even to countries not covered by the initial Three Principles. As a result, Japan has effectively been barred from exporting arms ever since (Tatsumi, 2008).

Through policy and legislative decisions in the 1950s and 1960s, Japan firmly established the principle of not acquiring nuclear weapons. While the possession of nuclear weapons is deemed constitutional in Japan, then Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi in 1958 declared that Japan had opted for a policy against developing nuclear weapons, even though nuclear arms with defensive characteristics would be constitutionally acceptable. Following the recommendations of the Higuchi Commission Report, the Japanese government updated the National Defence Program Outline (NDPO) in 1995. This revised NDPO recognized the unpredictable and dynamic nature of the post-Cold War international security landscape and suggested that Japan should bolster its security by reinforcing its alliance with the United States and contributing to global stability (Tatsumi, 2008).

### **3. From Japan Defence Agency to Ministry of Defence**

On January 9, 2007, the Japan Defence Agency (JDA) was elevated to the Ministry of Defence (MoD). Established in 1954 as an agency under the Cabinet Office, the Japan Defence Agency's (JDA) role was limited to managing the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to maintain a strictly defence-oriented stance, coordinating with local governments hosting US and SDF bases, and addressing issues stemming from crimes committed by US soldiers stationed in Japan. Due to these tight restrictions on its military activities, the JDA has primarily operated as a “management agency” (*kanri kancho*) rather than a “policy agency” (*seisaku kancho*) (Jimbo & Tatsumi, 2007).

In many ways, the postwar relationship between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and the Japan Defence Agency (JDA) mirrored the nature of the US-Japan alliance during the Cold War, when Japan contributed minimally in military terms. Discussions between Tokyo and Washington focused primarily on the political and legal dimensions of the alliance, such as the US obligation to hold prior consultations regarding actions taken by US forces in Japan, or the rights of US forces personnel. Consequently, the Department of State (DoS) and MOFA, as the signatories of these agreements, became the primary agencies managing the US-Japan

alliance (Jimbo & Tatsumi, 2007). Changes emerged with the end of the Cold War. As pressure increased on Japan to contribute more substantially to international security efforts, expectations for the JDA's role in Japanese security policy grew.

The participation of the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) in international activities, including UN peacekeeping operations (PKO), required the JDA to take on a more significant role. Additionally, shifts in the international security environment and evolving expectations of Japan led to a greater focus on the military aspect of the US-Japan alliance. Consequently, the US Department of Defence (DoD) became a leading agency in alliance consultations on the US side (Jimbo & Tatsumi, 2007). Following 9/11, the Koizumi Cabinet seized the opportunity to engage more actively in international security affairs. The measures taken to adapt the country's diplomatic framework were deliberate. Additionally, the North Korean threat played a significant role in driving necessary security policy reforms (Tang, 2007).

In 1992, the Diet passed the PKO law, establishing the legal framework for Japanese participation in peacekeeping operations. While on the surface, this enactment was viewed as a classic case of *Gaiatsu* (external pressure), it was actually the outcome of two competing visions within Japan (Tang, 2007). One group, led by Ozawa, then the Liberal Democratic Party's General Secretary, argued that Japan should take part in UN peacekeeping operations under the UN's auspices. The second group consisted of a coalition focused on constitutional pursuits, aiming to uphold the country's pacifist tradition.

The resulting law was a compromise between the two positions and included a freeze on core PKO missions, effectively limiting Japan's contributions to logistical support and humanitarian relief operations. The enactment of the PKO Law illustrated that constitutional laws could be circumvented. In 2001, under Prime Minister Koizumi's administration, revisions to the PKO law lifted the ban on core peacekeeping operations, enabling the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to engage in soft enforcement activities such as monitoring ceasefires, disarming local forces, and patrolling demilitarized zones (Tang, 2007). The revised National Defence Program Guideline (NDPG), announced on December 10, 2004 by Koizumi Cabinet, was significantly shaped by Japan's Vision for Future Security and Defence Capability introduced in 2004. Notably, the NDPG placed a high level of importance on SDF participation in international operations.

Unlike the 1995 NDPO, which considered SDF engagement in international activities to be of secondary importance, the 2004 NDPO regarded it as equally significant to homeland

defence and maintaining a strong US-Japan alliance. The Mid-Term Defence Program, revised alongside the 2004 NDPG, included a more detailed plan for JSDF reorganization. Additionally, the Japanese government's decision in December 2003 to implement a ballistic missile defence system further demonstrated its commitment to enhancing its defence capabilities (Tatsumi & Oros, 2007).

Despite Japan's generally anti-military and pacifist sentiment, public confidence in the SDF has been steadily increasing. Recent opinion polls show that the SDF enjoys very high levels of trust among the public, surpassing that of the central government, local government, the parliament, and political parties. This growing confidence in the SDF contributed to the successful passage of the law upgrading the Japan Defence Agency to the Ministry of Defence in the Diet on December 15, 2006. The law received support not only from the ruling parties but also from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the largest opposition party. Consequently, on January 8, 2007, the JDA was officially elevated to the Ministry of Defence (MOD), attaining full ministerial status within the Japanese government (Tatsumi & Oros, 2007).

#### **4. Japan's Civil-Military Relations before PM Koizumi's leadership**

Japan enacted a pacifist clause under Article 9 of its constitution in the wake of World War II, overseen by General MacArthur. "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 a means of settling international disputes," states Article 9 of the constitution. Land, sea, and air forces will never be maintained, nor will any other combat potential, to achieve the goal stated in the previous paragraph. The state's entitlement to aggression will not be acknowledged (Prime Minister's office of Japan, n.d.). The question to reinterpret Article 9 came with the first Diet debates in 1995-54 over the creation of Japan's postwar military. However, the war was still fresh among the Japanese minds.

The Japanese Diet had to consider how best to provide for the country's defence as the Korean War ushered in a new era of major power competition. Japanese politicians also had to confront the reality so amply demonstrated at the end of WW II, that they had to do so in the era of nuclear weapons (Smith, 2019). Japanese politicians were faced with the challenge of addressing the issue of external defence immediately following World War II. The topic of how to take Japan's needs for external defence into account came up for debate.

With the establishment of the SDF and other ideas that followed, the Diet played a significant influence in defining the boundaries of Japan's military might and guided policy decisions for many years to come. Japanese policymakers gradually created a rhetorical framework that would justify the use of force. The question of "war potential or *senryoku*" dominated the most significant post-war discussions. The key to figuring out how to rearm was defining what war potential meant. Political leaders in Japan after the war argued against total disarmament and was in favour of the right to collective self-defence. Politicians then centred their discussions on the Diet on how to apply and interpret that right (Smith, 2019).

The Self-defence Force was founded by the Self-defence Forces Law and the Defence Agency Establishment Law in 1954, and its predecessors were the National Police Reserve and National Safety Agency. Alongside these two regulations, the Diet also approved the Ban on Overseas Dispatch, which forbade the SDF from being dispatched on operational missions abroad. This law was in force until the International Peace Cooperation Law of 1992, which made it possible for the SDF to deploy overseas. The SDF was established with a focus on the idea of civilian command of the armed forces. The bureaucracy overseeing the armed forces, the Japan Defence Agency (JDA), was elevated to a level below "ministry" status and put under the prime minister's office under the new defence legislation (Dunn, 2003). At first, bureaucrats with Home Ministry or police experience filled the highest positions in the Defence Agency. Later, bureaucrats from other ministries, particularly Finance (MOF), International Trade and Industry (MITI), and Foreign Affairs (MOFA), were brought in to fill these roles. Four of the eleven top positions are held by representatives from other ministries, and four of the twenty-five division chiefs were, once more, appointed by other ministries. The Accounting Bureau was typically led by an MOFA official, the Equipment Bureau by an MITI official, and the Counsellor for Foreign Relations by an MOFA official (Dunn, 2003). In addition to preventing pure-defence bureaucrats from assuming positions of power or becoming very powerful, these procedures also filter expert military advice through several civilian layers that may or may not be knowledgeable about defence-related matters.

Before 2001, the Japanese public was hesitant to accept the idea that the military might contribute positively to maintaining peace and security. Over the years this notion has been changed which is discussed below. Another obstacle to Japan-Military civil-military interactions was a bureaucratic influence on Japanese Diet decisions over the military (Hikotani, 2005). Legislative and financial decisions on the composition, organisation, and

strength of the SDF are made by the Japanese Diet on behalf of the people. The structure, extent, and placement of the authority are specified in the Constitution as well as in 1954 laws establishing the Defence Agency and the Law on Self-defence Force. When directing the mobilisation of all SDF components in response to external aggression, the prime minister must first get Diet 's approval (Hikotani, 2005). The single non-transferable vote system, encouraged multiple candidates from the same district to compete, minimised broad-based topics like the military and encouraged the distributive issue. Therefore, defence-related issues became relatively costly in terms of time and effort. Power is transferred to the bureaucracy more frequently in parliamentary systems than in presidential ones. Because Japan has had one-party rule for a long time, delegation there has become even more broad. Regarding military matters, this delegation was additionally impacted by LDP internal party regulations, which mandated that all bills and policy proposals get party approval before being brought before the Diet.

Due to the perception that issues about the SDF could be politically volatile, the LDP implemented several EX-Ante restrictions that imposed defence policy boundaries and, as a result, restricted the SDF's freedom of action. These include political restrictions on the defence budget, the denial of the right to collective self-defence, the *Senshu Boei policy*<sup>1</sup>, the prohibition on deploying SDF units into battle overseas, and the three non-nuclear principles (Hikotani, 2005). The degree of power delegation from politicians to bureaucrats was hastened by these control mechanisms, which allowed politicians to exercise control of the SDF at little expense. The executive legislature's relationship was altered by several institutional adjustments brought about by the LDP's 1993 defeat. Proportional representation took the place of the single, non-transferable vote system. Since this reform, there have been significant policy disagreements between the parties, particularly on defence. Younger politicians have grown even more vocal on defence-related topics, suggesting that there might have been a shift in public opinion (Mishima, 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> The "senshu boei" policy in Japan refers to a strategic defence policy aimed at enhancing the country's defensive capabilities and preparedness. It emphasizes self-defence and the protection of Japan's territory and interests. This policy is rooted in Japan's post-World War II constitution, particularly Article 9, which renounces war as a sovereign right and prohibits Japan from maintaining land, sea, or air forces for potential aggression.

## 5. 9/11 and PM Koizumi's role

The post-9/11 security environment has profoundly impacted Japan, potentially leading to notable, albeit gradual, changes in the direction of its security policy. Following the 9-11 terrorist attacks in 2001, Japan, under Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, made several unprecedented decisions. Firstly, in November 2001, Japan deployed Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF) vessels for a refuelling mission in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Then, in March 2002, Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF) troops were sent to East Timor. Finally, in November 2003, Japan sent the Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) to Kuwait to provide transport support and coordinate with the US Central Command (US CENTCOM) headquarters in Qatar, as well as the Ground Self-Defence Force (JGSDF) to Iraq, both in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). These decisions marked a significant departure for Japan, as they involved deploying the JSDF on overseas missions without an explicit United Nations (UN) mandate, made possible largely due to Prime Minister Koizumi's strong political will (Tatsumi, 2008).

To begin with, in his first press conference after becoming prime minister, Koizumi argued that Japan should move away from the narrow-minded tendency to label supporters of constitutional revision as right-wing hawks. He also emphasized that political leadership has the responsibility to create legal and other frameworks that ensure the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) receive the respect they deserve. In December 2003, Japan decided to co-develop a ballistic missile defence (BMD) system with the United States, marking a shift from its previous stance of only engaging in "joint study" of BMD with the US. In October 2004, the Council on Defence Capability and Security, a private advisory group to the prime minister composed of former senior government officials and prominent scholars, issued its final report (known as the Araki Report in the United States). This report advocated for Japan to take a more proactive role in international security affairs and recommended realigning the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) to achieve this goal (Tatsumi, 2008). Based largely on the recommendations from the Araki Report, Japan revised its National Defence Program Guidelines in December 2004. These changes were seen in the United States as indications that Japan, after six decades of reluctance, was finally prepared to take a more active role in international security, with an increased involvement of the JSDF.

The terrorist attack on the Pentagon in Washington on September 11, 2001, had a transformative impact on the SDF. Although many in Japan acknowledged that the military capabilities of advanced democracies are meant to uphold international order rather than to

attack other countries, few were willing to endorse an international role for the SDF. This sentiment changed rapidly after 9/11, as the Koizumi cabinet quickly announced that Japan would support the US in any way possible to apprehend the perpetrators. Following the events of 9/11, Koizumi's cabinet introduced an Anti-terrorism bill in the Diet (National Legislature of Japan). The Prime Minister emphasized that the core of the legislation was whether the Japanese considered the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11th as someone else's issue or as their own concern (Tang, 2007). In the following months, Japan deployed a naval task force to the Indian Ocean as part of its support for Operation Enduring Freedom. Japan's role primarily involved logistics and refuelling, but it was significant as it marked Japan's first participation in an ongoing conflict since 1952.

Japan contributed \$10 million directly to the victims' families and another \$10 million to support rescue and cleanup efforts in the United States. Additionally, Japan allocated emergency economic aid to Pakistan and India to secure their cooperation in the forthcoming war on terrorism. Prime Minister Koizumi announced a plan to amend the Self-Defence Forces Law, which would allow the SDF to defend U.S. bases in Japan against potential terrorist attacks. Previously, the law only permitted SDF involvement after an attack had already begun and only if the police were unable to manage the situation. Furthermore, Koizumi ordered the deployment of six ASDF transport aircraft to deliver relief supplies to Afghan refugees in Pakistan (Midford, 2003).

The central aspect of Koizumi's response to the 9/11 attacks was the decision to deploy the SDF, particularly ships from the MSDF, to the Arabian Sea to provide logistical support for U.S. military operations against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. This deployment was a major component of the United Nations Peace Cooperation Corps (UNPCC) bill, which was debated but ultimately rejected in the fall of 1990. Unlike the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures bill proposed by Koizumi, the UNPCC bill did not allow for logistical support for combat operations and required the SDF to withdraw if fighting occurred. Thus, the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures bill, enacted into law in October 2001, marked a partial precedent by broadening the scope of permissible non-combat operations for the SDF (Midford, 2003). The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law was enacted on October 29, 2001.

Japan's participation in the Afghan operation was notable because it was based on Japan's own policy decisions rather than a United Nations (UN) collective security measure, peacekeeping functions, or the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. Following its involvement in Afghanistan,

Japan's international role gained symbolic significance as a demonstration of "cooperation with the international community" and has expanded rapidly since then (Sato, 2005). In a press conference addressing the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Bill, submitted to the Diet on October 5, 2001, Prime Minister Koizumi stated that the law establishes measures to make a proactive and independent contribution to international efforts to prevent and eradicate international terrorism. He emphasized that these actions align with the spirit of international cooperation as outlined in the Preface and Article 98 of the Constitution and do not conflict with Article 9. Koizumi added that the bill aims to contribute to international efforts to combat terrorism based on related UN Security Council resolutions and is not directly linked to the Japan-U.S. alliance, which underpins the Japan-U.S. security system. This explanation underscores that Japan's contribution to the international community is "proactive and independent," indicating that Japan's involvement was not solely for the sake of Japan-U.S. relations (Sato, 2005).

Shinzo Abe succeeded Koizumi as prime minister in September 2006. Abe's ascent to the premiership was welcomed by alliance managers in the United States as the first genuine opportunity for Japan to break free from the institutional and legal constraints of World War II and the Cold War that had limited its national security policy. The possibility of constitutional revision in Japan began to be discussed with a newfound sense of realism. While no one in Washington expected the revision to be easy, the debate had at least been brought onto the political agenda, and Abe appeared dedicated to the cause. During his tenure, Abe continued Koizumi's efforts to bolster the prime minister's leadership in national security policy-making. Utilizing provisions in the Cabinet Law, he appointed the first Special Advisor in charge of National Security Affairs. Additionally, he initiated a serious study on establishing an American-style National Security Council in Japan to shape strategy and provide policy support for the prime minister (Tatsumi, 2008).

When Abe confidently declared during his visit to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in January 2007 that Japan would "not shy away from carrying out overseas activities involving the SDF, if it is for the sake of international peace and stability," many in Washington interpreted this as a sign that Japan's national security policy was on the verge of its most significant transformation since 1945. Or at least, that was the hope (Tatsumi, 2008).

## 6. Changes during Koizumi and Abe's Era

Following the conclusion of the Cold War, the Japanese government increased the SDF's responsibilities and secured domestic support for future SDF deployments. The government prioritised civilian control, the SDF successfully carried out its objectives, the changes were gradual and in Japan's best interests, they were discussed openly, and pressure from the United States and other nations forced Japan to take action. Unexpected changes in Japanese politics were overseen by PM Koizumi's administration. Under his administration, Japan's strong security posture within the US-Japan security alliance was made possible by his strong leadership. Japan also saw the biggest round of reforms since the Meiji restoration under his administration which had a positive impact on Japan's Civil-military relationship (Buszynski, 2006). Koizumi was a leading representative of the younger political age who aspired to an increased role in Japan's security via American partnership. Japan faced severe humiliation from the international community for its silence during the Gulf War (1990–1991).

On October 29, 2001, he swiftly gained Diet approval to dispatch naval units—two destroyers and a supply ship—to the Indian Ocean to aid in transporting fuel and supplies for US and allied navies. This deployment, unprecedented in nature, faced minimal resistance within the Diet, indicating a significant shift in security attitudes. Surprisingly, even the Japanese Communist Party supported the legislation. The Koizumi administration successfully obtained DIET approval for the War Contingency bills on June 7, 2003. These bills allowed Japan to deploy forces abroad in the event of a military emergency, marking another groundbreaking step that was criticized by the opposition party inside the diet (notably, the Democratic Party of Japan {DPJ}) for conflicting with the pacifist constitution (Buszynski, 2006). The Cabinet decided to send the Self Defence Forces (SDF) to Samawah in southern Iraq on December 9, 2003, by this legislation. In what was called a “major turning point” for Japan's security policy, some 1,100 soldiers were ultimately dispatched (Buszynski, 2006). In its October 2005 report, the LDP's constitutional drafting commission, led by former prime minister Mori, suggested several changes to Article 9, allowing Japan to continue its “self-defence military” status in the interest of global peace and security. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which is closely aligned with the LDP in terms of policy and whose founding fathers were former LDP leaders have been staunch advocates of the LDP on this matter.

A bill outlining the steps for a nationwide vote on constitutional amendment was presented to the Diet in May 2006. However, because Article 96 of the Constitution stipulates that a two-thirds majority in both houses with popular referendum is necessary before the Diet may submit the matter to a vote, change was purposefully made challenging (Buszynski, 2006). During the Koizumi era, Japan also saw the deployment of BMD (Ballistic missile defence) which was a major turning point in Tokyo's defence posture under Foreign Minister Fukuda. The significant advancement took place in enhancing both sea and ground-based missile tracking capabilities. This involved integrating the AN/SPY-1D radar tracking system on the Aegis destroyers with the ground-based EPS-3 radar system, planned for deployment at seven sites, alongside the deployment of the advanced EPS-XX tracking system at four locations in western Japan. Furthermore, the X Band radar system, with its capability to differentiate between missiles and decoys, was stationed in Northern Honshu. There's an urgent demand for precise early warning systems for missile launches, prompting Japan to strive for its capability development. In March 2003, two early warning satellites were launched: one equipped with an optical sensor, and the other featuring Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR) (Buszynski, 2006). These developments reflected a change in Japan's defence and security posture which positively contributed to a more integrated civil-military interaction (Buszynski, 2006).

Junichiro Koizumi was the one who started to make use of strengthened cabinet functions. To handle important national policy, he capitalised on bureaucrats from every ministry, including defence, outside specialists, the parliamentary secretary, and the cabinet secretary. Utilising the higher position of PM, he took the lead in expanding policy areas of the cabinet. Examples of this type of legislation were the emergency law and the anti-terrorism special measure law. By organising expert groups, such as the Foreign Relations Task Force in 2002, and hosting several security-related seminars, he proactively considered the cabinet's role in security topics. In 2004, his administration also established an advisory panel for the National Security and Defence Force and issued an order to update the rules for the National Defence Programme in light of the evolving threat landscape. Notwithstanding that Shinzo Abe was the Chief cabinet secretary during Koizumi's leadership tenure, which also influenced him to carry forward Koizumi's legacy (Yoon, 2019).

A strong ruling party and centralised politics are two of Japan's most well-known characteristics. Nonetheless, in contrast to parliamentary systems in Western Europe, where the prime minister exercises strong control over the ruling party and the administration of the state as a whole, PM has little influence over policy decisions in Japan. Cabinet decisions and ministerial assessments were essentially formalities, with bureaucrats writing most policies. This was first challenged by Junichiro Koizumi and later PM Shinzo Abe. Administrative reforms implemented by Abe's cabinet remain central to understanding Japan's civil-military relations (Yoon, 2019). The main agenda of LDP's electoral manifesto in the First Abe cabinet was Constitutional reinterpretation. Abe's primary campaign slogan in the July 30, 2007, Upper House election was "The Beautiful Country," referencing his political and ideological platform of changing the JSDF into a regular military force (Lee, 2016).

Abe's political platform during his party presidency campaign included advocating for an assertive foreign policy for Japan, particularly in relations with China and South Korea. He emphasized the importance of enhancing trust-based relationships with neighbouring nations such as China and South Korea. After the 2007 elections, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan experienced a significant decline, leading to its loss in the 2009 elections. Shinzo Abe's loss and the decline of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) after the 2007 elections were primarily attributed to a combination of economic challenges and perceived policy imbalances during his first term as Prime Minister. While Abe's administration focused heavily on security matters, including constitutional reforms for a more assertive defence stance and addressing regional threats like North Korea's missile tests, critics pointed out a neglect of pressing economic issues. Japan was grappling with a sluggish economy, rising public debt, deflation, and unemployment, which led to growing public dissatisfaction. Abe's policies were seen as insufficient in addressing these economic concerns, creating a sense of policy imbalance and misplaced priorities. This dissatisfaction eroded public confidence in the LDP and Abe's leadership, contributing significantly to their loss in the 2009 elections. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), capitalizing on public discontent and promising economic reforms, emerged victorious and ended the LDP's long-standing dominance. Thus, Abe's loss can be largely attributed to a failure to adequately address economic challenges and a perceived overemphasis on security matters during his initial term as Prime Minister (Edstrom, 2007).

Since Shinzo Abe began his second term as Prime Minister in 2012, the Japanese military's status within the country's hierarchy has undergone notable changes. This transformation coincided with the rising threats in the East Asian region post-Cold War, which PM Abe used as a rationale for reforming Japan's defence structure. In 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe reinterpreted Article 9 to permit Japan to defend its allies. This reinterpretation built upon Japan's 1998 policy, which authorized participation in international peacekeeping missions. Japan's involvement in the War on Terror, albeit in a noncombatant capacity, was a manifestation of this policy. The ambition to revise Article 9 and transform the Japan Self-defence Forces (JSDF) into a full-fledged military persisted even after Yoshihide Suga and Fumio Kishida successively took office (Sudirman & Pratama, 2022).

March 2016 marked the official implementation of PM Shinzo Abe's 2015 Peace and Security legislation. Together with the new international peace support bill, 10 other laws were revised as part of the legislation. The controversial 2014 cabinet decision to reinterpret the "Peace clause" in Article 9 to permit collective self-defence under certain circumstances is fundamental to comprehending his attempts to accommodate military adjustments and increase the role of Japan's Self Defence Forces. Above all, the historic law had three significant effects on JSDF operations. First, the circumstances under which the government may choose to use the JSDF in reaction to an armed attack against a third country were somewhat broadened by the security legislation. Before this law, the JSDF's use of force was deemed unconstitutional unless it was in response to an actual armed attack on Japan. The SDF is called to operate as a "dynamic joint defence force" by the 2013 New Defence Programme Guidelines, which significantly increased its capacity to deter if needed in the event of an armed attack (Yoon, 2019). In December 2013, Abe's cabinet established the National Security Council, which was the most significant reform. According to his cabinet, the National Security Council, also known as the "Control Tower", will be "centred on the Prime Minister" and entrusted with "flexible and regular discussions of diplomatic and security-related affairs from a strategic perspective." The main purpose of the NSC was to give the PM more power to directly influence national security policy, especially by fortifying the PM's office and Cabinet in comparison to the Japanese bureaucracy. The institution was now directly involving JSDF officers in the formulation of security strategy, which enhanced interagency coordination.

The “Four Ministers Meeting,” which regularly convenes the Prime Minister, Chief Cabinet Secretary, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and Minister of Defence to deliberate on both immediate and long-term security issues, is the most significant aspect of the NSC (Yoon, 2019). It was extremely revolutionary for Japanese military officials to participate directly in decision-making. NSC has also established the National Security Secretariat in January 2014; and employs between 70 and 80 people, the majority of whom are seconded civil officials from MOFA and members of the uniformed JSDF (Yoon, 2019). Since 2015, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and the civilian parliament have elevated the formal power and influence of military institutions, placing them on par with bureaucrats and enabling direct communication with policymakers. The Japanese government also promotes military professionalism by empowering the Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) with strategic and tactical authority to implement government policies. This shift demonstrates the government’s increasing recognition of the military’s specialized expertise in contributing to the decision-making process (Sudirman & Pratama, 2022).

## 7. Conclusion

Because of Article 9, Japan has a distinct history of civil-military relations. The military has historically been excluded from the democratic process; even during election campaigns, the military was a contentious issue. The way the Japanese military operates and its role in maintaining Japan’s security have both suffered as a result of these developments. The way the military participates in national security decision-making has improved as a result of legislative and administrative reforms put in place under the direction of PM Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe, narrowing the gap between the military and the civilian population. Positive improvements have also been made to the Prime Minister’s Office’s role in the process of making decisions about national security. This has strengthened Tokyo’s Civil-Military coordination positively.

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