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THE DEBATE OVER JAPAN'S  
INTERNATIONAL ROLE:  
Contending Views of Opinion Leaders  
During the Persian Gulf Crisis

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DURING THE PERSIAN GULF CRISIS**

**Eugene Brown**

**July 17, 1991**

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## FOREWORD

Japan's dramatic ascent to the status of economic superpower raises significant questions about how it will wield the broader global influence ordinarily conferred by wealth. Its emergence as an economic leader coincides with the demise of the cold war. Taken together, these trends alter the basis of the long-standing U.S.-Japan relationship. While the 31-year-old security partnership is likely to continue as a force for regional stability in the post cold-war environment, it is simply natural that a prosperous, self-confident Japan will begin to assert an independent voice in international affairs.

In this study the author examines Japan's recent debate over its policy in the Persian Gulf crisis. Particular attention is given to five competing schools of thought that shaped the national debate among Japanese opinion leaders. Although Japan's response to the Gulf crisis was marked by a series of false starts and confusion, it is likely that a new foreign policy paradigm will eventually emerge from the ongoing debate among the contending schools of thought identified by the author.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to present this study as part of its continuing effort to identify and analyze significant trends in the emerging international security environment.



KARL W. ROBINSON  
Colonel, U.S. Army  
Director, Strategic Studies Institute

## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH OF THE AUTHOR**

EUGENE BROWN is Visiting Professor of Foreign Policy in the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College. He received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the State University of New York at Binghamton and previously served as a *military intelligence analyst* in Japan and Vietnam. His publications include the book *J. William Fulbright: Advise and Dessent* (University of Iowa Press, 1985).

# **THE DEBATE OVER JAPAN'S INTERNATIONAL ROLE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, sparked the first major international crisis of the post-cold war era. U.S. leadership of the multinational drive to expel Iraq and restore Kuwaiti sovereignty is widely regarded as a strong performance that helps dispel recently-fashionable images of America in decline. For Japan, however, the 7-month Gulf crisis proved to be an acutely painful episode in its nascent effort to define its proper international role and responsibility.

For four decades after its defeat and occupation in World War II, Japan's international position was circumscribed by its patron-client relationship with the United States. Shielded by the American security guarantee, inhibited by fears of revived militarism both at home and among its Asian neighbors, and obliged to defer to U.S. political and strategic leadership under the rigors of the cold war, successive Japanese leaders clung to the essential elements of the so-called Yoshida Doctrine. Named after Shigeru Yoshida, Prime Minister on two occasions between 1946 and 1954, the strategy called for Japan to keep a low profile on contentious international issues and focus the nation's prodigious energies instead on economic pursuits. If political and military engagement was equated with conflict, suffering, and humiliation, economic undertakings seemed to provide a legitimate and peaceful channel for Japanese talents. Postwar necessity thus became enshrined as national self-concept. For two generations of Japanese, foreign policy has been virtually synonymous with foreign economic policy.

By the late 1980s, however, the convergence of three trends—the demise of the cold war, Japan's dramatic emergence as an economic superpower, and the perceived relative decline of the United States—produced a mounting

sense that Japan would have to rethink its truncated international role. Recent years have thus witnessed a debate among Japan's opinion leaders and policy elites over what the nation's global role should be.<sup>1</sup> Reminiscent in some ways of earlier American "Great Debates" on the eve of World War II, at the outset of the cold war, and during the Vietnam War, Japan's recent public dialogues indicate a nation confronting momentous change in its international role.

Left undisturbed by external crisis, Japan's broad rethinking would have proceeded at an exceedingly slow and deliberate pace due to two traits of Japanese society: first, the ingrained desire for broad consensus reached through comprehensive participation and, second, the traditional absence of commanding public leadership inclined to promote architectonic vision from the top down. However, the eruption of the Persian Gulf crisis in August found a Japan that was still in the early stages of consensus-building through its newly-begun national debate and without constitutional or statutory mechanisms for dispatching its uniformed personnel to foreign hot-spots.

Lacking an agreed concept of national purpose in the post-cold war environment and hampered by the exceptionally weak leadership of Prime Minister Kaifu,<sup>2</sup> Japan entered a 7-month ordeal of tepid measures, false starts, and arcane debate that did little to enhance its image as a major power.

Kaifu began firmly enough, halting oil imports from Iraq and Kuwait and suspending all commercial relations with Iraq on August 5.<sup>3</sup> In late August the government pledged that 100-200 medical personnel would be sent to the Gulf as the first step in a more comprehensive Japanese contribution.<sup>4</sup> A week later \$1 billion was pledged to support the multinational coalition and front-line states, an amount raised to \$4 billion in late September.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of September, Kaifu unveiled his proposed United Nations Peace Cooperation Corps, a mechanism for Japanese personnel to participate in the coalition in noncombat support roles. In succeeding weeks deliberations became mired in arcane disputes over the legal permissibility of

including elements of the Self Defense Forces (SDF) in the proposed corps.<sup>6</sup> Symptomatic of the debate were protracted discussions of whether overseas deployment of unarmed SDF forces would constitute merely the sending of personnel (*haken*) or the constitutionally-suspect dispatch of troops (*hahei*). Similarly, Kaifu himself weighed in with the argument that while the dispatch of SDF forces in the name of collective defense (*shudan boei*) would indeed be unconstitutional, their participation in collective security arrangements (*shudanteki anzen hosho*) would be constitutionally permissible. By early November, Kaifu was forced to withdraw the U.N. Peace Cooperation Bill in the face of certain Diet rejection.<sup>7</sup> In late January 1991, with the war to liberate Kuwait well underway, the government pledged to secure Diet approval of an additional \$9 billion to the allied effort.<sup>8</sup> Not until late April 1991, more than two months after the conclusion of the allied drive to expel Iraq from Kuwait, did Japan dispatch four minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. By this point the dispatch was largely of symbolic import, an effort by the Government of Japan to be perceived as an active participant in the international coalition and thus to avoid the potential international isolation and rejection that are sources of chronic Japanese anxiety.<sup>9</sup>

The government's handling of the issue was not an inspiring performance. Japan's conspicuous place on the sidelines prompted broad international criticism. "Where's the New 'Superpower'?" taunted *Newsweek* in its August 27 issue, expressing a widely-held sentiment. Largely unrecognized amid the apparent public relations debacle, however, was the fact that the Gulf crisis intensified the broader national debate already underway on Japan's future international role. Competing paradigms advanced by Japan's opinion leaders were brought into sharp relief amid the Gulf debate.

This study examines five schools of thought that were prominent in Japan's debate over its role in the Gulf: the Minimalists, who urged Japanese autonomy from the United States and minimal participation in the U.S.-led effort; the Realists, who argued that the Gulf crisis required Japan to wield greater international clout due to the imperatives of the

state system; the Moralists, who advocated a policy of activism grounded in ideological precepts; the Utilitarians, who saw the crisis as an occasion for Japan to enhance its international stature; and the Bilateralists, who urged robust Japanese efforts in order to strengthen the key relationship with the United States. Each school illustrated in Figure 1 is defined by its distinct theme, but it must be stressed that the schools are not entirely mutually exclusive.

The principal voices in the dialogue were the nation's opinion leaders. Drawn from think tanks, the media, business circles, universities, political parties, and legislative and bureaucratic elites, they compete to mold the projected new national consensus. Their efforts merit close study, since ideas are often the engines of action in foreign policy. It follows that the ultimate outcome of the competition among Japan's opinion leaders will do much to answer the often-posed question: now that it is a true economic superpower, how will Japan wield the broader political influence ordinarily conferred by wealth?

### **CONTENDING SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT IN THE GULF CRISIS**

**The Minimalists.** The Minimalist school stressed the need for Japan to minimize its participation in the U.S.-led effort and to generally distance itself from American policies. Though sharing a common theme of criticizing U.S. leadership, members of this school of thought are an otherwise exceedingly heterogeneous lot, embracing leftists, pacifists, isolationists, right-wing nationalists, and advocates of what might be called *realeconomic*, or preoccupation with Japan's economic self-interest.

Uniting this otherwise fragmented array of views was the focal theme struck early in the crisis by former Chief Cabinet Secretary Gotoda who argued in August that "Japan must not act simply for the reason that the U.S. tells us to."<sup>10</sup> Others soon echoed the theme. Eiji Suzuki, chairman of the influential Japan Federation of Employers Associations (Nikkeiren), urged greater Japanese autonomy "rather than meekly

SCHOOLS OF THOUGHT	POLICY PRESCRIPTION	DOMESTIC STRENGTH
MINIMALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Minimize Japan's participation in anti-Iraq coalition; maximize autonomy from U.S.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Strong; growing criticism of U.S. and widespread mass pacifism give this outlook a home court advantage in the contest for public opinion. Occurs in all five parties, but concentrated in Japan Socialist Party and Japan Communist Party.</li> </ul>
REALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participate vigorously in anti-Iraq coalition in order to maintain international balance-of-power system.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Moderate-to-weak; influential advocates at elite level but little mass support for the politics of realpolitik. Sentiment found principally in ruling Liberal Democratic Party.</li> </ul>
MORALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participate vigorously in anti-Iraq coalition because the invasion and annexation of a sovereign member of the United Nations constitutes a clear case of right versus wrong</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Weak; several prominent elite spokesmen, but Japan's political culture offers little support to policies grounded in moral abstractions. No clear party affiliation.</li> </ul>
UTILITARIAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participate vigorously in anti-Iraq coalition as a means of enhancing Japan's international political stature.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Moderate; considerable strength among opinion elites, but introversionist public sentiment limits freedom of action of this school's advocates. Found principally in LDP, Democratic Socialist Party, and Komeito.</li> </ul>
BILATERALIST	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participate vigorously in anti-Iraq coalition in order to shore up Japan's central relationship with the U.S.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Moderate-to-strong; broad support among centrist and conservative opinion elites, but growing national self-confidence coupled with skepticism of U.S. leadership creates a less hospitable public climate for proponents of this traditional outlook.</li> </ul>

Figure 1. The Debate over Japan's International Role.

following the leadership of the U.S."<sup>11</sup> Political commentator Saburo Kugai agreed, arguing that "the interests of Japan and the United States are different. . . [Japan should] set its own policies."<sup>12</sup>

Japan's Gulf diplomacy was similarly criticized by the *Tokyo Shimbun* for its "excessive leaning toward the U.S."<sup>13</sup> As the crisis dragged on, Professor Takeshi Sasaki of Tokyo University observed that "more and more respectability is being given to opinions against the United States. A very strong counteraction has started in leading journals that are always sensitive to shifts in public opinion."<sup>14</sup>

Calls by the political left for minimal Japanese involvement in the U.S.-led coalition focused almost exclusively on the fear that any relaxation of the strict policy of nondeployment of the armed forces would undermine Japanese pacifism and Article 9 of the Constitution. This in turn would raise "the fear once again of repeating . . . the nightmare" of Japanese militarism, in the words of Socialist Party Secretary General Tsuruo Yamaguchi.<sup>15</sup>

Some commentators couched their criticisms of the United States in the broader argument that Japan enjoys generally good relations with the nations of the Middle East and is looked upon as a nation with clean hands in the region. It is thus well positioned, they argue, to play an independent broker role in the region's disputes.<sup>16</sup> This is a view advocated by Tokyo University Professor Yuzo Itagaki, a specialist on Arab issues. "Japan should do its own thinking and come up with its own policies," he argues.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Shigeki Koyama, President of the Japanese Institute of Middle East Economics, asserted in December that "the American method of taking short cuts . . . and pushing for direct reaction is making more and more people worry."<sup>18</sup>

Some who advocated an independent role that would purportedly be less offensive to the Arab world did so from a belief that Japan's economic interests would be threatened by a war that could alienate Arabs from the industrial nations for many years to come. Kazuo Nukuzawa, managing director of Keidanren, the most important business trade group, put it this

way: "the sentiment of business leaders is that the United States shouldn't be holding a gun to the head of Saddam Hussein."<sup>19</sup> As to the oft-voiced argument that Japan, which relies on the Middle East for 70 percent of its oil, is the nation with the most at stake in restoring stability in the region, it "is not a rational argument but an argument based on emotion," asserted Tomoharu Washio, a research fellow at the International Institute for Global Peace, a think tank founded by former Prime Minister Nakasone.<sup>20</sup> Many business leaders and commentators believed that it was not in Japan's interest to join the American-led effort because its own economy was not nearly as vulnerable as was widely believed due to advances in energy efficiency, the overall strength of Japan's economy compared to its competitors, and the belief that Kuwaiti oil would soon flow regardless of who controlled the oil fields. To many Japanese predisposed toward political insularity and an economic-centered view of international affairs, the conflict in the Mideast looked like an instance of *taigan no kaji*, "a fire on the other side of the river."<sup>21</sup>

When the offensive to dislodge Iraq from Kuwait began in mid-January, it was clear that many of Japan's opinion leaders—and solid majorities of the mass public—opposed the military effort. Subsequent commentary often reflected an undercurrent of anti-American sentiment. Hiroshi Kume, a popular television news anchorman, told his viewers that "we didn't ask for war. Japan said differences should be settled through diplomatic means, but Bush didn't listen. We should tell him that America started this war and it's up to America to finish it."<sup>22</sup>

This undercurrent of anti-Americanism reflects the bilateral strains of recent years generated by bruising trade battles and the resentment felt among some Japanese over perceived American pressure and high-handedness. After 45 years as the decidedly junior partner in a patron-client relationship and amid growing national self-confidence and pride in Japan's economic ascendancy, it is simply inevitable that many Japanese feel the need to assert their nation's identity and independence from the United States. What remains to be seen is whether Japan's new-found pride and desire for foreign

policy independence will lead to neo-isolationism on noneconomic issues or find expression in cooperative forms of international interdependence<sup>23</sup> or instead be channelled into the nationalistic unilateralism espoused most prominently by the right-wing LDP legislator, Shintaro Ishihara, co-author of the controversial *The Japan That Can Say No*. Several months before Iraq invaded Kuwait, Ishihara repeated his familiar complaint that Japan "has become a country which moves as the U.S. wishes" on matters of defense and diplomacy.<sup>24</sup>

It is certainly the case that opinion polls have captured a distinct Japanese cooling toward the United States in recent years. For example, a November 1989 poll conducted by Louis Harris for *Business Week* magazine asked Japanese respondents: "how much admiration and fondness do you have for each of the following—a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, or none at all?" By wide margins the most frequent reaction to both "America as a nation" and "the American people" was "not very much" admiration and fondness.<sup>25</sup> Reporting new evidence of elite and mass Japanese disenchantment with the United States, the April 2, 1990 *Newsweek* cover depicted an American infant with the headline: "What Japan Thinks of Us: A Nation of Crybabies?"

The polls suggest that opinion leaders who urge greater Japanese autonomy in its international dealings are preaching to a mass public broadly predisposed to share their prescription. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* conducted two nearly-identical surveys during the debate on Gulf policy, the first in September 1990 and again in December. When asked "if this Gulf crisis is to be used as a lesson, on what fields ought our country place emphasis?" The most popular response on both occasions was the establishment of "Japan's own autonomous diplomacy line so as to become able to contribute to the world in non-military fields." (43.3 percent in September; 44.2 percent in December).<sup>26</sup> In both surveys, the least popular response was "to revise the constitution and to make the overseas dispatch of the SDF possible." (8 percent in September; 8.9 percent in December).<sup>27</sup>

Yet it would be unwise to read a virulent anti-Americanism into the available evidence of a broad desire for greater

autonomy from U.S. political leadership. Famously self-preoccupied with their presumed cultural uniqueness (there are over 1,000 titles in print in Japan on what it means to be Japanese, or *nihonjin-ron*<sup>28</sup>) and acutely self-conscious of their psychic separateness from the rest of the world, the Japanese, in the words of the late Edwin Reischauer, "find it hard to join the human race."<sup>29</sup> Most Japanese still regard the United States more highly than they do any other nation. It is nonetheless true that economic success has bred a new national self-confidence that for some leads to a desire to step back from the 45-year-long American embrace which they fear threatens to smother Japan's cherished uniqueness and separateness.

**The Realists.** Though clearly a minority outlook, it is notable that the logic of *realpolitik* appeared in the Gulf debate as the rationale for a policy of robust engagement. Opinion leaders in this category proceed from an analysis of the dynamics of the international system grounded in the familiar concepts of state sovereignty, systemic anarchy, the security dilemma, and the need for states to practice the impersonal calculus of balance of power policies. Members of this school of thought give little weight to matters of national preference or moral ideals. Rather, they pursue a line of reasoning grounded in the belief that the decentralized state system generates its own logic and requirements and that prudent national policy lies in grasping what steps are required in order to maintain the system and uphold international norms upon which one's own well-being depend. Though *realpolitik*, or realism, represents the thinking of a small minority of Japan's opinion leaders, its arguments are worth noting because they appear in prominent and prestigious fora.

Perhaps Japan's leading exponent of the realist school is Seizaburo Sato, professor at Tokyo University, research director at the International Institute for Global Peace, and confidant of former Prime Minister Nakasone. From an interview conducted with him last summer and an analysis of his writings, one can summarize the intellectual premises and policy prescriptions that lie at the core of Mr. Sato's world view.

He begins with the axiom that "the sovereign nation state system persists."<sup>30</sup> A decentralized system of sovereign states means an inherent structural anarchy. Derived from this is his second premise, that an inherently anarchic world will be a "world . . . full of dangers."<sup>31</sup> Third, a chronically dangerous world requires of its members "action to maintain order to prevent aggression anywhere in the world."<sup>32</sup> Peace and stability do not just happen. They must be made to happen through prudent stātecraft grounded in the necessity of maintaining an overall balance within the system.

A fourth premise involves Sato's frank recognition of "how important military strength is to protect peace at this starting point of the post-cold war period."<sup>33</sup> Sato is in no sense a militarist. To the contrary, he agrees with those who stress the growing significance of economic and political instruments of power in an increasingly interdependent world.<sup>34</sup> To Sato, noncoercive forms of power supplement traditional military might but they emphatically do not supplant it as the *ultima ratio* of international conflicts.

From this it is a short step to Sato's fifth premise, namely, his belief that Japan must assume greater responsibilities, including a role—if necessarily a noncombat one—for its armed forces, in order to help sustain a stable and peaceful world order.<sup>35</sup> To Sato, the Gulf crisis presented Japan with an inherent logic and set of requirements that it dare ignore at its own peril. "The talk of constitutional constraints and demons of the past is all one big alibi," he argued. "We musn't miss a golden opportunity to prove we recognize our responsibilities."<sup>36</sup> To Sato, the impersonal demands of realism require Japan to overcome its parochialism, its international timidity, and its preoccupation with economic pursuits to the exclusion of prudent attention to security needs.

Professor Sato's brand of *realpolitik* is shared in varying degrees by other opinion leaders and foreign policy elites in Japan, though it must be stressed that not all agree with his conclusion about the need to dispatch the SDF abroad. A representative media view was the *Sankei* editorial assertion that "the times and the world situation have completely changed and . . . many things are sought of Japan . . . for the

peace and stability of the world."<sup>37</sup> Michio Watanabe, an influential figure in LDP circles, offered this determinedly nonromantic analysis: "the Middle East is the foundation of Japan's prosperity. . . . We have the responsibility to do what we can do."<sup>38</sup> Komeito chairman Ishida's support for a time-limited law that would permit the dispatch of unarmed SDF personnel to the Gulf region to perform nonmilitary tasks was predicated on the conviction that Iraq's invasion of a weak neighbor was "a serious defiance against peace which appeared after the dissolution of the cold war structure."<sup>39</sup> Ishida argues that although it may wish to remain aloof from contentious international matters, Japan is simply required to participate in the construction and maintenance of a post-cold war global structure upon which its own well-being depends.

Ishida's analysis of the crisis was echoed by Satsuki Eda of Shaminren (Social Democratic Federation), who argued that Iraq must be stopped and that Japan has a responsibility to participate in the U.S.-led effort to do so.<sup>40</sup> Symptomatic of the attenuated *realpolitik* of a number of Japan's opinion leaders, though, is Eda's unwillingness to see Japan participate through any form of military contribution. He differs from other realists less in his analysis of the threats to Japan's security posed by unchecked aggression and international disorder than in his prescription of the instruments of power that Japan can properly contribute to the maintenance of world order.

As these examples show, there is an identifiable realist school of thought among Japan's opinion leaders. At this point its line of reasoning is not one that is particularly congenial to Japanese thought. Opinion polls show that the themes of *realpolitik* have minimal support among the mass public. For example, the *Yomiuri Shimbun* September 1990 poll of public perceptions of the Gulf crisis asked respondents to identify "what is a matter of concern to you about the Gulf crisis." The most frequent response by far was a humanitarian and emotional concern for "the problem of hostages" (64.9 percent) while only 16.3 percent indicated concern over the fact that Iraq's invasion threatened to reverse the general decline of tensions in the international system.<sup>41</sup>

However, the prominence and prestige of publicists such as Seizaburo Sato suggests that realism is an outlook likely to gain support in the future, at least among policy elites and opinion leaders. Such a development would, over time, affect the premises and conduct of Japanese foreign policy. *Realpolitik* connotes a dispassionate attentiveness to global political currents, a realization that Japan's interests are inextricably bound up with distant forces, and a willingness to take decisive action to maintain the broader political and security structure upon which Japan's safety and well-being depend. A Japanese diplomacy grounded in *realpolitik* would probably be one of greater independence from the United States and would most certainly, if pursued fully, require the will to utilize the nation's armed forces in a greater than defense-of-the-home-islands capacity. A rise in realist sentiment is unlikely to lead to a revival of Japanese militarism *per se*. Japan's immense stake in avoiding the isolation and rejection that renewed militarism would surely provoke will serve to temper the nation's reliance on military power for the foreseeable future. On balance, however, the growth of realist sentiment will help Japan to step up to the broad array of global responsibilities ordinarily borne by major nations.

**The Moralists.** Joseph Nye argues that in an increasingly interdependent world, so-called "hard" instruments of power such as military or economic coercion are of declining utility while "soft" power, such as a nation's cultural and ideological appeal, takes on greater significance.<sup>42</sup> As Nye notes, "many Japanese are concerned about their . . . failure to project a broader message" internationally.<sup>43</sup> This failure is rooted in Japan's traditional aversion to abstract formulations of overarching purpose. Japanese culture, with its philosophical relativism and group-defined situational ethics, has placed less weight on moral absolutes and abstract concepts than has been the case in Western societies.<sup>44</sup> Lacking fixed principles of right and wrong grounded in religious or secular tradition, Japan's culture conditions its members to focus on the shifting requirements of their immediate group. "Right" behavior springs from one's appreciation of his position within the group and his desire to be perceived as a team player who goes along with the group's consensual views. "Wrong" behavior arises

from individualistic impulses to follow one's own beliefs when they diverge from group-defined norms. The key point is that among the major nations, Japan stands apart in its relative absence of transcendent principles of right and wrong.

In foreign policy, this trait has given Japanese leaders broad latitude in making decisions pragmatically on a case-by-case basis, but to Japan's critics it is seen as evidence of an unprincipled opportunism incapable of acting on behalf of transcendent values. Certainly the nation's lack of ideological appeal, along with its insular culture, have put Japan at a disadvantage in projecting a clear vision of its national purpose.

It is thus interesting to note that in the debate over the Gulf crisis, a second school of opinion leaders who urged Japan to take vigorous action did so on frankly ideological grounds. Japan's foreign policy, they argued, must be grounded in a set of explicit principles with wide international appeal. Those principles, in turn, will require of Japan greater international participation and responsibility than has previously been the case.

Among the most outspoken proponents of this view is Mr. Yukio Okamoto. Prior to his recent resignation, Okamoto was a career diplomat who headed the First North America Division in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. To Okamoto, too many Japanese suffer from what he calls "a disease of relativism" that leaves them without a standard for judging right and wrong in world affairs and leaves the nation vulnerable to the charge of cynical opportunism. "There are no examples in our history of Japan standing up for one value against another," he says.<sup>45</sup> Okamoto is openly appalled that too few of his countrymen viewed the invasion, annexation, and destruction of a sovereign member of the United Nations as a clear affront to the norms of international society. "I lecture on this all the time," he said last December. "The business people say, 'you know, so what if Saddam Hussein gets hold of the oil fields? He has to sell his oil somewhere.'"<sup>46</sup>

Okamoto is also concerned about Japan's depiction by American critics as a nation with a "faceless diplomacy." He

argues that there is a need to articulate a "diplomatic ideology . . . so others will understand Japan's foreign policy."<sup>47</sup> To Okamoto, "the words or concepts most favored by Japanese are 'cooperation,' 'coordination,' 'harmony,' 'dialogue'—all of which are pleasing to the ears but do not contain a value in themselves. These are ethical standards of social behavior; they are not . . . moral goals."<sup>48</sup> He believes that Japan's diplomatic ideology must include, at a minimum, the values of freedom, democracy, free markets, and nonaggression.<sup>49</sup>

Other opinion leaders share Okamoto's belief that the Gulf crisis presented an opportunity for Japan to take a principled stand in a clear case of right against wrong. Mr. Ichiro Ozawa, the outspoken Secretary General of the Liberal Democratic Party, expressed concern over the broad perception of Japan as "a country without a face."<sup>50</sup> His call for vigorous Japanese participation in the anti-Iraq coalition was couched in explicitly ideological terms: "it is only when there is peace and freedom in the world that Japan can enjoy peace and affluence as at present."<sup>51</sup> Another opinion leader who urged Japan to take a stand on behalf of ideological principles was former Deputy Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, who argued that the Japanese people are so steeped in postwar pacifism that "we have hardly come to ask ourselves . . . if we will not bleed for freedom, either."<sup>52</sup>

Agreeing with Miyazawa that Japan should dispatch personnel along with its financial contribution to the Gulf effort, chairman Ouchi of the Democratic Socialist Party warned against what he called "an unprincipled course of steadily pouring in Japan's blood taxes."<sup>53</sup> In a similar vein, the newspaper *Nihon Keizai* sharply criticized what it saw as a "lack of fixed principles" among Japan's leaders in international dealings.<sup>54</sup>

Though still a minority view, a growing number of Japanese opinion leaders are sensitive to the perception of Japan as a selfish, unprincipled, opportunistic nation committed to nothing higher than its own economic interest. The vigorous debate over Japan's role in the Gulf crisis gave them added visibility and presented frequent opportunities to inject their views into the broader stream of public thought about Japan's relationship

with the outside world. The available polling data offers no clear evidence of the general public's receptivity to their argument, but in all probability appeals to foreign policy activism grounded in ideological concepts still find only moderate support among Japan's mass public.

In the longer term, however, it seems likely that the ranks of opinion leaders who advocate a principled basis for foreign policy actions will grow, both in numbers and in visibility. It seems equally likely that their appeals to moral values such as freedom and democracy will become increasingly popular as a younger generation attains maturity and influence. Less content than the postwar generation with the amoral pragmatics of economic growth and more attuned to global values through travel and communication, it may well be today's youth who will one day fulfill Yukio Okamoto's vision of a Japan taking its diplomatic bearings from the moral criteria of universal ideological precepts.

**The Utilitarians.** Perhaps the most prominent school of thought among Japan's opinion leaders was the view that Japan should respond positively and vigorously in the Gulf crisis as a means of strengthening the nation's standing and credibility as an independent global power. Advocates of this approach tended to place little emphasis on Japan's stake in the Middle East *per se* or on Japan's responsibilities in constructing a stable international order, nor did they speak of moral imperatives or ideological vision. Rather, their analyses and commentaries dwelt almost exclusively on matters of Japan's international role and reputation. Their prescriptions were heavily colored by utilitarian assessments of how Japan would be perceived if it did not take firm steps in the Gulf and how those perceptions would hamper Japan's ability to gain acceptance as a genuine international power. Put another way, if adherents of the realist school believe that the crisis *required* Japan to wield influence in the name of systemic imperatives, adherents of the utilitarian school believe that the crisis *permitted* Japan to wield influence to enhance its role as a recognized power.

This school of thought generally shares the view of David Rapkin that Japan's international leadership has been limited

by what he calls a "legitimacy deficit" which arises from "the legacy of militarism and colonialism, a mercantilistic reputation, and disbelief that Japan can articulate universalizable norms, values, and principles."<sup>55</sup> Proponents of this school ardently wish to see Japan overcome its "legitimacy deficit" and gain international acceptance as what Professor Hideo Sato has termed a "core member" in an emerging "system of plural leadership by major economic powers."<sup>56</sup>

Contained within this overall school of thought advocating firm action in order to enhance Japan's stature as a major power are two distinct sub-themes: an acute concern about what other nations think of Japan and the argument that Japan's contribution must go beyond money alone in order to be credible to the world community.

The first theme, reflecting characteristic Japanese sensitivity to how other nations view it, emphasizes the need for Japan to play a major role in the *Gulf crisis* because its image would suffer if it failed to do so. This was a ubiquitous message in the major newspapers. At the outset of the crisis the *Asahi* feared that Japan would be seen as "lagging behind"<sup>57</sup> while the *Tokyo Shimbun* warned that Japan's conduct will be closely watched and its "responsibility . . . will be questioned."<sup>58</sup> *Sankei* argued that without firm steps, "it will be difficult to obtain the understanding of other countries."<sup>59</sup> A few days later the paper stressed that "Japan is now being criticized as the 'Japan which does not take risks.'"<sup>60</sup> Still later *Sankei's* editors warned that Japan "appeared to be buying time while pretending to check into contribution measures; its reputation in numerous foreign countries is extremely bad."<sup>61</sup>

A number of prominent opinion leaders echoed the media's preoccupation with Japan's international reputation. Former Ambassador to the United States Nobuo Matsunaga believed that "the eyes of the world are on Japan" in the *Gulf crisis*<sup>62</sup> while LDP Secretary General Ozawa feared that Japan could become "isolated in the world . . . expecting that others will defend peace and security for us [while] we will do nothing for the peace and security of others."<sup>63</sup> He warned that "such a selfish way of living cannot pass muster in the world."<sup>64</sup>

Echoing Ozawa's fear of an isolated, ostracized Japan was Jiro Aiko, Japan's former Ambassador to Kuwait, who worried that Japan and Kuwait were alike in three ways: each is wealthy, militarily weak, and unpopular. Would Japan experience the same fate as Kuwait, he wondered.<sup>65</sup> The anxiety of international disapproval was shared by no less a figure than Prime Minister Kaifu, who argued in January that Japan faced "international isolation" if it did not contribute personnel and more money to the coalition effort.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Michio Watanabe, a key LDP leader, warned that Japan would become an international "orphan" if it failed to participate fully in the Gulf.<sup>67</sup>

This concern with international image and acceptance grew more acute when the U.S.-led coalition succeeded in liberating Kuwait while Japan remained mired in seemingly interminable debate over its proper role. The *Yomiuri Shimbun*, though closely linked to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, nonetheless offered this harsh postmortem: "Japan's poor skills in diplomacy surfaced during the seven-month crisis. Underlying the nation's political immaturity was its intellectual inadequacy in tackling the realities of a changing world."<sup>68</sup>

Among those advocating a vigorous Gulf role as a means of shoring up Japan's stature in the world, many shared a second theme: that Japan's contribution must go beyond money alone. Several major newspapers developed this theme early in the crisis. In August the *Yomiuri* noted that many countries view Japan as a country that "will not dirty its hands, though it is the country which benefits most from Middle East oil."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the *Tokyo Shimbun* argued against relying solely on "a lavish scattering around of aid" and asserted that "Japan will have to sweat" as well.<sup>70</sup> Tadahiko Nasa of the paper's editorial committee expressed the prematurely optimistic view that Kaifu's August 29 measures "will probably help eliminate the international image of Japan ... that supplies money but does not sweat."<sup>71</sup>

Opinion leaders echoing the same sentiment included Komeito Secretary General Yuichi Ichikawa<sup>72</sup> and Takashi Yonezawa, Secretary General of the Democratic Socialist Party, who argued in October that "up to now we have

contributed money and materials alone, but if we do not carry out personnel support, Japan cannot fulfill its role."<sup>73</sup> In official circles Japan's top career diplomat bluntly asserted that "the time has passed for us to cooperate with money alone. . . . The government's view . . . was . . . to create a structure where the Japanese people will sweat with their participation."<sup>74</sup>

The long and complex debate over the permissibility of utilizing elements of the SDF in noncombat support of the U.S.-led coalition, along with the embarrassing response to Kaifu's pledge to send at least 100 medical personnel to the Gulf region—only 24 agreed to go, and they returned home after a brief stint—demonstrates the great amount of work that remains to be done in developing modalities for Japan's citizens to take part in cooperative efforts to solve international crises. It is nonetheless significant that the need for Japan to do just that if it is to gain full acceptance as a major power has become a central theme among some of Japan's key opinion leaders.

**The Bilateralists.** A final school of thought among Japan's opinion leaders viewed the crisis in the Middle East principally in terms of the bilateral U.S.-Japan relationship. These opinion leaders proceeded from a straightforward, two-step thesis: (1) Japan should participate as fully as possible in the multinational coalition because (2) not to do so would jeopardize the critical relationship with the United States. Like the opinion leaders whose policy prescriptions were grounded in utilitarian assessments of what was expected of Japan if it is to be fully accepted as a major international power, members of this school placed almost no emphasis on the importance of the Middle East to Japan or on Japan's responsibilities in the maintenance of world order. Rather, the American connection is, for these opinion leaders, the *sine qua non* of Japan's international position and it is from this axiom that Japan's proper conduct in the Gulf should be deduced.

Given the centrality of the United States to Japan for the past 45 years, it is scarcely surprising that many Japanese elites respond to specific foreign policy issues through the intellectual prism of the U.S.-Japan relationship. Interviews with numerous opinion leaders in Tokyo last July, just weeks

before Iraq invaded Kuwait, underscored the importance that many opinion elites place on the maintenance of a sound partnership with the United States. This was true, for example, in media circles. Mr. Yoshio Murakami, foreign editor of the *Asahi Shimbun*, argued that most Japanese realize that there is much to lose if Japan-American relations break down: "they want to go with the winning horse," as he put it.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, Mr. Mikio Haruna, deputy editor on the foreign news desk of the Kyodo News Service, believes it is essential to keep the United States militarily engaged in Asia, less to curb the Soviets than as a "guarantor of regional stability."<sup>76</sup>

A number of policy intellectuals voiced similar sentiments, including professor Nushi Yamamoto of Tokyo University, Tomohisa Sakanaka of Aoyama Gakuin University, and Shigekatsu Kondo of the National Institute for Defense Studies.<sup>77</sup> All stressed the need to maintain and strengthen the bilateral tie, both in security and economic links.

Officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Defense Agency echoed the sentiment. For example, Mr. Toshinori Shigeie, then Director of the National Security Affairs Division in the Foreign Ministry, stated emphatically that "the U.S. must stay in the Pacific. Nobody can replace it. Japan must educate its people and support the U.S. and the basic structure in Asia, whose main pillar is the U.S. presence."<sup>78</sup> Shigeie's sentiments were seconded by Jiro Hagi, Counsellor of the Japan Defense Agency, who stated flatly that "the U.S. presence is indispensable for peace and stability in Asia."<sup>79</sup>

More than any other single opinion leader, Mr. Motoo Shiina has stressed the centrality of the U.S. relationship longest and most consistently. For many years the LDP's acknowledged leader on security issues in the Diet, Mr. Shiina continues to promote his views as a private citizen. A central imperative for Japan, he argues, is to keep the United States engaged in the security of Asia, and to do that it "must help the U.S. feel comfortable staying in Japan."<sup>80</sup> In August, Shiina urged a robust Japanese effort in the Gulf largely as a means of maintaining "the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty structure."<sup>81</sup> Shiina added that "if public opinion in the U.S. were to view that the Soviet Union, which they had thought to be an enemy until

now, did more to help, it will be considerably troublesome. Japan ought to do as much as it can."<sup>82</sup>

Shiina's central premise was repeated in a November editorial in the daily *Nihon Keizai*. Entitled "Do Not Drive U.S. to Road of Isolationism," the paper's editors urged Japanese support of the U.S.-led effort out of fear that America might otherwise withdraw into isolationism.<sup>83</sup> From this premise of the criticality of America's continued engagement in the world and in Asian security especially, it follows that Japan must be closely attuned to American perceptions of Japanese cooperation. In August and again in November, the daily *Sankei* reported on American "dissatisfaction 'with a Japan which does not bear risks'"<sup>84</sup> and noted its fear that "Japan's awkward or belated measures toward the Middle East crisis" could lead to a breakdown in U.S.-Japan relations.<sup>85</sup> Sharing this anxiety over American opinion were Yukio Okamoto of the Foreign Ministry, who feared that American mistrust of Japan's policy reluctance had created the most severe crisis in the bilateral relationship in years,<sup>86</sup> and Masashi Nishihara of the National Defense Academy, who told reporters that "if I were an American, I would see Japan as not reliable as a friend."<sup>87</sup>

From these premises, it follows—according to this school of thought—that Japan's responses to international crises must be framed with the requirements of the United States clearly in mind. Writing in the prestigious foreign affairs magazine, *Gaiko Forum*, Foreign Ministry official Shigeo Takenaka framed the issue this way:

the policy which Japan ought to take must be a policy which will foster sound U.S. internationalism. It must be a policy which will give self-confidence to the American people that the United States can manage with internationalism, because there is the cooperation of Japan and other countries, even at a time like the present when the United States has fallen into financial difficulties.<sup>88</sup>

It is in this context that Prime Minister Kaifu's September proposal to contribute both money and unarmed elements of the SDF to the coalition effort must be viewed. As *The New York Times* put it, Kaifu was attempting "to counter what Japanese officials fear is a tide of [U.S.] resentment over

Japan's role in the Persian Gulf."<sup>89</sup> In the same vein, Motoo Shiina argued in the November issue of *Chuo Koron* magazine that Japan's failure to act appropriately in the crisis—which, to Shiina, meant dispatching SDF personnel—might well trigger a move in the United States to review the overall U.S.-Japan relationship, a prospect he viewed with grave concern.<sup>90</sup>

It remains to be seen if Japan's 7 months of torturous indecision did indeed create the very bilateral crisis that opinion leaders of this school of thought sought all along to avoid. There is some fragmentary evidence that Japan's reputation has in fact declined in American eyes. A senior State Department official spoke in December of "a very distinct cooling" in U.S.-Japan relations.<sup>91</sup> At the mass level, a January 1991 poll found evidence of growing American resentment against Japan for its indecision and aloofness in the war; 42 percent of voters responded that they had lost respect for Japan during the crisis, while only 10 percent said their respect for Japan had increased.<sup>92</sup>

Against this background *The Economist* reported in February 1991 that "the Japanese now make no pretense of doing anything over the Gulf except repairing relations with the United States. Foreign policy has given way to damage control."<sup>93</sup>

Certainly no one would claim that the Gulf crisis represented Japan's finest hour. As Americans rejoiced in the striking success they engineered and discovered a new measure of international respect and popularity, theirs is certain to be a celebration without Japanese participation (as was, precisely, the effort to liberate Kuwait). But it is also the case that as time passes and the United States addresses new issues, it is likely to view its relationship with Japan in a balanced context. Though Japanese behavior in the crisis did little to endear it to the United States, as opinion leaders such as Motoo Shiina had warned all along, it remains unlikely that U.S. disappointment in a single case will unravel a relationship that is of such manifest importance to both sides.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

Two conclusions emerge from this analysis of contending schools of thought among Japan's opinion leaders during the Persian Gulf crisis. First, one is struck by the vitality, richness, and diversity of the debate itself. The range of paradigms competing to define a new foreign policy consensus is as broad in Japan today as in other major nations. The notion that it is Westerners who undergo periodic "Great Debates" about their international role while the Japanese avoid messy debates in favor of a more comfortable muddling through is clearly put to rest by the preceding analysis. Evaluated by the standards of thoughtfulness, intelligence, and the evident energy with which it has been pursued, the contemporary debate among Japanese opinion leaders merits high marks indeed. One must assume that this will continue to be the case as long as the central question—namely, what is Japan's proper world role?—remains unresolved. If it is true that the very fact of such wide-ranging debate at elite levels is symptomatic of a deeper crisis of national identity and international purpose, it is nonetheless the case that the nation is being well served by the intelligence and vigor of its contemporary opinion leaders.

Secondly, despite its high marks earned for waging a lively and thoughtful debate, Japan's opinion leaders have had but modest impact on national policymakers and the mass public. Recall that four of the five schools of thought called for Japan to accept substantially greater international burdens. Only one, the Minimalists, prefer a continued peripheral political role for Japan. It is thus fair to say that most of Japan's opinion leaders are ahead of the nation's politicians and mass public in their analysis of world affairs and their prescriptions for a more engaged foreign policy shouldering greater global responsibilities. Being ahead, however, can also mean being out of touch and thus of limited impact on others.

Polls routinely reflect a mass public whose international views are characteristically parochial, emotional, and modestly informed. Deeply rooted habits of mind, including those of insularity, ethnocentrism, and an aversion to firm national stands on contentious international issues present a

challenging public environment for the kind of sophisticated analyses and informed policy preferences advanced by most opinion leaders.

This is true to some degree for all five schools of thought, but it clearly poses greater challenges to opinion leaders whose world views are rather alien to traditional Japanese thought. As noted earlier, advocates of minimal diplomatic involvement based on a wish to preserve Japanese autonomy enter the debate with a home-court advantage in the court of public opinion, regardless of the merits of their arguments. By contrast, proponents of both *realpolitik* and a moral-ideological approach to foreign policy—though polar opposites in their core premises—have in common the formidable challenge of propagating ideas that are equally alien to Japan's conventional mass outlook.

Opinion elites have had similarly limited impact on senior policymakers. The traditional low salience of global issues to Japanese politicians, the personalist and pork-barrel character of factional politics within the ruling LDP, the limited authority of cabinet officers due to their exceedingly brief tenure—itsself a product of factional imperatives—, the ingrained habit of deferring policy departures until consensus emerges from below, and, finally, the traditional absence of commanding authority at the top of the government—a tradition unchallenged by Prime Minister Kaifu—are all familiar features of Japan's decision-making process. This process is well suited to incremental adaptation within an agreed policy framework, but is less well suited to making clear choices based on the interplay of competing abstractions.

While individual opinion leaders have certainly influenced particular decision makers, the evidence does not support a clear opinion leader-foreign policy link comparable, for example, to the influence of elite liberal internationalists in the Kennedy-Johnson years or the role played by ideological conservatives in the early Reagan years. One could of course argue that the division, confusion, and indecision of the Japanese Government during the Gulf crisis mirrored the divisions among the opinion leaders themselves, but to suggest a causal link between elite debate and policy paralysis

both exaggerates the power of opinion leaders during the 7-month debate and places the blame for tepid government action on opinion elites whose views were anything but tepid.

Like their counterparts in other democracies, Japan's opinion leaders are acutely aware of the modest short-term impact of their ideas in the policy process. But in arguing that being ahead of their countrymen lessens their immediate influence, one must avoid underestimating the potential long-term influence of today's opinion leaders. Sooner or later, a new foreign policy consensus will emerge in Japan. Its maturation—belated though it may be—will be due in no small measure to the efforts of today's opinion leaders in what continues to be a lively and important debate over Japan's future international role.

Japan's difficulty in forging a domestic consensus to legitimize a more visible and decisive role in the U.S.-led coalition suggests two implications for U.S. policy. First, it is clear that U.S. planners cannot assume that Japan will readily and dependably be available to absorb regional security responsibilities as we proceed with planned reductions in forward-deployed Pacific forces. If Japan is still in the early stages of defining its overall international political role, then it is fair to say that its efforts to accept regional security responsibilities are very much in their infancy. It follows that the drawdown of U.S. forward-deployed assets and personnel must occur with immense caution and be accompanied by continuous analysis of the wisdom of proceeding to progressively lower levels of deployment and capability. Any number of scenarios (e.g., a Chinese bid for regional dominance through, *inter alia*, greater naval force projection, or a nuclear-capable reunified Korea) could occur that would sharply degrade the security climate in the region. Unless and until Japan comes to terms with the security responsibilities of major power status, it is essential that the United States carry out its force drawdown with utmost caution and vigilance so as to maintain the intricate web of balances that have maintained the region's stability for the past quarter-century.

Secondly, the Gulf episode makes it equally clear that security relations—until recently an oasis of mutual pride and

goodwill largely insulated from bilateral economic frictions—may well become the source of further U.S.-Japan tensions. Although Japan's uncertainty and foot-dragging in the Gulf crisis are understandable when viewed in the context of an unfortunately timed crisis for a nation groping to define its international identity now that its post war recovery is complete, the fact remains that American sentiment toward Japan has measurably hardened in recent years in the face of Japan's aggressive challenge to America's economic well-being. As America's reservoir of goodwill toward Japan depletes, it will become increasingly difficult to persuade the American public and the Congress that our security arrangements in Asia—and our bilateral treaty with Japan in particular—should remain compartmentalized from the overall stresses generated by nonsecurity issues. Hence greater American demands that Japan "do more" on security issues and the inevitable Japanese resentment at constant American pressure might well further strain an already troubled relationship.

Both of these policy implications should prove to be manageable. What they require, however, is a sophisticated grasp of the interconnectedness both of domestic and foreign policies and of the political, economic, and security agendas.

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19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number) Japan's dramatic ascent to the status of economic superpower raises significant questions about how it will wield the broader global influence ordinarily conferred by wealth. Its emergence as an economic leader coincides with the demise of the cold war. Taken together, these trends alter the basis of the long-standing U.S.-Japan Relationship. While the 31-year-old security partnership is likely to continue as a force for regional stability in the post cold-war environment, it is simply natural that a prosperous, self-confident Japan will begin to assert an independent voice in international affairs. In this study the author examines Japan's recent debate over its policy in the Persian Gulf crisis. Particular attention is given to five competing schools of thought that shaped the national debate among Japanese opinion leaders. Although Japan's response to the Gulf crisis was marked by a series of false starts and confusion, it is likely that a			
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new foreign policy paradigm will eventually emerge from the ongoing debate among the contending schools of thought identified by the author.