

Postclassical realism and Japanese security policy

Tsuyoshi Kawasaki

Abstract The recent domestic constructivist studies characterize Japanese security policy as a serious anomaly to realism and a crucial case vindicating their approach to the larger study of world politics. The present paper challenges this view. It advances a postclassical realist interpretation of Japan's core security policy in the past quarter century. Japan's military doctrine expressed in the 1976 National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) is consistent with postclassical realism's predictions, as opposed to neorealism's predictions, which focus on the dynamics of the regional security dilemma and the question of financial burden resulting from military build-up. In addition, postclassical realism offers a more compelling theoretical guide for understanding Japan's core security policy than defensive realism or mercantile realism. This paper backs up its argument with the empirical evidence that Takuya Kubo, the author of the NDPO, himself intentionally based the NDPO on a postclassical realist line of thinking.

Keywords Japanese security policy; realism; postclassical realism; military doctrine; National Defense Program Outline; Takuya Kubo.

Introduction

Japan is commonly regarded as an anomaly to realism. For example, Chalmers Johnson, a prominent Japan specialist, once remarked as follows:

Since realism either does not inquire at all into the domestic responses to and constraints on foreign policies or else assumes that such responses are homogeneous across all states facing similar international

A specialist of Japanese foreign policy, Tsuyoshi Kawasaki is an Associate Professor at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, Canada.

Address: Political Science Department, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC V5A 1S6, Canada. E-mail: kawasaki@sfu.ca

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pressures, the cases of prewar and postwar Japan *directly challenge realist theory.*

(Johnson 1993: 202–3, emphasis added)

In other words, idiosyncratic domestic factors, we are told, constrain Japanese security policy so strongly that Japan does not respond rationally and responsibly to international imperatives. This view is widely shared in both academic and popular publications about Japanese security policy (e.g. Chai 1997; Tamamoto 1994).

Many actions – or rather inactions – taken by Japan seem to confirm the conventional wisdom that Japan is a serious puzzle for realism. The most powerful piece of evidence concerns Japan's basic policy stance in the past quarter century: despite its economic superpower status since the mid-1970s, Japan continues to arm relatively modestly and defensively – and above all, without nuclear arsenals.¹ Until the mid-1970s, Japan had depended quite heavily on the United States for its protection while focusing on diplomatic and economic recovery after the Second World War. But by that time, this recovery process was completed and the numerous assumptions on which Japan based its earlier US-dependent security policy had significantly changed or disappeared within and without Japan. Japan then started to reassess its national interest and took the initiatives to articulate its security policy, which culminated in the 1976 National Defense Program Outline (*Boei Keikaku no Taiko*, or the NDPO), post-war Japan's first military doctrine.² From the perspective of realism, then, Japan after the mid-1970s should be an excellent case of a military great power in the making. Yet, the military capabilities of this second largest economic power are far more modest than what ordinary realists would expect from the logic of international anarchy; that is, the expectation that as no higher political authority exists above sovereign states, any major state should arm itself to the maximum extent that its economic resources permit. Furthermore, Japan has consistently held on to its basic policy stance even after the Cold War ended. The key to solve this puzzling and continuing gap between Japan's economic and military power since the mid-1970s, according to conventional wisdom, lies in the peculiar nature of Japanese domestic politics, not in the nature of the international system.

One finds the most recent – and the most sophisticated – version of this conventional wisdom in the domestic constructivist works of Thomas Berger (1993, 1996, 1998) and Peter Katzenstein (1996a). In general, constructivists explicitly challenge the rationalist and materialist assumptions of realism and instead explain state behavior in terms of the norms and identities that are socially constructed at the international and/or domestic level(s) (see, e.g., Katzenstein 1996b). In the specific context of Japanese security studies, Berger and Katzenstein argue that anti-militarist norms and identity, deeply institutionalized in both Japanese society and

the Japanese state apparatus, are the key to understanding 'irrational' Japanese security policy. According to these domestic constructivists, therefore, the aforementioned basic policy stance of Japan is precisely an expression of deep-rooted Japanese anti-militarism; that is, a result of the Japanese aversion to the use of force. Berger and Katzenstein then conclude that contemporary Japanese security policy constitutes a compelling case vindicating constructivism as a viable or even superior alternative to realism in the broader study of world politics.

This paper challenges these domestic constructivist studies of Japanese security policy. It argues that Japan's basic policy posture, which was formalized in the form of military doctrine first in the NDPO and reaffirmed in the 1995 New National Defense Program Outline (*Shin-Boei Taiko*, or the N-NDPO), is no puzzle for realism.³ Contrary to what the existing domestic constructivist studies have led us to believe, realism generates a robust and credible explanation of Japan's core security policy (i.e. alliance choice and force structure) in the past quarter century. Thus, this paper's findings have significant implications to the ongoing debate between realists and constructivists in broader international relations scholarship, as the paper's analysis constitutes a crucial case study against constructivism: the case of contemporary Japanese security policy, allegedly one of the strongest cases for constructivism, turns out to be otherwise. By closing realists' hitherto 'weak spot', the findings presented in this paper should boost realists' confidence in Michael Desch's (1998) conclusion that constructivism has supplemented but not supplanted realism.

More specifically, this paper argues that Japan's basic policy stance in the past quarter century ceases to be puzzling to realists if we employ the analytical lens of what Stephen Brooks (1997) calls postclassical realism. Neorealism sees states driven by the pressure of international anarchy to arm themselves with offensive weapons for their worst-case scenarios. Such a view generates poor predictions, and a wide gap emerges between its predictions and actual Japanese policy behavior. Postclassical realism does much better: as will be demonstrated later, its predictions are consistent with the policy behavior concerned. In contrast to neorealism, postclassical realism construes states as actors who, while highly sensitive to the economic costs of defense, are maximizing their security without threatening others in a situation of the security dilemma.⁴ Fixated on neorealism as the target of their criticism, Burger and Katzenstein prematurely closed the books.

Postclassical realism explains Japan's basic security policy as follows. Japan's overall strategic goal is to reduce the intensity of the security dilemma in Northeast Asia. To achieve this goal, Japan maintains its alliance with the United States and its modest and defensive military capabilities. Any other security measures would only intensify the security dilemma surrounding Japan in a self-fulfilling prophesy fashion and/or generate enormous financial burden on the Japanese economy. First, as

long as Japan allies with the United States, the security dilemma that Japan faces in Northeast Asia remains generally moderate in its intensity. Thanks to the alliance's deterrence effects, the probability of a large-scale military campaign against Japan remains relatively low. At the same time, Japan's Asian neighbors should feel more secure now that potential Japanese military aggrandizement is contained within the framework of the alliance. Second, the size and mission of the Japanese military must be just right so that the spiral intensification of the security dilemma does not start in Northeast Asia. On the one hand, too big Japanese military power, nuclear armed and designed for the worst-case scenario, would ignite an arms race in the region, with an enormous financial burden on the Japanese economy. On the other hand, too small Japanese military power – the extreme case being unarmed neutrality – would make Japan a power vacuum, inviting interventions by the neighboring superpowers (including the United States) that want to keep Japan, a state strategically located and economically powerful, under their control. Thus, with its modest and defensive military capabilities (that cost Japan approximately 1 per cent of its gross national product, or GNP), coupled with the alliance with the United States, Japan can effectively prevent either of these scenarios from happening while keeping its defense expenditure within a reasonable range for its national economy. In sum, the combined concerns for the regional security dilemma (primary concern) and economic resources (secondary concern) form the theoretical core of Japan's basic defense posture since the mid-1970s.⁵

This interpretation has greater explanatory power than defensive realism (Glaser 1994/95, 1997; Jervis 1978) and mercantile realism (Heginbotham and Samuels 1998) in accounting for Japan's basic policy posture. Defensive realism and postclassical realism are united against neorealism as they both see states reacting to the probability, not possibility, of conflicts in the situation of the security dilemma. Yet, unlike defensive realism, postclassical realism explicitly incorporates the question of economic power in addition to that of the security dilemma. Thus, defensive realism remains incomplete in explaining Japan's basic policy posture. In addition, whereas some version of defensive realism incorporates ideational variables (e.g. Glaser 1997), postclassical realism focuses exclusively on materialist factors; thus, postclassical realism is more suitable when realists contrast their materialist explanations to constructivists', ideational explanations of Japanese security policy. On the other hand, mercantile realism shares postclassical realism's concern for economic power; and both reject neorealism in explaining post-war Japanese security policy. Yet, it puts too much emphasis on the economic power dimension of Japanese security policy; one even gets the impression that Japan sees security affairs only through the lens of its economic interests and that it does not have its own military doctrine to speak of. In fact, Heginbotham and Samuels, just like Berger and Katzenstein, overlook the security

dilemma as the fundamental analytical concept of contemporary Japanese security policy. In sum, postclassical realism offers a more compelling explanation for Japan's basic policy posture than neorealism, defensive realism, or mercantile realism.

Moreover, this paper presents key evidence to support the postclassical realist interpretation: chief Japanese policy planners intentionally based Japan's military doctrine on what we now call postclassical realism when designing the NDPO – they in fact explicitly rejected a quasi-neorealist line of thinking then espoused by the Japanese military. Central among these planners was Takuya Kubo, a senior civilian bureaucrat of the Defense Agency who was the author of the NDPO. By extensively utilizing his papers that have rarely received systematic scholarly analysis, this paper shows that the postclassical realist framework of thought guided Kubo, and the actual policy behavior of Japan, although this branch of realism was explicitly formulated only recently in the United States.

The paper starts with outlining the problems of the existing domestic–constructivist studies of Japanese security policy. It then will clarify the tenets of postclassical realism compared with neorealism. After elaborating the postclassical realist account of Japan's basic policy posture since the mid-1970s, we will proceed to analyze Kubo's thought behind the NDPO. The paper will conclude by discussing some implications of its findings as well as future research directions.

The problems of the domestic constructivist studies

In recent years, Berger and Katzenstein have presented a strong case for the efficacy of constructivism in the study of Japanese security policy.⁶ Katzenstein even states that 'Japan's policy of external security is *largely* shaped by factors that realist theory excludes from analysis' (1996a: 129, emphasis added). Well grounded in the larger constructivist scholarship in the study of international relations, their studies have made important contributions. Among their achievements, the most important is that they have rigorously clarified the theoretical underpinnings of the aforementioned conventional wisdom about Japanese security policy, which were not necessarily clear before. Thus, on the surface, the domestic constructivists seem to have established an invincible case that Japan is in fact an anomaly to realism.

These existing domestic constructivist studies contain two types of biases, however, which seriously undermine their case. First, they gloss over the security dilemma – the key concept of defensive realism and postclassical realism – which Japan directly faces (or perceives) in Northeast Asia. Instead, they target neorealism or its variants when they criticize realism (Berger 1993: 121–4; 1996: 319–23; 1998: 202; Katzenstein 1996a: 23–5, 184–6, and 215, note 19).⁷ As far as the topic of Japanese security policy is concerned, neorealism is an easy target. Neorealists like Christopher

Layne (1993: 41–5) and Kenneth Waltz (1993: 61–70) have presented unconvincing analyses of Japan. They claim that Japan will acquire massive military capabilities, even nuclear arsenals, as any other economic super-powers would do under international anarchy; but they remain silent about why Japan has not done so when Japan has had plenty of opportunities for the past thirty years.

This neglect of the security dilemma – which is understandable as the implications of the security dilemma’s dynamics are only recently articulated – is highly problematic because the domestic constructivists use neorealism as a baseline against which they measure how deviant Japan is. A modestly and defensively armed Japan is deemed to be a puzzle because it contradicts the neorealist prediction that every economic super-power including Japan should be heavily and offensively armed. But once we use postclassical realism, which can incorporate the security dilemma in its theoretical scope, in drawing our baseline, Japan will cease to be a deviant and the puzzle disappears because the Japanese case fits well with postclassical realism. In other words, if we compare Japan’s security policy with predictions based on postclassical realism, the gap between the two is quite small. Thus, the so-called puzzle about a modestly armed Japan is an artificial illusion, a product of choosing a neorealist baseline. It follows that the constructivist claim that realism cannot adequately explain Japanese security policy loses its grounds.

Second, the existing domestic constructivist studies suffer from the problem of selection bias. Berger and Katzenstein have made an important scholarly contribution; however, in the overall picture of Japanese security policy, their insights remain largely on the margins of what many security analysts and policy practitioners consider as the core and vital interests of Japan, interests governed primarily by realist thinking – or by postclassical-realist thinking, to be more precise, as we will see later. Yet, Berger and Katzenstein overgeneralize their insights and paint a distorted picture of Japanese security policy as if this core area of national interest hardly existed.

Such a core area is concerned with two fundamental or strategic-level questions for Japan’s security policy: What is the purpose of allying with the United States and what is the mission of Japan’s armed forces? The NDPO and the N-NDPO present the Japanese government’s answers, which as we will see below are products of postclassical realist thinking. This core area is limited in its scope; yet, it is central to Japanese security policy because it defines the strategic goal for and the basic framework of defense planning and activities.⁸ Surrounding this ‘realist core’ consisting of strategic-level issues are two types of periphery areas where anti-militarist norms and identity matter significantly in Japanese security policy-making. To the first type of the periphery belong tactical-level or technical-level issues involving home-territory defense within the basic framework of the NDPO/N-NDPO – for example, the ban on the right

of collective defense. The second periphery area consists of (1) such highly symbolic, yet non-vital security issues as the ban on sending troops abroad for combat purposes and on enforcing a compulsory draft system; and (2) Japan's security challenges beyond Northeast Asia, such as those in the Middle East, which the Japanese tend to debate, as they did in the Gulf crisis of 1990–91, using highly symbolic yet non-vital security terms such as 'international contribution' (*kokusai koken*).

The existing domestic–constructivist studies overlook or gloss over the 'realist core' of Japanese security policy. For example, Katzenstein (1996a: 124–9) picks up three specific policy issues to back up his domestic–constructivist arguments: the GNP 1 per cent ceiling for defense expenditure, the overseas dispatch of troops, and the three non-nuclear principles. Here conspicuously missing is an in-depth analysis of the NDPO, the heart of contemporary Japanese security policy.⁹ Berger (1998: 104), meanwhile, correctly characterizes the NDPO as a refinement of the Yoshida Doctrine (i.e. Japan arming modestly while relying on US protection and focusing on economic affairs). Yet, he implies that the Yoshida Doctrine itself does not constitute a true realist position (perhaps a reflection of his aforementioned focus on neorealism as his target). Consequently, he fails to grasp the (postclassical) realist underpinning of the NDPO.

In sum, the case made by Berger and Katzenstein is not as convincing as they make it out to be. Their puzzle about Japanese security policy is an artifact resulting from choosing a wrong baseline for measuring Japan's behavior. Furthermore, their conclusions about the explanatory power of realism regarding Japanese security policy suffer from serious selection bias. Looking at Japanese security policy through the lens of postclassical realism can rectify these problems, but let us first clarify the nature of this branch of realism.

Tenets of postclassical realism

According to Brooks (1997), neorealists and postclassical realists make markedly different assumptions (1) on state behavior toward the worst-case scenario and (2) on state preference on military preparedness and economic capacity, while these two groups of realists do share their basic assumption that the behavior of states is shaped primarily by the international system.

First, neorealism assumes that rational states are always anxious about, and ready to implement, military measures designed for the worst-case scenario even when such a scenario is an extremely remote possibility. In other words, neorealists see states responding to a mere possibility of conflict. They argue that political pressure to take such a line of security policy is always high under international anarchy (Brooks 1997: 447–50). In contrast, postclassical realism hypothesizes that rational states respond to probable, not possible, conflicts. The probability of conflicts among states,

furthermore, fluctuates considerably according to such international-level factors as technology, geography, and international economic pressure, even when the distribution of military capabilities changes little among these states (*ibid.*: 455–8).

This distinction between neorealism and postclassical realism becomes clear when we see a state in the security dilemma whose intensity is mild (that is, the probability for a major conflict to start is low thanks to defensive advantage). On the one hand, neorealists predict that the state prepares itself for the worst-case scenario, even willing to employ offensive measures, although such a policy may cause a strong reaction from its neighbors and may eventually lead to an arms race – or even war – in a spiral escalation fashion. On the other hand, postclassical realists hypothesize that the state in question is more likely to opt for a defensive posture to maintain its currently secure position, not to disturb international stability.

Second, neorealism and postclassical realism offer two different conceptions about state priorities between military preparedness and economic power (and between short-term and long-term objectives, more generally) (*ibid.*: 450–5, 458–63). Brooks states this point as follows:

Whereas neorealism views the pursuit of [economic] power as secondary to that of [military] security, postclassical realism regards rational states as ultimately seeking to increase the economic resources under their control ... subject to the constraint of providing for short-term military security.

(1997: 461)

Another way to put this difference between the two realisms is to use the concept of cost sensitivity. Neorealism sees states as relatively insensitive to the economic costs of military build-up – these states see achieving their military goal as their first priority and the resulting economic burden, even heavy burden, as a necessary cost to be accepted. States are more cost-sensitive in postclassical realism: if a particular defense plan is too expensive for a national economy, the state will choose a more cost-effective defense plan as long as such a plan does not seriously undermine its minimum security.

In sum, given the above observations, we are most likely to see contrasting predictions of neorealists and postclassical realists when we have a state under the security dilemma with moderate intensity, whose defense plan for the worst-case scenario is likely to generate a quite heavy burden on its national economy. Neorealists posit that the state in question will pursue the very defense plan for the worst-case scenario. Postclassical realists predict that the same state will opt for an alternative defense plan with which it can sustain, rather than destabilize, the moderate security dilemma and the health of its national economy. This point is highly impor-

tant for us because the security dilemma situation just described happens to be precisely what Japan has faced since the mid-1970s – and post-classical realism's predictions, not neorealism's, are consistent with evidence as the next section demonstrates.

Postclassical realist account of Japan's basic policy posture

According to postclassical realism, the central strategic goal of Japan should be to alleviate the severity of the existing regional security dilemma in general, and that of the security dilemma that Japan faces directly in particular. Such a security policy also corresponds to Japan's economic interests: Japan can avoid the crippling effects of large-scale arms build-up to its national economy. To achieve this goal, so the argument goes, Japan allies with the United States, while committing itself to modest and defensive military capabilities. With such a policy package, Japan can keep enjoying the moderate security dilemma in Northeast Asia. Taking other policy measures would be self-defeating for Japan because they would only intensify the severity of the security dilemma around itself in a spiral fashion and/or result in an extremely heavy financial burden. Let us elaborate this postclassical realist account in an historical context.

Cold War period

During the Cold War when the US–Soviet bipolarity dominated Northeast Asia, Japan's alliance with the United States helped reduce the intensity of the security dilemma surrounding Japan in two ways. First, it deterred large-scale Soviet aggression against Japan, because such an aggression meant for Moscow to confront Washington directly with the risk of initiating spiral escalation leading to nuclear war. With the US air–naval power now combined with its own, furthermore, Japan, an island state, could enjoy great defensive advantage against the Soviet Union that had inferior naval capabilities. In addition, the alliance with the United States generated important economic benefits to Japan. It allowed Japan to forgo the financial burden of building up the military designed for a large-scale war against the Soviet Union. It also protected the sea lanes on which the Japanese economy critically depended for its survival.

Second, the Japan–US alliance alleviated the intensity of the Northeast Asian security dilemma through three additional avenues. First, through the alliance, the United States had its 'leash' on Japan, so that it could influence Japan's policy-making and reduce the chance (however unlikely that may have been) of Japan pursuing any security policy that would destabilize the Northeast Asian strategic environment. Second, the fact that Japan was 'on the leash' of the United States helped alleviate any uneasiness that Japan's neighboring states may have had toward Japan. Finally, the very act by Japan of remaining allied with the United States

sent the signal to all interested states, including the United States itself, that Japan was content with the status quo, because the act in question was a logical result of a rational Japan seeking its own security without any other ambitions. In other words, if Japan had abandoned the alliance despite the aforementioned benefits and pursued a neutrality strategy, that very move would have signalled to other states that Japan was a state ready to challenge the status quo in Northeast Asia. 'Why does Japan want to pursue heavily armed neutrality when the only likely consequence of such a strategy is self-destruction in the form of a spiral arms race coupled with economic disaster?', the other states would have asked themselves. They would then have concluded: 'Japan is not interested in its own security; it wants to challenge us at any cost.' Japan switching its alliance partner from the United States would have sent a similar message, because Japan as a rational security seeker would not opt for starting a naval arms race with the United States at the risk of shouldering extreme financial burden and losing its easy access to Middle Eastern oil.

Japan adopted another policy in an attempt to render the intensity of the regional security dilemma milder: building a modest and defensive military. Japan (still allied with the United States) with too weak military capabilities would have become a *de facto* power vacuum inviting a military intervention by the Soviet Union. Such an intervention would then have forced the United States to respond strongly, which could have started the feared military escalation between the two superpowers. An offensively armed Japan, on the other hand, would have invited an aggressive response from the Soviet Union, to which the United States, again, would have had to respond strongly. In either of these scenarios, the intensity of the security dilemma between the two superpowers would have increased tremendously, seriously undermining Japan's otherwise favorable security environment. By maintaining a moderate-sized military with a defensive posture, Japan helped prevent the regional security dilemma from intensifying. Such a force structure, in turn, helped the Japanese economy as the Tokyo government could contain the defense expenditure around 1 per cent of Japan's GNP.

Japan's military doctrine, and Japan's actual defense policy pursued within the framework of that doctrine, generally correspond to the post-classical realist interpretation elaborated thus far. Although the NDPO does not use the term 'the security dilemma', it clearly states Japan's firm commitment to the alliance with the United States and *senshu boei* (defense-only military posture), in addition to the three non-nuclear principles and civilian control of the military as well as the peace constitution. Central to the NDPO is Japan's commitment to the concept of 'a basic and standard defense capability' (*kibanteki boeiriyoku*), which is what we referred to earlier as a modest and defensive military. Such a capability is the minimum necessary defense capability for an independent nation so that it would not become a source of instability in the surrounding

region by creating a vacuum of power: 'it is not a capability directly linked to a military threat to Japan'.¹⁰ Under the NDPO, the principal mission of Japan's military was to frustrate any potential aggression toward the Japanese mainland while not posing a threat to Japan's neighbors – in other words, it was a security-seeking mission. Japan's force structure largely reflected this mission, as one can see in any published procurement information of the Japanese military. Furthermore, Japan has consistently forgone the acquisition or development of clearly offensive military weapons – even conventional ones – such as ballistic missiles, long-range strategic bombers, and aircraft carriers.¹¹ Such weapons would have allowed Japan to project its destructive power deep into the military and civilian centers of the Soviet Union, which in turn would likely have intensified the security dilemma that Japan faced with the superpower. In addition, Japan kept its defense budget around 1 per cent of its GNP, which was a reflection of concerns for financial burden on the national economy that appeared in the NDPO.

Through the analytical lens of postclassical realism, furthermore, it is not surprising that the Soviet military build-up in Northeast Asia in the late 1970s and early 1980s did not trigger as drastic a change in Japan's security policy as some neorealists had anticipated. The logic of postclassical realism suggests that Japan did not have a strong incentive to change its defensive security posture into an offensive one – even in the face of the increasing offensive capabilities of the Soviet Union – *as long as the Japan–US alliance kept generating the aforementioned benefits to Japan*. In theory, two extreme situations existed when the level of these benefits dropped to a dangerous point, powerfully forcing Japan to rethink its defense policy: (1) the Soviet Union's offensive military capabilities reaching a point where the air–naval advantage of the United States and Japan combined clearly disappeared; and (2) the United States dissolving its alliance with Japan. Neither of these scenarios happened during the Cold War era – the Soviet military build-up in question was strong, but not sufficient to eliminate the defensive superiority of the Japan–US alliance. As Tetsuya Umemoto (1985: 315–38) correctly documents, Japan's actual procurement pattern did not change (or even accelerate) significantly from the procurement plan specified in the NDPO, although the Japanese rhetoric did reflect increasing concerns about the Soviet arms build-up.

Post-Cold War period

After the Cold War ended, Northeast Asia became a unipolar situation, the United States being the sole superpower. Despite this fundamental shift in polarity, postclassical realism does not anticipate Japan's strategic goal and measures to go through a fundamental change. The logic of postclassical realism still holds for post-Cold War Japan. The collapse of the

Soviet Union has only reduced the intensity of the security dilemma that Japan used to face *vis-à-vis* the Soviet Union. This is a favorable condition for Japan's security interest. If Japan abandons its alliance with the United States and/or starts large-scale military build-up with clearly offensive weapons, such an action would only ignite the serious intensification of the security dilemma in Northeast Asia, encouraging the military build-up of China and two Koreas (and potentially ASEAN states) and clearly undermining Japan's otherwise secure strategic position.¹² In addition, the Japanese economy would face an enormous financial burden generated by such arms build-up programs. Thus, Japan as a security-seeker has no incentives to abandon its Cold War policy package, whereas neorealists (Layne 1993: 41–5; Waltz 1993; 61–70) may hypothesize that Japan will weaken its commitment to the old policy package in light of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the threat for which the Japan–US alliance was originally intended.

The behavior of the Tokyo government backs up postclassical realism's prediction. Japan sought the continuation of the Japan–US alliance even after the Soviet Union collapsed. As postclassical realists would predict, furthermore, Japan's reasoning was that US military presence in the Western Pacific region, which was guaranteed by the Japan–US alliance, was necessary to keep the security dilemma in post-Cold War Northeast Asia from intensifying (see, e.g., Kitaoka and Takano 1994: 17). Japan succeeded in keeping the US military presence, as it signed the 1996 Japan–US Joint Declaration on Security. Moreover, Japan explicitly reaffirmed in the N-NDPO its commitment to maintaining a modest and defensive military, while the N-NDPO broadened the scope of Japanese military activities somewhat to include logistic support to the US forces.

Kubo and the NDPO

The postclassical realist interpretation of Japan's basic policy posture that we have developed thus far can be supported by hard empirical evidence. It is not coincident that Japan's basic policy posture is consistent with postclassical realism's predictions; key Japanese policy planners, especially Kubo, intentionally designed Japan's core security policy in the postclassical realist line of thinking in the mid-1970s when they had to rethink hard what true Japanese national interest was, which culminated in the formulation of the NDPO. Kubo left many writings that explicate his theoretical grounds for the NDPO. His ideas were powerful and continue to survive even today, as every major government report on security policy, including the N-NDPO, has confirmed the alliance with the United States and the concept of a basic and standard defense capability as the twin foundations of Japan's security policy. Thus, analyzing Kubo's thought is crucial to our correct understanding of the theoretical foundation of Japan's core security policy in the past quarter century.

For our interest here, Kubo's ideas can be divided into two groups: on the rationale for acquiring a basic and standard defense capability within the framework of the Japanese–US alliance, and on the rationale for keeping the alliance in the first place.

Why a basic and standard defense capability?

Kubo's starting point of inquiry was to ask, 'What is the nature of international–political contexts, as opposed to purely military contexts, in which Japan seeks its security?' (Kubo 1981a: 107–8, 118–19; 1981b: 190–3; 1981c: 137–8; 1981h: 233; see his remarks in Inoki *et al.* 1977: 121). To him, Japan's old (if implicit) military plan based on the concept of 'a required defense capability' (*shoyo boeiriyoku*) was fundamentally flawed (more on this later), because it did not address this question of international–political contexts.¹³ Although he rarely used political science terms like the security dilemma and bipolarity stability, he essentially understood these concepts and used them in analyzing Japan's international–political contexts in the 1970s (e.g. Kubo 1981a: 107; 1981g: 72–6, 80–1). What he saw in Northeast Asia in the 1970s was essentially bipolarity stability in which neither the Soviet Union nor the United States was willing to risk starting escalation toward intercontinental nuclear exchange. The security dilemma between the two superpowers, in other words, was moderate. The basic strategic goal of Japan, according to Kubo, was to help sustain this international stability through its security and other measures.

A careful reading of his writings strongly suggests that Kubo attributed the regional stability primarily to US–Soviet strategic parity centering on nuclear balance, although he listed other factors supporting the regional stability (e.g. the low likelihood of war on the Korean Peninsula). He also understood the defensive advantage of Japan in relation to the Soviet Union at sea. Given the US–Soviet strategic parity that should hinder the spiral escalation of tension between the two superpowers, and given the absence of direct military confrontation lines on land (such as on the East–West German border and on the Korean Peninsula) between Japan and the Soviet Union, Kubo reasoned that a Second World War-style unlimited attack by the Soviet Union on Japan, not to mention a Soviet nuclear strike on Japan, was highly improbable as long as Japan had a solid alliance with the United States (Kubo 1971: 1–3, 10–12; 1972: 22–4; 1973: 15–18; 1979: 165–73, 193–5; 1981a: 116; 1981f: 100–1; 1981g: 60, 66–70; Tajima 1971: 36–43; Kubo's remarks in Inoki *et al.* 1977: 121–2, 130–1).

Japan's security environment defined in this way was quite robust and persistent, because the intensity of the security dilemma surrounding Japan was determined primarily by nuclear technology and geography. In fact, even when the Soviet Union started military build-up in the late 1970s and even when the idea that *détente* had ended became widespread, Kubo was not alarmed because the Soviet build-up signalled no fundamental

demise of either the US–Soviet nuclear parity or Japan’s geography-rooted defensive advantage against the Soviet Union (Kubo 1979: 175–82, 194–7; 1981h: 244–52). Furthermore, in Kubo’s view, destabilization or even war in the Korean Peninsula and/or Taiwan was a secondary factor that would not fundamentally change Japan’s basic policy package of allying with the United States while keeping modest and defensive military capabilities. Japan would make some adjustments within such a policy framework in the eventuality of another Korean war or Chinese civil war; but no fundamental change of the framework itself was deemed necessary (Kubo 1972: 21; 1979: 184–7; 1981g: 70).

Given this assessment of Japan’s strategic environment, Kubo claimed that a limited attack on Japan, to which the United States was ill-prepared, was still possible, toward which Japan’s military planning should be directed. ‘There is no immediate factor for military conflict surrounding Japan,’ argued Kubo. ‘Therefore,’ he went on, ‘there is no probable threat to Japan, while a possible threat exists. . . . [Such a] possible threat is a limited war’ (1971: 2–3, translated by the present author). Japan should then be able to cope with a limited invasion all by itself until US forces arrived. Kubo called such a military capability ‘a basic and standard defense capability’. Such a force structure should be characterized by a more balanced resource distribution between frontline weapon systems and behind-the-frontline needs, so that Japan’s long-term ability to resist a limited invasion would be strengthened (Kubo 1971: 13–20; 1981a: 125–7; 1981d: 154–6; 1981g: 65, 73–4, 84–5). Furthermore, Kubo believed, as early as in 1971, that a basic and standard defense capability should cost Japan approximately 1 per cent of its annual GNP, not too heavy a burden on the Japanese economy (Kubo 1971: 17).¹⁴

Thus, Kubo, while sensitive to the question of economic burden, deduced the appropriate size and goal of Japan’s military power from his analysis of the security dilemma in Northeast Asia and he responded to the probability, not possibility, of large-scale conflict – these points constitute explicit evidence in favor of postclassical realism. Furthermore, Kubo saw a two-way street: Japan could make significant contributions to the regional stability by acquiring modest and defensive military capabilities. Either too small or too large Japanese military power would intensify the severity of the security dilemma surrounding Japan in a spiral fashion. To Kubo, therefore, Japan’s security policy had to be part of, or interacting with, broader international politics, rather than a narrow military planning exercise designed for defeating enemies (Kubo 1971: 3–4, 24–5; 1972: 19; 1973: 18–20; 1979: 178–84; 1981a: 107–18; 1981g: 62–83; 1981h: 234–7).

Kubo clashed with the Japanese military that clung to a quasi-neo-realist argument that Japan had to be prepared for the worst-case scenario conceivable under the framework of US nuclear deterrence – that is, a large-scale invasion by the Soviet Union or ‘a total and unlimited non-nuclear war embroiling entire Japan for a long period’ (Tajima 1971: 38).¹⁵

The military argued that the appropriate level of Japan's military capabilities (a required defense capability) should depend on possible, not probable, threat to Japan, which in turn was to be inferred solely on the basis of the Soviet Union's military capabilities. This 'military rationality' put emphasis on acquiring frontline weapon systems, hindering the development of a more balanced national defense program. Until the NDPO, the previous defense plans were built around the concept of a required defense capability and designed for a Second World War-type unlimited conventional attack on Japan by the Soviet Union. Consequently, Japan had a potentially far more ambitious defense plan than the one stipulated in the NDPO.

To Kubo, the military's logic, however rational in terms of military thinking, was politically bankrupt for peacetime (Kubo 1971: 3–14, 17–18; 1973: 15; 1981a: 106–8, 123–5; 1981b: 190–1; 1981g: 58, 61–2, 72, 80, 84). He thought that preparing for the worst-case scenario was a virtually endless process, as the Soviet military capabilities were enormous and changing, which would simply drain Japan of its economic resources. The military's logic seemed particularly problematic when the Japanese economy was hit hard by the oil crisis of 1973–74 and Japan faced a more relaxed international security environment after the 1972 Sino-Japanese and Sino-US agreements of diplomatic normalization. Since the problem with the old military plan lay in its very core logic, which could not be simply solved by symptom-correction measures such as setting up a numerical ceiling to military budgets, the old military plan itself had to be scrapped.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, the military was bitterly opposed to the NDPO (Chuma 1985: 150; Murata 1997: 82–5; Otake 1983: 115–18). Thanks to then Defense Agency director-general, Michita Sakata, Kubo could successfully push his new military doctrine through inside the Defense Agency.

Why a Japan–US alliance?

Kubo regarded the alliance with the United States as central to Japanese security policy. It provided Japan with nuclear deterrence against the Soviet Union and narrowed down the scope of Japan's defense tasks, resulting in a relatively light economic burden for military programs (Kubo 1981e: 48–9). Kubo rejected heavily armed neutrality, Japanese Gaullists' option.¹⁷ In the first place, he argued that from a purely military perspective, Japan could not obtain credible nuclear deterrence even if it had 'gone nuclear', precisely because of its geography-rooted vulnerability against nuclear strike. Even with conventional military capabilities alone, moreover, Kubo saw that it would be almost impossible for Japan to win a war against the Soviet Union if it fought alone. Second, pursuing heavily armed neutrality would result in the intensification of the security dilemma with both superpowers and in enormous financial burden on the Japanese

economy – in other words, self-destruction. Thus, the only viable alliance policy for Japan, in Kubo's view, was allying with the United States (Kubo 1971: 20–4; 1979: 174–5; 1981a: 111–12; 1981e: 48; Tajima 1971: 49).

In addition, this alliance was an effective political tool of Japan, according to Kubo. First, it stabilized Japan's relations with the United States, setting a cooperative framework to solve any bilateral problems. Second, it helped stabilize Northeast Asia. Kubo plainly acknowledged that the alliance calmed any potential fears for Japan's reagrgrandizement that Japan's neighbors had. By allying with the United States, Japan could help prevent the regional security dilemma from intensifying, just as by holding its military power at the level of a basic and standard defense capability. In fact, Japan could send the same message to the United States by intentionally being on the US 'leash'. In this way, Japan could communicate to all states in Northeast Asia that it was only interested in acquiring its security without threatening others and that it had no ambition to challenge the present regional order governed by the superpowers (Kubo 1971: 4–10; 1972: 22–4; 1979: 197–207; 1981c: 135–6, 138–40; 1981e: 43–9, 53–6; 1981g: 53, 64–5).

Conclusion

Military doctrine is the backbone of any state's security policy. Post-war Japan is no exception. Since 1976, Japan has followed the military doctrine stipulated in its NDPO that was later revised in 1995. This core of contemporary Japanese security policy makes sense through the lens of post-classical realism. Furthermore, Kubo, the key designer of Japanese military doctrine, himself resorted to postclassical realist thinking when replacing the old military doctrine in the mid-1970s.

Many anti-realist studies of Japanese security policy generally, and the domestic constructivist studies in particular, have inadequately analyzed Japan's core security policy. As a result, they have concluded mistakenly that Japan is a powerful case demonstrating the limitation of realism. They may be right if their realism means neorealism. But they have overlooked postclassical realism that has formed the theoretical foundation of Japanese military doctrine since 1976.

This paper's findings raise new questions about post-war Japanese security policy: for example, if in fact the Japanese military was pursuing a quasi-neorealist policy line (that is, preparing for a large-scale Soviet invasion) until the mid-1970s, how did this come about and how was the military allowed to do so in light of anti-militarism among the general public? What exactly was the nature of 'civilian control' in early Cold War Japan? We may have to revise the conventional view of the docile Japanese military well controlled and penetrated by civilians, a view that is recently solidified, again, by domestic constructivists (Katzenstein 1996a: Ch. 5). A new debate on the issue of Japan's civilian control system is certainly

welcome as the issue has not received the systematic academic scrutiny it deserves.

Furthermore, our examination of Kubo's thoughts has revealed that, in fact, strong realist rationales exist for Japan to (1) forgo nuclear armament and (2) keep its defense expenditure around 1 per cent of its GNP. This finding leads us to wonder whether a realist rationale exists for another security measure of Japan: an arms export ban. Anti-realist scholars have characterized these three Japanese policies as epitomes of Japanese anti-militarism that realism cannot explain adequately. Through the analytical lens of postclassical realism, rather than neorealism, future research should tackle this question of arms exports. Although some preliminary research exists (Aihara 1997), we need more research on this topic.

Postclassical realism was only recently formalized in the United States. Yet, in a latent form, it has guided Japan's security policy in the past quarter century. How long will it continue to constitute the theoretical foundation of Japan's core security policy? Only future historians can tell.

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Notes

- 1 The Royal United Services Institute for Defence Studies (RUSIDS) in London ranks states according to their 'martial potency', that is, their 'resources committed to defense' (RUSIDS 1999: 324). Japan was ranked tenth in 1996, the top five positions being occupied by the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (*ibid.*: 331).
- 2 The content of the NDPO is more limited than what one may expect from the term 'military doctrine' in the English-speaking world. Nevertheless, even pre-Second World War Japanese military doctrines (the first one of which was issued in 1907) were quite limited in their content; and the NDPO is quite similar to its pre-Second World War predecessors in this regard. However limited their content may be, all Japanese military doctrines do define strategic goals and basic frameworks for defense planning and activities on the basis of some analyses of Japan's international environment.
- 3 The full texts of the NDPO and the N-NDPO can be found in Japanese Defense Agency (1996: 308–21).

- 4 Brooks (1997) himself does not use the concept of the security dilemma when describing postclassical realism. Yet, I believe that a part of postclassical realism can be aptly rephrased in the language of the security dilemma – only a part, however, because postclassical realism, as will be explained later, also incorporates the economic power dimension of international politics to its analytical scope whereas the concept of the security dilemma does not.
- 5 While some excellent analyses of the NDPO exist in Japanese, none of them captures this theoretical core. See Chuma (1985: 147–69), Hirose (1989), Kurokawa (1985), Murata (1997), Muroyama (1992: 329–70), Otake (1983: Chs 9–10), A. Tanaka (1996).
- 6 The two are not in total agreement, however. For example, Berger (1996: 319–20) accepts, whereas Katzenstein (1996a: 196–204) rejects, the efficacy of realist analysis for Japanese security policy in the 1950s.
- 7 Also see Chai (1997: 390–3). Berger (1993: 122–3) does briefly refer to defensive realism but he essentially uses it interchangeably with balance-of-threat theory, not with the security dilemma.
- 8 In addition, this core area consisting of strategic-level issues remains the realm of realpolitik discourse among government officials (see, e.g., Kitaoka and Takano 1994; H. Tanaka 1996) and those strategic thinkers who are close to the government (e.g. Kosaka 1969; Nishihara 1988; Okazaki 1983).
- 9 Katzenstein (1996a: 133, 149) describes the NDPO but offers little in-depth analysis of the content of the doctrine.
- 10 These quotes in English are from the N-NDPO reprinted in Japanese Defense Agency (1997: 292). The N-NDPO also acknowledges that Japan's basic and standard defense capability 'was derived from relevant factors such as the strategic environment, geographical characteristics, and other aspects of Japan's position' (*ibid.*).
- 11 In the 1970s, the Japanese government singled out these three types of weapons as clearly offensive weapons not to be acquired by Japan. See Asagumo Shinbunsha (1995: 413–17).
- 12 As Brooks (1997: 464–5) points out, balancing against the United States in the post-Cold War period would simply hurt Japan's economic interests.
- 13 Kubo was aware of the public's anxiety about this concept, but for him, as the careful reading of his writings and remarks indicates, that was not the primary reason why the old security concept was flawed. See especially his remarks in 'Nattoku dekiruka "Boei Keikaku no Taiko"'. Also see Kubo (1981a, 1981b, 1981g).
- 14 In fact, Kubo (1972: 18; 1973: 16) singled out the fact that no direct threat was posed to Japan as the main reason why Japan could keep its defense expenditure around 1 per cent of its GDP. Meanwhile, his defense plan always took into account socio-economic dimensions seriously and he advocated 'comprehensive security' (Kubo 1973: 24; 1979: 207–18; 1981g: 61–2).
- 15 No evidence is found to suggest either (1) that the military was seriously split internally and Kubo allied with one group and confronted another when he promoted the NDPO; or (2) the military was heavily involved in the formulation of the NDPO.
- 16 Kubo (1981a: 107–8; 1981e: 52–5; 1981g: 80–1) even claimed that the purpose of Japan's Self-Defense Force was not to war with, but to deter, an enemy state.
- 17 On policy options debated in Japan during the late 1970s, see Mochizuki (1983/84).

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