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BOOK REVIEW ROUNDTABLE

Tom Phuong Le's

Japan's Aging Peace:
Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century

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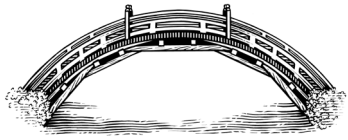

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Japan's Aging Antimilitarism Is Alive and Well

Charles T. McClean

The end of 2022 marked a watershed moment for Japan's military planning. A new National Security Strategy offered a sober assessment of the security environment in East Asia, clearly identifying the serious threats posed by Russia, North Korea, and especially China. The accompanying procurement plans included a commitment to making across-the-board improvements in defense capabilities, from acquiring new weapons systems such as long-range missiles to establishing a joint command to oversee the three Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) branches, expanding investments in space and cyber domains, and upgrading systems intelligence. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida further pledged to double Japan's defense spending to 2% of GDP, eschewing a long-held norm that limited such spending to no more than 1%.

These developments are sure to make many who follow Japan interested in reading Tom Phuong Le's new book, *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century*, which offers both important historical context and insights into the factors that are likely to shape Japan's strategic choices for decades to come.

Crucially, for Le, increases in Japan's defense spending and capabilities do not necessarily mean that the country is remilitarizing. To the contrary, Le boldly asserts that Japan's "antimilitarism ecosystem" is alive and well. This ecosystem is powerfully sustained by a set of material constraints and ideational restraints that "have limited [Japan's] embrace of conventional militarism as a tool of statecraft" (p. 6). In other words, Japan may develop capabilities to better defend itself, but Le argues that the country will remain committed to only limited uses of force for the foreseeable future.

As suggested by the title, aging is an important theme of the book—with "aging" here referring both literally to the immense challenges posed by Japan's rapidly aging population and figuratively to interpretations that can carry either positive (e.g., wisdom) or negative (e.g., being out of date) connotations. Demographics are thus only part of the story, as the

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book explores a wide range of cultural, economic, and political factors that have contributed to the durability of Japan's peace culture.

The result is a book that is comprehensive and detailed, yet consistently engaging. Chapter one introduces the main argument before Le begins to unpack, in chapter two, Japan's "multiple militarisms" at different stages of the country's history. Chapters three and four focus on material constraints, namely demographics and limited technical-infrastructural capacity, while chapters five and six explore political and normative ideological restraints, respectively. Chapter seven turns to the effects of antimilitarism for the JSDF's involvement in peacekeeping operations, humanitarian assistance, and disaster relief activities. Finally, chapter eight discusses former prime minister Shinzo Abe's "Proactive Contribution to Peace" policies before offering some concluding thoughts.

Across these chapters are several standout sections. In chapter three, Le takes a fascinating look into how the shrinking youth population is posing recruitment challenges for the JSDF. But rather than simply presenting the numbers on Japan's demographic decline, he goes further to critically evaluate the successes (and failures) of the government's efforts to make military service more attractive to young people, especially young women. In chapter five, Le identifies six specific qualities that characterize Japan's style of antimilitarism in a section that also skillfully addresses the sensitive issue of how citizens have grappled with their country's wartime past. And, in chapter six, Le highlights the important role played by grassroots movements and peace museums, particularly those in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, in promoting peace education.

Japan's antimilitarism ecosystem may continue to evolve, but Le does not see it eroding any time soon. According to Le, one reason for this is that "antimilitarism plays a prominent role in the formative years of many Japanese" (p. 187). Young people in Japan, compared to their counterparts in East Asia, are significantly less likely to have any type of military training, given the absence of conscription. By contrast, they are substantially more likely to have visited a peace museum on a class field trip, thanks to Japan having the most peace museums in the world (p. 76). While skeptics may worry that antimilitaristic attitudes will only weaken as the older generations that personally experienced World War II pass away, Le instead views the younger generation as ready, willing, and able to take on a larger role in peace activism.

Le thus offers a refreshingly new take in a crowded field of work on Japanese security policy, but there may be some who quibble with certain

aspects of the book. For instance, a consistent theme in the book is that prior work has too often tried to oversimplify Japan's complex relationship with the military into dichotomies, such as pacifism vs. militarism. Le's "multiple militarisms" approach certainly allows for more nuance, but it comes at the cost of parsimony and generalizability, issues that he tackles in the conclusion. Still, readers who are interested in militarism beyond Japan will find much to like in the book. Le may not offer a new typology of militarisms that can be easily exported to other cases, but he does offer a new process for how one might approach the study of militarism in other countries.

There is also the unavoidable reality that even a hefty tome such as this one cannot cover everything. Le goes into wonderful detail about the changing reputation and recruitment strategies of the JSDF but says less about whether similar changes are affecting other parts of Japan's security apparatus, such as the Ministry of Defense and the Japan Coast Guard. In addition, the book uses a tremendous variety of evidence, including firsthand interviews, but devotes comparably less space to analyzing generational differences in public opinion polling. Lastly, this is a book that seeks to understand the role of internal changes (or lack thereof) within Japan in informing the country's views on militarism, and thus it spends relatively less time discussing the role of external pressures from the country's neighbors in East Asia.

In the end, though, Le has managed to create that rare book that can appeal to both academics and policymakers. It is a book that will be carefully read by Japan experts but also makes for an easy recommendation for anyone interested in an introduction to Japanese security policy. Additionally, the book is unlikely to lose its relevance any time soon. Japan's demographic challenges are "profound…and difficult to overcome" (p. 81), yet how Japan tackles these challenges will have "far-reaching impacts for regional and global security" (p. 4). ◈

The Next Generation of Japan's National Security

Marina Fujita Dickson and Yoichi Funabashi

Japan's security policy has undergone several drastic changes in past decade: the establishment of the National Security Council in 2013; the easing of defense equipment exports in 2014; and, most recently, the publication of the new National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, and Defense Buildup Program white papers in late 2022, combined with the increase of the defense budget to 2% of GDP and plans to establish new measures like a counterstrike capability. While many analysts have highlighted these developments as significant shifts in Japan's strategic priorities, a single major factor looms in the background that continues to hinder developments—Japan's aging population.

Japan's attempt to become a "normal nation"—a country with an effective security policy that can accept the use of force as a potential policy tool—is constrained today by a declining birth rate, an aging population that both stresses the government's budget and limits the recruitment pool for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), and the slow pace of technology adoption in the JSDF. Tom Phuong Le's book *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century* addresses these major challenges and uniquely explores the intersection between Japanese defense policy and the country's demographic crisis, detailing exactly why and how these issues are causational. First, fewer children mean fewer potential military recruits. Second, an older, aging population requires a larger budget for institutions like the pension system, leaving less money for defense matters, such as recruiting and retaining troops. Le carefully describes both the uniqueness and individuality of the problem; while most developed economies today are experiencing declining birth rates, Japan's crisis has arguably attracted the most attention as a social phenomenon over the last two decades.

In exploring how the abovementioned demographic shift affects Japan's defense, Le compares Japan with its neighbors South Korea, Taiwan, China, and Singapore, which all have some form of mandatory conscription. Yet, each of these countries faces the same issue of an aging population—and

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some of these countries (such as Taiwan and South Korea) are experiencing this problem to an even more acute degree than Japan. Having tapped into the full extent of their recruitment pool, these four countries could be looking at a potentially more dire situation in their future. Indeed, Japan is not the only country, but rather just the first, to face the challenge of an aging population. Le argues that the way in which Japan manages this crisis domestically will thus be a lesson for its neighbors.

Throughout the text, the author also underscores the various constraints on Japanese militarism beyond demographics, including issues resulting from an underdeveloped military industrial complex, arms export principles, public opinion, the constitution, the international stigma of militarism, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and Japan's three nonnuclear principles, among others. While the government can alleviate some of these issues through policy reform, many are norms that cannot be overcome without "significant social engineering" (p. 11), which is beyond the capability of the government.

While Le's discussion of Japan's intertwined demographic and defense challenges—and the immense hurdles Japan faces to overcome them—is crucial, Le's most important contribution to the existing literature is perhaps his examination of "militarism" itself as a concept. Some scholars have predicted that Japan will "return to normal security behavior" (p. 34), but what do they mean by that precisely? Because there is a lack of specificity in this idea of a return to normal, it is unclear what path of militarization Japan would take and what it would mean for the country's future. It is clear, however, that Japan's "return to normal" in military terms will not be a return to the 1930s. To understand this point, one must look beyond conventional metrics of militarization such as the "increased activity" of the armed forces or changes in the defense budget to other indicators such as civil-military dynamics, the prevalence of military symbols in public view, and education on Japanese history and war, to name a few. In the 1920s, for example, Japan had lowered its defense budget but was emphasizing nationalism and militarism in schools. By contrast, Japan today is increasing defense spending on deterrence capabilities and increasing JSDF activity, but much of this is for humanitarian assistance and purposes. Schools have emphasized peace education (*heiwa kyouiku*) since the postwar period, so most students receive some formal education on the importance of peace in the context of Japan's history and experience in World War II. The metrics for measuring militarism are thus complex, and levels of militarism cannot necessarily be explained linearly from one end (antimilitarist) to

another (militarist). Rather, multiple militarisms exist, which can explain how Japan's security trajectory is changing without it reflecting the patterns of pre–World War II.

While Le analyzes the various barriers that Japan faces vis-à-vis its national security policy, he also examines the ways the country has tried to overcome these long-standing problems, both through policy changes and shifting cultural norms. Former prime minister Shinzo Abe, who was the longest-serving prime minister in postwar Japan, leaned into the contemporary concept of "proactive pacifism" that opens the way for a more assertive security posture within an antimilitarist framework. Abe introduced concepts such as the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" and established the National Security Secretariat, the National Security Council, and the country's first national security strategy during his second administration. At the same time, Abe was careful to use inclusive rhetoric to keep channels of cooperation open with skeptical neighbors, including Russia and China, as well as to emphasize Japan's commitment to peace and security both at home and abroad. Antimilitarism is part of the spectrum of militarism, and Abe's proactive pacifism moved the policy needle to accommodate Japan's surrounding reality.

In addition to the efforts of ambitious leadership, the book points to other ways some of Japan's defense policy issues can be overcome. Lack of manpower can be addressed by encouraging and incentivizing more young people to join the JSDF—especially women, who account for only a miniscule share of the current force. JSDF recruitment varies by region, with a disproportionate number of recruits coming from Kyushu (p. 88). Greater exposure of Japanese youth to JSDF activities, such as peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations, would benefit JSDF recruitment efforts. Le, however, describes the Japanese as being "indifferent or antagonistic" toward military service as result of the military "hijacking the nation and leading it down a destructive path in WWII" (p. 11). In reality, however, this picture is outdated and skewed. Those in Japan who were skeptical of the military have already aged-out of enlisting. At the same time, recent polling shows younger generations have an overwhelmingly positive view of the JSDF, likely bolstered by its service during the Great Tohoku earthquake and tsunami in 2011, which remains in the memory of potential recruits today. The JSDF is also consistently ranked by the public as the most trusted institution in Japan. Having a positive view of the JSDF does not equate to wanting to enlist, of course, but nevertheless the Ministry of Defense has at least cleared one major hurdle on perceptions of the military. These changes

in norms take time, as Le underscores throughout his book, and Japan is indeed undergoing a significant shift in how it views itself.

It is precisely the effect of this new generation that Le overlooks, where small but clearly visible shifts in norms and culture are appearing. Young Japanese today are more in favor of a defense spending increase and constitutional reform (including revision of the antiwar clause) than their parents' and grandparents' generations and are also supportive of the Liberal Democratic Party's push for a more robust defense policy. In addition, recent polling data shows that Japanese in their twenties were the most in favor of the country adopting a counterstrike capability at 65%, while those in their seventies were the least in favor at 51%.[1] This momentum has certainly not hurt the Kishida administration's setting of a more ambitious defense policy in the 2022 National Security Strategy. Furthermore, with the voting age lowered from twenty to eighteen in 2022, the youngest voters in Japan may start to have an outsized impact on the policy direction of their country. While younger Japanese may not be enthusiastic to join the JSDF right now, normalizing its presence and visibility in Japanese society will elevate the JSDF in the public consciousness. As younger generations become more invested in national security, enthusiasm for the JSDF will grow. As Le puts it, "reality comes first, then policies adjust" (p. 264).

The future of Japan's defense lies in its people: this is the central argument the author makes, but it can only be demonstrated by events yet to come. This book thus provides valuable insights not only to scholars of Japan but to leaders in other countries that are eager to see what lessons they can draw for their own armed forces. For Japan, however, the future will remain an ebb and flow of societal change and policy adjustments and readjustments. The public and government will continue to "negotiate militarism" in the context of international norms as Japan's security environment, as well as the public's perception of it, evolves over time. ◈

[1] "Teki kichi kougeki 'sansei' 56% naikaku fushijisou demo sansei kahan Asahi yoronchousa" [56% "In Favor" of Counterstrike Capability, Including Those Not in Favor of Current Administration Asahi Poll], *Asahi shimbun*, December 19, 2022 ~ https://www.asahi.com/articles/ASQDM552TQDLUZPS006.html.

Japan's Decaying Antimilitarism Ecosystem

Christopher W. Hughes

Japan's postwar military posture has always demanded careful analysis, given its intricacies and implications for East Asian security. Right now, it warrants even greater attention with the government's avowed intention in its 2022 National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) to "fundamentally reinforce Japan's defense capabilities."[1] Tom Phuong Le's *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century* forms a key part of the debate on Japan's military trajectory and should be read by all scholars and practitioners engaged in this topic. It contains much that is valuable, innovative, and provocative. At the same time, the volume presents overextended claims and argumentation that undermine its conclusions and impact. These issues were evident upon the volume's release in mid-2021, and events thereafter—Japan's further "major shift" or "major transformation" of its defense posture—have confirmed these flaws.[2]

The essential contention of *Japan's Aging Peace* is that many scholars and practitioners, and particularly "realists," have too readily accepted the factors contributing to Japanese "remilitarization" or "normalization" but have not focused enough on the continuing and dominant strength of internal obstacles—both material and ideational—in forming an "antimilitarism ecosystem" (p. 33) that prevents Japan from remilitarizing, or at least remilitarizing along a certain trajectory. If Japan is experiencing any change in its military posture, then it is toward types of "militarism" that leave the constraints of the past intact and contribute to nontraditional security objectives, such as UN peacekeeping operations and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

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[1] Ministry of Defense (Japan), *National Defense Strategy* (Tokyo, December 16, 2022), 4 ~ https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/index.html. Similar language is used in Cabinet of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan* (Tokyo, December 2022), 2 ~ https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf.

[2] Fumio Kishida, "Japan's Decisions at History's Turning Point, Policy Speech by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio at the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)," Prime Minister's Office of Japan, January 13, 2023 ~ https://japan.kantei.go.jp/101_kishida/statement/202301/_00005.html.

The "antimilitarism ecosystem" is laid out across several substantial chapters providing detailed and creative analysis of how this ecosystem has constrained Japan's defense posture in the past and explaining why remilitarization is not an easy pathway for contemporary policymakers to pursue. The volume points out obstacles that the country must overcome, including demographics and recruitment for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), technical-infrastructural needs for indigenous defense production, defense budget resourcing, and a domestic antimilitaristic culture. The chapter on demographics (chap. 3) is a well-researched reminder of this important variable in shaping Japan's military policy.

There is much to agree with in the discussion of key areas that Japan needs to address to facilitate fundamental change in its military posture. But the volume subsequently falters in important aspects of argumentation. Specifically, it presents fallacious benchmarks for just how far and in which direction Japan needs to shift to achieve a remilitarization trajectory; fails to recognize that Japan's potential for remilitarization is not to be found solely within its own national resources and strategy but also must account for the crucial importance of its U.S. alliance linkages; and underestimates how far Japan's policymakers and public, in committing to shifts in military trajectory, have diminished the constraints of the antimilitarism ecosystem.

False Benchmarks and Strawmen

Although the book's acceptance of the concepts of militarism and remilitarization as legitimate social science frameworks for assessing change in all states—with Japan as no exception—is important and welcome, the actual deployment of the remilitarization framework is problematic. The result is assertions that risk caricaturing the arguments of others and a tendency toward the use of strawmen.

The most pivotal examples are the benchmarks that are set. The book, ironically, is evasive in its own definitions but repeatedly suggests that Japan cannot be viewed as moving toward any form of remilitarization unless it utilizes its military as in the 1930s or prewar periods for purposes that are "aggressive," "offensive," "autonomous," "expansive," or otherwise challenging to the "status quo" (chap. 2). Not only does the volume set egregious, and thus nearly unchallengeable, benchmarks for Japanese remilitarization, but it misrepresents much of the debate on remilitarization that it claims to counter. No serious contemporary analysis of Japan's security policy, or at least none cited in the volume, argues that Japan is rewinding its military stance to the

prewar era. In fact, most analysts indicate that the trajectory of Japanese remilitarization is directed toward a more proactive defense of the Japanese homeland, contributing to the defense of the surrounding Northeast Asia region, and intended to integrate with the U.S.-centered military strategy and alliance system in the Indo-Pacific.

Moreover, contrary to assertions in the volume, much of the realist literature does provide clear definitions and benchmarks of remilitarization related to facets of military policy, such as the procurement and doctrines for use of certain types of capabilities, civil-military relations, defense production, external military and alliance commitments, and internal political, legal, and public opinion constraints. For a long time in the postwar period, the Japanese government has publicly declared similar benchmarks of a demilitarized stance, including the non-exercise of collective self-defense, the eschewing of power-projection capabilities, the peaceful use of space, the limitation of defense spending to 1% of GDP, and restrictions on the export of arms and military technology. These benchmarks imply what changes might indicate a shift toward remilitarization. If they are used consistently, as in most realist analysis, and alarmist-labeling definitions of remilitarization as spelling a return to the 1930s are set aside, then there is ample opportunity for identifying Japan's breaching of these benchmarks and remilitarization in objective social science terms. The extent and implications of remilitarization might still be the subject of disagreement, but to dismiss it entirely based on extreme and unattainable benchmarking is unpersuasive.

Missing the Bigger Picture and Underplaying the U.S.-Japan Alliance

There is a surprising lack of attention in the book to the role of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Out of approximately 270 pages (excluding appendices, the bibliography, and the index), there are only around 12 pages of sustained examination of the U.S.-Japan alliance—despite the fact that the trajectory of Japan's defense posture has been bound up inextricably with the development of the alliance. In recent years, Japanese policymakers have moved to further integrate JSDF doctrine and capabilities into a framework of bilateral U.S.-Japan regional and global military strategy through the revised 2015 Defense Guidelines and related security legislation, the 2+2 Security Consultative Committee, and the NSS and NDS processes. Any balanced analysis of Japan's remilitarization trajectory, therefore, must

fully account for the influence of the U.S.-Japan alliance in amplifying Japan's military power and reach.

Japan's Aging Peace, nonetheless, focuses on Japan's own national capabilities, largely isolated from the U.S.-Japan alliance context, and extrapolates from this analysis the possibilities for and concomitant limits of Japanese remilitarization. The volume overlooks the full implications of the increasing U.S.-Japan alliance integration over recent decades, which is accelerating in the current period. The alliance functions as a multiplier for the JSDF and Japanese base infrastructure. In turn, the alliance not only contributes to the defense of the Japanese homeland but also enables JSDF projection of force in and around the Japanese archipelago, and it supports the functional and geographic scope of U.S. military operations for Japan's defense and U.S. power projection in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. Where the U.S.-Japan alliance is examined in the volume, it is categorized as a constraint on Japanese remilitarization, buying into a version of the tired "cork in the bottle" argument.

Fast-Aging Conclusions

Japan's Aging Peace does alight on and usefully examine many important aspects of Japan's developing military profile that influence trajectories of militarism and remilitarization. However, in line with its approach in steering toward forms of militarism that it endorses, such as UN peacekeeping operations, the volume downplays change to the point of absolute denial. The consequence is that much of the analysis feels dated in casting back to the past halcyon days of the antimilitarism ecosystem and projecting this forward intact to the present day. The determination to prove no substantive change in Japanese remilitarization appears ever more obsolete given recent shifts in Japanese defense policy.

In discussing JSDF capabilities, for instance, the volume attempts to explain procurements in recent years as simply incremental additions and "upgrades" that cannot be categorized as remilitarization because they are not, in some way, abrupt game-changers and do not match in exact proportion China's investments in new capabilities. Although we should calibrate carefully the significance of Japan's capabilities, the notion that incremental change cannot eventuate in something more significant over time, that accumulated upgrades cannot be significant, or that a remilitarized posture can only be achieved through "pound-for-pound" improvements in capability are again unreasonable benchmarks.

The arguments set forth in the book are also strategically myopic in overlooking the military value of recently introduced JSDF weapons systems if they are deployed within a particular offshore island defense strategy (or even in support of a U.S. intervention strategy to defend Taiwan), used in joint or cross-domain fashion, and crucially linked to U.S. force deployments.

The limited longevity of the analysis has been further demonstrated with Japan's moves in the 2022 NDS to acquire an inventory of "upgraded" and new cruise missiles (including initially 400 Tomahawks) and to utilize these for counterstrike in conjunction with U.S. capabilities. The NDS and Defense Buildup Program will further procure for Japan combat drones, "active" cyberdefense capabilities, military satellite constellations, and improved command-and-control functions.[3] The volume might dismiss these procurements as just continuations of previous programs and doctrine, as not "offensive" in orientation, and thus failing to meet its benchmarks for remilitarization. But it surely stretches all credibility not to recognize that the recent policy documents, taken in totality, amount to step changes in Japanese military capability for serious power projection and a shift in alliance functions that will allow Japan to be equipped with a "spear" alongside its "shield" in complementing the U.S. "spear." This is hardly the inability, material or ideational, to invest in power-projection capabilities or a mark of essential continuity with the antimilitarism ecosystem.

Other factors that the volume claims act as a drag on Japan's remilitarization, and that policymakers and the public supposedly lack the will to overcome, also stack up poorly against recent developments. The conclusion that Japan's constrained defense budget is a near absolute bar on remilitarization is now dated with the decision in 2022 to push defense expenditure to around 2% of GDP, furnishing the country with the third-largest defense budget in the world. Japan will use this budget to address several issues that the volume seems to view as immovable obstacles: improving conditions for the JSDF to boost recruitment; fostering "sustainability and resilience" for combat operations, with investment in ammunition and missile stocks and storage; hardening bases and command-and-control facilities; and increasing mobility through improved sea and air lift and logistics.

[3] Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense Buildup Program* (Tokyo, December 16, 2022) ~ https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/plan/pdf/program_en.pdf.

The book's view of normative constraints also appears increasingly moribund. In placing so much emphasis on internal domestic norms and constraints, it underestimates Japanese assessments of the changing international security environment, and thus the extent to which Japanese policymakers and the public, when faced with sufficiently pressing threats—as is the case with the reverberations from the Ukraine war, China's rise and intimidation of Taiwan, and North Korea's missile and nuclear threats—are prepared to suppress antimilitaristic instincts and acquiesce in shifting Japan's military posture. Indeed, perhaps the most notable feature of recent security policy changes is the absence of any significant political or public protest against doubling the defense budget and developing counterstrike capabilities. Moreover, in promoting UN peacekeeping operations as its preferred alternative of "militarism," the volume is removed from empirical reality in that the JSDF has not effectively engaged in these operations since 2017, which hardly suggests this a higher priority for military policy than strengthening JSDF doctrine, capabilities, and the U.S.-Japan alliance for traditional warfighting.

Overall, the volume is certainly a thought-provoking work and a must-read for anyone interested in Japan's military policy, and it contains many individual sections of original research, critique, and ingenious argumentation. However, while the volume asks many of the right questions and investigates many of the right areas, in the end it comes up with erroneous conclusions given its determination to set unreasonable benchmarks and bypass important aspects of Japan's military policy and empirical evidence that inconvenience its arguments. Japan's transformation to become a more muscular military actor in its own right and effective U.S. alliance partner is not yet entirely complete or obstacle-free, but this is the indisputable and accelerating overall trajectory. ◈

Is *Japan's Aging Peace* Aging Gracefully?

Paul Midford

With *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century*, Tom Phuong Le has written what is arguably the most comprehensive and compelling scholarly book-length study to address the question "can Japan become a major military power?" Moreover, the book answers with a resounding "no." Le devotes two chapters to explaining the demographic and technical-infrastructural constraints on Japan's industry and economy that he identifies as major barriers to Japan's reemergence as a major military power. Nonetheless, at the heart of Le's argument are claims that antimilitarism, peace culture, and normative restraints prevent Japan from reemerging as a major military power, which is what one would expect from an unabashedly constructivist work.

Two years after its publication, the material constraints identified in Le's book, especially demographic, but also technological and economic, have changed little or become even more binding. But what about the ideational constraints on the country's reemergence as a military power, specifically antimilitarism, peace culture, and political and normative restraints? While they still exist, it is easy to argue that since 2021, and especially 2022, these ideational constraints have become far less limiting. Many observers argue that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and China's large-scale military exercises around Taiwan following the visit of U.S. Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi to that island in August 2022, have redrawn the baseline for how the Japanese public views issues of war and peace, creating a far more permissive environment for Japan to "finally cast off pacifism" (something that pundits have been telling us at regular intervals over the past thirty years has just been achieved) and reemerge as a great military power. Certainly, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, opinion polls in Japan showed a jump in support for increasing military spending. A plurality or small majority of those polled also supported Japan's acquisition of counterstrike capabilities, which would allow the country to attack military bases in foreign countries. Following this shift, the Kishida administration announced a dramatic increase in Japan's defense spending (although less than the doubling that had originally been discussed) as well as plans to

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acquire offensive counterstrike capabilities.[1] Based on these developments, many are ready to write an obituary for Japan's pacifism, antimilitarism, and normative constraints. This would imply that, apart from the material constraints he identifies, the ideational side of Le's book has not aged well.

Although I do not emphasize the role of norms and pacifism as security policy constraints in my own work, and although I think the influence of antimilitarism in Japan has faded over time as trust in both the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) and civilian control has risen, I do not agree with those who argue that all constraints on postwar Japanese security policy have been thrown off. These constraints remain far more limiting than is commonly recognized. Nonetheless, I argue here that these are not the constraints of antimilitarism, pacifism, or norms, but rather the long-standing attitudes of the Japanese public toward remilitarization, which I first identified as attitudinal defensive realism in my book, *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?*[2]

In 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's large-scale military exercises around Taiwan both had a significant impact on Japanese public opinion and defense policy, but these events did not motivate Japan to throw off the postwar constraints it has been operating under and reemerge as a great military power. Rather, the result has been to cause Japanese public opinion and government policy to double down on territorial defense. What is clearly absent from the mainstream of the new security debate, and even from Japan's new basic security documents that the Kishida administration issued in December 2022 (most notably, the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy, and the Defense Buildup Program),[3] are any signs that Japan is moving in the direction of reemerging as a military power prepared to project military force overseas, even in the case of its neighbor Taiwan.

Moreover, it is important to recognize that the major developments in Japan's security policy in 2022 owe more to the challenge that China has

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1 These capabilities are initially to take the form of several hundred U.S. Tomahawk cruise missiles, until Japan's own indigenous anti-ship missile (the T-12) is fully redeveloped as a general-purpose long-range strike missile and deployed by early next decade or later.

2 Paul Midford, *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011). Attitudinal defensive realism refers to the public attitude that military power has utility for territorial defense but lacks utility as a foreign policy tool that can be employed beyond national territory.

3 Cabinet of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan* (Tokyo, December 2022) ~ https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf; Ministry of Defense (Japan), *National Defense Strategy* (Tokyo, December 16, 2022) ~ https://www.mod.go.jp/j/policy/agenda/guideline/index.html; and Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense Buildup Program* (Tokyo, December 16, 2022) ~ https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/plan/pdf/program_en.pdf.

posed to Japan's territorial integrity in the Senkaku Islands since 2012 than to either the Russian invasion of Ukraine or even China's exercises around Taiwan, although the latter did matter significantly in that they appeared to signal further risks to Japan's territorial integrity.[4] Since September 2012, China's policy of sending maritime police vessels into the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands, and even harassing Japanese fishing boats there, represents the first sustained challenge to Japan's territorial integrity since 1945. These activities have prompted the Japanese public, based on its attitudinal defensive realism, to demand the military be strengthened for territorial defense, based on the public's overwhelming belief that the Senkaku Islands are Japanese territory. China's challenge to Japan's control over the islands has thus had a long-term, radicalizing impact on Japanese security policy and played a significant role in the return to power of hawkish Shinzo Abe in late 2012.[5] Since then, Japan gradually has been building up an anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) strategy covering the Senkaku and the Ryukyu islands. The new policies outlined in Japan's 2022 National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy represent less of a departure than a culmination of this trend.

The impact of both Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's military exercises near Taiwan has not been to motivate the Japanese public or elites to believe that their response should be to start deploying the JSDF overseas to defend its allies in international conflicts, not even to defend Taiwan. Nor have events motivated the public or most elites to think that the country would become more secure if it participated militarily in international conflicts alongside the United States and its allies. Rather, considering the Russia-Ukraine war and a potential Taiwan crisis has prompted ordinary Japanese to more easily imagine their own country being invaded the same way that Ukraine was, and thereby to support doubling down on strengthening territorial defense. They see Japan as a potential victim, not a potential savior.

The influence of this shift in public opinion can be seen in the three security documents approved by the Kishida administration in December 2022. They hardly mention Taiwan at all and do not envisage any direct role for Japan in Taiwan's defense. They also make clear that Japan will not

[4] In particular, Japan noted the symbolism of several Chinese missiles falling inside Japan's exclusive economic zone, and Chinese military drones making a roundtrip to Taiwan via the Miyako Strait near Okinawa, even though both can be seen as exercises of freedom of navigation under international law.

[5] Shinzo Abe served two terms as prime minister: 2006–7 and 2012–20.

engage in preemptive attacks or take the initiative to defend Taiwan or any other nation—for Japan to be involved in a China–Taiwan conflict, China will have had to fire the first shot at Japan (including U.S. bases and forces within Japanese territory). While both pundits and cynics might conclude that the Japanese government can simply abandon this constraint at a moment's notice, that this pledge was written into Japan's 2022 security framework means that it would be politically costly to remove and that its inclusion appears to have been a precondition (perhaps for Komeito) to acquire counterstrike capabilities in the first place. Here, we can see the continued influence of some of the constraints that Le identifies in his book, although these do not limit Japan's defense of its own territory. This constraint, and the lack of any commitment to defend Taiwan, means that Japan will not be able to effectively plan, exercise, or shape the JSDF for overseas missions to defend Taiwan.

Rather, the National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy focus on the defense of Japanese territory, most notably Yonaguni and the other Sakishima islands in the western Ryukyu Island chain as well as the Senkaku Islands, where there is a strong public consensus in favor of strengthening territorial defense. For example, although acquiring several hundred Tomahawk cruise missiles will provide Japan with a modest counterstrike capability, an arguably more important and larger thrust in the security and defense strategies is the new focus on building shelters and hardening JSDF bases against attack, measures that are important for territorial defense but do little to project Japanese power overseas.

Finally, it will be easier to make effective use of the JSDF's new bases on Miyakojima, Ishigaki, and Yonaguni if the military concentrates on territorial defense as opposed to defending Taiwan. The rallying cry of local opponents to these bases is the possible entrapment of these islands in a war over Taiwan, while the role of the bases in defending of the Senkaku Islands has generated deafening silence. Demonstrations over basing have their origins in the antimilitarism and peace culture that Le analyzes in *Japan's Aging Peace*. As noted, however, the demonstrators are not objecting to territorial defense, and a major demand of many of these demonstrators is that the Japanese government build shelters for civilians on the islands hosting new missile bases, demands more consistent with attitudinal defensive realism than pacifism. At the same time, community relations matter. In the past, for example, the JSDF had been forced to temporarily remove all its weapons from Miyakojima Island due to residents' claims that the JSDF had misrepresented when and where weapons were being

deployed to this island. Moreover, as these new island bases are small, the ability of truck-mounted missile batteries deployed there to survive Chinese counterstrikes is low, unless they can move beyond the narrow confines of these bases. The ability to deploy beyond their bases, and especially the ability to exercise doing so, will depend on overcoming local opposition. That is more likely to be achieved by focusing on territorial defense.

In conclusion, many of the nonmaterial constraints that Le identified in *Japan's Aging Peace* still inhibit Japan's emergence as a military power that can use force overseas. On the other hand, the remaining constraints related to the defense of Japanese territory, including counterstrike capabilities, have effectively vanished. ◈

Author's Response: Demographics Is Destiny—It's Just Difficult to Pinpoint When It Will Arrive and How Much It Will Hurt

Tom Le

Writing a book challenging the prospects of Japanese militarization during the 3,188-day tenure of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe seems like a risky endeavor. The popular press, pundits, and scholars were quick to declare the end of pacifism every time Abe pledged to amend the constitution, increase defense spending, bolster the defense sector, or return Japan to its "rightful" place in the international hierarchy. Abe did not achieve most of these policy goals, however. Hence, the irony is not lost on me that Fumio Kishida, the dovish prime minister from Hiroshima, introduced a new National Security Strategy, a Defense Buildup Program, and a five-year target to double defense spending to 2% of GDP, all within months of Abe's tragic assassination in July 2022.

I thank *Asia Policy* for giving me the opportunity to respond to these major developments. *Japan's Aging Peace: Pacifism and Militarism in the Twenty-First Century* sought to engage with the big international relations "ism" debates and the rich literature explaining Japan's reluctant and not-so-reluctant remilitarization. As such, I give my full gratitude to Charles McClean, Marina Fujita Dickson, Yoichi Funabashi, Christopher Hughes, and Paul Midford for pushing the debate forward by being so generous in time, praise, and critiques in this book review roundtable. I will quickly summarize the findings they found persuasive and then address some of the questions raised to push the debate forward.

To begin, I appreciate that there was universal agreement on the importance of considering demographics when discussing security policy. Previous studies looked at the broad pacifying or conflict-inducing effects of aging populations and youth bulges but neglected the very tangible impacts of demographics on defense force readiness, defense technology, social movements, and peace culture.[1] Security policy cannot be understood

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[1] Valerie M. Hudson and Andrea Den Boer, "A Surplus of Men, a Deficit of Peace: Security and Sex Ratios in Asia's Largest States," *International Security* 26, no. 4 (2002): 5–38 ∼ https://www.jstor.org/stable/3092100; and Seongho Sheen, "Northeast Asia's Aging Population and Regional Security: 'Demographic Peace?'" *Asian Survey* 53, no. 2 (2013): 292–318.

only by recognizing external threats but must consider domestic obstacles as well.[2]

Most reviewers also found value in two of the more significant claims of the book: (1) the existence of an antimilitarism ecosystem where ideational restraints and material constraints influence security policy, and (2) the limited utility of the traditional "militarism" concept. Where reviewers had some pause was whether ideational factors such as antimilitarism norms (or "rules," as I prefer to call them) can endure given recent developments such as the Russia-Ukraine war and reinvigorated hawkishness from China and North Korea. Dickson and Funabashi note "small but clearly visible shifts in norms and culture" among Japanese youth who may be more understanding, and even supportive, of Kishida's ambitious security agenda. Hughes, similarly, concludes that the "absence of significant political or public protests" against the doubling of the defense budget and acquisition of counterstrike capabilities suggests greater readiness to suppress antimilitaristic instincts.

Although polls show strong public support for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF), the Japanese public has shown little willingness to enlist or pay increased taxes to support them. The World Values Survey has most directly asked about the public's willingness to fight for the country in times of war and found that only 13.2% of respondents answer "yes." Moreover, only 8.8% of the under-29 population answered in the affirmative, compared to 16.6% of respondents over 50.[3] The positive view of the JSDF can be attributed to its humanitarian assistance and disaster relief activities, which is a far cry from conventional power-projection militarization.[4] In chapter seven, my book explains how the Japanese public and elites have not fully accepted the military dimensions of the responsibility to protect found in

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2 Andrew L. Oros's forthcoming book, tentatively titled *Asia's Graying Security: Aging Powers and Rising Challenges in the Indo-Pacific*, will undoubtedly take the argument *Japan's Aging Peace* proposes further to demonstrate how demographics will be a varied and ongoing puzzle to solve in the rest of East Asia and beyond. For a snapshot of his research, see his article in this issue of *Asia Policy*, "The Rising Security Challenge of East Asia's 'Dual Graying': Implications for U.S.-Led Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific."

3 World Values Survey, "Japan 2019," WV Survey Wave 7 (2017–2022), 2022 ~ https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp. A more recent, 2022 Worldwide Independent Network survey found that 19% of Japanese respondents would fight for their country (an age breakdown was not available). Worldwide Independent Network, "Willingness to Fight for One's Own Country and Attitudes towards Safety and War," May 19, 2022 ~ https://winmr.com/willingness-to-fight-for-ones-own-country-and-attitudes-towards-safety-and-war.

4 As discussed in the book, respondents to cabinet surveys consider "national defense" the JSDF's primary responsibility. Antimilitarism is not pacificism, but a form of militarism that finds the use of force acceptable in some circumstances.

UN missions and finds the deployment of the JSDF for disaster relief—the majority of its international deployments—far more compelling.

Emphasis on public protests is somewhat misplaced, however. Although the media has focused on the historical significance of recent defense-related announcements, Japan's Liberal Democratic Party must negotiate with its more antimilitaristic coalition partner, Komeito, over acceptable changes to security policy, and in fact the public did protest the government's recent security policy shifts.[5] I also urge readers to consider that peace discourse is cultivated in less dramatic daily activities such as education in addition to protests. Headline-catching rallies, such as protests against U.S. military bases in Okinawa and the 2015 Students Emergency Action for Liberal Democracy's antiwar protests are more of a sign of the lack of militarism in Japan over the last 75 years than the erosion of antimilitarism. Contrary to popular belief, peace groups do not regularly hold large rallies; civil society primarily mobilizes on war anniversaries and at important peace locations that serve as temporal and physical cultural signposts that frame the antimilitarism ecosystem. Moreover, it is vital that scholars and policymakers do not dismiss the normative power of over 4.9 million annual visitors to Japan's 76 peace museums.

The public has not been satisfied with Kishida's explanations on how to fund defense, and a recent poll shows that 77.9% of respondents want an election before the government significantly increases the defense budget.[6] Raising defense spending to reach 2% of GDP may be difficult given public opposition to taxes, special interest lobbying, a shrinking tax base, and growing entitlement spending.[7] Additional economic and political headwinds should also be expected even if Kishida is successful in obtaining his desired defense budget, as other interests and factions will question what justifies deficit spending. The 2% target is also misleading—new defense spending is considerably less than a doubling of the defense budget, as many

5 Yuki Nakamura, "Japan Ruling Bloc Split over China 'Threat' in Defense Policy Review," *Nikkei Asia*, December 15, 2022 ~ https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-ruling-bloc-split-over-China-threat-in-defense-policy-review; and "Protestors Lambast Japan Defense Policy Shift Outside PM Office," *Kyodo News*, December 16, 2022 ~ https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2022/12/7d69f6a04cbf-protesters-lambast-japan-defense-policy-shift-outside-pm-office.html.

6 "78% Urge Election before Tax Hikes to Cover Japan Defense Budget Rise," *Kyodo News*, January 29, 2023 ~ https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2023/01/d7cb11e278f0-breaking-news-63-oppose-consumption-tax-hike-to-cover-japans-child-policies-poll.html.

7 Daisuke Akimoto and Purnendra Jain, "Doubling the Defense Budget Won't Be Easy for Japan," *Diplomat*, January 21, 2023 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/doubling-the-defense-budget-wont-be-easy-for-japan; and "Poll Shows Nearly 65% Disapprove of Tax Hikes to Cover Japan's Increased Defense Budget," *Japan Times*, December 19, 2022 ~ https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2022/12/19/national/politics-diplomacy/kishida-japan-defense-budget-tax-poll.

defense-related line items were already subsumed by different government budgets.[8] While Hughes argues that more funds will be utilized for military recruitment, the newest budget allocates only 1.1% more for human resources compared to the previous year, and the last decade's recruitment expenses have not resulted in a significant increase of new recruits.[9]

This is a good place to remind readers that demographics slow down policy efforts designed to enact meaningful changes to Japanese security policy. Between the release of the book in 2021 and now, annual Japanese births dropped below 800,000, a 4.9% decrease from one-and-a-half years ago (it may have dropped even further by the time one finishes reading this essay). The Japanese government may utilize creative tax and accounting tricks to reach a 2%-of-GDP target for defense spending within five years but sustaining these grand ambitions for ten or twenty years will be increasingly difficult. Death and taxes are more certain than political objectives or war with China.

Analyzing an entire antimilitarism "ecosystem" is bound to have limits, and McClean rightfully calls attention to the importance of examining developments in the Ministry of Defense (MOD), the Japan Coast Guard, and other parts of Japan's defense apparatus beyond the JSDF itself.[10] The focus of *Japan's Aging Peace* was on the JSDF to demonstrate that many changes to security policy over the decades are (1) not directly tied to specific external threats, (2) not as substantial as purported, and (3) workarounds or indirect security policies to comport with the antimilitarism ecosystem. Since the MOD was upgraded from the Japan Defense Agency in 2007, it has had to operate within demographic, budgetary, and technological constraints—all of which are shaped by antimilitarism rules. Despite the MOD's greater prominence, the ministry struggles with recruitment and working with academia and the private sector to build up Japan's

8 Tom Le, "A Japanese Sea Change? Let's See Change First," *Critical Asian Studies*, January 4, 2023 ~ https://criticalasianstudies.org/commentary/2023/1/3/commentary-tom-le-a-japanese-security-sea-change-lets-see-change-first.

9 Ministry of Defense (Japan), "Boueiryoku bapponteki kyouka 'gannen' yosan" [Budget for the "First Year" of Drastic Reinforcement of Defense Capabilities], December 23, 2022 ~ https://www.mod.go.jp/j/budget/yosan_gaiyo/2023/yosan_20221223-1.pdf.

10 For a thorough overview of the increased sophistication of Japan's defense policymakers, see Andrew L. Oros, *Japan's Security Renaissance: New Policies and Politics for the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

independent defense capabilities.[11] Chapter seven argues that the MOD's efforts have had the effect of streamlining and rationalizing defense policy more than power-projection militarization. Hughes is correct to highlight what certain scholars and policymakers have used as bright-lines for evidence of Japan crossing a pacifistic threshold, but it is equally important to ask what makes counterstrike capability, or preemptive strikes, a Japanese red line and not a U.S., Chinese, or Korean one. In other words, Japan's antimilitarism ecosystem creates unique rules and barriers that the government must navigate. This can help explain why the government increases the coast guard's budget for patrol ships instead of christening a new Maritime Self-Defense Force aircraft carrier, why it stops at acquiring limited counterstrike capabilities instead of nuclear weapons, why Japan entrusts so much of its security to the U.S.-Japan alliance instead of to its own indigenous capabilities, and why constitutional revision is such a prominent topic in Japanese security debates.

If Abe's attempt at constitutional revision was the policy threat to my book's argument, then Midford's work is its greatest theoretical foil. Following his conclusion that "two years after its publication, the material constraints identified in Le's book, especially demographic, but also technological and economic, have changed little or become even more binding," Midford provides a persuasive counterhypothesis to antimilitarism rules in that the Japanese public may hold defensive realist attitudes that limit Japan's ability to become a "normal" military power. I agree with much of Midford's analysis that seeing the insecurity facing Ukraine and Taiwan has not led Japanese elites or the public to embrace power projection or adventurism overseas but rather to double down on territorial defense. Much of a realist reluctance to embrace a constructivist analysis of Japanese security policy can be put to rest if the argument proposed in *Japan's Aging Peace*, that antimilitarism and pacifism are fundamentally different, is accepted. Japan's gradual development of more robust defense systems and shoring up the defenses of its southern islands fall within rules emanating from the antimilitarism ecosystem. Hence, Midford and I arrive at the same place but from different paths. Where my book may offer additional nuance to defensive realist analysis is its

[11] Alexandra Sasaki and Sebastian Maslow, "Japan's New Arms Export Politics: Strategic Aspirations and Domestic Constraints," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 74, no. 6 (2022): 649–69 ~ https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2020.1781789; and Tim Kelly and Kaori Kaneko, "Japan Battles to Persuade Big Brands to Join Military Buildout," Reuters, March 15, 2023 ~ https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-battles-persuade-its-big-brands-join-military-buildout-2023-03-15.

argument that antimilitarism rules, and the peace movements that cultivate them, create an ideational power that influences the cost-benefit analysis of elites and the public. That is, the antimilitarism ecosystem tells a society why offensive realism does not pay and why the mobilization of the JSDF overseas is acceptable for nontraditional security reasons. Ideas are nothing without the resources to effectuate them, and resources only have meaning when ideas inform a society on how to use them.

I am grateful for the reviewers' insightful comments and questions that provide an opportunity to address important new developments. McClean notes that the book's approach loses "parsimony and generalizability," and Hughes finds it may set up "unreasonable benchmarks" for determining militarism. These were the fortunate costs of abandoning the traditional analysis of militarism in the discipline. Kishida's security policy agenda may be a critical juncture in Japanese history, or it may not. Here, I ask for some grace. If realists had 77 years to find reason for Japan to militarize, then it may be worth waiting a few months to see if Japan can find the revenue to pay for a larger defense budget, a few years to find the tens of thousands of civilian volunteers to defend the country, and a few decades for new defense equipment to be developed and produced.

Hughes concludes that "recent policy documents, taken in totality, amount to step changes in Japanese military capability for serious power projection and a shift in alliance functions that will allow Japan to be equipped with a 'spear' alongside its 'shield' in complementing the U.S. 'spear.'" Yet, as the last three-quarters of a century have shown, for every new concept and policy goal, there are missed recruitment quotas, failed defense contracts, years of declining defense expenditures, and political scandals and resignations for overstepping the bounds of antimilitarism.[12] In sum, it is too early to declare a sea change until the government can get the public on board to pay for greater defense capabilities and overcome the demographic and technological hurdles that are amplified by antimilitarism rules. ◈

[12] Jonathan Soble, "Japan Consortium Misses Out on $38.5 Billion Australian Submarine Deal," *New York Times*, April 26, 2016 ~ https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/27/business/international/australia-submarine-deal-japan-france.html; and Ankit Panda, "Tomomi Inada, Japan's Defense Minister, Resigns Following Weeks of Scandal," *Diplomat*, July 28, 2017 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/tomomi-inada-japans-defense-minister-resigns-following-weeks-of-scandal.