

DECADES IN THE MAKING: JAPAN'S 2015 SECURITY REVISIONS

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Abstract

For decades, strong political opposition, organized around Japan's peace constitution prevented major security legislation or revisions, yet in 2015, neither the constitution nor political sentiment proved effective obstacles to the legislation's passage. Japan's 2015 security legislation (JLPS) codified Japan's right to exercise collective self-defense, allowing it to defend close allies like America. It captured global headlines, sparked mass public demonstrations inside Japan, and precipitated a considerable drop in Prime Minister Abe's approval ratings. Why was this legislation possible? Moreover, how was it possible for Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to pass this legislation in 2015? This piece posits a two-part explanation, one of both substance and process. Regarding the former, an analysis of de jure and de facto policies since 1991 reveals a slow, continuous accumulation of substantive precedent on which the 2015 JLPS stands. As for the process, examination of the "bait-and-switch" electoral successes of the LDP coupled with the simultaneous perception of an inept Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) alternative, help explain why the LDP obtained the necessary majorities to force the JLPS

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through the Diet and, in spite of old institutional restraints, take another step in expanding Japan's security operational capabilities.

I. Introduction

Only a few years have passed since the Japan enacted its 2015 security revisions. Known as Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security or JLPS, the legislation allowed the Self Defense Forces (SDF) to defend close allies like America, while also recognizing Japan's ability to exercise collective self-defense. Despite a controversial reception of mass domestic protest and regional backlash, JLPS has only become more relevant as tensions in and around the Korean peninsula have flared. Japan's newly proclaimed ability to defend allies like the United States have made the implications of any American conflict all the more concerning for Japan. At a time when tempers, tensions, and tweets have cast new doubts upon the region's security, it is well to revisit these 2015 security revisions and examine why, and perhaps more interestingly, how was the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) under Prime Minister Abe was able to pass this legislation.

Given that the LDP had just returned to power in 2012 and security legislation has practically been a third rail of Japanese politics, there are a number of puzzles that make examining the impetus and legislative mechanism intriguing. First, it was very unpopular - according to numerous public polls administered while the legislation was debated, the Abe administration's approval dropped from the mid 40% range to 35% and nearly 60% of respondents opposed the legislation.² This adds to the puzzling fact that Japan has historically

² "Support for Abe Security Bills Slumps: Survey," *The Japan Times Online*, June 22, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/06/22/national/politics-diplomacy/support-abe-security-bills-slumps-survey/>.

been shackled on the one hand by its war-renouncing constitution and checked by strong, public, anti-nationalist sentiment on the other. Why then, was this legislation even possible? Moreover, how was it possible to pass this legislation in 2015? In 2015, neither the constitution nor the written objections from 225 constitutional scholars who claimed the policy was unconstitutional, were enough to prevent the revisions.³

While the Abe's administration has made an international relations justification for Japan's efforts to strengthen its bilateral alliance with the United States, citing a newly assertive China and an increasingly threatening North Korea, this ultimately falls short for two reasons. First, while it is clear that the security arena has changed, the desire to adjust and expand Japan's security apparatus precedes these changes in the security environment by decades. Moreover, the changing security environment also fails to explain *how* the legislation was passed.

What then, about a domestic politics explanation? Ethan Scheiner points to the ineptitude of the opposition parties which have historically struggled in terms of cohesion and candidate quality, thereby limiting their electoral success in the Diet.⁴ However, while poor candidate quality and coordination was compelling insofar as it historically hurt the opposition's ability to win seats in the Diet, it is far less compelling as an explanation in 2015. On both fronts, opposition parties have improved,⁵ recruiting better candidates and coordinating across party lines to oppose the LDP.⁶

³ Lawrence Repeta, "Japan's Proposed National Security Legislation — Will This Be the End of Article 9?," *The Asia-Pacific Journal - Japan Focus* 13, no. 24.3 (June 2015), <http://apjif.org/-Lawrence-Repeta/4335/article.pdf>.

⁴ Ethan Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition: Opposition Failure in One-Party Dominant Japan* (Cambridge University Press, 2006).

⁵ Ethan Scheiner, Daniel M. Smith, and Michael F. Thies, "The 2014 Japanese Election Results: The Opposition Cooperates but Fails to Inspire," in *Japan Decides 2014*, Japan Decides (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 22–40.

⁶ Daniel M. Smith, "Candidates in the 2014 Election: Better Coordination and Higher Candidate Quality," in *Japan Decides 2014*, 1st ed., Japan Decides (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 118–33.

Ultimately, this legislation requires another explanation – an explanation which both addresses substance and process. I examine the former by analyzing the important legislative predecessors and practical changes in Japan’s defense and security policy since 1991. What I argue is that a slow, continuous accumulation of de jure and de facto policies formed a crucial and compelling substantive foundation on which this legislation stands. As far as the process is concerned, I analyze Japan’s recent elections and electoral trends, and argue that because the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was unable to implement much of its proposed reforms during its recent 2009-2012 rule, they were regarded as ineffective. As a result, they have struggled to obtain seats in Parliament to oppose the LDP, which, on the other hand, has successfully utilized “bait-and-switch” narratives during the snap lower house elections to cement their majorities and force the JLPS through the Diet.

The outline for this piece is as follows. The first section piece provides a brief overview of Japan’s security apparatus since World War II and summarizes some of the major changes of the JLPS. Then, I will explain why the external threat explanation is inadequate by first examining the nature and perception of threat changes, and then turning to the older desires to change Japan’s security, which far predate these shifts. Following will be the two-part explanation of substance and process to explain why and how the JLPS was passed. Finally, I will conclude by summarizing my findings and briefly examining the implications of this policy in the context of an institutionalized pacifism that seems to be eroding over time.

II. History of Japanese Pacifism and Pacifist Legislation

Since the end of World War II, Japan has been both America’s keystone East Asian ally and a pacifist state. Though it is a wealthy country with a highly trained and well-equipped

Self-Defense Force (SDF), the use of those forces is highly restricted. The two formal institutional lynchpins to Japanese pacifism were the domestic inclusion of Article 9 in the Japanese constitution and this strategic alliance with its former enemy, the United States. Article 9 in particular is crucial; it achieved the formal and perpetual demilitarization of Japan and put in place a system that would, as Samuels described, “keep Japan a merchant state, not a samurai one.”⁷ Since the 1990s however, fading memories of World War II along with new global crisis have rekindled debates about Japan’s role in the international community and it is from these conversations that the 2015 JLPS evolved.

III. The 2015 Security Revisions

What does it change?

The legislation, which can be split into the Legislation for Peace and Security and International Peace and Support law, brings a few crucial changes. The first and perhaps most important change is that it permits Japan to use force to defend a country that is in close security relationship with Japan. Because the US security alliance is uniquely important in ensuring “the Japanese people’s right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness”, the most likely case would be Japan using force to aid the US.⁸ This in essence, means the bilateral alliance between America and Japan takes greater significance; now, both parties can come to the defense of the other.

The second change of the JLPS is that it expands the SDF’s operational capabilities on peace keeping missions. They may now use their weapons to defend themselves and those

⁷ Richard J Samuels, *Securing Japan : Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

⁸ Satoru Mori, “The New Security Legislation and Japanese Public Reaction — The Tokyo Foundation,” *Japan Perspectives* 15 (December 2, 2015): 40–50.

whom they are supporting, assisting, and/or transporting, allowing the SDF to protect civilians, local populations, or Japanese nationals.

IV. External Security Explanation - Questionably Necessary, not Sufficient

Changes in Japan's External Security

The question of why the LDP was able to pass the security revisions of 2015 can be broken down into two component questions. The first is one of timing and motivation: why did the LDP pursue these changes to their security apparatus in 2015? The second is one of success: why and how were they successful in passing these revisions?

An intuitive international relations answer to the former is simply that Japan faced greater external threats and adapted their foreign policy to counteract this fact. China's assertiveness,⁹ ranging from its renewed maritime claims with the 9-Dash Line,¹⁰ to the construction of artificial islands on semi-submerged reefs, certainly points to a changing security environment.¹¹ Add North Korea into the mix, and Japan's security situation has undoubtedly changed. North Korea's six successful nuclear tests including the strongest from September of 2017,¹² on top of their numerous ballistic missile launches, which have recently flown directly over Japan, certainly present a case for a more threatening security arena.¹³ All of this makes for a seemingly

⁹ Alastair Iain Johnston, "How New and Assertive Is China's New Assertiveness?," *International Security* 37, no. 4 (2013): 7–48.

¹⁰ The Nine Dash Line refers to China's claims in the South China Sea, which far exceed the 200 nautical miles guaranteed by UNCLOS. Their claims include the contested Spratly Islands and Scarborough Shoal, which are both claimed by numerous other countries such as the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam

¹¹ Hudson Lockett, "Timeline: South China Sea Dispute," *Financial Times*, June 12, 2016, <https://www.ft.com/content/aa32a224-480e-11e6-8d68-72e9211e86ab>.

¹² "What Did N Korea's Nuclear Tests Achieve?," *BBC News*, September 3, 2017, sec. Asia, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-17823706>.

¹³ "What Missiles Does North Korea Have?," *BBC News*, November 30, 2017, sec. Asia, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41174689>.

compelling case as to why the LDP would pursue the 2015 security revisions. The new laws strengthen alliance ties with the United States and indicate a bolder Japanese defense policy.

However, this ultimately is not sufficient as an explanation for two reasons. First, the impetus for more ambitious Japanese security legislation precedes both of these threats; many in the governing LDP have actually sought to expand Japan's security apparatus and operational capacity for decades but found themselves hamstrung by a variety of domestic factors. Kishi Nobusuke, one of the first LDP prime ministers and grandfather to Shinzo Abe, wanted to amend the constitution and remove Article 9 as early as 1954.¹⁴ Nakasone Yasuhiro, LDP prime minister during the mid 1980s, pushed for Japan to take greater responsibility for its own defense, trying to remove the SDF's strict 1% of GDP spending.¹⁵ He actually succeeded in this endeavor, managing to increase it to 1.004% of GDP.¹⁶ So, the desire to expand Japan's security capabilities is far older than these new security challenges of 2015.

Moreover, this external threat argument does not satisfactorily explain the mechanism or means by which this controversial legislation was passed. It still leaves unanswered, the important questions of why and how the LDP was *successful* in passing this legislation. Thus, the external changes to Japan's security environment may be questionably necessary at best, but by no means in and of itself sufficient, as the explanation for why the LDP passed the 2015 security revisions.

V. Explaining why the Security Revisions Passed: A Two-Part Answer

¹⁴ Samuels, 32.

¹⁵ William Shaw, "Security Studies in Japan: An Overview." (Federal Research Division - Library of Congress, December 1986), <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA318124>.

¹⁶ Clyde Haberman, "Japan Formally Drops Military Spending Cap," *The New York Times*, January 25, 1987, sec. World, <http://www.nytimes.com/1987/01/25/world/japan-formally-drops-military-spending-cap.html>.

Thus, we return again to the two component questions: first, why did the LDP pursue these changes to their security apparatus in 2015? And the second, why and how were they successful in passing these revisions? To answer the former, it is worth analyzing the legal precursors from the past two and a half decades, which opened the door to SDF deployment and collective self-defense in practice. These provided a crucial substantive foundation for the JLPS and made the near unthinkable thought of exercising collective self-defense, possible in 2015. Then, to address the process and success of this legislation, I will examine the recent parliamentary elections, which gave the LDP both a public mandate and the necessary majorities in both houses of the Diet to steamroll the legislation over the opposition. Included in this will be a discussion of opposition party viability. Combining these two threads encompasses both longer term and proximate explanations, while also acknowledging both the substance and process of this legislation.

A Question of Substance: Precursors to JLPS - Examining Japan's Evolution

Critical Junctures and Path Dependency

When examining the substance of JLPS, it is important to consider Japan's security evolution over the past two and a half decades. According to critical juncture and path dependency theory, particular attention should be paid to the periodic 'critical junctures' that punctuate and alter the status quo of an institution, as well as the trajectory-sustaining feedback loops that often follow.¹⁷ Much like a hiker on a particular trail, institutions often maintain a fairly steady course, gradual and generally predictable in their evolution, but occasionally, critical

¹⁷ Giovanni Capoccia and R. Daniel Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures: Theory, Narrative, and Counterfactuals in Historical Institutionalism," *World Politics* 59, no. 03 (2007): 341–369.

junctures present crossroads on the trail, opening new and alternative policy avenues. Such junctures are often marked by discrete events or crisis,¹⁸ and the decisions that follow often create rapid change or expand the realm of politically tenable possibilities. These alterations can then be sustained and reinforced into a new status quo.¹⁹

In this next section, I examine the impact of two critical junctures from the past three decades, finding that they have catalyzed important legal and practical expansions of Japan's security apparatus, which serve as precursors to the recent security revisions. First, is the impact of the First Gulf War, which spurred Japan to take a more active role in international and humanitarian affairs. Following, is Japan's reaction to the September 11th attacks, which catalyzed operations abroad by the SDF. Each crisis precipitated new, often controversial, legislation and these new laws provided both a practical and legal foundation for Japan's 2015 security revisions.

1990s: Checkbook Diplomacy Humiliation and the PKO Law

The first Gulf War of 1991 catalyzed substantive shifts in Japan's security system by delegitimizing the historical practice of "checkbook diplomacy". After Kuwait was invaded, Japan supported the UN mission but refused to send any personnel, equipment, or physical support. Given their institutional restraints on using of force abroad and domestic divisions over the scope and scale of Japan's security role in world affairs,²⁰ Japan opted only for a financial contribution that eventually totaled close to 13 billion dollars.²¹

¹⁸ Capoccia and Kelemen, 343.

¹⁹ Capoccia and Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures."

²⁰ Inoguchi Takashi, "Japan's Response to the Gulf Crisis: An Analytic Overview," *Journal of Japanese Studies* 17, no. 2 (1991): 257–73, <https://doi.org/10.2307/132742>.

²¹ Richard J Samuels, *Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007), 66.

While substantial, the lack of physical support led to international criticism. When Kuwait expressed appreciation to the participating countries, Japan was conspicuously absent.²² This humiliation repudiated “checkbook diplomacy” and this embarrassment emboldened conservatives, who proposed new legislation that would expand Japan’s ability to deploy the SDF abroad. This led to the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992. Better known as the Peace Keeping Operations (PKO) law, this legislation had the notable effect of allowing Japan’s SDF to deploy in UN peacekeeping operations as long as such participation did not involve the use or threat of force.²³ Though deployments had to be exclusively peaceful in nature,²⁴ the 1992 law nonetheless, quickly led to SDF deployment in Cambodia.²⁵ It also opened the door to numerous other operations in places like Haiti, Timor Leste, Mozambique, and most recently in South Sudan.²⁶

Allowing the SDF to be deployed abroad for PKO missions provided a substantial foundation for the JLPS, but the legislative process of the PKO law is also worth examining. The PKO law, like the 2015 JLPS required a constitutional reinterpretation, this time regarding the constitutionality of Japanese participation in a UN coalition. LDP leaders like Ichiro Ozawa, claimed both that Japan needed to proactively contribute to international efforts to preserve

²² Jonathan Watts, “Japan Revisits the Gulf War,” the Guardian, September 20, 2001, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/20/worlddispatch.afghanistan>.

²³ “Act on Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations,” June 19, 1992., article 2.2)

²⁴ Japan’s SDF forces had extremely strict limitations to the use of force, not even able to use it to defend other peacekeepers or help ensure the success of the mission. Non-violent limitations meant the SDF could only engage in direct self-defense when operating abroad Akiho Shibata, “Japanese Peacekeeping Legislation and Recent Developments in U.N. Operations,” *Yale Journal of International Law* 19 (1994): 307–48.

²⁵ Shibata, “Japanese Peacekeeping Legislation and Recent Developments in U.N. Operations.”

²⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Japan’s Contribution to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2014).

stability and that the PKO law was justified by the UN charter.²⁷ Ultimately, their efforts were successful as they used backlash against checkbook diplomacy to pass the PKO law and open new debates about Japanese contributions in international affairs.²⁸

The PKO law thus provides a smaller scale illustration of the means by which Japan's security apparatus had been expanding. Not only did it provide a legal mechanism for boots on the ground in other countries, it was also designed as an expandable piece of legislation. One of its key provisions was the so-called "freezing provision" which prevented Japanese forces from being involved in any "high capacity" military operations until a future piece of legislation specifically overturned or "unfroze" this particular article. Shibata explained this as a political calculation that helped skirt some of the constitutional controversy while also providing a clear, avenue for future expansion after the public had come to terms with this legislation.²⁹

9/11 and Further Changes

Few crisis have so clearly shaped international policy both for Japan and other countries around the world as the September 11th attacks. In many ways it represents just the kind of critical juncture Capoccia and Kelemen would expect to shift Japan's defense posture.³⁰ Ultimately, 2001 and the following few years were important in laying a de-facto framework for collective self-defense and further expanding the roles in which the SDF was operating abroad.

²⁷ Bhubhindar Singh, "Peacekeeping in Japanese Security Policy: International-domestic Contexts Interaction <sup/>," *European Journal of International Relations* 17, no. 3 (September 2011): 429–51, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066110364422>.

²⁸ Singh combines Samuels terminology of normal nationalists with the military realists from Mochizuki to describe the political factions that strove for military strategic thinking in security policy, closer ties with the US, and the potential revision of Article 9 Singh..

²⁹ George, "Japan's Participation in U.N. Peacekeeping Operations."

³⁰ Capoccia and Kelemen, "The Study of Critical Junctures."

Much of the foundation for the JLPS regarding its collective security components were established in practice during this time, and it is to this topic to which I now turn.

After the attacks, Koizumi quickly responded, voicing Japanese solidarity with the United States.³¹ Aiming to avoid the mistakes and criticism from the 1991 Gulf War, his words were backed with action; he promised immediate SDF assistance in supplying, transporting, and medically supporting US responses to the terror attacks. Furthermore, he dispatched SDF warships to help in the information and intelligence efforts.³² It took just three weeks for the LDP to push through the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (ATSML),³³ which allowed the SDF to support and supply foreign forces while also contributing to humanitarian efforts and rescue missions. Not long after, they passed the 2004 Law Concerning Special Measures on Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq, which sent more than five hundred Japanese troops to the Samawah region of Iraq to help with infrastructural and engineering projects.³⁴ Despite further restrictions on the use of arms, it was the first post-war deployment of troops with heavy weapons and provided a distinctive and deliberate show of support for the United States. In fact, many saw these deployments as establishing collective self-defense as a “fact on the ground”.³⁵

Fenwick argues that the significance of these changes after 9/11 was not just the scaling up of Japanese involvement in international affairs, but rather the eroding normative ability of

³¹ Lisa DiCarlo, “World Leaders Condemn Attack,” *Forbes*, September 11, 2001, <https://www.forbes.com/2001/09/11/0911reaction.html>.

³² “Japan Pledges Help in Terror Fight - September 19, 2001,” *News*, CNN.com, September 19, 2001, <http://us.cnn.com/2001/WORLD/asiapcf/east/09/19/ret.japan.pledge/index.html>.

³³ Mark Fenwick, “Japan’s Response to Terrorism Post-9/11,” in *Global Anti-Terrorism Law and Policy*, ed. Victor V. Ramraj, Michael Hor, and Kent Roach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 327–50, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511493874.016>.

³⁴ David Fouse, “Japan’s Dispatch of the Ground Self Defense Force to Iraq: Lessons Learned” (DTIC Document, 2007), <http://oai.dtic.mil/oai/oai?verb=getRecord&metadataPrefix=html&identifier=ADA493701>.

³⁵ Samuels, *Securing Japan : Tokyo’s Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia*.

Article 9 to constrain the SDF and Japanese deployments.³⁶ It is true that under the new Anti-Terrorism legislation, the SDF could operate without an exclusive UN mandate and in the territories of foreign countries. However, the constitutional finagling that was required to make the ATSMML and subsequent laws possible, illustrated both a political will and growing leverage over the bureaucracy to loosen the constraints on the SDF. The government argued the preamble of the Constitution allowed for the use of force for the sake of international cooperation, and this loophole allowed for actions beyond the historically defensive-oriented policy.

Reinterpreting the Constitution - Ending the mismatch

While these new laws had established de-facto collective self-defense, a formal recognition was still missing and would be necessary in order for the JLPS to pass. The government still officially operated under the 1954 interpretation by the Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB), which stated that Japan had, but could not exercise its right to collective self-defense. Thus, in order to pass the JLPS, Abe and the LDP needed either to amend the constitution and remove Article 9 - a herculean feat requiring two-thirds approval in both houses and public ratification, or instead to reinterpret it in a manner amenable to de facto exercise of collective self-defense.

Unsurprisingly, they opted for the latter and in July of 2014, Abe announced a cabinet resolution which did precisely that.³⁷ The new interpretation allowed Japan to exercise collective self-defense, and while it was extremely controversial, it was the final technical hurdle for the LDP to overcome before they could actually draft their legislation.

³⁶ Fenwick, "Japan's Response to Terrorism Post-9/11."

³⁷ Shinzo Abe, "Press Conference by Prime Minister Abe (Speeches and Statements by Prime Minister) | Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet," July 1, 2014, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/statement/201407/0701kaiken.html.

Analyzing Japan's responses since the end of the Cold War reveals accelerating changes to Japan's security posture. The PKO law allowed the SDF to be sent abroad, while the Anti-Terror legislation and follow up operations in Iraq established the de-facto exercise of collective self-defense. The final technicality was overcome with the new interpretation which allowed the exercise of collective self-defense and thus, going into 2015, the groundwork for the substance of the security revisions was in place. All that was left was writing, proposing, and passing the legislation in both houses. That parliamentary process is vital to understand.

VI. A Question of Process - Securing the Seats to Pass the Legislation

Party Politics and an "Untwisted Diet"

The second question regarding why and how the security revision passed, involves the process of its passage. Put simply, how did the LDP get the votes in Parliament to overcome the opposition in 2015? Existing explanations on opposition parties and the LDP, while contextually useful, fall short of explaining the timing of these security revisions. However, examining the historic role of the Socialist party along with their contemporary decline helps address the question of why the security revisions were possible in 2015. Additionally, an analysis of the new opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) and their recent term in power, reveals a lack of public faith or trust in the opposition parties. Finally, the LDP's bait-and-switch election 2014 caught the opposition off balance and re-solidified the necessary two-thirds majorities to push through JLPS.

In Japan's Diet, new legislation is submitted to, and debated within, the houses of parliament and requires a simple majority in both houses to pass. That means 238 votes out of 475 for the lower house and 122 out of 242 for the upper. In the event that the upper house rejects

the bill, the governing party's only option for passage is to force it through the lower house with a two-thirds supermajority.³⁸

Candidates and coordination

One domestic politics explanation that ultimately falls short of explaining why the JLPS was successful in 2015 would be poor candidate quality or opposition coordination against the LDP. Professor Ethan Scheiner found that opposition parties in Japan have historically struggled at the ballot box because they have fielded less qualified candidates than the LDP. Due to the LDP's near monopoly on government offices and hence state finances, they can take advantage of constituent pleasing, pork pipelines that both attract better candidates to the LDP and help those candidates win.³⁹ However, analysis of more recent elections actually reveals that the DPJ has improved its candidate recruitment strategies, leading to better quality of leaders. By the 2014 election, 70% of the DPJ's candidates had prior electoral experience, served in local government, or were incumbents.⁴⁰ Similarly, Scheiner has also found that in the recent elections, the opposition parties have actually gotten better at coordinating across party lines, limiting competition in single-member districts to have a better chance at beating the LDP.⁴¹ Consequently, it is not for lack of candidate quality or opposition coordination that the DPJ was unable to stop the LDP in 2015.

Post War Politics and the Fall of the Socialists

The LDP's nearly sixty years of practically uncontested political rule made it one of the most successful parties in recent democratic history. The LDP's odd, but politically powerful

³⁸ Thies and Yanai.

³⁹ Scheiner, *Democracy Without Competition: Opposition Failure in One-Party Dominant Japan*.

⁴⁰ Smith, "Candidates in the 2014 Election: Better Coordination and Higher Candidate Quality."

⁴¹ Ethan Scheiner, Daniel M. Smith, and Michael F. Thies, "The 2014 Japanese Election Results: The Opposition Cooperates but Fails to Inspire."

coalition of big and small business and agriculture, bound together by economic growth and clientelistic payouts worked for decades.⁴² During this time of LDP dominance, the Socialist Party of Japan (JSP) was the main rival and it was their *raison d'être* to oppose any attempts to militarize Japan.⁴³ Its platform was of firm pacifism and adherence to the Peace Constitution and while it tended to have modest support of 20-30% of the seats in the upper and lower houses, it never really challenged the LDP for control of the government.⁴⁴ Nonetheless, it still had enough power to put the brakes on radical LDP proposals and set outer limits on the policies that the LDP could pursue. They were outspoken opponents of the SDF from the moment it was formed in 1954; they opposed the 1960 US Security Alliance treaty revisions, and vigorously opposed efforts to abolish Article 9 or revise the Constitution. Their presence goes a long way to explaining why no radical security legislation passed until the early 1990s, despite past LDP majorities in parliament.

Why then, during the 1990s, did their fortunes reverse? They had only 15 seats in 1996 and by the time of the 2015 security revisions, that had shrunk to two.⁴⁵ What happened to the historic anchor of opposition to LDP security changes?

While a full discussion regarding why the JSP fell is beyond the scope of this paper, two noticeable declines can be seen first when the party's inflexibility alienated their moderate supporters, and finally when political compromises on the party's core principles fostered disenchantment with their core voters. These two reasons are related to events already

⁴² Ellis S. Krauss and Robert J. Pekkanen, "The Rise and Fall of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 69, no. 1 (2010): 5–15.

⁴³ Sarah Hyde, *The Transformation of the Japanese Left: From Old Socialists to New Democrats*, Nissan Institute/Routledge Japanese Studies Series 73 (Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), 77.

⁴⁴ Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipsey, eds., *Japan under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance* (Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2013) 9-10.

⁴⁵ "Strength of the In-House Groups in the House of Representatives," House of Representatives, Japan, March 17, 2017, http://www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_english.nsf/html/statics/english/strength.htm.

discussed. Hyde argues that they lost a great deal of moderate voters after the 1991 Gulf War Crisis because they opposed the use of the SDF for humanitarian missions. Their ideological intransigence opposing the SDF and any expansion of Japan's operational ability had been a historical magnet for support, resonating well with a public that remembered World War II and had strong anti-war feelings. But the humiliation of checkbook diplomacy catalyzed substantial shifts in public opinion, an opinion with which the JSP platform was increasingly out of touch. Greater numbers of Japanese now supported a more involved and proactive stance in international affairs, as a 1995 Yomiuri Shimbun poll revealed. 65.8% of respondents thought the SDF should participate in peace-keeping activities, echoing a 1992 Asahi poll which found 54% of respondents either agreed or tended to agree that the SDF should make an international contribution.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Courtney Purrington, the first Gulf War helped shape an emerging new consensus about Japan's place as an internationally engaged, proactive contributor to the international community.⁴⁷

Another key reason behind the JSP's downward spiral was the fact that in 1994, the party alienated its core voters by reversing its stance on a number of key ideological policies and platforms. In exchange for obtaining the office of prime minister, JSP Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi publically accepted the Japan-US Security treaty, acknowledged the constitutionality of the SDF, and withdrew opposition for the use of the national flag and Japanese national anthem, (which had previous connotations with Japanese imperialism). These fundamentally contradicted nearly four decades of JSP policy. Core socialist voters felt that their party had betrayed their key beliefs.

⁴⁶ Hyde, *The Transformation of the Japanese Left: From Old Socialists to New Democrats*, 89–90.

⁴⁷ Hyde, 84.

Thus, the JSP lost some of its votes because it lost support from both its moderate and core constituents, and the JSP support ratings illustrate these losses. The JSP's intransigence on the former accompanied a drop in JSP support from ~33% to ~17% between early 1990 and late 1991. Not long afterwards, the JSP suffered its second drop in public support, this time from the 1994 compromises. Support for the JSP fell from 15% to 5% between February 1994 and February 1996.⁴⁸ Consequently, by the mid 1990s, the JSP had lost much of their previous strength as an opposition contender. Though their pro-pacifist ideology would have been the intuitive anchor for major organized political opposition to the security revisions, their inability to garner parliamentary seats precluded their opposition the security revisions in 2015.

The DPJ - Not quite ready for prime time

As the JSP weakened, some politicians began leaving the party, joining the newly established Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which would go on to interrupt five decades of nearly uninterrupted LDP rule in 2009. With this victory it appeared as if a cohesive and formidable opposition party had emerged, challenging the LDP and opening the door to greater alternations of power. Though the DPJ was the new opposition party, it was not necessarily the direct ideological offspring of the JSP as it lacked the singularity of purpose and ideological coherency that had defined the JSP's pro-pacifist platform. Instead it emphasized a reformist image and reputation including reductions in wasteful spending, cuts on local taxes and highway tolls, and a new focus on regional sovereignty.⁴⁹ Their goal was to attract support from Japan's

⁴⁸ Hyde, 95.

⁴⁹ Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Lipsey, eds., "Introduction to Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipsey Eds. Japan under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance.," in *Japan Under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance* (Shorenstein APARC, 2013), 1–40, <http://web.stanford.edu/~plipsy/kushidalipseydpjintro.pdf>.

‘floating voters’;⁵⁰ a growing Japanese electoral demographic that does not strongly identify with any one party and which tends to fluctuate in its support for different parties.⁵¹

Yet within three years, the DPJ had fallen in spectacular fashion, no doubt hurt by the 3/11 Triple Disaster but also marred by their own political divisions. The DPJ had both campaigned on, and gathered a great deal of support from its promises to reform, but their failed reform efforts and general lack of policy making hurt their public image and created a reputation of incompetence.⁵² Highway tolls and gas taxes remained unrepealed. Efforts to break up the National Telegraph and Telephone company stalled and were abandoned. Even in the realm of foreign policy where the DPJ hoped to clearly distinguish themselves from the LDP by focusing on better regional relations, they eventually came to settle back close to the status quo. They also had major diplomatic mishaps, such as when they angered Washington in their attempt to renegotiate the Futenma military base relocation in Okinawa, upending nearly 13 years of US-Japan negotiations. The gaffe forced Prime Minister Hatoyama to resign.⁵³

While there were many reasons behind the DPJ’s inability to execute their reforms, the ultimate problem was that the DPJ had promised a great deal but had little to show for it after three years of governance. Not only did the total number of legislation proposed decrease after 2009, the percent of those proposed bills which actually passed decreased following the assumption of DPJ control, despite the party’s huge majorities. The passage rate of

⁵⁰ MacElwain also argues that one of the key factors in the rising importance of these reformist appeals has been the nationalization of Japanese elections. This has shifted focus away from local personalistic campaigns and more toward evaluations of the party at the national level.

⁵¹ Kenneth Mori McElwain, “The Nationalization of Japanese Elections,” in *Japan under the DPJ* (Walter H. Shorenstein Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2013).

⁵² Kushida and Lipsy, “The Rise and Fall of the Democratic Party of Japan.”

⁵³ Kushida and Lipsy, *Japan under the DPJ: The Politics of Transition and Governance*.

cabinet-submitted legislation in particular fell from a range of 70-100% under the LDP to a new average of 66%.⁵⁴

All of this is to say that in terms of substance and attempts, the DPJ's reformist agenda fell short, and the party saw substantial drop offs in its level of public support toward the end of their rule. Forced to contend with the unforeseen Triple Disaster of March 11th, it was no surprise that by mid 2012, approval ratings for the DPJ Noda cabinet were around 28%, with support for the party down to between 18% and 8% depending on the source.⁵⁵ In the lower house election of 2012, the DPJ were swept from power. When they took over governance in 2009, they had over 300 seats in the Lower House. By the end of the 2012 election, they had only 57 and it was, somewhat justifiably, clear in the public mind that the DPJ was not capable of effective governance.⁵⁶

Getting the Seats - The LDP's Revival

The DPJ's fall from power and the general perception of its incompetence helped restore LDP majorities to both houses by 2013. As the opposition faltered, the LDP under Abe actively sought to reestablish their political legitimacy and obtain a public mandate on policy with the snap elections of 2014. In effect, the election was a clear, deliberate move by Abe to solidify political strength ahead of the push for controversial security revisions

The 2014 Snap Election - Obtaining a mandate?

⁵⁴ Kushida and Lipsey, "Introduction to Kenji E. Kushida and Phillip Y. Lipsey Eds. Japan under the DPJ."

⁵⁵ Yuki Tatsumi, "Japan under DPJ Rule," *Harvard International Review* 34, no. 3 (January 31, 2013), <http://hir.harvard.edu/mobile-mightjapan-under-dpj-rule/>.

⁵⁶ "December 16, 2012 House of Representatives Election Results - Japan Totals," Election Resources on the Internet, December 16, 2012, <http://www.electionresources.org/jp/representatives.php?election=2012&prefecture=>.

The timing of Abe's Parliament dissolution only two years after coming into power, while surprising, may have been a stroke of political genius. Both the timing and framing of the election was intentional; Pekkanen, Reed, and Scheiner explained that the 2014 election was, on the surface, a rather dull political affair. Historically low turnout coupled with little public buzz illustrated a rather low level of excitement around the election, which resulted in relatively few changes in the lower house balance of power. The main coalition of the LDP and Kōmeitō had a net gain of one seat for a total of 326 out of 475, while the DPJ had slight gains increasing to 73 total seats from 57.

Though this election was crucial in that the LDP emerged with a consolidated political position from which it could push through the revisions, it was also notable because it was framed almost entirely around economic policy. "Abenomics"⁵⁷ dominated newspaper headlines; the LDP's popular plan to revitalize the limping Japanese economy, took center stage in any policy discussions. Abe even stated in a press conference, "To advance Abenomics ahead? Or to try and stop it? That is the question of this election."⁵⁸ He effectively set the terms of debate for the election, using his current position of power to shape the social and political discourse.⁵⁹

Maeda examined this by analyzing the coverage of political issues in the Yomiuri Shimbun, examining over 500 articles that mentioned Prime Minister Abe between November through December of 2014. He discovered the most covered issues were Abenomics and the

⁵⁷ The term "Abenomics" refers to the LDP response to the multiple "Lost Decades" of economic stagnation, and is Abe's three-part economic solution to revitalize the economy. It consisted of fiscal stimulus through government spending, a monetary policy of quantitative easing, and structural reforms that would reduce regulation and slash protections for historically protected (and often uncompetitive) sectors of Japan's economy like agriculture. Robert J. Pekkanen, Steven R. Reed, and Ethan Scheiner, "Introduction: Take a Second Look at the 2014 Election, It's Worth It," in *Japan Decides 2014* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 3–8.

⁵⁸ Ellis S. Krauss, "Unraveling the Abe Conundrum in Foreign Policy: The Mystery of the 'Dog That Didn't Bark'," in *Japan Decides 2014*, Japan Decides (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 234–35.

⁵⁹ Paul Pierson, "Power and Path Dependence," in *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*, ed. James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 123–46, <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ref/id/CBO9781316273104A017>.

consumption tax, both of which appeared in 40% of the issues. Since the public generally rated Abe's economic and monetary policies highest, (46.7% approval ratings compared to only 27.6% on security or nuclear power policies) this frame was logical.⁶⁰ Kyodo public polls administered during November and early December revealed the most important issue to voters was economic policy while other polls by the Yomiuri Shimbun revealed similar findings. 70% of those respondents cited the condition of business and unemployment as one of the most important issues in deciding who to vote for. Maeda's found that the focus on Abenomics tended to 'crowd out' the other more polarizing issues such as security or nuclear policy, helping to divert attention from controversial topics and focus it onto the LDP popular policies.⁶¹

Abe intentionally campaigned on the economy (the bait) because their other issues like security stances were controversial. Yet, the victory from that economic frame afforded the LDP the political flexibility to push any part of their agenda (the switch). Essentially, whether or not the LDP victory in 2014 was truly a public endorsement of their entire platform mattered little. At the end of the day, what mattered was securing the Diet.

Unfortunately, the opposition DPJ lacked clear counterproposals or sharp enough criticisms of Abenomics to convince the public. According to a Waseda study of major party manifestos, the DPJ had the least specific and most unclear alternatives on economic policy.⁶² Moreover, the DPJ's criticisms of Abenomics were lukewarm and unfocused at best due to the

⁶⁰ Masahisa Endo and Robert J. Pekkanen, "The LDP: Return to Dominance? Or a Golden Age Built on Sand?," in *Japan Decides 2014* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 41–55.

⁶¹ Maeda uses the Butler and Stokes (1974) framework to compare the impact of an issue on voter behavior. There was a positive correlation between voter's appraisal of Abenomics and support for the LDP but because the number of people who thought Abenomics was working was similar to the number of those who did not, the effect roughly cancels out Yukio Maeda, "The Abe Cabinet and Public Opinion: How Abe Won Re-Election by Narrowing Public Debate," in *Japan Decides 2014*, Japan Decides (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 99..

⁶² Gregory W. Noble, "Abenomics in the 2014 Election: Showing the Money (Supply) and Little Else," in *Japan Decides 2014*, Japan Decides (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 159.

fact that their own economic and financial policies were actually fairly similar. It seemed as if voters lacked alternatives to the LDP plan because the DPJ also supported quantitative easing and fiscal stimuli.

This general lack of differentiation between party platforms put a greater importance on the perceived effectiveness of parties. Consequently, many undecided voters who were not particularly supportive of the LDP's policies, either stayed home or voted for the LDP simply because the DPJ was still not viewed as a competent alternative. Asahi Shimbun polls from December 2014 reflected this with 72% of respondents saying the LDP won because the opposition parties were not appealing.⁶³

Ultimately, the 2014 election was an LDP victory; they flipped a seat and preserved the two-thirds majority, giving them the seats to push any part of their agenda. Armed with a lower house coalition majority exceeding two-thirds, an upper house majority from the 2013 election, and this 'public mandate', the LDP was logistically poised to pass any legislation it proposed.

VII. Conclusion and Implications

In this piece I have argued there were two threads that were key to making this legislation possible. The first dealt with Japan's responses to external circumstances; a series of earlier actions laid the substantive foundation for the particular security revisions of 2015. The PKO law allowed SDF deployment abroad for humanitarian missions and each subsequent mission loosened the political and logistical constraints therein. On the other hand, the Anti-Terror legislation and assistance to the United States in the years following 9/11 also established

⁶³ Noble, 166.

de-facto collective self-defense, circumventing the decades old interpretation of Article 9 that had forbidden it.

The second thread dealt with the domestic party arena in Japan showing how the LDP managed finally after decades of failed attempts to pass these substantial security revisions. The opposition DPJ party was still recovering from its ineffective stint in government, which helped return the LDP to power in 2012 and 2013. On top of this, Abe skillfully cemented the LDP gains through bait-and-switch tactics during the snap election of 2014, providing the LDP both a public mandate and the political majorities in both houses to force the passage of the legislation.

Japan's security revisions of 2015 were extraordinarily controversial then, and tensions in East Asia have made the its implications all the more salient. Everything from the newest missile launches and nuclear tests, to loud international threats or the upcoming back to back Olympic games in Pyeongyang and Tokyo, have focused attention on the evolving political relations in East Asia. In this context, Japan's JLPS has strengthened the keystone strategic and military partnership in the region by allowing the use of force in defense of the United States while simultaneously posturing for Japan's more proactive international contributions.⁶⁴ It formalized Japan's exercise of collective self-defense opened the door to the SDF's use force on certain humanitarian missions, and allowed them to support and assist in wider array of humanitarian missions both within and outside of the UN.

Some have argued the revisions create a slippery slope toward militarism in Japan. The prime minister's ability to issue a new constitutional interpretation as was done in July 2014, undermines the watchdog capabilities of the CLB regarding the constitution. Moreover, the

⁶⁴ Christopher W. Hughes, "Japan's Strategic Trajectory and Collective Self-Defense: Essential Continuity or Radical Shift?," *The Journal of Japanese Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 93–126, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jjs.2017.0005>.

widening geographic operational ability of the SDF coupled with their expanding jurisdiction to act, marks a distinct departure from Japan's pacifist past in which the SDF was shackled by various logistical, institutional, and practical restraints. While the movement to "normalize" Japan and revise or repeal Article 9 has been present in Japan since the moment Japan's pacifist constitution was ratified, it appears as though these efforts are finally making headway.⁶⁵ Buoyed by his recent October 2017 victories that again reinforced the LDP's two-thirds majorities, Abe has made constitutional revision a priority for the LDP moving forward.⁶⁶

Whether or not the implications of this security revision are truly a radical shift or the next step in Japan's evolving foreign policy and security trajectory, the *process* of this legislation has been one of cumulative continuity. Thirty years ago, few would have expected to see Japanese SDF forces anywhere other than in Japan, and exercising collective self-defense was out of the question. Trying to pass the 2015 security revisions without the subsequent two and a half decades of legislative groundwork would have been near impossible. It was only because of this foundation, and a contemporary political arena of firm LDP coalition control that it was possible for the LDP to pass one of the most controversial laws of the last half-century.

⁶⁵ Eyal Ben-Ari, "Normalization, Democracy, and the Armed Forces: The Transformation of the Japanese Military," in *Japan's Multilayered Democracy* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2015), 105.

⁶⁶ "Victorious Abe Seeking Allies in Push to Revise Constitution: The Asahi Shimbun," The Asahi Shimbun, accessed February 12, 2018, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201710230029.html>.

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