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Japan in Search of a Normal Role

PROFESSOR TAKASHI INOBUCHI

It is sometimes fashionable to argue that the Japanese state is abnormal in the sense that it does not play a standard security role on the world stage. Although this may be true to an extent, it must be remembered that, strictly speaking, as Kenneth Waltz reportedly said, the only states that could boast a normal security role were the United States and the former Soviet Union.¹ With the demise of the Soviet Union, the United States is the sole surviving superpower in the full sense of the word. It can even be argued that there are no remaining sovereign states, in the nineteenth-century European sense of sovereignty, in this era of global economic and security interdependence. Therefore, rather than branding Japan an 'abnormal' state and prodding it in the direction of more global responsibilities commensurate with its technological, economic and financial power, it would seem more productive to search for other roles that states like Japan could be induced to take on for the benefit of the global community as well as for its own sake in anticipation of the possible nature of the world order towards and in the twenty-first century. Such a task requires a deep understanding of those factors, both at international systemic and national levels, that have restrained Japan from assuming such roles.

To this aim, the present paper will first summarize some of the major factors which have prevented Japan from assuming greater global responsibilities. Second, it will describe some recent Japanese participation in international security-related affairs, especially in international organizations. The paper will also attempt to show that Japan's involvement in global security affairs is part of a learning process and signifies its desire to contribute in such areas as producing new thinking, surveillance and systems design.² Third, the paper will examine two arguments: that a more vigorous political leadership is required; and that more volatility in the international environment might induce Japan to accept its international security responsibilities.

Japan's reluctance to assume security roles

Despite all its wealth and associated muscle, Japan has been unusually hesitant to take on security roles. Japan is a 'peacenik' of a very rich kind. However, it has reasons to be hesitant.³ First of all, it has been constrained by its own convincing defeat in the Second World War and the consequent constitution, and by the Japan-US

Security Treaty, all of which have made it difficult for Japan to use its own military forces to resolve international disputes even for its own national interest.

The United States was the prime actor in ensuring that Japan was no longer militarily menacing. Although the US subsequently changed its view of Japan because of its utility to the US-led global coalition confronting the former Soviet Union and its presumed allies at the height of East–West tension in the wake of the outbreak of the Korean War, the internationally formulated institutions and arrangements constraining Japan in the security arena have remained largely intact. They have been revised in line with changing realities since the 1980s, but their revision has been largely confined to the Japan–US bilateral framework. Agreements on joint exercises and joint military technology, and cooperation in research and development with the US including Japan’s participation in the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI) project, have been made politically possible because the Japanese government was able to justify them in the context of the Japan–US Security Treaty.

Secondly, all domestic institutions have been consolidated and arrangements made since 1952, despite the change in the US government’s view of Japan. The Japanese government found it virtually impossible and very impolitic to revise these internationally formulated arrangements given the then feeble political base at home and the vital need to focus its resources on economic recovery and resumption of growth. In particular, major domestic constraints were consolidated in the 1960s and 1970s, including principles on the export of weapons, the three principles on the non-possession, non-production and non-importation of nuclear weapons and the 1% of GDP ceiling placed on the defence budget. Meanwhile, the gap between the institutional framework with the US and the domestic facade that the Japanese government helped create and has been obliged to adhere to has become steadily wider. Although those in power of nationalist persuasion like Prime Ministers Ichiro Hatoyama and Nobusuke Kishi argued for constitutional revision, the pragmatic realist school led by Yoshida Shigeru and his disciples caused Japan to acquire a number of attributes which prompted Ikutaro Shimizu, for one, to call Japan a non-state.⁴

However, in tandem with the change in the US view of Japan’s utility, Japan’s SDFs (see Glossary) were created. But the decision has never been fully legitimized at home. Each SDF has been given three major roles: to act as an auxiliary force to the US military forces in the Far East; as a national military institution that could deter potential anti-government and anti-US segments of society from resorting to collective action; and as a military force that could assume the role of territorial defence. The first role has been given utmost priority throughout. The SDF’s force structure makes clear that as a military force it could not fight a war without the USAF’s direct support. In

fact, the SDF's role is to support the USAF. An example of its auxiliary role was its mine-sweeping operations in the territorial seas of Japan during the Occupation, and in the territorial seas of the Republic of Korea during the Korean War. This operation had been hidden from the public until recently because it violated all the public arrangements and understanding of the role of the SDF and the disbanded Imperial Navy after 1945. The second role has been successfully carried out, although the SDF has never been deployed for such a purpose. Social unrest immediately following the Second World War and during the Cold War in the 1950s was almost certainly prevented from worsening by the presence in Japan of the USAF. The anti-US demonstrations of 1960, triggered by the ratification of the revised Japan-US Security Treaty, were dealt with by national police forces rather than by the SDF. The third role has gradually been given more emphasis in the wake of post-Cold War changes. The constraints placed on weapons acquisitions have been so strict that those weapons more tailored to territorial defence have been somewhat restricted, given the limited budgets generally placed on defence.

Thirdly, Japanese public opinion has been a major factor in preventing Japan from assuming global security roles since 1952. Most Japanese are inclined to believe that the Second World War was the chief cause of their nation's sufferings and that, if they denounce war and avoid potential war situations, peace is bound to prevail in Japan. This public sentiment has been reinforced by the nation's economic success: for the Japanese, Japan has achieved high economic power status without substantial defence expenditure. Any attempt to persuade it to get involved in international security issues has been regarded, until recently, as pressure for Japan to fight alongside, or on behalf of, the US – whether in Korea, in Vietnam, against the former Soviet Union or in Cambodia.

Fourthly, the global community has not necessarily been receptive to the idea of Japan shouldering global security responsibilities.⁵ Four major factors play a part here. First, the Japanese record during the 1930s and 1940s: those who suffered have every reason to retain deep-rooted suspicions of the Japanese. Second, US world hegemony for the last half-century has helped make it somewhat easier for many countries to make critical remarks about Japan as a former Axis country. Third, increasing Japanese economic preponderance throughout the world has made many apprehensive about the possibility of Japan becoming a military power not with feet of clay, as was said on the eve of 1941, but with a solid technological, economic and financial base.⁶ Fourth, Japan has not been very successful in conveying lucidly its wishes, intentions and plans to the rest of the world. It has been giving the impression of being deliberately vague about its intentions because it entertains some hidden ambition to shape the world according to an unwritten plan.⁷ The requirement for consensus in the Japanese decision-making process is time consuming and

without the full articulation and clear presentation of some of the principles or criteria whereby arguments are made has inadvertently contributed to the reinforcement of this widely held impression.

Despite these and possibly other reasons for not willingly assuming global security responsibilities, it is fair to say that changes have been in the offing since the 1980s.

Japan's scope for multilateral security participation

Japan's adjustment towards greater global security responsibilities⁸ came with the US government's vigorous campaign for an anti-Soviet defence build-up during the first term of the Reagan Administration. It resulted in a number of enhanced schemes for cooperation between Japan and the US including Japan's participation in the SDI and other military programmes with some spin-off for civilian technology in Japan. All these agreements were, however, bilateral in scope. Only with the sanction of the Japan-US Security Treaty could the Japanese government begin adapting to the increasing expectation that it should assume greater global security responsibilities. But now with the end of the Cold War, the scope for multilateral security roles for Japan has been enhanced, albeit slowly. While Japan finds no reason to water down the content of the bilateral alliance with the US – somewhat contrary to the expectations of some observers in the West – it has every reason to take part in discussions on international security whenever possible. It is particularly interested in surveillance systems and in the systems design of other international security-related matters. Surveillance involves the monitoring of data pertaining to global management, and the improvement of indicators and measures for such monitoring. Systems design involves the conceptualization and institutionalization of devices and mechanisms for global management.⁹ It is the widely held assumption of many leading members of the Japanese government that the next 20 years will be a transitional period of uncertainty, that the monitoring and understanding of global developments are therefore of the utmost priority and that any schemes for insuring against uncertainty should be developed and implemented for the global community.¹⁰

UNITED NATIONS

Of all UN operations, it is UNTAC which has attracted most attention in Japan. UNTAC is expected to play a crucial role in the history of UN peacekeeping operations since it plans to become the *de facto* government of Cambodia until a free and secret election under UNTAC's aegis takes place in Copenhagen in 1993 and a democratic government starts to function effectively. Since Cambodia has not been efficient either in economic or political terms, UNTAC has the heavy responsibility of running the country with the *Khmer Rouge* still refusing to disarm itself in accordance with the peace process agreed in the Paris Peace Accord. The Japanese government was

finally able to steer its UN peacekeeping operations law through the national Diet in July 1992, two years after it first attempted to introduce a similar bill. As a result of this law, in late 1992 the Japanese government sent a team of roughly 700, including 600 SDF personnel, 75 policemen and a number of bureaucrats, to supervise the cease-fire and forthcoming election.¹¹ Theirs is not a combat mission, as the law precludes such a mission being undertaken. The government was prepared to accommodate the demands of two smaller opposition parties to overcome its minority status in the upper house in order to ensure the passage of the bills – one forbidding the SDF from participating in combat missions, and the other requiring the government to obtain the Diet's approval for participation in UN PKO activities. Furthermore, in three years, the law can be reviewed by the Diet. It is widely expected that Japan's performance in Cambodia will shape significantly the nature and scope of Japan's global security involvement in the future: its experience in official development assistance; its willingness to help refugees to relocate inside Cambodia; and its expertise in creating and maintaining social and economic order will all be tested in Cambodia. The task is immense and will not be easy because Cambodia is in flux: the legitimacy and effectiveness of the Cambodian government in Phnom Penh is melting away rapidly as the *Khmer Rouge* distances itself from the Paris process; the Thais and the Vietnamese are moving into Cambodia for business purposes and mostly *de facto* settlement; while UN personnel are pouring into the capital and elsewhere in large numbers. The situation is confusing and confused to say the least.

GROUP OF SEVEN

To Europeans, the G-7 has lost its vital role of mutual cooperation in confronting the former Soviet Union. Yet, to the Japanese, it must continue to exist. If the Europeans downgrade it, of all the seven countries, Japan will suffer most. That the G-7 exists for global management is important. It is one of the reasons why Japan has been increasingly active of late in such areas as arms control and financial assistance to Russia – tasks that have gained salience in the wake of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Arms control is increasingly an area of study for Japan, although it suffers from an insufficient number of experts in that area. Japan would be interested in a less-armed world monitored closely by satellites and regulated accordingly by transnational authorities commissioned by, say, the United Nations or the G-7. Japan would try to promote arms control not because it believes in a world without weapons, but because fewer weapons would mean a safer world. Financial assistance is also important to Japan since it is the *de facto* sole major trade surplus country excluding Taiwan and some OPEC countries. Arguably, this means that Japan's ideas on systems design should be taken much

more seriously than before. The Economic Planning Agency of the Japanese government has recently suggested to Russia how to transform its economy. This suggestion is in stark contrast to the Shatalin or Gaidar plans in that it envisages a slow restructuring process towards a market economy with many regulated elements retained, as in the Japanese economic development model.¹²

POST-ASEAN CONFERENCE OF MINISTERS

It was in 1991 that the Post-ASEAN Conference of Ministers issued a communiqué to the effect that it would study a regional security formula, though subsequent ASEAN meetings did not come up with any such agreed formula. However, following its 1974 and 1988 naval actions, China forcibly consolidated its position in the South China Sea largely at the expense of Vietnam and Malaysia. This incident has prompted ASEAN to put forward its joint communiqué on the peaceful resolution of conflicts in the region, paving the way for the Post-ASEAN Conference of Ministers to discuss regional security issues at a later date. ASEAN's apprehension concerning China's naval ambitions is based on the fact that China has changed its 12-year policy of reduction in defence expenditure to one of strong build-up – a 50% increase since 1990. For the last 15 years, the percentage of China's GNP spent on defence has been about 10%. Moreover, the return of Hong Kong in 1997 means that China would acquire a good deep-sea naval port suitable for its submarines and large vessels to operate from, unlike those of Dalian, Qingdao and Shanghai.¹³ If all of this is put in the context of the 1974, 1988 and 1992 naval actions by China in the South China Sea – in the heart of ASEAN territory – clearly intended to secure oil resources by military means if necessary, then Japan is not happy about possible instability on its vital oil routes from the Middle East and Indonesia. Japan is worried by this antagonism between China and ASEAN because both parties are of vital importance to it. A Post-ASEAN Conference of Ministers, in particular because of US participation, might be useful for the purposes of conciliation.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

Although NATO is an Atlantic organization, Japan has status as an observer. Whether NATO continues to be relevant or not in the wake of the Cold War and the disappearance of its counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, interests Japan directly. What direction will NATO take: dissolution, status quo or expansion? Is it about to disband since its major enemy has disappeared? Or will it remain in place since it is the main transatlantic tie binding western Europe and North America? Is it about to take on other members so that it can be remoulded as a global security institution? The first option could be dangerous for Japan since it might have implications for the Japan–US Security Treaty. The second option is not easy to sustain without creative

thinking, although Japan would be interested in helping in this process. The third option would not be to Japan's advantage unless it is included. Besides adjusting to Euro-American post-Cold War priorities, there is a more fundamental problem for Japan: to learn how to participate in the management of global security, for which it needs more time.

CONFERENCE ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

CSCE is a European institution with some North American participation. Like NATO it had in a sense succeeded in its task by the time the Cold War ended. Japan has recently gained observer status in the CSCE which is a slightly disturbing entity to Japan in that it encompasses virtually all the major countries in the northern hemisphere except Japan; hence the unwittingly negative impact of US Secretary of State James Baker's statement which includes the phrase 'from Vancouver to Vladivostok'. But by the time Japan had been admitted as an observer, the CSCE had become an organization without much influence. Despite the best of intentions, it has not to date been able to take effective action either with regard to the former Yugoslavia or the peripheral republics of the former Soviet Union. Also disturbing to Japan were the tasks the CSCE set itself on human rights and arms control. With the APEC conference and other possible regional organizations in mind, Japan had a hard time envisaging a conference on security and cooperation in Asia and the Pacific since such agenda would be hard for most Pacific Asians to deal with collectively, given their generally intense abhorrence of interference in internal affairs.

INTERNATIONAL BANK FOR RECONSTRUCTION AND DEVELOPMENT (WORLD BANK)

The World Bank is not normally considered a security-related organization. Yet the economic dimension of global security must increasingly be taken into account in the wake of the Cold War; and the Japanese voice on economic management in such organizations as the World Bank has become an increasing influence, hence its inclusion. The Japanese economic development model lays particular emphasis on the important role of government in economic development.¹⁴ One of the directors of the World Bank, Masaki Shiratori, put forward a report on economic policy in some developing countries which challenges the World Bank orthodoxy of correcting prices first, and of deregulating the market thoroughly by emphasizing the government's role in economic development.¹⁵ Shiratori is not alone in proposing the Japanese economic development model: the Economic Planning Agency has put forward the Japanese model which, in its view, should be applied to Russia where the radical reform plan of Gaidar has been derailed. It is also the Economic Planning Agency which has spelled out, in a radical departure

from previous policy, what constitutes the Japanese economic development model in its White Paper on the economy (1992). The Japanese government also recently issued a cabinet decision on the basic principles guiding its official development assistance in which the Japanese economic development model is again put forward.¹⁶ The Economic Planning Agency is not alone in dissenting from the mainstream voice in global economic management. The MITI has published a report in which a systematic and empirical investigation of what it considers to be unfair trade practices throughout the world is amply documented, identifying the US as the main offender.¹⁷ Professor Mitsuo Matsushita of the University of Tokyo is chairman of the Committee. The Ministry of Finance's deputy minister in charge of international finance, Dr Eisuke Sakakibara, has published a book entitled *Japan Has Surpassed Capitalism* (1990). He has also published an article in *International Economic Insights* in which he disputes the American-style liberalization of financial markets, indicating that he does not see much potential in the Japan-US SII talks.¹⁸ All this indicates that the Japanese government has started acting to modify some of the principles and practices guiding international economic organizations like the World Bank, GATT, the IMF, the EBRD and the OECD. How far the Japanese government can go is a moot point, however. When enacted, these changes, however small, will steadily affect the course of world trade and finance and the shape of developing and transitional economies. The important point is that all these economic changes are likely to affect global security in a much more profound way than some analysts might wish to admit.

UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME

Not only development, but also the environment is an increasing focus of Japanese attention. With the Rio de Janeiro conference on global environment in July 1992 creating political momentum in Japan, its proactivism in environmental affairs is bound to affect global attitudes, including attitudes towards security. Japan will do its best to try and persuade both south and north that development and the environment can and must coexist, and that new Japanese anti-pollution technologies and their more widespread diffusion will increase development while mitigating environmental hazards. Japan will accelerate its efforts on two fronts: firstly, by global monitoring of the environment using satellites; and secondly, by making a global deal on development and the environment. With this kind of deal a change in global coalitions could emerge. A majority of the 'Development at Any Cost' school could be transformed to the 'Development and Environment' school of which Japan is a leading member. This is the distinctly Japanese way of thinking about monitoring and managing the global environment.

How to encourage Japan to accept its global security roles

Japan has already embarked on the three tasks of conceptualizing, monitoring and designing international security affairs, albeit mostly in an *ad hoc* and non-dramatic fashion. It is also important to note that Japanese change takes place as if nothing had changed, a characteristic inherent in its largely incremental nature. If the direction of change is fairly widely agreed among the leaders and the public, then the result of Japanese change in five to ten years tends to be quite substantial; but it is difficult to detect change at the negotiating table.

Two examples will suffice. First, after Japan was criticized for not doing much to assist such front-line states as Pakistan when the Soviet Union intervened in Afghanistan in 1979, it subsequently stepped up its official development assistance to South Asian countries including Pakistan. By 1989 Japan emerged as the main provider of official developmental assistance to virtually every country in the region. This represents a big change in ten years. But little change was detected because virtually nothing happened in 1979 or 1980.¹⁹

Second, Japan's mine-sweeping operations were first requested in 1984 in the Red Sea. The request was declined and not made public by the Japanese government. In 1987 mine-sweeping help from Japan was requested in the Persian Gulf during the Iran-Iraq War. Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone's apparent wish to accept, and that of his Foreign Ministry, was overruled by Cabinet Secretary Masaharu Gotoda. In 1990-91 the UN PKO cooperation bill was defeated twice during the Gulf War.²⁰ In March 1991, after the end of the war, when the German government decided to send its mine-sweepers to the Gulf, the Japanese government also decided to do so. In July 1992 the UN PKO cooperation bill was passed after the opposition amendments were accommodated by the government. Towards the end of 1992, a Japanese contingent of roughly 700 was attached to UNTAC, thus representing a big change in eight years. Most people, however, only remember Japan's lack of action during the Gulf War.

Because of the continuous lack of strong political leadership, Japan cannot take decisive action even when it is needed. This absence is often said to derive from the multiple-constituency system whereby two to five persons are elected by one vote in the same district. However, more vigorous political leadership through electoral reform is not the best way of encouraging Japan to shoulder more security responsibilities. The theory that, if there is a series of major destabilizing events and/or the formation of an unstable balance of power in Asia, Japan will assume a greater global security role is an alternative scenario. These events could be the rupture of the Japan-US alliance, aggressive self-assertiveness by China, a Korean vortex or a Russo-Japanese *entente*. A more positive formulation might be: how might Japan be induced to assume a greater global security role

when its contribution to the international security equation could clearly be both significant and helpful?

It must be observed that in both the US and Japan, nationalists are in the ascendant with anti-Japanese and anti-American sentiments growing respectively.²¹ But looking at comparative opinion polls conducted in both countries, a favourable Japanese perception of the US is much higher than a favourable American perception of Japan, although the gap is diminishing steadily as the Japanese view of the US is becoming less positive.²² In the US, sentiment that America's domestic needs at home are adversely affected by expenditure on the US military presence in the Pacific has grown to a significant extent amidst widespread economic dissatisfaction. But it seems that the United States' trump card is its ability to assert itself internationally, whereas any blunders in the international arena are likely to accelerate its decline. In Japan the feeling that it should be able to assert itself globally is rising. This derives largely from a renewed self-confidence in economic achievement and from a perceived injury to Japanese pride, especially given demands for Japan to change its political system. It seems that the Japanese will become more self-assertive, as can be seen in their increasingly tenacious demands in the SII talks with the US. However, the likelihood of a rupture in the Japan-US alliance when all parties in the Asia-Pacific region want the alliance to continue, including Japan, the US, China, Russia, both Koreas and the ASEAN countries, is low. If a rupture occurred, a destabilizing momentum would be created with enormously negative consequences, even if Japan assumed a greater security role.

Conclusion

In search of a 'normal' role in the wake of the Cold War, Japan has been trying to locate itself in the potentially very volatile post-Cold War world order. It has also been trying to see how much and in what way Japanese resources, most importantly its intellectual resources, can be made available to the global community whilst at the same time restructuring its politics and economy to favour the carrying out of these global responsibilities. Progress in this regard has been achieved in many ways. Yet some may find it very limited in comparison to the high expectations of Japan's future security status. This is understandable to a certain extent since Japan's manner of avoiding its global security responsibilities, as, for instance, during the Gulf War, is clearly undesirable. But the crux of the matter is that unless the Japanese people and government are convinced of the need to shoulder those responsibilities, no outside pressure will lead to sustainable change. Japan will continue to search for a 'normal' role in the post-Cold War era, not as in the nineteenth-century conception of a standard sovereign state, but in the context of deepening global interdependence in the twenty-first century and the increasing

acknowledgment of the technological, economic and financial foundations of national security.

Notes

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¹ Hayward Alker, Thomas Biersteker and Takashi Inoguchi, 'The Decline of the Superstates: The Rise of a New World Order?', paper presented at the World Congress of the International Political Science Association, Paris, 15–20 July 1985.

² Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japan's Role in International Affairs', *Survival*, vol. 34, no. 2, Summer 1992, pp. 71–87.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Ikutaro Shimizu, *Japan! Be a State!* (Tokyo: Bingei shunjusha, 1980). See also Kataoka Tetsuya, *Farewell to Yoshida Shigeru* (Tokyo: Chuo koronsha, 1992).

⁵ Inoguchi, *op. cit.* in note 2, and 'Four Japanese Scenarios for the Future', *International Affairs*, vol. 65, no. 1, Winter 1988–89, pp. 15–28.

⁶ For a forceful argument on the technological and economic foundation of national security in the US context, see John Zysman *et al.*, *The Highest Stake* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

⁷ Takashi Inoguchi, 'The Nature and Functioning of Japanese Politics', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 26, no. 2, Spring 1991, pp. 185–98.

⁸ Inoguchi, *op. cit.* in note 2.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Economic Council, Committee on the Year 2010, *Choices Toward 2010* (Tokyo: Economic Planning Agency,

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¹² 'A Reconstruction Model in Postwar Japan', *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 2 August 1992.

¹³ 'China's Naval Power is on the Rise', *ibid.*

¹⁴ Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japan's Politics of Interdependence', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 25, no. 4, Autumn 1990, pp. 419–37.

¹⁵ Susumu Awanohra, 'Question of Faith', *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 March 1992, p. 49.

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¹⁷ Industrial Structure Council, Uruguay Round Committee, Subcommittee on Unfair Trade Policies and Measures, *Report on Unfair Trade Policies by Major Trading Partners* (Tokyo: MITI, June 1992).

¹⁸ Eisuke Sakakibara, *Japan Has Surpassed Capitalism* (Tokyo: Tokyo keizai shimposha, 1990); Sakakibara, 'Japan: Capitalism without Capitalism', *International Economic Insights*, vol. 3, no. 4, July/August 1992, pp. 45–47.

¹⁹ Inoguchi, *op. cit.* in note 14.

²⁰ Takashi Inoguchi, 'Japan's Response to the Gulf Crisis: An Analytic Overview', *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 17, no. 2, Summer 1991, pp. 257–73.

²¹ Takashi Inoguchi, 'Awed, Inspired and Disillusioned: Japanese Scholarship on American Politics', in Richard Samuels and Myron Weiner (eds), *The Political Culture of Foreign Area and International Studies* (Washington, DC: Brassey's (US), 1992), pp. 57–74.

²² 'Japanese Government Examines Consultative Mechanisms with China on Security Confidence Building Measures', *Asahi shimbun*, evening edition, 3 August 1992.