

# Debates and Deliberations in Japan over Peacekeeping Missions After 1992

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## Abstract

The debates and deliberations surrounding Japan's involvement in peacekeeping missions after 1992 have sparked considerable interest and controversy. Japan's history of pacifism and its post-World War II constitution have been central in shaping these discussions. As Japan navigates its role in international peacekeeping efforts, various perspectives and concerns have emerged, reflecting Japan's foreign policy's complex and evolving nature. These debates and deliberations have been fueled by multiple factors, including the country's pacifist legacy, concerns about potential involvement in armed conflicts, and constitutional limitations on the use of force. Furthermore, public opinion and international pressure regarding more military involvement have also influenced the debates and deliberations surrounding Japan's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions (UNPKO). These discussions have centred on topics such as the interpretation of Article 9 of Japan's constitution, which prohibits the use of force as a means to settle international disputes, the scope of Japan's military involvement in peacekeeping activities, and the potential risks and benefits of contributing to global peace and security. Focusing on all these factors, this paper delves into Japan's stance on peacekeeping missions after 1992, analyzing factors such as historical pacifism, constitutional constraints, and geopolitical considerations. It also examines the role of public opinion and international pressure in shaping Japan's approach to these missions.

**Keywords:** Peacekeeping, Japanese Self-Defence Force, PKO Law, United Nations, Cold War, Gulf War

## Introduction

The debates and deliberations surrounding Japan's involvement in peacekeeping missions after 1992 have sparked considerable interest and controversy. Japan's history of pacifism and its post-World War II constitution have played a central role in shaping these discussions. As Japan navigates its role in international peacekeeping efforts, various perspectives and concerns have emerged, reflecting the complex and evolving nature of Japan's foreign policy (Akimoto, 2012). The debates and deliberations in Japan over peacekeeping missions after 1992 have been fueled by various factors, including the country's pacifist legacy, concerns about potential involvement in armed conflicts, and constitutional limitations on the use of force. Furthermore, public opinion and international pressure regarding more military involvement have also influenced the debates and deliberations surrounding Japan's participation in United Nations peacekeeping missions (UNPKO). These discussions have focused on topics such as the interpretation of Article 9 of Japan's constitution, which prohibits the use of force<sup>1</sup> as a means to settle international disputes, the scope of Japan's military involvement in peacekeeping activities, and the potential risks and benefits of contributing to global peace and security.

In the wake of the Cold War, Japan found itself engaged in debates and deliberations over its involvement in peacekeeping missions. This period marked a pivotal turning point in Japan's foreign policy, as the nation grappled with the question of its role in promoting global peace and security while also taking into consideration its constitutional limitations and domestic political dynamics (Hynek, 2012). As Japan considered its position on peacekeeping missions after 1992, various Japanese representatives, including policymakers, scholars, and the public, engaged in discussions that shaped the trajectory of Japan's international relations. This period of introspection and debate laid the groundwork for

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Japan's evolving role in the realm of peacekeeping and its broader contributions to international security (Iwami, 2018). During this time, the Japanese government passed the International Peace Cooperation Law (the PKO Law), enabling its armed forces to participate in peacekeeping operations. The passage of the PKO Law in 1992 marked a significant milestone for Japan, as it provided a legal framework for its involvement in peacekeeping missions (Ishizuka, 2004). Moreover, the shift from a bipolar to a multipolar and multi-faceted world has significantly influenced Japan's approach to peacekeeping missions after 1992. The shift in global dynamics and the changing nature of conflicts have presented Japan with new challenges and opportunities in its participation in peacekeeping missions (Akimoto, 2018).

This paper delves into Japan's stance on peacekeeping missions after 1992, analyzing factors such as historical pacifism, constitutional constraints, and geopolitical considerations. It also examines the role of public opinion and international pressure in shaping Japan's approach to these missions. Furthermore, this paper seeks to explore the complexities surrounding Japan's engagement in peacekeeping missions after 1992, shedding light on the multifaceted factors that have shaped the nation's stance on this critical issue. This paper also tries to answer the following three key questions: (1) What were the key turning points in Japan's decision-making process regarding peacekeeping missions after 1992, and how did they impact Japan's approach to these missions? (2) Did public opinion and international pressure play a significant role in shaping Japan's approach to peacekeeping missions after 1992? And, (3) What were the limitations faced by Japan in conducting peacekeeping missions after 1992, and how did these constraints shape Japan's involvement in such missions? Finally, this paper undertakes a deep analysis of Japan's changing stance on peacekeeping since 1992, considering historical, constitutional, and geopolitical factors, as well as public opinion and international dynamics and aims to enhance understanding of Japan's role in global peace and security efforts.

### **The End of the Cold war and the Gulf War Crisis**

During World War II, tensions between the United States and its ally during the war, the Soviet Union, led to a rivalry that ushered in the Cold War. Their competition for military supremacy resulted in espionage, battles over communism, and a dangerous buildup of nuclear weapons (Singh, 2010). With the end of the Cold War came a shift in global dynamics as the Soviet Union dissolved and tensions between the United States and Russia eased. Former British Prime Minister Winston

Churchill observed this situation as an "iron curtain", descending across Europe in February 1946 (Tanaka, 2019). Accordingly, the Cold War became a defining feature of international relations with geopolitical tensions growing amidst concerns about promoting democracy while ensuring stability and security in East Asia.

Soon after, a series of significant events unfolded across East Asia, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea were founded in 1948. In October 1949, the Communist Party emerged victorious in China, leading to the establishment of the People's Republic of China. Chairman Mao Zedong signed a Treaty with the Soviet Union. North Korea launched a military assault on South Korea in June 1950 escalating tensions during Cold War. Japan also regained its sovereignty after signing the San Francisco Peace Treaty in September 1951. However, the Soviet Union disagreed with the proposed peace treaty. The People's Republic of China, the Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea were not invited due to debates over representation. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's government decided to embrace the agreement with the US and other key allies as a strategic move to align Japan with Western powers for security amidst growing geopolitical tensions in East Asia. In his acceptance address at the conference, PM Yoshida stated:

"The peace treaty before the Conference contains no punitive or retaliatory clauses; nor does it impose upon Japan any permanent restrictions or disabilities. It will restore the Japanese people to full sovereignty, equality, and freedom, and reinstate us as a free and equal member of the community of nations. It is not a treaty of vengeance, but an instrument of reconciliation. The Japanese Delegation gladly accepts this fair and generous treaty". (PM statement, 1951)

Moreover, during the Peace Treaty conference, several parties, including the United States and the United Kingdom, waived their right to compensation. Since they believed that imposing harsh reparations on Germany after World War I had contributed to the rise of Nazism, they decided against it (Morrison, 1993). In light of the Cold War, they preferred a more generous peace and sought to avoid repeating past mistakes to prevent political extremism (Morrison, 1993).

As Japan was on the brink of achieving independence from the US occupation, it needed to develop its security policy. Prime Minister Yoshida concluded that, given the context of the Cold War, Japan had no choice but to rely on the United States for security support. Despite initially imposing Article 9 on Japan, the US requested additional defence capabilities and reluctantly agreed to limited defensive build-up under pressure, Yoshida conceded

(Tanaka, 2019). As part of this agreement, despite relying upon the US for security support, the San Francisco Treaty permitted continued US occupation of Okinawa and other islands. However, not everyone in Japan supported this decision to align with the Western powers and make peace with the US and its allies (Shaikh, 2021). Some advocated for a more neutral stance, prioritizing peaceful relations with all neighbouring countries including China and the Soviet Union, rather than escalating tensions in East Asia. They argued for an independent foreign policy focusing on diplomacy and non-alignment instead of being drawn into Cold War power plays, expressing concerns about compromising Japan's autonomy by aligning with foreign interests (Shaikh, 2021).

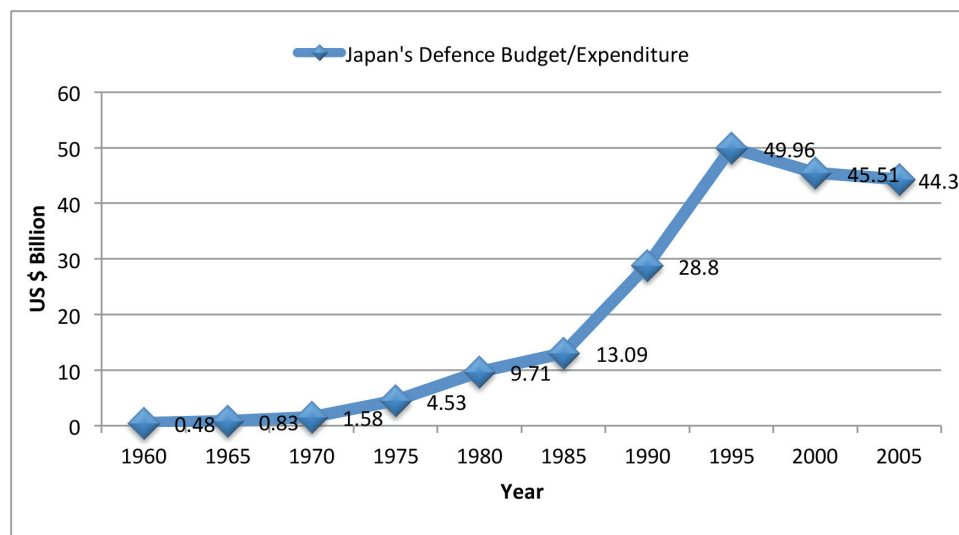
Later, when Nakasone Yasuhiro became the Prime Minister of Japan in 1982, he aimed to '*Nihon-no-Kokusaika*' (internationalize Japan) by improving foreign language teaching, encouraging imports, and attracting tourists (Akaha, 1991). American culture continued to influence the government and people despite over thirty years of negative sentiments about the occupation. The presence of American bases like the Okinawa Base became inconvenient for the Japanese people, leading them to question the usefulness of the Japan-US Treaty. By 1989, Japan had transformed its economy significantly with its GNP per capita doubling between 1979 and 1986, contributing to an appetite for innovative ideas within its population (Crawford, 1998). This economic growth also led to a quadrupling of the tourist population visiting Japan between 1985 and 1996. This very period also laid the foundation for increased global peacekeeping efforts by Japan. Japan maintained the world's third-largest defence budget in the 1970s and 1980s, gradually

increasing it alongside development aid. These trends continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 1). This increase, however, did not seem to be the result of the assumption that a real war would be fought, but rather a result of a SDF strategy to modernize. Furthermore, these developments underscored Japan's need to carefully navigate its role in the international arena amidst changing global dynamics and evolving self-perception.

During the financial year 1989-90, Japan's defence spending reached US \$27.97 billion, accounting for 6.49 per cent of all expenditures and 1.006 per cent of the GDP. This budget supported various defence entities of Japan, to ensure the safety and security, both domestically and internationally amid significant events such as the Unification of Germany in 1989, the dissolution of the Soviet Union by the end of 1991, Japan entering the Heisei Era after Emperor Hirohito died in 1989, and the beginning of the Gulf War in 1990 with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. These events had a profound impact on Japan's foreign policy and defence strategy.

Although; Japan seemed to have integrated itself globally in many fields till the early 1990s, it struggled in international politics. The US-UK-Japan axis deepened the rift between the US and the UK, making Japan's policy options challenging. Amidst the constant threat of nuclear war between Washington and Moscow, there was even a proposal in 1983 for Tokyo to become an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" for the USA. Despite having pledged to be an indispensable ally for peace in East Asia, Japan found itself reduced to being seen as a "*Tokushu Kokka*" (a special state), without its voice and initiatives (Gilson, 2007).

Figure 1: Japan's defence budget/ expenditure over the years (1960-2005)



Source: World Bank (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/JPN/japan/military-spending-defence-budget>)

Moreover, in 1990, the Gulf War Crisis precipitated another scenario that was unprecedented for Japan in terms of defending its citizens. The Japanese government directed its embassy in Kuwait to provide refuge to 261 Japanese nationals. However, many were relocated and held at strategic facilities by the Iraqi government and later they were denied permission to leave (Diplomatic bluebook, 1991). Despite efforts from political parties and business communities to negotiate their release, the Japanese government took little notable action due to limited room for negotiation with Iraq. Moreover, Japan refused to contribute military troops to the Gulf War and instead opted to provide financial aid. This decision made by the Japanese government was criticized by many who believed Japan should have been more driven as it directly concerned its citizens.

Japan's limited involvement in the Gulf War also raised questions about its commitment to global security and proactive role on the international stage and led to increased scrutiny and a perception of the country as self-centred, leading to it being labelled with the condemnation of "Cheque book diplomacy" (Grant, 1995). Various critics argued that this particular insensitive behavior of Japan highlighted the need for Japan to reevaluate its approach to foreign policy and citizen protection in international crises (Hiroshi, 2011). In addition, the globally criticized lesson from the Gulf War served as a wake-up call for Japan to reassess its military capabilities and the need for a more proactive approach to maintaining peace and security in the region.

As a result of this criticism, US President Bush put significant pressure on Japan to offer more than just monetary commitments. The Japanese government's response in these pressured circumstances can only be described as confused. President Bush requested Japanese assistance in logistical planning for the deployment of a large number of troops to the Persian Gulf, specifically in areas such as transport and supply where US resources were exhausted (Hiroshi, 2011). Since, there was no framework in place to allow Japan to deploy its Self-Defence Forces (SDF) to the Gulf, as an alternative, the government considered chartering commercial ships and aircraft. However, commercial firms were hesitant to take on missions in a combat zone. When senior Japanese diplomat Tanba Minoru informed the US that Japan could do little to help, the US responded by pointing out that many of the ships in the Persian Gulf at that time were en-route to Japan, implying that the Japanese shippers were willing to take risks for their country's economy (Hiroshi, 2011).

In the meantime, because of constitutional restrictions, the Japanese government was seeking another way to deploy its military personnel (SDF) to international war-

like situations, but under the supervision of another organization. Keeping this in mind, the Kaifu Government proposed the "United Nations Peace Cooperation Bill" in 1990, aiming to establish a legal framework for dispatching the Self-Defence Forces overseas.

Following the bill, extreme debates took place in Japan. The LDP Secretary General Ozawa Ichiro suggested that Japanese forces should be dispatched to the Gulf under the banner of the SDF because, even under the current constitution, Japanese soldiers can participate in UN-organized collective security operations (Dobson, 2003). However, there were competing viewpoints inside the Foreign Ministry. Moreover, the Japanese nationals were also opposed to the bill due to their strong apprehension of the LDP's plan to deploy the SDF overseas. Because of all these disagreements among the public and *Kokkai* (the Japanese Diet), the bill's chances of passing were lowered. Furthermore, any law authorizing the deployment of the SDF had a very low chance of passing because the opposition held a majority in the upper body of the Diet. Only about one-fifth of the population in the Diet sided with this proposal (Dobson, 2003). After much debate within the government, the bill was put on hold on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1990 and later rejected. After the rejection of the bill, a "three-party accord" was reached, leading to the enactment of the new International Peace Cooperation Law in June 1992.<sup>2</sup>

### **Enactment of the International Peace Cooperation Law, 1992**

The need for a larger role in international affairs was widely felt in Japan, with emphasis on the importance of military personnel contributions. Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa stressed that Japan's international contributions should go beyond "a lavish dispersal of aid" and include sending personnel to help UN Peacekeeping operations, contributing to a consensus among major political parties and the Japanese population that Japan must play a more active role in sustaining worldwide peace and security rather than relying solely on financial donations (The Mainichi, 1991).

After the Gulf War, there was a significant shift in the perspectives of the Japanese public and major political parties. Support for assigning the Self-Defence Forces to Peacekeeping operations rose from 22.5 per cent in June 1988 to 67.8 per cent by April 1992, as revealed by a survey conducted by Japan's largest newspaper company, the Yomiuri Shimbun (Ishizuka, 1996). The ruling LDP established the 'Special Study Group on Japan's Role in the International Community' on June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1991, led by the LDP General Secretary Ichiro Ozawa and known colloquially as the 'Ozawa Commission' (Ishizuka, 2005).



This commission argued that deploying SDF troops under the UN Charter Articles 42 and 43 would be legal based on Japan's Constitution's Preamble provision for peaceful cooperation with all nations (Ishizuka, 2005).

The Commission's 1991 findings strongly urged Japan to participate in the UN Peacekeeping missions, emphasizing the country's potential role in dispatching a logistics unit to multinational troops authorized by UN Security Council resolutions. The 'International Peace Cooperation Bill' introduced in the Diet in September 1991 marked a significant step towards this goal. This bill had clearer purposes and detailed provisions regarding the deployment of SDF personnel for participation in UN Peacekeeping operations and humanitarian aid. Additionally, it established "Five Principles" for the involvement of the SDF in peacekeeping operations as outlined under Article 9 of the Constitution. The "Five Principles" in the PKO bill included:

- I. Agreement on a cease-fire shall have been reached among the parties to armed conflicts.
- II. Consent for the undertaking of UN Peacekeeping Operations as well as Japan's participation in such operations shall have been obtained from the host countries as well as the parties to armed conflicts.
- III. The operations shall strictly maintain impartiality, not favouring any of the parties to armed conflicts.
- IV. Should any of the requirements in the above-mentioned principles cease to be satisfied, the Government of Japan may withdraw the Self-Defence Force (SDF) contingent.
- V. The use of weapons shall be limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of personnel, etc. (Cabinet Office, 2016)

The DSP and Komeito political parties required the "Five Principles" for PKO participation to uphold Article 9 (Dobson, 2003). The Japanese government integrated these principles into the PKO bill to gain approval from both the opposition parties. The Komeito emphasized that these principles were crucial for civilian control, while the Ozawa Committee highlighted the Japanese Constitution's preamble and stressed international collaboration. The bill also restricted the use of force to self-defence to protect Japanese personnel and established an administrative body overseeing SDF peace missions under the Prime Minister's chairmanship (Heinrich, 1999).

The DSP and Komeito proposed a separate peacekeeping organization apart from the SDF, which was rejected due to concerns about effectiveness, and administrative and financial issues (Ishizuka, 2005). The Socialist and Communist parties strongly opposed deploying SDF to peacekeeping operations as illegal. Interestingly, all three

major political parties had sections both in support of and against the SDF's participation in UN Peacekeeping. It became clear that creating a distinct organization from the SDF was not viable since military groups involved in peacekeeping are universally recognized regardless of their specific identity like that of the SDF. The crucial question should have been focused on what tasks the Japanese contingent could perform as peacekeepers rather than who would be part of it; unfortunately, this aspect was overlooked (Ishizuka, 2005).

The Japanese government sees SDF participation in UN Peacekeeping operations as a way to enhance global reputation and transparency, ultimately building public trust in Japan. However, this view was overlooked during the debates, leading to divided opinions among the Japanese population due to their limited knowledge about UN Peacekeeping operations. According to a survey by Asahi Daily News in 1992, 41.6 per cent of Japanese respondents supported SDF participation while 36.9 per cent opposed it (The Asahi Shimbun, 1992).

The debate over the passage of the second PKO-related bill had both positive and negative aspects. It offered Japan its first opportunity to consider the possibilities and implications of its country's first "physical commitment" to international peace and security. Despite aggressive debate and opposition, including a resignation attempt by all the members of the Socialist Party, the PKO bill was ultimately passed into law in June 1992, establishing the legal basis for SDF's participation in all UN Peacekeeping missions.

According to the PKO Law, Japanese peacekeepers have various responsibilities including election observation, supervision of fair voting, administrative guidance (police administration, communications, medical care, construction work transportation), and humanitarian efforts such as refugee rescue. The law prohibits participation in monitoring ceasefires or patrolling demilitarized zones and restricts actions like stationing troops or controlling weapon influx due to domestic antimilitarism influence. Japan's security policy transition towards the UNPKO participation reflects the depth of anti-militarism within Japanese society and its commitment to constitutional pacifism. Moreover, concerns were there about the participation of the SDF in such missions, challenging the traditional interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution (Hook, 2003).

However, the effectiveness of the PKO Law was questioned by the critics. Opponents argue that Japan's participation in UN Peacekeeping missions blurs the line between its self-defence posture and offensive military actions, potentially violating the country's pacifist principles (Akimoto, 2018). Concerns include constitutional legality, potential mission creep,

doubts about the SDF's effectiveness and readiness for peacekeeping tasks, as well as the risk of diverting resources from Japan's primary defence role (Akimoto, 2018). Critics have also argued that Japan's normalization of military activities through UN Peacekeeping missions may strain diplomatic relations with neighbouring countries, particularly those with historical sensitivities towards Japan's military actions (Suzuki, 2017). The potential risks and complications associated with the SDF's participation in the UN Peacekeeping operations warrant a re-evaluation of Japan's security policy transition and its long-term implications.

### Debates regarding the Amendments to the PKO Law

The initial enactment of the PKO Law in 1992 was followed by subsequent amendments in response to changing international dynamics and domestic concerns. In 1998, a new category for "International Election Observation Operations" was added, allowing Japan to observe elections at the request of international organizations. The amendment also permitted contributions in kind for international humanitarian relief operations carried out by specified international organizations even without a cease-fire agreement. Additionally, it allowed Japanese SDF personnel to use weapons under higher-ranking authorities' direction and safeguard equipment as part of UNPKOs.

The second major amendment to the PKO Law occurred after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, in New York City. This amendment sought to address the evolving nature of conflicts and adapt missions accordingly. Later in 2015, a third amendment was made when the Peace and Security Legislation came into force in Japan due to civil war outbreak and lack of ceasefire agreement in South Sudan. The third amendment aimed to establish the foundation for the SDF's ongoing presence and expand its mission to include rescuing fellow SDF personnel in danger. The amendments to the PKO Law reflected Japan's recognition of the need to adapt its peacekeeping policies in response to changing global circumstances and operational challenges faced by the SDF.

However, these amendments highlighted the ongoing national debate regarding Japan's role in UN Peacekeeping operations and the need for flexibility in response to changing global security challenges. Adding to that, these amendments have also sparked intense debate regarding their implications on the country's pacifist principles enshrined in Article 9. Critics argued that these changes have gradually eroded Japan's longstanding commitment to pacifism and raised concerns about a potential shift towards a more assertive and interventionist security

posture (Liff, 2017). Critics also express doubts about transparency, accountability, and mission creep within UN peacekeeping missions.

Proponents of the amendments argue that they were necessary to address the evolving security environment and enable Japan to contribute more effectively to international peace and stability (Liff, 2017). They emphasized the importance of Japan playing a proactive role in international security, particularly in light of complex global challenges and the growing interconnectedness of security threats. Proponents highlight potential benefits such as strengthening international partnerships, demonstrating commitment to global peace, and enhancing diplomatic standing on the world stage apart from increased engagement in the UN Peacekeeping missions. They stress that the amendments have provided Japan with flexibility while maintaining a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution. The long-term implications of this security policy transition are being carefully considered about regional stability and global security dynamics.

### Political Rationales for Japan's Contribution to Peacekeeping

Since joining the United Nations in 1956, Japan has focused its foreign policy on the organization itself. The UN has played a crucial role in shaping Japan's foreign policy for two main reasons. First, after World War II, Japan's Constitution prohibited the possession of armed forces to align with the fundamental spirit of the UN Charter and emphasized peaceful dispute resolution. Second, many Japanese viewed the UN as a symbol of American strength and prestige during the early postwar years due to America's pivotal role in founding it. This 'UN-centered policy approach' remained essential for Japan. The PKO debate in Japan was sparked by the 1991 Gulf War, leading to a transition from domestic to international pacifism and subsequent SDF deployments for international peace operations influenced by external pressure from the United States and the desire to enhance Japan's status internationally.

Japan's transition from passive observer to active participant in peacekeeping operations was influenced by the criticism and lack of appreciation it faced following the Gulf Crisis, leading to a psychological shift among the government and populace (Ishizuka, 2015). This change was necessary for Japan to achieve the status of a 'normal nation' according to liberal internationalists, involving both financial contributions and increased participation in peacekeeping missions (Ishizuka, 2005).

Japan's physical engagement in peacekeeping was necessitated by the increased number of UN missions

after the Cold War. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali lauded Japan's participation during his 1993 visit to Tokyo, encouraging expanded involvement within constitutional limitations (The Japan Times, 1993). Germany's similar historical experience and multiple constitutional changes to meet international demands further motivated Japan to take on a new role in peacekeeping.

However, many critics have expressed their disagreement regarding Japan's actual intention behind the increased SDF participation in peacekeeping missions. They argued that this transition may not solely be motivated by a genuine commitment to international peace, but rather also by a goal to assert national interests and increase global influence (Liff, 2017). They also debated that Japan's increased engagement in peacekeeping operations is a calculated move to enhance its international reputation and influence, positioning itself as a responsible global actor while subtly expanding its sphere of influence. The critics were concerned about the potential erosion of Japan's pacifist principles. They further argued that the broader interpretation of self-defence and collective security provided by the amendments could lead to Japan's involvement in military operations beyond its borders, contradicting Article 9 (Liff, 2017). Japan's participation in UN peacekeeping operations faces challenges due to the lack of consensus in the political debate and constitutional controversy. These hurdles have led Japan to take a cautious approach, expanding gradually its involvement in civilian peacekeeping activities where there is no constitutional controversy.

Furthermore, Japan's geopolitical position is another factor that affects the country's perspectives on the UN and the UN Peacekeeping. More than eighty per cent of Japan's overall oil requirements are met by countries in the Middle East and Southeast Asia; moreover, Japan heavily relies on safe sea routes for its exports and sees the UN as a crucial platform for addressing issues that could threaten Japanese interests. Contributing to the UN Peacekeeping operations is integral to advancing regional security and safeguarding economic and political interests, especially its own. Ultimately, Japan's decision to participate reflects its desire to be seen as a responsible member of the international community, which contributes formidably to global peace and security.

### **Debate Regarding the Reinterpretation of the Constitution**

On July 1, 2014, Japan's government reinterpreted its constitution to allow the country to undertake Collective Self-Defence for the first time (Ryu, 2018). This

controversial decision resulted in significant political controversy domestically and led to swift policy changes. In April 2015, Japan and the United States updated their defence cooperation guidelines, revising key treaties outlining their respective roles and procedures for operational coordination. Additionally, in March 2016, the Peace and Security Legislation went into effect intending to reform and 'normalize' Japan's security posture while expanding the responsibilities and missions of the Japanese SDF (Ryu, 2018).

However, after the Constitution was reinterpreted, the debate over Japan exercising Collective Self-Defence without revising Article 9 became a focal point for intense contestation in Japanese domestic politics (Richter, 2016). Various political factions and interest groups voiced their concerns and were opposed to the government's reinterpretation. The political atmosphere was tense, with widespread condemnation of Prime Minister Abe's actions and warnings of resurgent Japanese "militarism" and war legislation involving young Japanese in foreign war (Richter, 2016). This intense situation also raised questions about Japan's role in regional and global politics, diplomacy, foreign affairs, and its alliance with the US.

Moreover, the reinterpretation of the Constitution and newly enacted Peace and Security Legislation in Japan had also stirred public outcry, leading to widespread protests. The Asahi Shimbun conducted an opinion poll in 2014, revealing that 54 per cent of the Japanese people opposed the Peace and Security Legislation, causing a sharp decline in approval ratings for the Abe administration (Liff, 2017).

Following the debates and criticism from political parties and Japanese citizens, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe sought to convince them that the country's geopolitical landscape had transformed since World War II and emphasized a desire for Japan to be perceived as a normal country participating in international affairs (Shinichi, 2021). He also highlighted the need for Japan to take responsibility for its security while also accommodating the US desire for greater contribution to global order. He further added that this shift requires developing reliable deterrent capability, national willpower, and mechanisms to combat prejudice.

### **The Gap between the Japanese-authorized Limitations and the UN PKO**

Since 1992, Japan has faced challenges in utilizing the fundamental nature of the PKO Law due to the very strict 'Five Principles' for participation, reflecting the country's pacifism-based Constitution. As these principles require consensus from parties involved in conflicts, impartiality,



immediate withdrawal if guidelines are not met, and minimal use of weapons, identifying suitable missions for peacekeepers has been difficult due to past deployments that did not align with these principles.

Before the SDF deployment to Cambodia, the Japanese government and peacekeepers focused on implementing the PKO Law. However, once deployed, they faced challenges in complying with legal mandates due to the harsh reality of the UN Peacekeeping differing from their anticipated scenario (Shinoda, 1994). This led to accusations of disregarding the law as both governments struggled with expanded activities for Japanese personnel without a formal mandate amidst escalating dangers in Cambodia.

In the case of Haiti, the Japanese government faced challenges in combining its laws on disaster relief and peacekeeping operations to effectively respond to the emergency (Wada, 1998). This unprecedented situation involved overlapping problems of natural disasters and armed conflict, leading Japan to deploy both civilian and military units under different laws to deal with the unique emergency in Haiti.

Additionally, legal constraints have limited Japan's participation in missions in South Sudan and the Sinai Peninsula. The 'Five Principles' governing the use of weapons has been a challenge for Japanese peacekeepers, but with amendments to the PKO Law, JSDF troops were permitted to use firearms for self-defence and protection of those under their command, following the 'self-preservation' category<sup>3</sup>. These regulations contrast recent trends in UN peacekeeping which may include armed coercive measures authorized by the Security Council based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter.

The 2019 Policy on the "Protection of Civilians in United Nations Peacekeeping" (POC) outlines the roles and expectations of relevant mission components, allowing for the full integration of the POC into mission planning and activities (United Nations, 2019). Peacekeeping operations with the POC mandates are expected to protect civilians threatened by physical violence by the UN Security Council resolutions specific to each mission. Individual mission mandates may vary in language and specify particular duties and methods for the POC, guiding the implementation of the mandate and strategic approach (United Nations, 2019).

Furthermore, in recent years of peacekeeping missions, UN troops, particularly the infantry battalions, are increasingly involved in *de facto* combat missions. That is a huge concern for Japanese engagement in peacekeeping as due to domestic constraints and constitutional prohibitions on using force abroad, Japan faces challenges contributing an infantry force to international missions.

Consequently, Japan's SDF contributions have been limited to non-combatant operations only. In addition to enhancing its security capabilities, Japan's involvement in peacekeeping operations has provided an effective way for the country to participate in the multilateral system.

Over the last few years, the SDF's participation in international operations has virtually disappeared, including the UN Peacekeeping Missions. Given that the army has never engaged in combat since its inception, peacekeeping missions are considered too risky for such a military force. Furthermore, public opinion in Japan remains largely supportive of pacifism. Late Prime Minister Abe's plan to revise Article 9, which prohibits Japan from waging war and maintaining regular armed forces, continues to face unpopularity within the country.

## Conclusion

Since joining the UN Peacekeeping in 1992, Japan has made deliberate efforts to align with global trends in the UNPKOs, particularly towards greater robustness, and to bridge the gap between the Japanese legal system and international standards. The idea that a more 'proactive' deployment of troops, especially in terms of quantity, would be a desirable national policy goal is based on this assumption. In addition, following the attacks of September 11, 2001, Japan has taken significant steps to reduce legal constraints on overseas deployments of the SDF. However, despite these changes, there remained a significant mismatch between the Japanese policies and the general trends towards peacekeeping on the international stage. As part of the Peace and Security Legislation enacted in 2015, revisions were made to address these lingering concerns and problems within the PKO Law. The evolving world dynamics present an imperative for Japan to consider a more independent security approach. This will impact how Japan engages with UN operations and commits itself to promoting international peace initiatives.

Furthermore, it is observed that Japan's participation in the UN Peacekeeping missions has been shaped by the challenges posed by domestic legal constraints and public opinion. The clash between the strict 'Five Principles' governing the use of weapons and the evolving requirements of robust peacekeeping authorized by the UN Security Council has limited Japan's ability to contribute infantry forces to international missions. Despite facing difficulties, Japan's involvement in peacekeeping operations has provided valuable international experience for the country's Self-Defence Forces. However, with public opinion remaining largely supportive of pacifism and ongoing resistance to the



revision of Article 9, significant barriers persist in Japan's ability to fully engage in combat-centric UN peacekeeping efforts.

Despite the challenges Japan has faced in contributing to robust peacekeeping operations, the country's approach to international missions has continued to evolve over the years. The clash between domestic legal constraints and the evolving landscape of UN peacekeeping has led to a reevaluation of Japan's role in such missions. Additionally, the discrepancies between the PKO Act and the Japan Disaster Relief Law have highlighted the need for a more comprehensive legal framework that can address complex emergency situations such as those seen in Cambodia and Haiti. This has prompted discussions within the Japanese government regarding potential amendments or additions to existing laws to better accommodate the evolving nature of peacekeeping missions.

While public opinion in Japan has traditionally been supportive of pacifism, there is a growing recognition of the importance of international engagement and the potential benefits of contributing to robust peacekeeping efforts. Efforts to educate the public and garner support for a more active role in UN missions may gradually shift public opinion on this matter.

As the UN places increasing emphasis on the protection of civilians in peacekeeping operations, there is a growing need for member states, including Japan, to align their capabilities and regulations with these expectations. This may involve revisiting the 'Five Principles' governing the use of weapons and exploring ways to reconcile these principles with the evolving mandates of UN peacekeeping missions. The difficulties and obstacles that Japan has encountered in fully participating in combat-focused UN peacekeeping operations have not discouraged the country from seeking solutions to these challenges. Despite the opposition to amending Article 9, there is an active discussion within Japan about the potential advantages of a more adaptable approach to peacekeeping and global security.

Japan's involvement in the UN Peacekeeping missions continues to be influenced by an intricate combination of legal, societal, and international elements. As Japan addresses these hurdles, there is a growing acknowledgement of the necessity to adjust to the changing landscape of peacekeeping while upholding the principles and values that have been essential to its international engagement. This ongoing adaptation demonstrates Japan's dedication to striking a balance between its domestic limitations and its role in advancing worldwide peace and security. The establishment of a global peacekeeping system requires meaningful partnerships between the UN and regional organizations,

as well as a greater integration of peacekeeping and peacebuilding.

## Notes

1. Article 9 of Japan's postwar constitution states: "(1) Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. (2) To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized"
2. Following the rejection of the UN Peace Cooperation Bill in 1990, the LDP, Komeito, and Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) reached a "three-party accord" to propose a new legal framework for PKO involvement. Ichiro Ozawa from LDP, Yuichi Ichikawa from Komeito, and Takashi Yonezawa from DSP signed an agreement stating that the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO) could play a key role in Japan's foreign policy.
3. The use of arms in the military is commonly referred to as "the use of force". However, according to Japanese government terminology, "the use of force abroad" specifically denotes aggression against a foreign country, thus violating Article 9.

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