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War drive

# Japan: militarisation under the Koizumi Administration

- IV Online magazine - 2002 - IV345 - November 2002 -

Publication date: Friday 15 November 2002

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**Under the Koizumi Administration [Liberal Democratic Party leader Junichiro Koizumi has been Japan's Prime Minister since 2001], Japan is advancing headlong on a course toward militarisation. In this context, militarisation first means the preparation by the government of the social machinery allowing it to obtain the power to apply and activate military powers without restraint.**

Second, it means the preparation of the legal, political, social background for ensuring the smooth implementation of the above policy. Third, it means to enhance social systems to punish, expel, and retaliate against opposition, resistance, and obstructive groups within and without Japan, who are struggling against the above policies. Fourth, it means to propagate the ideology that it is 'just' to eradicate the 'enemies' of war, national security and the nation state. This is, of course, nothing other than an energetic call for xenophobia.

These policies are not recent, but were planned in a longer time span since the end of US Occupation. In a perspective of 20 years, they represent the 'sum total of the Post World War Two Politics' as exemplified by the Nakasone Administration in the 1980s, which came to power amid the dramatic ebb of the anti-government forces which had embodied the post WWII situation.

## Japan's historical revisionism in early 90s

In a short span, in the second half of the 1990s, the precedents for the establishment of the Koizumi Administration were set up through a series of legislation. These laws included the revision of the Defense Guideline for the Japan-U.S Security Treaty, the Law for Military Emergencies in Areas Surrounding Japan, passed in August 1999; the Anti-Organized Crime Law, The Basic Resident Register Law; and the National Flag and Anthem Law.

However, the Koizumi administration has pushed the pedal to the floor in terms of these retrogressive policies of the nineties. The authorization of a junior high school history textbook written by revisionists who denied Japan's responsibility for the war of aggression, together with Koizumi's official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine (where war criminals are enshrined) on August 13, 2001 two days before the anniversary of the end of the war, marked the beginning of its militarisation policies. Koizumi's display to the world of his close friendship with President George W Bush, on the other hand, was a sales pitch for his administration.

## After September 11

Then, the events of September 11 happened. The suicide attacks on the World Trade Center in New York and the Pentagon were, regardless of who were the perpetrators, and whether they were right or wrong, expressions of political will, or symbols of the hatred and grudge against US control over the world, through globalisation.

It is terrible that these attacks brought many casualties, including innocent civilians who had no responsibility for US supremacy. However, it may be inevitable there were many people who secretly cried 'hurray!' at the success of the attacks on the heart of the US military and financial establishments. This is because five-sixths of the world population have failed to share in the profits of US dominance over the world. Noam Chomsky very appropriately

pointed out that it was precisely the US that is a 'rogue nation,' as he criticized Bush's policy and US domination.

# The success of the US threat

America, the modern 'Empire,' declared a war of retaliation against the terrorists and their accomplice nations, and launched military actions to annihilate Osama Bin Laden and al-Qaeda. The US went on to threaten the whole world: it demanded that all countries be either on the side of good or of evil, or in other words either on the US side or on the other. The industrialized countries went along with this logic, and even China and Russia followed suit. Pakistan, the only nation that had recognized the Taliban Administration in Afghanistan, and even Libya, which was intimidated by the threat of being labelled a terrorist supporting country, joined in.

Bush labelled the remaining countries, which opposed the US, as an 'axis of evil.' As a result, Iraq and the People's Democratic Republic Korea will be declared the next targets of US military attacks after the restoration of order is completed in Afghanistan. This intimidation continues.

Why has this reckless blackmail been able to go on? There are two reasons:

- US military technology has reached a level so advanced that it can now bomb targets in any areas of the world as long as it can set up a front-line base in a neighbouring country. All countries of the world know this quite well.
- Countries complying with America can expect some economic gain.

The former condition might apply to Libya, and the latter to Russia and Pakistan.

# In the interstices of the mass media

Needless to say, not all articles in the media supported the argument for war. Although the number was very limited, some articles critical of the retaliatory war appeared in the mass media.

Among them, a report from the Asahi Shinbun Jerusalem office on September 16th highlighted the plight of Palestine which bin Laden believed to be similar to the Afghan situation. The reporter stated that "if the fight against terrorism is analysed as a clash between West and non-West, it would just support Saddam Hussein and bin Laden. In the Islamic world, extremists like bin Laden are quite exceptional. As the connections between terrorism and Islamic extremists are made clear, it is easy to trumpet the Islamic threat. However, if anti-terrorist acts are enforced without resolving the difficulties of the Third World, such as oppression and poverty, more people would be driven to bin Laden's 'empire'."

As for arguments against war, a letter to the editor in the Asahi Shinbun by Sakamoto Ryuichi, an internationally known musician, had a limited but significant impact. In his letter, he stated that "Prime Minister Koizumi, as the representative of a nation with a pacific constitution, should not support any form of war. Furthermore, he should not be able to contribute to a war in which innocent citizens are being targeted.": Sakamoto's argument certainly brought fresh air to an atmosphere in which it was difficult to raise voices of disagreement or criticism. His position as a musical celebrity made it possible for Sakamoto's opinion to appear in the newspaper. However, it was followed by sporadic criticisms against war in other regions in Japan, such as Nara, Nagasaki, Tottori, and Kyoto. Unfortunately, most of these articles appeared only in regional papers without being connected to one another; they were contained

in the 'interstices' of the mass media.

## No Future

The Japanese government has always 'cooperated' actively with US 'wars.' This means that it neglected the indignation against America of five-sixths of the world's population. Actually, the US did not even appreciate this Japanese 'cooperation' because the Japanese Army, or 'Self Defence Forces' as they are called, did not engage in combat directly. The US also felt that Japanese economic 'servicing' for US wars was insufficient.

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/12\\_Emperor.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/12_Emperor.jpg)]

The Emperor of Japan visits one of the US warships that got away

Therefore, in order to obtain appreciation from the Bush administration, and to win economic gains, the Japanese government has been carrying out an endless series of 'services'. Since the European Union's cooperation with America began to diminish, Japanese support has been increasing. With regard to the reduction and reorganization of US bases in Okinawa, the government turned down people's demands for a review of the US-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), and it is clear that Tokyo gives more weight to Washington than to the Okinawan people. I cannot totally disagree with the voices of the spirited right-wing nationalist who call the government 'traitorous.'

Since joining the US war in Afghanistan, Japan seems to be losing the trust it once enjoyed among the people of Afghanistan and the Middle East countries, a level of trust which US and European countries never received. Consequently, it lost the chance to make non-military people's grassroots assistance for basic needs such as medical services, health, education, clothing, food, and housing. Moreover, because of its unwillingness to welcome refugees from Afghanistan, and to provide support for war damage and victims (apart from 'services' to the US), Japan invited ridicule and scorn from abroad. In the long run, this has been a huge and unrectifiable mistake. In this sense, the Koizumi administration's choices without future are 'traitorous.'

## Muted criticism

However, criticism has been muted in spite of all these consequences. The media has also failed to make any fundamental criticisms to the government. This is not simply because the anti-government movement in Japan has stagnated for a long time, split into specific issues, and generally inclined to withdrawal. It is also because Japan is, as everybody knows, in a serious and chronic economic slump. People are concerned with social problems such as corporate bankruptcies, joblessness and suicides caused by economic distress.

Koizumi's reform program has failed to undo the collusion between politicians, bureaucrats and business, but rather has preserved the privilege of the powerful, who can get away with criminal offences and wrongdoing without facing prosecution. People have become aware that if the reform is pushed through, it will hit the economically weak directly. This has increased criticism against Koizumi, and his popularity has fallen from a high of 80% to 40%. However as a result of the events of September 11, voices against Koizumi's militarisation have been toned down. The administration, taking advantage of this situation, has pushed forward with militarisation.

## Escalating militarisation

Japan has been under strong influence from US military and political strategy since its defeat in 1945. During the Cold War period, this might have been excused as inevitable due to the international political structure. However, under the new international structure since the 1990s, it could have been possible for Japan to contribute to international politics following a spirit of 'demilitarisation and democratisation,' the ostensible slogans of the US occupation of Japan.

On the contrary, however, the Japanese government has become increasingly enslaved to America, and enhanced its war efforts. The following examples are instructive: the huge monetary contributions it made to the Gulf War in 1990; dispatching the Self Defense Forces to join UN Peace Keeping Operation in Cambodia in 1992; the revision of the Japan-U.S Defense Cooperation Guidelines and the preparation of related domestic laws in the late 1990s; active cooperation in US military exercises; and, in the name of cutting back on the bases, the coordination of Japan-US military forces in actually strengthening the bases in Okinawa.

Up until the Mori Administration (with the exception of the Nakasone government in the 1980s), however, the Japanese government has maintained restraints on militarisation. This has been true since the policy of Yoshida Shigeru, who was prime minister in the late 1940s to early 1950s, to maintain a small military.

Koizumi Junichiro gained public support with his pledge to carry out structural reform and to change post-war politics as a 'mission.' The fact that he was sitting in the premier's chair in 2001 was very distressing to many Japanese and other people throughout the world who had been victimized by US supremacy. In terms of his reforms, because of opposition from powerful leaders of his own party, who had gained profits from post-war conservative politics, he could not carry out any social and economic reforms that were beneficial to marginalized people. So he turned to education, where he promoted a scheme to hollow out the democratic principles of the Basic Law on Education in order to bring competition into education.

He also tried to abolish the 'control' that Article 9 (the peace clause) of the Constitution exerted over the government and military, who wanted a free hand in issues involving security. There is only weak lobbying in terms of education, whereas there is strong lobbying in terms of Article 9. Both involved 'Americanisation' in areas where there was no fear of the opposition.

## The Military Emergency Laws

Taking advantage of the September 11 attacks, the Koizumi Administration began to plot to rapidly change Japan into a nation capable of engaging in warfare in close cooperation with the US. The newspapers of April 8 printed some of the proposed text of the three Military Emergency-related Laws, which included sanctions to be meted out to people or organizations that opposed the use of civilian properties for cooperation with the US military under the Emergency laws. Later, clear language will be written on 'large scale terrorism' and countermeasures against 'suspicious vessels' or in other words, to use Bush's phrase, attacks from the 'evil axis.'

Therefore, the Military Emergency Laws, which will be discussed again in the extraordinary Diet session this fall, signify an assurance by government authorities that they will serve the interests of US and the 'Japanese Military' in war situations. Moreover, on the 'home front,' they will establish a 'National Mobilization System,' like the one that existed during World War II, in present-day Japan.

The special relationship between Japan and America since 9/11 has meant a change for Japan along the road to becoming a nation that can wage war, by throwing away Article 9 of the Constitution.

## Critical voices

[[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/13\\_Japanese\\_women.jpg](https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/13_Japanese_women.jpg)]

Japanese women demonstrating against the war drive

In opposition to the 'cooperation' between US and Japanese government carried out in the name of retaliation for 9/11, there have been critical voices and activities from citizen groups and political parties (though as I said before, they have not been large in numbers). They have equally condemned the war and terrorism.

There is another view, however, which says that nearly all the terrorists of 9/11 as well as other suicide bombers thereafter, as well as people who had relationships with the terrorists, had no means to express their political opinions legally in the face of the military, political and economic violence directed against them. We should work before all to ensure that they have the means of free expression, so that they do not have to resort to terrorism, and to achieve solutions to the problems they face. If we do not do so, it will be a glaring injustice.

## Sustainable development or massacre

In other words, people from the North should be aware that we have no right to blame terrorists when there is a terrible gap between the North and the South, a vicious cycle of poverty, and a Debt Crisis which widens the economic gap. People in the North should at least be aware that there are people who had no options than to resort to suicide bombing as an expression of desperate resistance against US supremacy, or against the tyranny of dictators in their own countries. It is trivial to ask whether Bin Laden and his group are the real perpetrators, or even who Bin Laden is at all.

The international community should work to eliminate the poverty suffered by five-sixths of the world's population. We should try to realize an economics that enables sustainable development for the whole world. Through this process we should build a social environment where democratic politics can be realized. Once these conditions are guaranteed, we can launch debates and articulate the problems that exist between peoples: in economics and politics, religions and cultures. The question of whether the political structures of the countries in the so-called 'evil axis' are desirable or not seems irrelevant in this connection.

What is called 'war' by the US (its selfish activities in the Middle East), and what Israel calls 'war' (evil robbery supported by the US) are frontal attacks against the road to peace and justice. To comply with the US is a crime. Dr. Nakamura Tetsu, who has worked providing medical services in Peshawar, Pakistan, told us of the inevitability of becoming a terrorist for people born and bred in Afghanistan, who are only given the choice between dying in disgrace and becoming a suicide bomber, refusing to die in disgrace. There is some ground for choosing to be a bomber. If we deny both options, then we leave literally nothing but genocide. The US and Israel are going along that path.

## A glimmer of hope

However loudly they may condemn terrorism, US policymakers may encourage further terrorism and suicide bombings, and the militarisation of the Koizumi Administration is complying with the US.

The Japanese Government and its people are at a junction where we must choose whether we will go forward along the road to Hell, killing five sixths of the world in league with Bush and Sharon, or to turn around in order to seek an

alternative road of co-existence with others.

If we do nothing, the structure today ensures that we will proceed in the former direction. It will take much time and energy to choose the latter. This is because it is difficult to find a quick and workable solution. To change the world, we must begin by changing ourselves. With the current historical background, it is very difficult for us to do so. All the same, I believe that the future, and the only glimmer of hope, lies in the latter.

*This article was translated by Ishio Miyoko. It first appeared on PARC's new English language website at:*  
[http://www.parc-jp.org/parc\\_e/index.html](http://www.parc-jp.org/parc_e/index.html)