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**Foreign Policy Making under Koizumi:  
Norms and Japan's role in the 2003 Iraq war**

Abstract: Japan's policy toward the 2003 Iraq war is a test of the constructivist argument about the weight of norms as opposed to material systemic factors in foreign policy-making. Constructions of external threats and interests were contested between a largely realist-minded elite around prime minister Koizumi bent on Japan's re-militarization and those still holding to anti-militarist norms. This contest is traced in an analysis of the policy-making process, including the role of bureaucratic and political institutions, the opposition parties and the public. Indicative of the power of norms, Koizumi was forced to compromise his ambition to use the Iraq crisis to help make Japan a 'normal' great power.

This article examines Japan's policy in the Iraq war, with the aim of using IR theory to illuminate the case and of drawing some lessons from the case relevant to debates over foreign policy making.

THEORETICAL DEBATES

One of the main debates in IR is between the 'neo-utilitarians' (e.g. realists) and constructivists over how far norms, as opposed to material, systemic factors drive foreign policy decisions (Ruggie, 1999). Realist scholars see a world in which states face objective threats: thus, Chinese power, Korean missiles, and Japan's energy and security vulnerabilities are objective factors that can harm or constrain Japan and to which policy-makers must respond. Realists expect states to respond to the systemic environment by relatively similar

strategies of power-balancing, with variations a function of level of threat and a state's power position. For them, Japan's non-military strategy is a temporary anomaly and, as its economic capabilities and interests have expanded, Japan is seen to be acquiring enhanced military capabilities. Particularly in the post-Gulf war (1990-91) period, Japan became increasingly 'proactive' and prepared to use its military instruments in international crises (Green, 2001; Iwamoto and Edirippulige, 2001; Katzenstein, 2002; Yachi, 2002; Lind, 2004). For realists, Japan is in the process of becoming a "normal" great power.

For constructivists, however, this is not inevitable: states' perceptions of external threats are a function of contingent historically constructed enmities while identity and norms determine what aims and methods (e.g. realist or liberal) are thought appropriate responses. For them, Japan's distinct anti-militarist national security culture explains its deviation from conventional "realist" behavior (Berger, 1996); its eschewing of a military great power role commensurate with its economic capabilities is attributed to distinctive anti-militarist norms generated by the Second World War experience of the cost of militarism and institutionalized in its "Peace Constitution" (Katzenstein, 1996: 3) Against realist expectations, Japan's foreign policy remained 'reactive,' 'passive,' and 'low-risk,' long after the norm-shaping experience and despite great changes in its potential power position (Drifte, 1990; Curtis, 1993; Yasutomo, 1995; Hook, 1996; Heginbotham and Samuels, 1998).

Examining the mechanisms said to explain states' adaptations to the international system gives some leverage over this debate. For neo-realist Kenneth Waltz (1979), states are *socialized* into the realist rules of an anarchic system by the high costs of defying them and by emulation of successful realist states. Yet, it is neither self-evident that Japan's strategy as a trading state has failed nor that the more militarist American approach is so successful that it should be emulated; indeed, Japanese policy makers have until recently seemed to agree with Wendt (1992) that anarchy is what states make of it and that through their non-

militaristic behaviour they can deter its construction in a malign Hobbesian way. Rose's (1998) neo-classical realism explains *lags* in adaptation by domestic factors such as elite failures to perceive threats correctly and/or the lack of institutions to mobilize a country's power potential; but these variables must themselves be explained by domestic political culture. Both explanations point to *interpretations* of the external environment by domestic actors, thereby opening the door to the constructivist argument that the distinctive norms and identity of individual states shape their responses to systemic factors. Adaptation in *behaviour* depends on adaptation in *norms*.

What, then, determines norm change or persistence, particularly in the Japanese case? A primary constructivist pathway to norm change is a state's adoption of system-level norms in order to be accepted as a legitimate world player. Japan's vulnerability, as a result of its post WWII experience and subsequent security dependency, to US normative pressures to assume military responsibilities can be seen in the way the Japanese elite was seared by US admonitions that they had responded "too little too late" to the 1991 Gulf war. Such external pressure is, however, chiefly applied to elites who must still transmit the new norms, if they absorb them, to their own societies; however since, as Katzenstein (1996) argues, domestic norms are denser than those at the international level, the former may prove very resistant to change. This exposes how far Wendt's notion of the state as a corporative entity sharing collective norms is inappropriate in periods of change when multiple norms are contested among elites and between elites and publics (Zehfuss, 2006). In this contest, Putnam's (1988) idea of Janus-faced elites negotiating between the outside and the inside is relevant, especially as adapted by Finnemore and Sikkink (1999), who see domestic political entrepreneurs using dominant international norms to shift the identity of their own states.

Foreign policy analysis is essential to take the argument further since the structures and processes of foreign policy-making are the site of such norm contestation. When norms

conflict, which ones prevail is a function of the power struggle inside regimes and the policy-making process that channels it. The role of norms in the foreign policy process has several dimensions:

1) Leaders whose policies diverge from dominant norms must normatively legitimize them or face constraints and high costs (Reus-Smith, 2002); 2) Leaders must carry state institutions with them but other office-holders may have their own views. The bureaucratic politics paradigm in which policy is affected by competition between different branches of the bureaucracy whose views are shaped by the special interests and jurisdictions of their offices can be extended to wider political institutions; moreover, the contest is best seen to be conducted by normative discourse over the goals appropriate to a country's identity and the means compatible with its norms; 3) The distribution of power in the policy process can be altered in several ways. First, institutional and legal change may empower certain office-holders and weaken others. Second, when dominant national norms are at stake, the scope of conflict may widen and actors be differentially empowered or constrained by the mobilization of the public around normative issues.

This analysis of Japan's role in the Iraq war will depart from and explore the following assumptions: 1) policy-makers must respond to material systemic factors but that responses vary by state identity which shapes conceptions of interest; 2) there is no single fixed national interest and in times of change, it becomes an object of internal contestation, with the balance of institutional power and competitive normative discourse determining which view prevails. More particularly, the study will show that while top policy-makers around Prime Minister Koizumi saw the war as an opportunity to advance their realist interpretation of the world and of Japan's national interest, they faced significant constraints in operationalizing their policy from deep-rooted anti-militarist norms.

## JAPAN BETWEEN REALIST ELITES AND ANTI-MILITARIST NORMS

The Iraq war coincided with a Japanese government of exceptional political strength. While even association with an unprovoked war against a state that posed no threat to Japan and which lacked UN endorsement would seem to be highly problematic on normative grounds, the Koizumi administration, far from simply responding to US pressures for involvement, saw the war as a major *opportunity* to serve what it took to be vital national interests.<sup>i</sup> Japan's policy included a statement of clear political support for the US invasion; diplomatic efforts to get support from UN Security Council member states for a resolution to endorse the war and another for post-war reconstruction; and the passage of special legislation, the Iraqi Special Law in July 2003, to enable the dispatch of the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq. Japanese ground troops were deployed in Samawah, a city in southern Iraq to render reconstruction assistance, and Maritime and Air SDFs undertook transport and fuelling operations in support of the US-led coalition. Japan also hosted a post-war international conference on Iraq reconstruction in October 2003 in which it pledged US\$ 5 billion (US\$1.5 billion in grant and US\$3.5 billion in loan), the largest amount of financial assistance after the US and nearly 10% of the sum called for by the US from donor states.

Japanese policy-makers believed this policy would enhance the nation's power position and military security, as realists would expect. They aimed to use the crisis to reinforce the US alliance, on which they believed Japan's security in East Asia to depend in the face of rising Chinese power and a North Korean nuclear threat. It was also an opportunity to recover the stake in Iraq's oil fields they had been forced to relinquish after the 1990-91 Gulf war, and hence contribute to Japan's energy security, so dependent on Middle East oil. They believed it would demonstrate international leadership and gain the international respect as a great power that the Japanese elite craves while redressing the

international contempt they suffered for their failure to make a military contribution to the 1990-91 Gulf war. And, perhaps most important, by enabling the deployment of the SDF, the crisis was expected to help reshape national norms in a way more favorable to Japan's re-militarization and hence mark a major step in redressing its lopsided strategic profile as an economic giant without commensurate military capabilities and hence global political clout.

All of these aims reflected a sea-change in norms at the elite level, with Japan's leaders seeking now to be a 'normal' great power rather than a non-military great power or mere trading state. Although fully explaining this norm shift is beyond the scope of this paper, it was in great part the result of rising US global hegemony; the embrace by a new generation of Japanese elite of US-promoted 'realism;' their fear of abandonment by the US in the face of perceived new threats in East Asia, and the deeply ingrained norm among them of priority to the US alliance.<sup>ii</sup>

However, this new "realist" view was strongest among top policy makers around Prime Minister Koizumi, in his Cabinet Office and in the senior ranks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was much less embraced outside this top policy-making circle. Japan had become sharply divided over the relevance of the old anti-militarist norms between the new realists and the older generation within the ruling party, opposition politicians and the public majority, which continue to hold, to varying extent, to anti-militarist norms. Involvement in the Iraq war was highly controversial in that it seemed to challenge national norms and hence rapidly mobilized opposition, even in policy-making circles.

The outcome was affected by alterations in the balance of power in the policy process. Traditionally, Japanese policy-making was made by consensus within a broad but cohesive elite made up of senior bureaucrats, ruling party officials, and the leaders of the business community (Kusano, 2001: 65-7). This was consistent with a cautious, incremental and reactive foreign policy. However, power in Japan had been increasingly centralized (Nakano,

1997), with the weakening of LDP party factions and strengthening of the prime minister's office, accompanied by a decline of the old consensus politics. The Koizumi administration (2001-2006) was a period of exceptional power concentration in the hands of the prime minister and his Cabinet Office. Under the central administrative reforms of January 2001, policy-making in an international crisis was centralized in their hands, enabling the prime minister to take decisions without seeking a consensus. This 'top-down' policy process was deliberately designed to by-pass the bottom-up bureaucratic and consensual policy process that had delayed Japan's contributions to the 1990-1 Gulf war, at great cost, in the elites' view, to its international prestige and value as an ally of the US. Additionally, the government benefited from an exceptionally popular prime minister, the electoral dominance of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party and historic weakness of the opposition parties which constrained the ability of opponents of the Iraq war to mobilize popular normative opposition. (Shinoda, 2004, 2007; Muramatsu, 2004, 2005a, 2005b; Furukawa, 2005; Takahashi, 2003).

Additionally, the government exploited US pressure to overcome resistance to its policy. US demands for Japan's military participation in the war in Iraq helped Koizumi to put his policy preferences on the agenda, while contact with US counterparts, either in the form of visits of US leaders or bilateral meetings of high-ranking officials, determined the timing of specific decisions or spurred policy implementation against the inertia or even resistance in the bureaucratic process. Thus, the decisions on SDF participation in Iraq and financial contributions to Iraq reconstruction were both responses to specific requests by US Under-secretary of State Armitage. Cabinet approval of SDF deployment in December 2003 was a response to the visit of US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld to Tokyo in November 2003 and the subsequent US expressions of anger at the delay (Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, 2006: 171-2).



Thus, the prime minister was empowered to push his policy preferences in the Iraq war and to use participation in the war to erode anti-militarist norms. But he still had to struggle to impose his preferences against the wider circles excluded from decision-making. Moreover, the policy-making process still gave sufficient weight to anti-militarist norms, by which decision-makers were constrained and opponents of the war empowered, that the Koizumi administration had to substantially compromise its original ambitions.

## THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS IN THE IRAQ WAR

### The inner policy-making circle

*The Prime Minister and the Cabinet Office (Naikaku Kanbō): (C Head)*

The prime minister made the key decisions on Japan's policy toward the war. Determined to show support for the US quickly and willingly rather than under pressure, he decided on early support for the US military attack on Iraq when even high pro-US officials in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) could not reach an agreement. He decided on deployment of the SDF to Iraq. He also decided to carry the burden of 10 per cent of the international financial contribution to Iraqi reconstruction that the US called for, despite the preferences of the Ministry of Finance. It was also his idea to seek US cooperation in getting UN endorsement of the war in order to facilitate Japan's involvement (Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, 2006: 152, 159-60, 168). The prime minister personally believed that the Japanese military should recover its role through a revision of the Constitution's Article 9 (Tachinana, 2003: 34) and hoped the Iraq war would facilitate this.

Koizumi's exceptional personal popularity, with approval ratings as high as 78 per cent compared to the more usual prime minister ratings of around 20%, combined with the powers of his office, made him by far the single most powerful policy-maker. Within the Cabinet, the prime minister had a firm grip on his Cabinet colleagues.<sup>iii</sup> Crucially, his

exceptional personal public stature allowed him to include in the cabinet only his trusted followers and to ignore the traditional practice of giving representation to the LDP's factional balance (Shinoda, 2004:105-7; Shinoda, 2007: 118-21). Koizumi's leadership was also strengthened by the fact that the Foreign Minister, Yoriko Kawaguchi, having been chosen from outside inner political circles, lacked an independent power base and had to consult with the prime minister on every detail. Also, the Director-General of the Cabinet Office, Yasuo Fukuda, acted on behalf of the prime minister, shared his views and had a significant degree of control over when and how to implement his key decisions, such as when to send the SDF to Iraq (Akasaka, 2004: 225). The prime minister's dominance within the cabinet was by no means the norm, and contrasts, for example, with the ability of an independent-minded cabinet director general to block the wish of a former, also activist-minded pro-US prime minister, Yasuhiro Nakasone, to comply with a US request that Japan send mine-sweepers to the Persian Gulf in the 1980s.

*The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) (Gaimu shō): (C Head)*

The main partner of the Cabinet Office in policy-making on Iraq was MOFA. Besides its bureaucratic jurisdiction over foreign relations, senior MOFA officials carried exceptional influence with the prime minister because he had taken office lacking familiarity with foreign affairs. Moreover, the Cabinet Office worked closely with top MOFA officials and greatly relied on their views and interpretations of Iraq issues and of Japan's interests (Kan, 14 March 2003).

The policy-making structure within MOFA also took on a top-down pattern, following a new structure that took effect in cases of international crisis in order to speed up decision-making. Policy-making over Iraq was therefore dominated by the highest-ranked MOFA officials, who are disproportionately recruited from US specialists or diplomats who

have served in America and who tend to prioritize the US alliance over all other interests. Most involved in the Iraq case were the North American Affairs Bureau and the Foreign Policy Bureau's Division of General Affairs, which were among the most enthusiastic about meeting US demands. By contrast, the Middle East and African Affairs Bureau (MEAB: Chūtō Afurika kyoku), which deals with and has knowledge of the Middle East through the embassies posted in Middle East states, as well as functional sections such as the UN Policy Division (Kokuren Seisaku ka), were more skeptical about bandwagoning with the US but they were excluded from Iraq war policy-making. MOFA officials outside the senior ranks were even denied information on aspects of Japan's policy, which was known to be highly controversial (Yamatani, 2005: 24; Amaki, 2003: 21, 27, 29, 173-74). This suggests that the merits of the war carried far less weight in the policy process than the perceived needs of the US alliance.

In their interactions with the Prime Minister and Cabinet Office, MOFA's top ranks advocated proactive co-operation with the US and SDF participation in Iraq. They were especially active in lobbying in the war's aftermath for a quick dispatch of the SDF while Iraq was still under US occupation for fear that the UN might take over and Japan would lose the opportunity to show its commitment to the US alliance (Okamoto, 2003: 19). In this one respect, however, the prime minister proved more cautious. On the visit of the US Defense Secretary Rumsfeld in November 2003 to encourage the SDF dispatch within the year, MOFA officials attempted to force Koizumi's commitment by including the prime minister's pledge in his script for the meeting, but Koizumi ignored it (Kasumigaseki Konfidensharu, January 2004: 235). Contrary to their preference, SDF activities were reduced from what was originally planned and the SDF dispatch was further delayed as the prime minister attempted to appease opposition to the move.

### The intermediate policy-making circle

In the intermediate policy-making circle, which enjoyed access to the dominant policy-makers, were the bureaucratic branches relevant to the issue, including the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) and the Self Defense Force (SDF), the key economic ministries, the leadership of the ruling coalition parties and the leaders of the business community. The majority of them agreed on the basic position of support of the US and of SDF participation in Iraq, but their views on the degree and the manner in which these policies should be pursued varied.

#### *Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB) (Naikaku Hōsei kyoku): (C Head)*

The Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB), positioned above the bureaucratic branches, was supposed to be the guardian of national norms in policy-making, charged with ensuring the constitutionality of draft legislation before its submission to parliament. In this capacity, it had to certify the constitutionality of legislation enabling the planned SDF participation in Iraq. It was therefore pivotal in shaping the form of Japan's participation. The perimeters of the debate were set by the fact that 'collective security,' meaning participation of Japanese forces abroad in UN peace-keeping had, since the 1990 Gulf war, come to be accepted as constitutional, while the use of force in 'collective defense,' meaning SDF participation in a purely US-led coalition, was still considered to be prohibited or at least highly controversial. While a UN resolution had legitimized participation in re-construction activities in Iraq, the country was in practice under US control and the SDF would in key respects be operating under it; it was, hence, unclear how far the SDF could assume an active military role. The CLB's attempt to accommodate the government by flexible interpretation of the constitution while still maintaining constitutional principles led to inconsistency. The CLB took a more restrictive view on the constitutionality of the use of force in 'collective defense' than the permissive reinterpretations promoted by MOFA and JDA and only approved legislation on

SDF deployment in Iraq on the condition that its activities be restricted to ‘non-combat areas’ (*hi sentō chiiki*). However, this was eccentrically defined as areas free from combat between entities claiming to represent a state, thus excluding the activities of anti-occupation insurgents in Iraq who, in reality, made Iraq a combat zone. In interpreting the area to which the SDF was going as not ‘a combat area’ (*sentō chiiki*), it allowed its dispatch without armed capability beyond that needed for strict self-preservation, hence without the actual ability to engage insurgents. As the prime minister decided against investing his political leadership capital in reinterpreting the issue of the use of force in collective defense, the CLB’s weapons restriction went unchallenged.

*Japan Defense Agency (JDA) (Bōei chō): (C head)*

Under Koizumi, younger leaders with strong views on a greater role for the SDF were appointed Directors General of the JDA<sup>iv</sup> and its top permanent officials were also enthusiastic about sending the SDF to Iraq. This would please US counterparts, enable expansion in the mission of the SDF and possibly lead to the upgrading of the agency to the ministerial level—which did actually happen in January 2007. However, compared to MOFA and some military activists among the politicians, JDA was more cautious about the conditions and the timing of SDF participation, putting greater emphasis on minimizing casualties and wanting better weaponry. However, mainly due to the agency’s structural disadvantage of being at the sub-ministerial level and subordinate to the Cabinet Office, but also in part because the JDA’s director lacked good relations with the head of the Cabinet Office, these concerns were largely ignored.

JDA lobbying was, however, effective in overcoming the reservations of some political leaders over sending an Aegis information-processing warship to support the war in Afghanistan from the Indian Ocean so over-stretched US forces could concentrate on the Iraq

war. The JDA favored it because of the little risk and large gains from US appreciation but some politicians in the LDP and its ruling coalition partner, the Kōmeitō, were wary about the Aegis' possible involvement in the constitutionally prohibited 'collective defense' with the US. Exceptionally in matters regarding the Iraq war, Prime Minister Koizumi followed in this case the traditional practice of deferring to ruling coalition party leadership, but JDA and SDF officials were successful in getting party leaders' support for a revision of the Anti-Terror Law (first passed in 2001 to enable Japan's naval participation in support of the war in Afghanistan), to authorize dispatch of an Aegis vessel in November 2002.

*Self-Defense Force (SDF) (Jiei tai): (C head)*

The Self-Defense Force's involvement in policy-making was limited to technical matters, with the JDA otherwise representing it (Kasumigaseki Konfidensharu, August 2004: 235). SDF officers viewed participation in Iraq as a way to enhance their inferior status in Japanese public life and overcome what they took to be crippling restrictions on Japan's defense capability. Among some lower-rank SDF officers, there was a feeling of duty, even a heroic sense of risking their lives for these goals (Handa, 2004: 39). However, the SDF was far from united over the conditions and timing of deployment. The Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), having the closest liaison with the US, was in favor of an early deployment. The Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) was more cautious due to the security risks. Its leadership had successfully opposed government desires to deploy it to Afghanistan in 2001, but once some politicians began to complain that there was no reason to have an army that could not be used, the GSDF put its priority on securing proper conditions for deployment in Iraq (Kasumigaseki Konfidensharu, March 2004: 236). SDF's top ranks appealed directly to leaders of the Cabinet Office and in a Diet session GSDF Chief of Staff Hajime Matsusaki appealed for a revision of the restrictions on heavy weaponry for the forces to be deployed to

Iraq. But the Cabinet Office ignored this, fearing it could throw doubt on the claim that the SDF would be deployed in a non-combat area. It also ordered an overly hasty deployment from the point of view of military preparations.

*The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (Jiyū minshu tō or Jimintō): (C Head)*

The Prime Minister's extraordinarily (as high as) 78 % popularity rating compared to the public 30% approval of the LDP meant that the party was dependent on his personal popularity and therefore lacked much leverage over his government's policy-making. This enabled Koizumi to promote party leaders sharing his pro-US, military activist views, thus speeding up the shift in the power balance within the LDP in this direction.<sup>v</sup> By contrast, the traditional mainstream LDP Diet members, who were now marginalized, generally favored a more cautious, self-restrained and moderate activation of the SDF. For the activist group, the Iraq war was an opportunity to advance their agenda.

The prime minister was not entirely free of intra-party opposition to his Iraq policy. The strongest opposition came from anti-Koizumi factions that were marginalized under his government and objected to his bypassing of traditional consensus-building within the LDP and his evasion of any discussion of the constitutionality of the government's war policy (Shinoda, 2004: 106-07). Other party members who opposed the policy were not anti-Koizumi but opposed sending the SDF to Iraq, fearing the political risk of going against public opinion. However, the Koizumi government was able to use the prime minister's popularity among the electorate to contain this opposition (Takahashi, 2003: 98-9). In the end, only three LDP deputies remained opposed but, indicative of the strong disquiet evoked by Koizumi's policy, these were considerable heavyweights, namely, former LDP Chairman and Minister for Home Affairs, Hiromu Nonaka (Hashimoto faction), former LDP Chairman

and Minister for Transportation, Makoto Koga (Horiuchi faction), and former Minister for Home Affairs Mamoru Nishida (Hashimoto faction).

Another line of disagreement came from the ‘defense tribe’ of politicians with close ties to the JDA who shared the view that the GSDF should be deployed with proper weaponry, expecting that casualties among the troops were likely under the regulations in force; there was even a voice calling for abandoning GSDF deployment under these conditions. But they too were contained by the prime minister’s influence in the party.

The great majority of intra-party opposition was mainly over the details, not the substance of the Iraq policy, and mostly motivated by concern for the risks to the LDP’s electoral prospects. The prime minister was more of a risk-taker and was ineffectively constrained by the more cautious majority. The government had, of course, to overcome opposition by its own Diet members in order to pass the enabling laws needed to act in Iraq. Its strategy was to pick off opponents one-by-one through a combination of threat, persuasion and cooptation. But, crucially, the government also had to make concessions that constrained or reduced the SDF’s mission in Iraq. For example, it had to defer to a demand to remove WMD clearance activities from the GSDF’s mission. However, given such concessions, the LDP Diet majority provided the enabling legislation the government needed to advance its overall policy on Iraq (Ishiba and Ushio, 2004: 102).



*The Coalition Partners: (C Head)*

At the time of the Iraq war, the Koizumi government depended for its parliamentary majority in the upper house on a coalition of the dominant LDP with two smaller parties, the New Conservative Party (Hoshu shin tō) and the Kōmeitō. The overwhelming dominance of the LDP was the main source of its ability to co-opt its coalition partners over the war in return for minor concessions.

The New Conservative Party, having split from the LDP over factional politics, but ideologically very similar, was highly supportive of the government's Iraq policy. After a great loss of its Diet seats in the November 2003 election, its remnants merged with the LDP, increasing the latter's representation. On the other hand, the Kōmeitō had historically represented itself as a 'party of peace' based on UN-centrism, anti-militarism and opposition to the US alliance. In the case of the Iraq war, however, the party leadership shelved the party's historic policy. The Kōmeitō's leadership appealed for a non-military solution in Iraq but did not obstruct the government's planning for military participation. Its opposition to sending the Aegis vessel was also withdrawn at the beginning of December 2002. When the war was launched without a UN resolution, it officially criticized the US action while still accepting the Japanese government's support for it. Indeed, it defended the government's policy by criticizing the Saddam Hussein regime and its supposed WMDs and later argued that the SDF mission was humanitarian.

The Kōmeitō leadership successfully rebuffed criticism from the party membership and strong protests from its main public support base, the Buddhist religious organization, *Sōkagakkai* (Hirano, 2005: 26-7). This was because the party's electoral support, being based on religious identity, was relatively secure regardless of party policy. The party leadership's bandwagoning with the LDP was motivated by its urge to remain in power and to survive in

what it feared was an emerging two-party system of the LDP and the opposition Democratic Party. It had witnessed the collaboration between those two large parties in the passage of the Anti-Terror Law in 2001 following the 9/11 terrorist attacks; it was therefore keen, on the occasion of the Iraq war, to show its readiness to collaborate with the LDP in order not to be replaced by the Democratic Party as the LDP's coalition partner (Shinoda, 2004: 77). The government therefore could rely on the Kōmeitō in the Diet to support key enabling legislation needed for its Iraq policy.

Nevertheless, the government had to make some concessions to keep the Kōmeitō's support. It was necessary to the LDP majority in the House of Councillors and LDP Diet members were increasingly dependent on its highly-organized voting support for their victory in elections under the dual voting system.<sup>vi</sup> The Kōmeitō's influence on government policy grew with the October 2002 election, and further in the election a year later. Hence, at the time of the passage of the Iraq Special Law, it was able to strike a bargain with the LDP on tax concessions favoring its constituency in return for support of the law. It was also able to secure the exclusion from the SDF mission of the transportation of weapons and ammunition on the grounds that this constituted a prohibited 'use of collective defense' with the US coalition. The Kōmeitō was also able to convince the government to postpone the SDF deployment on the grounds of its negative impact on the up-coming Autumn 2003 elections, and to further postpone it until after the Kōmeitō party conference of 6 December 2003. Overall, the coalition parties supported the government's basic policy for post-war participation of the SDF, while diluting the substance of its mission.

#### *The Economic Ministries: (C Head)*

The two major economic ministries, the Ministry of Finance (MOF - Zaimu shō) and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI - Keizai Sangyō shō) were historically less

pro-US and more protective of Japan's national interests than MOFA, but they were largely marginalized by Koizumi's jettisoning of consensus-based decision-making. Their involvement in policy-making over Iraq was limited to matters such as the amount of Japan's financial contribution to post-war reconstruction. Initially MOFA preferred to provide US\$5 billion to shoulder about 10% of the total amount called for in order to maintain the Japanese position as the world's leading aid donor, while MOF was proposing a tenth of this. High-rank MOFA officials persuaded Prime Minister Koizumi and Cabinet Office Director Fukuda to opt for the provision of US\$5 billion (Yomiuri Shinbun Seijibu, 2006: 174-5). The government originally intended that only US\$0.5 billion of this would be a grant (rather than a loan) but the US objected that the grant should be larger in order to encourage other states to be generous. MOFA wanted to accommodate the US. Within MOF, the Budget Bureau (Shukei kyoku), the most powerful section within the ministry, wanted the grant minimized while the International Bureau (Kokusai kyoku) supported MOFA.<sup>vii</sup> The decision, finally made jointly by the Cabinet Office and MOFA, raised the grant portion to US\$1.5 million (Iraku Fukkō ni 10 Oku Doru. 18 September 2003; Washimi, 2004). The Japanese government's earlier reluctance to yield to the US demand to write off the Iraqi debt similarly reflected the influence of less pro-US, more domestically-oriented bureaucratic branches, METI and MOF, but, again, they were overridden from above. On the other hand, METI represented and had been organizing the part of the Japanese business community that was enthusiastic about reconstruction contracts in post-war Iraq. It was therefore interested in having the SDF dispatched as early as possible in order to take an advantageous position in seizing business opportunities. However, its influence on the matter proved very limited.

*The business community (zaikai): (C Head)*

Business was largely a bystander in the debate over the war, bandwagoning with rather than lobbying the Koizumi government (Zaikai, 2005: 50; Sonoda, 2004). Business leaders generally feared the war would have a negative effect on the Japanese economy by causing an oil price rise, a lowering of investment and a reduction of their exports (2003 nen Keizai Saisei. 21 January 2003). However, believing that the US decision for war could not be reversed by Japan, they focused on how to minimize the negative effect and make use of the war to gain business advantages.

Japan's over-grown construction industry saw a great opportunity for re-construction contracts in Iraq. Also keen for opportunities in Iraq were chemical plant builders, the financial sector, and Japan's leading general trade companies (Nihon Kensetsugyō Dantai Rengō kai 2003; Hamada, 2004: 160). The business association, the Keidanren, with the participation of nearly 70 companies from these industries, had held three meetings with government officials from MOFA and METI by Autumn 2003, to discuss post-war reconstruction business, the possibility of a share in the Iraqi oil industry and the Iraqi market for Japanese exports (Mori, 2004: 156). In contrast to these sectors, Japanese oil companies were reluctant to enter the Iraqi market, believing investment in Iraq to carry great risks and that the Japanese oil industry lacked the capital to obtain a large contract and would have to enter a consortium with a major US or British company.<sup>viii</sup>

Business sectors hoped the war would take place within a UN framework since the UN would likely be favorable to the business interests of Japan, its second largest donor (IEEJ, 2002: 3). As the military attack was launched without UN support, and it became clear the US would decide the allocation of reconstruction contracts, business leaders started arguing that it was necessary to gain US favour through early SDF participation in Iraq. When, after the invasion, the US government started to allocate Iraqi contracts to US enterprises, there was impatience among business leaders at the government's delay in

deploying the SDF. However, their urging of early deployment proved ineffective in the face of government caution (Sakae, 2003; Hamada, 2004). For the government, Japanese business opportunities in post-war Iraq were secondary to its strategic goals and domestic popularity.

### The outer policy-relevant circle

#### *The opposition parties: (C Head)*

The opposition parties strongly opposed the war and were excluded from policy-making over Iraq. The smaller opposition parties, the Japan Communist Party (JCP, *Nihon Kyōsan tō*) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP, *Shakai Minshu tō*, the former Socialist Party), firmly held to Japan's non-militarist and UN-centrist national norms, standing against the war and against sending the Aegis vessel to the Indian Ocean, for a non-military solution to the Iraqi WMD issue within the UN framework, and for the provision of humanitarian and post-war reconstruction assistance to Iraq without the use of the SDF. However, the number of their Diet seats had declined to the point where the government could ignore them in legislation, hence in the policy-making process. The largest opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ, *Nihon Minshu tō*), stood for a UN-centered policy in opposition to the government's support for the US invasion without a UN resolution. Its condition for post-war SDF participation was that there should be a new UN Security Council resolution establishing a UN multilateral force for the purpose of providing reconstruction assistance, and that there should be a request from a new Iraqi government.<sup>ix</sup> The Democratic Party rebuffed attempts by the government to co-opt it, believing that, in view of public opposition to the war, an independent policy would win it electoral support. As a result, the government decided to marginalize the opposition altogether, dismissing all its protests and questioning of government policy and relying on the ruling coalition's majority in the Diet.

The opposition parties were unable to mobilize the public's broad opposition to the war to effectively counter the government. To be sure, they jointly submitted a resolution against the war to the House of Representatives demanding the withdrawal of the Prime Minister's statement of support for the US invasion. They also used delaying tactics against passage of the Iraqi Reconstruction Law, submitted motions of no confidence in the government and boycotted the vote on ex-post facto approval of the SDF dispatch in late January 2004. However their position was weakened by lack of unity. Thus, when the DPJ submitted on 3 July 2003 an amended bill to the House of Representatives that removed authorization of SDF deployment, the three other opposition parties did not back it since they believed it did not challenge the legitimacy of the occupation of Iraq. The DPJ itself was divided since its members came from various political parties including both the LDP and the former Socialists. As a result, the opposition parties could not block SDF participation in Iraq, although the government's fear not to give them too much ammunition in forthcoming elections contributed to the concessions it made to its own parliamentary supporters.

*The media: (C Head)*

The two pro-government papers with 55 per cent of the total circulation, *Yomiuri Shinbun* and *Sankei Shinbun*, systematically promoted the government message that support for US policy was in the national interest by linking the Iraq issue to the North Korean WMD threat. Most journalists and the widely-watched privately-owned TV news programs opposed the war and helped maintain a critical atmosphere. But they failed to mobilize the public behind a viable alternative to government policy mainly due to their lack of investigative reporting and in-depth explanation of the issue and their limiting of the discussion to the terms of Japan's relationship with the US (Fujita, 2003: 86-94). The critical majority of Middle East experts refrained from open opposition for fear of government retaliation. As a result, the public did

not receive vital information that would have enabled it to reach an informed opinion. Among the five major newspapers, only the left-center *Mainichi Shinbun* shed light on the broader picture but it had only a 14 per cent share of total circulation.

*Public opinion and national norms: (C Head)*

Policy-makers saw the Iraq war as an opportunity to further erode the anti-militarist and UN-centrist norms in Japan's political culture and also to promote a new public appreciation of the US alliance. Public sensitivity to military activism had, over time, already been assuaged by policy-makers' security discourse, which insisted on the importance of Japanese participation in management of international crises following the 1990-1 Gulf war and had been invoking the 'North Korean threat' since the late 1990s. Their hope was that new precedents established in the Iraq war, especially SDF participation, would also come to be publicly accepted.

However traditional norms remained strong enough that the disparity between them and Japan's bandwagoning with the US in the war crisis had to be addressed. To comply with the still strongly held UN-centrist norm, the government sought UN backing for the expected US attack on Iraq. When this failed, the government claimed that twelve-year-old UN resolutions, numbers 678 and 687, and Resolution 1441 demanding Iraq disarm but not specifically authorizing an attack on it, were sufficient. The government also sought to displace UN-centrism with prioritization of the US alliance as a new public norm. However, in contrast to the Gulf war of 1991, which was widely seen as a UN-authorized defensive war in which Japan had some obligation to participate, US pressures for participation in the unprovoked 2003 war were received negatively by the public. The government therefore played down demands from the US to join the coalition, and argued that strengthening of the alliance was in Japan's own interest in countering the North Korean nuclear threat;<sup>x</sup> in fact,

the Asahi polls of November 2002 and March 2003 showed that 73 per cent of respondents were worried about North Korea and 67 per cent took it into consideration in judging the Prime Minister's support for the US war on Iraq (Koizumi Naikaku Shiji. 2002; Iraku Kōgeki 'Fushiji'. 22 March 2003).

Overall, however, the Iraq war showed the persisting strength of the anti-militarist and UN centric norms among the public. An Asahi poll taken just before the war showed around 78 per cent of respondents against the US military attack and around 52 per cent disagreeing with the government's support for it. Active expression of public opposition included over 60 local assemblies' anti-war resolutions, prefectural governors' protests, a lawyers' lawsuit against the government, a mail and phone-in campaign of protest to the Prime Minister's Office, and a 'human shield' traveling to Iraq.

Around 70 per cent of the public also opposed SDF participation in Iraq (Tachibana, 2004: 29). The prime minister repeatedly asserted that the SDF was not going to Iraq for war but for humanitarian reconstruction. He also promoted a re-interpretation of the Constitution, claiming that the phrase in its Preamble on the 'aspiration [of Japan] to occupy an honored place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace' meant that Japan should gain international respect by sending Japanese troops in support of international peace (MOFA, 2003; Kantei, 2004; MOFA, 2004). However this re-interpretation did not win public acceptance, and on the contrary, elicited criticism even from LDP leaders. The high level of insecurity the SDF would encounter in Iraq added to the public opposition.

None of this, however, deterred the government from pursuit of its aims. Koizumi openly insisted the public should not always be heeded since it was wrong in always preferring peace to war (Yoron ni Sayū sarete Tadashii ka? 5 March 2003; Jidai Banare no Gaikō. 17 March 2003). To be sure, his popularity dropped dramatically as a result of the war but nevertheless remained above 40 per cent, still a record level of public support for a



Japanese prime minister (Naikaku Shijiritsu. 19 January 2004). Crucial was that while a majority opposed the government's policies on Iraq, this did not necessarily turn them against the government *per se*. An opinion poll of 23-4 February 2003 showed that 41 per cent of those opposed to the war nevertheless accepted the government policy, with the majority of such supporters saying that there was no credible alternative to Koizumi's leadership. A poll taken four months after the SDF dispatch showed that 73 percent of the respondents still favored the prime minister staying in office (Sōsaisen Jimin Shijiritsusō. 10 September 2003; Shushō Tsuzukete Hoshii. 20 April 2004).

Although policy-makers managed to deploy the GSDF, thus setting a precedent for enlarging its overseas activities, they had, nevertheless, to scale down their original ambitions and to refuse certain US requests. Expected SDF participation in logistical and rear support for the US coalition during wartime proved impossible due to the absence of an endorsing UN resolution and planned security maintenance tasks after the war were abandoned either because the government could not secure enabling legislation from the Diet despite the ruling coalition's majority or saw domestic political risk in doing so in the face of strong public objections. In the end, the SDF deployment to Iraq for post-war humanitarian and reconstruction assistance was purely symbolic, demonstrating political support for the US war but contributing nothing to its military effort. The effect of public opinion on policy-making although indirect, was powerful: it was the public's personal support for Prime Minister Koizumi that allowed him to advance his agenda and it was public criticism of the war, inspired by anti-militarist norms, that limited its extent.

## CONCLUSION

Japan's pro-US military activism in the Iraq war marked a clear departure from its traditional policy. It demonstrated that anti-militarist norms at the elite level had been

thoroughly eroded by ‘realist factors’ such as US-hegemony and the asymmetric relationship between the US and Japan, coupled with the absence of zones of peace in East Asia and the Middle East. The Iraq war was also exceptional in the relative ability of policy-makers to reinterpret national norms in the pursuit of their agenda. This was possible because of the exceptional political strength of the Prime Minister, the LDP near-majority in the Diet, the newly established structure of top-down policy-making, and policy-makers’ recognition that the public’s opposition to the war was not turning it against the Koizumi government.

Yet this power centralization in the hands of a ‘realist’ elite, even combined with US pressures and perceived threats from without, was not enough to transform Japan into a realist actor. Policy-makers remained constrained by the institutionalization of anti-militarist norms in the constitution and backed by public opinion. The UN-centric norm that Japanese involvement in military operations had to be within a UN framework forced the leadership to invest much diplomatic effort in trying to secure UN approval and failure to get it excluded Japanese participation in the war itself. UN endorsement of Iraq’s post-war reconstruction enabled SDF participation in this but the fact that it took place in a de-facto war zone under US control meant constitutional constraints and anti-militarist norms still forced the government to so reduce the scope of the SDF mission that it was robbed of most of its substance.

Traditional norms were empowered in the policy process by the role of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau in defense of constitutionality; concessions that had to be made to keep support for government policy within the ruling party, the ruling coalition and the Diet; and government fear of negative reaction from public opinion. That despite their power advantage the prime minister and the Cabinet office got only a fraction of what they wanted is evidence of the constraining impact of norms on the elite’s ability to operationalize its ‘realist’ worldview.

To be sure, from a realist viewpoint, Japan is moving toward a “normal” great power in that a dominant part of the policy-making elite has embraced realist norms and increased Japan’s military capabilities. The notion of the national interest they embraced was not, however, self-evident, but issued from an interpretation of the world seen through the prism of norms absorbed in good part from the world hegemon but which were contested within Japan. The elite’s attempt to use the Iraq war to further promote a realist interpretation of the world faced resistance both from within the political class and from public opinion which, to varying extents, continued to hold to non-realist liberal internationalist and anti-militarist views. Alterations in political institutions, in the distribution of power among agents and in the dominant discourse, had shifted power marginally but not decisively in favour of the realists and their norms.

The test of *how far* the Iraq war episode eroded anti-militarist norms will be whether a future leader can respond as Koizumi did to a similar US request for Japan’s military participation in a crisis. So far, neither normative or institutional change appear sufficient and, hence, a similar venture would require another exceptionally favourable balance of forces in the policy process, that is, a strong Koizumi-like leader backed by an LDP majority. Indicative of this is the strong opposition that had to be overcome by the post-Koizumi leadership to renewal of the Anti-terrorism Law allowing quite modest support of US naval operations in the Indian Ocean.<sup>xi</sup> Hence Japan’s reconstruction as a “normal” great power in the realist mould remains far from complete.

The Japanese case exposes, for the broader discipline, the importance of a complex multi-level analysis for a sufficient understanding of state behavior. It underlines the importance of combining attention to agency, exposed by foreign policy analysis, with systemic structure and of material with socially constructed ideational factors, as argued by Hudson (2005). The system level is, as realists argue, constituted of objective material

factors—global hegemons, powerful neighbors, economic interdependencies and vulnerabilities—that states cannot ignore but whether they are threats or opportunities is never self-evident; rather policy-makers’ *interpretation* of the external environment is the most important immediate factor shaping in their responses. Their interpretation is affected by norm contestation involving *both* international, often hegemon-promoted, norms and domestic level ones that reflect the historically accumulated experience of the foreign policy establishment and the distinct security culture of a particular society, with elites, Janus-faced, negotiating between the two levels. Against realism’s assumption that analysis can safely take the state as a unitary actor, FPA’s opening of the black box of internal decision-making is essential to identify the relative weight and interaction of ideational and material factors. The policy process resembles bureaucratic politics but one in which varying actor interests are promoted through competitive normative discourse over conceptions of national interest and identity, of the nature of the external environment, and the appropriate (e.g. liberal vs. realist) kinds of response. Neo-classical realism sees lags in states’ “rational” adaptation to systemic situations as a function of domestic constraints on or distortions of “realist” behavior; what it fails to acknowledge is that “rationality,” itself constructed—and somewhat differently in different security cultures—need not take a “realist” form. Indeed, realist analysis, in taking the state as a unit, looking only at policy outputs and failing to penetrate the policy process would miss, as it does in the Japanese case, the ambiguities, complexities and normative constraints on state behavior.

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<sup>i</sup> The George W. Bush administration was viewed by prominent military activists as a window of opportunity for Japan (Kataoka, 2003: 70)

<sup>ii</sup> For a thorough explication, see Yukiko Miyagi, *Japan's Middle East Security Policy: Theory and Cases*, London and New York: Routledge, 2008.

<sup>iii</sup> Such as Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko and Japan Defense Agency (JDA) Director-General Ishiba Shigeru.

<sup>iv</sup> Namely, Gen Nakatani, and later Shigeru Ishiba.

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<sup>v</sup> Prominent examples are Yoshirō Mori, the prime minister's factional leader and former prime minister, who he closely consulted on policy; Taku Yamasaki, the prime minister's close political ally and leader of the LDP 'defense tribe' (*kokubō zoku*) whom he appointed as party secretary-general, and Shinzō Abe, the prime minister's favorite among the younger party leaders, who was appointed to the party's chairmanship and succeeded Koizumi as prime minister. The LDP's 'defense tribe' was constituted of Diet members having substantial ties with JDA's high rank-officials and SDF officers, including several who had formerly served as JDA Director General.

<sup>vi</sup> In the Japanese dual voting system of casting one vote for a candidate and another for a political party, the LDP and the Kōmeitō members co-operated to ask their supporters to cast the first vote for a LDP candidate and the second for the Kōmeitō. (*Yomiuri Shinbun Sejibu*, 2005: 67, 74, 139, 144).

<sup>vii</sup> Correspondence with a MOF official at the International Bureau Policy Division on 30 November 2004.

<sup>viii</sup> Interview with an executive in the Institute of Energy Economics, Japan (IEEJ) on 21 October 2003; interview with a representative of Mitsui Co. Ltd. at the Tokyo Chamber of Commerce and Industry on 20 November 2003; IEEJ Report April 2003: 8.

<sup>ix</sup> When UN Security Council resolution 1551, calling for international participation in Iraq's reconstruction, was passed on 16 October 2003, the JDP's position shifted to support for SDF participation even though the US, not the UN, remained in control of Iraq. It believed, however, that the government's decision on deployment was too hasty in view of the deteriorating security situation there.

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<sup>x</sup> In the Prime Minister's statement of support on 20 March 2003 for the US attack, he emphasized the value of the US alliance as the only deterrent against threats to Japan, and said "we would face great danger if we let dangerous weapons into the hands of dangerous dictators" and "we need to make efforts not to let North Korea get out of control" (*Chūnichi Shinbun* 21 March 2003). However, JDA Director General Ishiba Shigeru's remarks that the Japanese should thank the North Korean president for his nuclear program implied that the North Korean threat was being exaggerated by the government for its own purposes (Ishiba, 2005: 31).

<sup>xi</sup> Other possible scenarios such as DPJ cooperation with the LDP or even a DPJ coalition government are also unlikely to authorize a military venture in view of the internal disagreements in the DPJ and would require consolidation of its hawkish wing at the expense of the doves.