

He [Nakasone] is clearly distrusted and disliked by many Japanese contemporaries, who see him as excessively ambitious . . . Personable, intelligent, and self-assured, Nakasone strikes one as the type of leader who might be called on in the event of a crisis but who in normal times is likely to generate too many enemies to be acceptable as a leader.' (Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Fragile Blossom*, 1972, p27)

If Brzezinski is right, why has Nakasone now become Japan's new prime minister? Does it mean that there really is a crisis? Has Nakasone undergone a personality change? Or have his enemies, perhaps, become weaker?

The *Financial Times* noted that 'this was a succession of power determined not only without reference to external relations but even without real debate on domestic issues.' (November 26, 1982). Regrettably, this lack of reference within Japan to external issues was matched externally by considerable nonchalance and even neglect towards this major event: the advent to power of the most able and determined hawkish nationalist in Japanese politics. On the weekend following his election-appointment, not one of the three leading Sunday papers in Britain bothered to profile him or even describe his advent to power. Japan may be a long way away, but why does the second most important capitalist economy, a key trading rival and a rising military power get such short shrift?

At 64, Yasuhiro Nakasone is one of the youngest postwar premiers in Japan. He reached this position after both the unexpected resignation of his predecessor, the lacklustre Zenko Suzuki, on October 12, 1982, and via a hitherto unused two-tier electoral process within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (which the *Times*, in an interesting lapse, referred to as the 'Imperial Democratic Party' on November 25, 1982). The LDP has an absolute majority in the Diet (Parliament) and, given the weakness of the opposition, governmental politics is essentially coterminous with the internal politics of the ruling party.

### The Tanaka factor

Both the resignation of Suzuki and the accession of Nakasone were determined as much by invisible and murky pressures within the LDP as by external economic or political factors. By far the biggest single faction in the LDP is controlled by the former premier Kakuei Tanaka, who is not even a member of the party. Tanaka has been on trial for the past three years on charges of bribery and corruption in connection with the Lockheed scandal and a judgement is expected in mid-

## Jon Halliday Mr Weathervane takes over in Japan



1983. It is very hard for an outside observer to situate this scandal and its political effects with precision. On the one hand, it was the biggest scandal to rock Japan since the war; it led to Tanaka having to resign the premiership in 1974 and to his arrest in 1976. On the other hand, it is widely accepted in Japan that politics is mainly (often entirely) a matter of bribery and corruption; the press regularly publish estimates of the sums of money passed round in both party and national elections.

Tanaka, though formally ousted, continues to be the most powerful politician in the country — and even in the party of which he is no longer a member, although everyone knows why he cannot be a member and that his non-membership is a complete formality. Even if he were to be condemned and sent to jail (where he has been already) it is unlikely that this would affect his standing much, either in the LDP or in the country at large. Several of his key associates have been convicted. Others hold prominent positions in Nakasone's cabinet, which in some ways is a Tanaka cabinet without Tanaka (or, perhaps, rather without Tanaka in any formal post).

Nakasone himself has had a career which matches the mood and interest of the shadowy right wing forces which are gradually re-establishing their control over Japanese life behind the facade of formal democracy. Nakasone started his career as an officer in the Imperial Navy (1941-45), where he was a member of one of the two most bellicose factions (the 'Strike North' — ie, against the

USSR — faction). After the surrender he became a police official before entering the Diet in 1947. He first came to prominence as a leader of the very first attempts within the Diet publicly to revise the new US-imposed Constitution, which enshrined sovereignty in the people rather than the Emperor, and which committed Japan to a policy of peace, including a total ban on any armed forces. As early as November 1953 Nakasone was urging that the Constitution be revised and this is sure to form a central part of his governmental programme.

He first came to international attention as the head of the Self-Defence Agency (ie, Minister of Defence) in the early 1970s. During this period he was one of the first people in such a position to suggest that Japan might acquire nuclear power for military purposes and he also floated the idea of a 'defence periphery' extending well beyond the shores of Japan which, at a minimum, would include Korea, which he referred to then as Japan's 'advance stronghold'. Nakasone subsequently held other important jobs, including Minister of International Trade and Industry (MITI), chairman of the LDP Executive Board and Secretary General of the LDP. Concurrent with some of these posts, he was Governor of Takushoku (literally 'Colonization') University, with some 10,000 students, which he used as a base for instilling nationalist ideas into the young, and which was controlled internally by gangs of thugs and right wing athletic groups.

### Mr Weathervane

Nakasone has earned himself the nickname of 'Mr Weathervane' or 'Mr Weathercock'. The implication of this being that he is an opportunist, which he certainly is. But such stress on his opportunism, along with ideas that Japanese politics somehow operates according to consensus (which is not true), risks obscuring the much more important fact that he is a diligent activist who can be expected to move Japan significantly to the right, both internally and externally (unless, of course, something is done about it, which seems unlikely). Likewise, while it is quite correct to emphasise that he is to some extent the creature of Tanaka, the 'shogun in the darkness', Nakasone also has his own autonomous record of conservative positions, going right back to the period immediately after the restoration of full independence in 1952. Although Nakasone may be almost as corrupt as Tanaka, it is probably misleading to think of him as equally opportunist. In fact, he is probably *less* of an opportunist and more of a genuine right wing nationalist. His nearest European

homologue would be Franz-Josef Strauss, who in many ways could be considered a moderate compared with Nakasone.

Nakasone takes office not just in the middle of a world recession (including a dead halt to the growth of world trade), but at a time when there are very strong new pressures on Japan to accelerate rearmament. These are the two areas in which the Nakasone government's actions will most be felt by the rest of the world.

### Rearmament

First, rearmament. In 1970 Nakasone, then head of the Self-Defence Agency, said that in a military sense Japan 'can be viewed as a rabbit with long ears plus the defences of a porcupine' (ie, powerful intelligence plus good home defence). But the Reagan administration and powerful forces inside Japan do not consider this enough. As so often, fact and fiction are mixed up — by both the Tokyo regime and the Reagan-Weinberger administration — and some clarification is in order.

At present Japan has total armed forces of some 240,000 men (approximately three-fifths land army, and one-fifth each in the navy and air force). Current (pre-Nakasone) plans called for the army to add about 25,000 men by 1984, the navy 3,600 and the air force about 1,800. In sheer numbers, this is not a huge military and there are no current plans to expand it on a major scale in numbers of personnel. However, there is a very large number of officers and non-commissioned officers (nearly 70% of the land army, according to Soviet sources). And in terms of technology, it is extremely sophisticated. It is, basically, a high technology, low quantity (of personnel) military force, with special emphasis on an advanced navy and air force.

The Japanese government claims that it spends only 0.9% of GNP on military expenses and that this therefore places it in a category far below that of other major capitalist countries. This claim needs to be unpacked. On the one hand, it *is* true that relative to GNP Japan's defence expenditure is low compared with that of the NATO countries. But it is not true that Japan's armed forces are therefore somehow 'inadequate'. In the first place, Japan computes its military expenditure by wholly idiosyncratic criteria which are not used in other countries. If NATO criteria are used, then Japan's military expenditure comes out at 1.5% of GNP (about US\$20 billion in 1982); and even this understates the true amount, since sizeable expenditures on new weapons systems are hidden in other parts of the budget (a practice not confined to Japan).

The development of rocket boosters, for example, comes under the education budget because the work is being carried out at Tokyo University. But, secondly, what would be the point — and the effect — of Japan greatly increasing its military spending?

The US claims that Japan has been getting 'a free ride' from the US and wants Japan to increase spending by about 15% per annum. A prominent Chinese official has called for Japan to double its military spending. Current increases are slightly over 7% pa. Right wing Japanese meet the 'free ride' argument by pointing out that the USA cannot be relied on as an ally since it 'gave up' in Vietnam, as well as pointing to Japan's (rising) unpopularity with large sections of the United States, a factor which might become acute. Some Western officials have recently begun to worry aloud that Japan might 'go Asian' (ie, form an alliance with China).

### US-Japan relations

Up till now the US has kept a virtually exclusive hold on military relations with Japan. There are at least three very strong reasons for this. First, memories of Pearl Harbor and Japanese brutality during the Pacific War make it necessary for any US administration to be able to demonstrate to its own people that Japan is not 'out of control'. Second, the USA has to be able to show its other allies in East Asia (South Korea, Philippines, etc) who suffered greatly under the Japanese that it has Tokyo well in hand. And third, the US wants to ensure (and so far has) that within the Trilateral group (USA, EEC, Japan) relations are kept *bilateral* — ie, that the US has strong ties with Japan and with the EEC, but that EEC-Japan ties are not of nearly commensurate strength. Military muscle (including an atomic 'umbrella') has been the main means to achieve this political goal.

The dual objective of perpetuating US control over the Japanese military and accommodating rising nationalist sentiment in Japan is being met by new plans to increase Japan's military range. The US has asked Japan to take over responsibility for patrolling an area 1,000 nautical miles from Japan. Within this radius lie parts of the Soviet Far East and Northeast China and the whole of Korea (North and South). After vigorous protests from the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, it was made clear that Japanese 'responsibility' does not cover any of the ASEAN countries' territories, but it does extend as far as Guam, to the East, and covers the sea lanes running between Japan and the Philippines and Japan and Taiwan.

### School textbooks

To some extent the discussion about Japan's re-militarisation has been conducted in confused and confusing terms. Often it has been couched in terms of revising the Constitution. But the main fact is that the postwar Constitution does not just impose a ceiling on the armed forces or ban them being sent abroad. *It explicitly bans Japan having any armed forces at all for ever.* Critics on the left have sometimes been accused of crying wolf about re-militarisation. The point is not that Japan is necessarily about to launch an armed attack on its neighbours. Rather, increased defence expenditure and extended patrolling of the oceans will bolster Japan's ability to back up its already great economic muscle and exert more pressure on neighbours who are already weaker than it. Discussion of Japan's expenditure in terms of a low percentage of GNP masks the fact that its military budget is already the sixth or seventh largest in the world and its armed forces are already, in terms of conventional forces, qualitatively stronger than those of its neighbours.

Furthermore, the heightened Reagan-Weinberger pressure coincides with worrying manifestations of right wing resurgence inside Japan. The most clamorous of these was the Japanese government's authorisation of revisions to the school textbooks which radically (and in a blatantly mendacious way) downplayed or excised mention of Japan's aggression and cruelty against many countries in Asia up till 1945. Among the revisions was one referring to the assault on China in 1937 as an 'advance'; the forcible deportation of Korean workers became a 'voluntary act'. Almost as disturbing as the changes themselves was the government's reactions to protests. At first, Tokyo did nothing. Only under tremendous pressure from China and South Korea in particular did it agree to envisage changes. But it limited revision of the revisions to countries which had exercised enough pressure. So far it has not even announced reconsideration of equally offensive passages referring to other countries which have not been able to apply the same kind of pressure. Rather as when the US was forcing through the Peace Treaty with Japan in the early 1950s, Washington is now again, in effect, having to go guarantor for Japan's good behaviour *vis-a-vis* its own allies in East Asia. This group may now, to some extent, even include China, which appears to be re-thinking its endorsement of Japan's re-militarisation and the role of the US-Japan Security Treaty (parallel with some re-thinking of relations with the USSR).

**Economic questions**

The question of re-militarisation and higher military expenditure also directly relates to two major economic questions. One concerns the role of state spending and Keynesianism. The other the relationship between an advanced military machine and high technology.

It is generally accepted that relatively low military spending, along with very low expenditure on social services, has been central to Japan's high postwar growth. Japan, in effect, missed out on Keynesianism. The question now is whether Japan is more likely to recover (relatively) high growth by continuing the postwar policy of low state expenditure, or whether, having missed out on a Keynesian phase, it could now practice 'Keynesianism in one country' and stimulate domestic growth via higher government spending. In abstract, the latter route would appear possible. But it is probably blocked by a combination of factors specific to Japan. For domestic electoral reasons, the LDP appears unable to raise taxes (which are, overall, very low in Japan). The budget deficit is already the highest, proportionately, of any major OECD country and deficit financing is becoming increasingly difficult.

The second major issue is the relationship between advanced technology and military

expenditure. There has not yet (to my knowledge) been a case in the modern world of a state which was an economic leader without a large and advanced military sector. Even the smaller capitalist economies which produce advanced industrial equipment, such as Sweden and Switzerland, have a sophisticated arms sector. Japan is already the leading economy in many fields of technology and electronics and is making a determined push to catch up with and overtake the US in computers.

The only sector in which Japan conspicuously lags is aerospace. The sectors which the Japanese government has targeted as those for special attention and high growth in the forthcoming period — computers, semi-conductors, lasers, new alloys and electronics — are all closely military-related. The Japanese aviation industry, which makes many of its products under licence from US firms, already sells 85% of its output to the Defence Agency. The (understandable) emphasis on developing 'knowledge-intensive' industries contains within it a very strong impetus in the direction of militarisation. It is hard to see how Japan can continue to take the lead in high technology without this leading to the development of much more military-related products. And, along with this, the worrying

question is what Japan will do with it all. Japan has a relatively restricted domestic market; it is surrounded by hyper-militarised regimes, especially those in Korea and Taiwan, but also in ASEAN. The logic of such a development must be to make Japan into a major arms exporter and to increase the role of the military-industrial complex within Japan.

A move in such direction seems only likely to be encouraged by continuing stagnation in world trade. Contrary to widespread myth, Japan is not a major exporter relative to the size of its GNP (compared to the EEC countries, say). But its economy has been geared to the expectation of rising GNP and rising exports. To some extent, the accusation that Japan has benefited by combining the advantages of free trade at the world level with protectionism at home was true for much of the postwar period. But the less obvious aspects of Japan's relatively low integration into the world economy was the low level of internationalisation of the society as well as the economy. To a large extent the Japanese bourgeoisie liked things this way. But perhaps the time has come when the rest of the world should pay a bit more attention to what is going on inside Japan itself.



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