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THE CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT AND NATIONAL SECURITY POLICY IN POSTWAR JAPANESE HISTORY

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Abstract

In postwar Japanese history, the Liberal Democratic Party (*LDP*) has been in power for a long time. However, before the LDP was formed, or even after the LDP was formed, changes of government occurred. The LDP was a party that firmly maintained the Japan-United States (*U.S.*) Alliance and promoted light armament, but due to changes in government, party that advocated autonomous defense and full-scale rearmament, as well as party that advocated neutrality and disarmament, had also become ruling parties. So how did security policy change as a result of these changes in government? Or did it not change?

It can be said that in Japan, a change in government did not often bring about major changes in security policy. In fact, within Japan, there were three groups concerned with security: the constitutional revision group, the Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida Doctrine group, and the unarmed neutral group. However, the situation had continued for a long time in which none of these groups had a majority. As a result, a situation arose in which each group had to compromise with the others. In this way, security policy proceeded through gradual changes and consensus-building in spite of changes of government. Therefore, there was no sudden change in the relationship between politics and the Self-Defense Forces.

Keywords: Japanese politics, Liberal Democratic Party, Self-Defense Forces, change in government, civilian control

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between changes of government and national security policy in Japan after World War II.

In Japan, the Liberal Democratic Party (*LDP*) had been in power for a long time. However, before the LDP was formed, or even after the LDP was formed, changes of government occurred. The LDP was a party that firmly maintained the Japan-United States (*U.S.*) alliance and promoted a light defense capability, but due to changes in government, party that advocated autonomous defense and full-scale rearmament, as well as party that advocated neutrality and disarmament, had also become ruling parties. So how did national security policy change as a result of these changes in government? Or did it not change?

From the Liberal Party Government to the Democratic Party Government (1954)

Before the establishment of the LDP, a political party called the Liberal Party was in power. The Prime Minister was Shigeru Yoshida. He was the leader who signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1951 and reintegrated Japan into the international community. Yoshida did not try to change Article 9 of the Constitution, which was created during the allied occupation of Japan and stipulated that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential (*senryoku*), will never be maintained.” After Japan lost the war and was disarmed, it rearmed, but in the process it only attempted to carry out limited rearmament. Instead, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed in 1951, and the U.S. military was stationed in Japan to ensure Japan’s national security. Yoshida’s Liberal Party administration adopted the idea of maintaining a light defense capability and prioritizing the economy, spending as little money as possible on defense. In response, the opposition Kaishinto Party called for amending the constitution and carrying out full-scale rearmament without relying on the U.S.

The people grew tired of Yoshida’s long-term government, and he resigned in 1954. The Democratic Party, which evolved from the Kaishinto Party, took power. This was the Ichiro Hatoyama Cabinet. Behind the Democratic Party’s backs, there was also a group of former military personnel who advocated the revival of the former Imperial Army and Navy. So, with the change of government from the Liberal Party to the Democratic Party, did the government change from prioritizing a light defense capability and the economy to constitutional revision and full-scale rearmament? It was not. Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama explained the constitutionality of the Self-Defense Forces by changing the interpretation of the provisions of the Constitution without amending the Constitution itself.⁽¹⁾ In other words, the Yoshida Doctrine was inherited.

1. “Omura boeicho chokan, shugiin yosan iinkai, showa 29 nen 12 gatsu 22 nichi,” Masashi Nishihara and Asagumo Shimibun Shuppan Gyomubu eds., *Wakaru Heiwa Anzen Hosen: Nihon to Sekai no Heiwa no tameni Hatasu Jieitai no*

One reason was that the Democratic Party was a minority ruling party, so it had to make concessions to the opposition party, that was, the Liberal Party. The other was the need to oppose the leftwing Socialist Party. At that time, in addition to the Liberal Party, which prioritized a light defense capability and the economy, and the Democratic Party, which advocated constitutional reform and full-scale rearmament, the Socialist Party, which advocated unarmed neutrality, were powerful. The Liberal Party and the Democratic Party cooperated because of the need to counter the Socialist Party. The following year, in 1955, the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party joined together to form today's LDP. As a result of the election, the LDP remained in power. The Socialist Party, on the other hand, also became the main opposition party. The political situation in Japan that continued for a long era after this time was called the "1955 System."

During this period, civilian control was fully established within Japanese society, including the Self-Defense Forces. In 1970, 4 years before the Carnation Revolution, an incident occurred in which Yukio Mishima, a world-famous writer, barricaded himself in a Self-Defense Force facility and called for a coup d'état to the Self-Defense Forces. However, none of the members agreed.

From the LDP Government to the Non-LDP Coalition Government (1993)

After the Cold War ended, the rivalry between the LDP and the Socialist Party became old-fashioned. Furthermore, as a result of the LDP's political funding problems and power struggles within the LDP, some members of the LDP left the party and formed a Shinseito Party or Sakigake Party. New political parties such as the Nihonshinto Party and traditional opposition parties such as the Socialist Party and Komeito Party joined this framework, and as a result of the election, a non-LDP coalition government was formed.

A non-LDP coalition government headed by Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa was called a "disarmament cabinet" in terms of national security.⁽²⁾ The idea was that since the Cold War had ended, the Self-Defense Forces should also be downsized. In Japan, the state of defense force was expressed in a document called the "National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG)." This is the current "National Defense Strategy." Then it is necessary to take a look at the NDPG, which was created in 1995 after the change of government.

After post-war demilitarization and rearmament, Japan placed emphasis on building up its defense capabilities. Therefore, operation became secondary.⁽³⁾ Therefore, the idea of "Basic Defense Force Concept" was adopted, which emphasized the building

Yakuwari, edition (Tokyo: Asagumo Shimbunsha, 2015), 101-102.

2. Masahiro Akiyama, *Nichi Bei no Senryaku Taiwa ga Hajimatta: Anpo Saiteigi no Butaiura*, (Tokyo: Akishobo, 2002), 32.

3. Keiji Omori, *Waga Kuni no Kokubo Senryaku*, (Tokyo: Naigai Shuppan, 2009), p. 29.

up of defense capabilities.⁽⁴⁾ In fact, the 1995 NDPG followed the “Basic Defense Force Concept” of the LDP administration time. How should we explain this fact?

The Hosokawa Cabinet collapsed in a short period of time due to political funding issues, and was replaced by the Tsutomu Hata Cabinet, based on the almost same coalition framework. However, unlike the Hosokawa Cabinet, the Hata Cabinet started out as a minority ruling parties with the Socialist Party and Sakigake Party leaving. The Socialist and Sakigake, who were outside the framework of this non-LDP coalition government, teamed up with the LDP, resulting in a coalition government of the LDP, the Socialist Party, and Sakigake Party. The leader was Tomiichi Murayama, chairman of the Socialist Party. In other words, there was a political situation in which the cabinet was replaced and the coalition was reshuffled in a short period of time, and the LDP returned to power, albeit as a coalition government. Although the Socialist Party called for cuts to the defense budget,⁽⁵⁾ it aligned with the LDP on defense concept and the Japan-U.S. alliance.

From the LDP Government to the DPJ Government (2009)

In 2009, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) won the election, partly due to voters growing tired of LDP’s long-term rule. The DPJ mentioned here: a different political party from the Democratic Party of the 1950s that was mentioned earlier in this paper. The new DPJ was formed by Yukio Hatoyama, grandson of Ichiro Hatoyama of the old Democratic Party in the 1950s.

The DPJ administration suspended the work to revise the NDPG that was underway during the LDP administration. The NDPG, created in 2010 under the DPJ government, called for a departure from the Basic Defense Force Concept and a transition to the new concept of “Dynamic Defense Force” which emphasized operation. In that sense, Japan’s national security policy appeared to have changed under the DPJ administration.

On the other hand, continuity from the time of the LDP government was also important. This was because the 1995 NDPG had already removed the idea of “repelling limited small-scale aggression without external assistance,” which was a component of the Basic Defense Force Concept. The idea of repelling limited and small-scale aggression without external assistance was not an operational plan, but the logic behind acquiring budget for the defense buildup.⁽⁶⁾ Furthermore, in the 2004 NDPG during the LDP administration, the idea of a “Multi-Functional, Flexible, and Effective Defense Force” was introduced along with the Basic Defense Force Concept. This was an approach that emphasized

4. Yasuaki Chijiwa, *Anzenhosho to Boeiryoku no Sengoshi 1971-2010: 'Kibanteki Boeiryoku Koso no Jidai'*, (Tokyo: Chikura Shobo, 2021), pp. 83-86.

5. Boeisho Boei Kenkyujo, *Oraru Hisutori, Nihon no Anzenhosho to Boeiryoku (14) Sato Ken*, edition (Tokyo: Boeisho Boeikenkyujo, 2024), pp. 64-67.

6. Chijiwa, *Anzenhosho to Boeiryoku no Sengoshi 1971-2010*, pp. 85-85.

the use of defense capabilities, such as cooperation in the “war on terrorism” after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001, and the introduction of missile defense to counter North Korean missile launches. Therefore, the DPJ government did not suddenly change from the Basic Defense Force Concept that emphasized defense buildup to the Dynamic Defense Force concept that emphasized operations. Things had changed little by little since the time of LDP government.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said that in Japan, a change in government often did not bring about major changes in national security policy. In fact, within Japan, there were three groups concerned with security: the constitutional revision group, the Yoshida Doctrine group, and the unarmed neutral group. However, the situation had continued for a long time in which none of these groups had a majority. As a result, a situation arose in which each group had to compromise with the other. In this way, national security policy proceeded through gradual changes and consensus-building in spite of changes in government. Therefore, there was no sudden change in the relationship between politics and the Self-Defense Forces.

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