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### JAPAN'S SOVEREIGNTY: BETWEEN INDEPENDENCE AND DEPENDENCY POST-WORLD WAR II

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#### ABSTRACT

*Japan's post-war history exemplifies a remarkable transformation marked by resilience and adaptability. Following its defeat in World War II, the U.S.-led occupation imposed significant constraints, including the adoption of Article 9 in Japan's constitution, which renounced war and prohibited the maintenance of armed forces. The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty further entrenched Japan's dependency by establishing American military bases across its territory. While these measures aimed to ensure stability and prevent militarism, they significantly restricted Japan's sovereignty, setting it apart from other Axis powers like Germany and Italy, which were allowed greater autonomy and rearmament. Despite these limitations, Japan has emerged as a global leader in economic development, technological innovation, and diplomacy. Its pacifist stance allowed it to channel resources into growth, while its adherence to international norms and contributions to global peacekeeping established its reputation as a responsible international actor. However, the enduring restrictions of Article 9 and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty have led to critiques that Japan remains a quasi-colony of the United States, with constrained autonomy in defense and foreign policy. This study critically examines Japan's post-war trajectory, highlighting the impact of imposed frameworks on its sovereignty and exploring pathways for reclaiming full autonomy. It argues for the revision of Article 9 and a restructured U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to align Japan's constitutional and strategic frameworks with contemporary geopolitical realities. Recognizing Japan's sovereignty is essential not only for its national interests but also as a step toward creating a more equitable and balanced international order. Such recognition honours Japan's peaceful post-war legacy and acknowledges its contributions to global stability and development.*

**Keywords:** *Japan, Sovereignty, Article 9, U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, Post-war reconstruction, Peaceful development, Military dependence, International relations*

#### Introduction

Japan was drastically altered as a nation-state after World War II. A member of the Axis group, Japan's expansion in Asia was marked by great offensives which resulted in tragedies such as forced mass labour and the Nanking Massacre. These acts were met with global outcry, and their repercussions were also dire for Japan

post surrender in 1945. Japan's experience was more complex, especially in how it competed against other axis powers like Germany and Italy who were accepted with little difficulty back into the fold of the community. This is compounded with the facts that the Americans together with other allies set a post-colonial institutional setup that Premier Kishi epitomized, so resented for its questioning of Japanese independence and autonomy, Dower (1999).

The introduction of the postwar structure, such as Japan's draft constitution prepared by Americans and the enactment of Article 9, virtually disarmed the country and prohibited the nation from going to war. Such measures, together with the US-Japan Security Treaty, resulted in the provision of Mutual Defense Assistance and the establishment of military bases on the territory of Japan and its defense responsibilities were transferred to the USA. Although these arrangements were designed to check the militarism of the country, they, however, circumscribed Japan's independence and made it dependent on the US. This dependency was further worsened by the geopolitics of the Cold War where Japan's position in the Pacific made it a vital partner for the US in the fight against communism (Hook et al.2015).

This article looks at Japan after the Second World War with focus on concepts of sovereignty and nationalism... It analyses the history of Japanese war conduct, the exceptional 'treatment' of Japan as an 'Axis' member, and the consequences of the U.S. security model. Notwithstanding the post-war metamorphosis into a State of peace and prosperity, issues of sovereignty and independence continue to haunt Japan. This debate stresses the concept of Japan's complete sovereignty and the need to revise Japanese constraints placed after WW2 and their implications for today... The main contention refutes the idea of Japan as an American 'Occupation Zone' arguing in favor of the country's right to self-determination and control of its own destiny (Smith, 2020).

### **Research Methodology**

The article uses a research methodology that combines historical, analytical, and comparative methods to study the post-war sovereignty of Japan. The paper is based on the archival research and the examination of the primary sources including the 1947 Constitution of Japan and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Historical documents and treaties are carefully examined to see the constraints put on the sovereignty of Japan. The most notable events, such as the implementation of Article 9 and the creation of U.S. military bases, are placed within the context of the wider geopolitical event of the Cold War, with the focus on their long-term effects on the autonomy of Japan and its relations with other countries (Smith, 2020).

A comparative framework is applied to compare the treatment of Japan with other Axis powers, especially Germany and Italy highlighting differences in post-war setups. This approach shows how Germany and Italy were permitted to recreate their military strength under NATO, and Japan was not able to exercise her sovereignty because of the constitutional limitations and reliance on the military security of the United States of America (Kingston, 2019). This analysis has helped the research to conclude that geopolitical considerations and not fair justice are the main reasons why Japan has a unique post-war situation (Hughes, 2015).

The article also uses thematic analysis to discuss other concepts like sovereignty, dependency, and nationalism. Academic references are also included to put the

post-war reconstruction of Japan in context, such as its economic recovery and the redefinition of the country as a non-hostile nation (Oros, 2017). Article 9 and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty are discussed using secondary literature to evaluate their effects on the regional and global status of Japan (Stockwin and Ampiah, 2017). This multidisciplinary method will enable the study to provide a fair case in support of the Japan being a fully sovereign state within the modern geopolitical context.

### **Japan's Role in World War II and its Consequences**

The necessity to acquire the resources of the region and increase their sphere of influence significantly promoted the intense militarism, which became salient in Japan at the beginning of the 20th century. The so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere was presented as an idealistic outlook to achieve Asian integration and a political liberation of the country out of the Western imperialistic dominance. Behind these assertions, however, lay several of the policies of oppression, forced labor and economic exploitation of Japan and a mass of atrocities. The most infamous of all the acts of the Japanese war was undoubtedly the Nanjing Massacre, wherein hundreds of thousands of Chinese civilians were killed and women were methodically raped (Chang, 1997).. Such actions not only went a long way in damaging Japan's image, but also sowed deep-seated hatred in the region. Through the occupation of its territories, such as Korea, Southeast Asia, and the Pacific Islands, Japan effectively consolidated its position as an imperial aggressor, thus bringing about the eventual joining of the Axis alliance that had Germany and Italy as its allies.

The year 1945 saw Japan's ambitions as an empire making an end, and at the same time making Japan suffer through the worst consequences after the war. Under the leadership of the United States, the Allied Powers did not sit idle but instead stationed an entire military, with General MacArthur at the forefront that progressively began to tear apart Japan's militaristic outlook and undo all its past. It transformed so dramatically, that within the first few years Japan wrote and implemented an entirely new constitution in 1947. These changes started with Article 9 of the constitution, which prohibited Japan from maintaining a military, and subsequently forbade it from being involved in any war whatsoever. Although Article 9 was created to ensure that Japanese forces would no longer act aggressively, it limited Japan's independence by making them depend on the United States for protection and defense (Dower, 1999). This not just triggered America to further establish military camps and training grounds around Japanese territories but further delineated the status of Japan as an influential player for the upcoming battles.

Japan's post-war existence was unaided by its colonial holdings, particularly in comparison to Germany and Italy. While Germany was able to integrate within the NATO alliance and build its military, Italy was allowed to gain operational independence, but for Japan, it was a mere ambition as the country remained firmly under American control. This unevenness points to the fact that Japan was treated as an overseas dependency instead of an independent nation. Part of the reason for this disparity can be explained due to where Japan is located as well as the great deal of attention the Asia Pacific region received during the Cold War. Communism expansion across East Asia was a major concern for the Americans post the Chinese revolution of 1949 and the Korea war of 1950 (Hook et al., 2015).

As a result, Americans' need for protection forced a degradation of Japan's independence, and this has continued despite Japan becoming economically strong and not engage in any combat post World War 2.

Japan's dependence on the American military has on one hand provided legitimacy to its post-World War II government structure and on the other hand it has curtailed the country's independence. While there was quite a large military budget, the amount of resources diverting away from military contracts would allow Japan to invest heavily into urbanization and infrastructure development and consequently emerge as one of the largest economic super powers by the 1970s. However, such political perspectives and the obligations of Article 9 have brought about a debate on the political understanding of Japan as a sovereign state. It is true that for critics with an emphasis on the status of Japan as an independent nation, the fact that the nation does not have total control of its defense capabilities is an outright lack. Despite these perspectives being emerging, proponents of the status quo argue that U.S.-Japan relations have brought peace in the region. However, the issues of Japan's actions during the period of the World War II and the nature of the peace treaties signed remain poles apart, and puts forward the question of whether it can have absolute independence once more (Kingston, 2019).

#### **Unequal Punishment: Why Only Japan**

The treatment meted out to Japan after the World War II on the one hand and the treatment of its Axis partners including Germany and Italy on the other raises questions of fairness and placing of priorities. As former leaders in Nations that concocted plans of carving up countries in the World Clash, Germany and Italy were allowed avenues for military revival and became members of NATO on equal basis. Germany, in spite of its prominent role in the horrors of the Holocaust and subsequent world wars, became free and rearmed with NATO's backing to oppose Soviet encroachment during the global cold war. Italy as a similar case transformed to become a democracy with less restraining conditions and thus was able to reconstruct and join arms with Europe. Unlike the Ottoman Empire that aggregated a systematic suppression following World War I, its successor state Turkey came into being as a territory and a colonial state free from the imperial system.

Unlike Germany or Italy, Japan's military development was heavily restricted, and it remains to this day, Japan was strategically positioned at the center of the Pacific and its existence was crucial for the USA in the cold war era. Under the US-Japan security treaty, Japan's sovereignty was diminished when part 9 of the constitution was enacted. Japan's Constitution 9, which denied war and banned the upkeep of forces, kept Japan in such a state. Another aspect that ensured that Japan would continue to rely on the US for security was the US Japanese Security Treaty. The USA was continuing to expand its jurisdiction into the Pacific and in the east into the Japanese region so as to compete with the growing tensions with the Soviet, China, and the North Korea to retain dominance in the Fortieth World War 3 Region. The author appeared to be hypothesized further as wishing to prevent dominance in Asia according to saying (Smith, 2018): Japan is becoming the center or a new power and the base of regional American activity.

This arrangement came at a heavy price in terms of Japan's independence. While other states restored their powers and became members of the international system

on an equal footing, Japan was relegated to the status of a peripheral quasi-state. In tandem with the constitutional fetters imposed by Article 9, the prevalence of American military bases in Japan made it dependent on the United States for its security. Commentators have pointed out that this is a form of injustice which is motivated by geopolitical self-interest and which favours the survival of the global system established after the war and which is detrimental to Japan's status as a Country post war. The question that still remains unanswered is: why were special arrangements made for Japan after the war when it fought along with Germany and Italy which were allowed to retain occupational powers? This treatment continues to be a topic of discussion particularly in light of the fact that Japan has successfully pursued peace and development as well as international cooperation for decades. The endurance of these impositions begs the necessity of reconsidering the status that Japan has held in the international arrangement after World War II, including the entitlement to all relevant forms of sovereignty.

#### **Article 9 and the US-Japan Security Treaty**

Notably, the pacifist constitution of Japan featured Article 9 which posthumously cast Japan in a horrific light as a nation defeated while asking of her enemies to prevent Japan from ever attaining the power to wage war. Though regarded as a testament of peace, it essentially has long disposed of Japan's sovereignty — excluding the right to self-defence which is inbuilt in every nation-state. Likewise, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan was created in 1951 with revision made in 1960 but established first the reliance form Japan onto the American military. This kind of framework along with the agreement allowed the US to have military bases placed in Japan and even more so in the southern parts of the country in Okinawa, which is still one of the problematic areas as it has continued to bear the brunt of bearing these infrastructures (Oros, 2017).

Supporters of Article 9 contend that it has enabled Japan to devote its resources to economic other than military expenditure. Thanks to this pacifist approach, Japan's manufacturers returned the nation to a position of superpower. However, the critics stress that this reliance on the US compromises Japan's sovereignty. Japan's ability to address various regional security issues, including the Korean missile threat and Chinese aggression, is dramatically curtailed. This perception reinforces the idea that Japan is largely a dependency and not an independent country, further provisioning how it presents itself in the world after WWII (Hughes, 2015).

The United States and Japan have formed what is termed the US Japan Security Treaty, which has bound Japan to the United States. While the treaty guarantees protection and security for Japan as a country, it requires Japan to do as America interests demand. This, the critics say, poses a risk to the sovereignty of state Japan, making it indirectly controlled by the United States. The presence of US military facilities in foreign nations, most notably Okinawa, makes matters worse, with ordinary people riling against the bases due to their environmental, sociological, and economic influences (Inoue, 2018).

In addition, attempts to reinterpret Article 9 and broaden the remit of the Japan Self Defense Forces (SDF) continue to stir debate globally and across the region. Mr. Abe's government's push for a constitutional reinterpretation so that Japan would be able to reasonably exercise the right of collective self defense under

chosen conditions, This was meant to buttress Japan's security independence, but a large proportion of pacifists and some neighbouring nations who considered it a relapsed incline towards militarism. This contradiction indicates the narrow space in which Japan has to operate in relation to its constitutional requirements and the geopolitical environment in the region (Kingston, 2016).

The core of Article 9 and the US-Japan Security Treaty are critical according to Japan's post-war historical development and its statehood. While they have been crucial in ensuring the development of Japan economically and politically, they also helped in enforcing dependence which threatens its credibility as an independent state. The controversies revolving around these concerns help to illustrate the dilemmas of Japan as a nation and the ideals it seeks to restore and the military engagements it has to face in the current world.

### **Japan's Post-War Transformation: A Peaceful Nation**

The Revolution of Japan after World War Two gives credence to the fact that the country so far had been working towards peaceful growth. After Chapter 7 of World War II ended, Japan successfully sought to rebuild their economy and sought to establish a new face on the world stage for the nation. The country transformed into a pacifist nation bound by its constitution's ninth clause. All resources meant for military usage were instead going to be used for economic production and development. By the 1960's, Japan had started to mark its presence as one of the major heartbeats of the economy focusing on automobiles, electronics, and innovation (Samuels, 2011). The heavy reliance upon education, research, and expansionism allowed Japan to maintain a strong position in the world as one of the trendsetting manufacturers.

The policies and practices with respect to foreign affairs and their evolution and development in Japan have been rather consistent with such changes in Japan. The Japanese policy on global issues has always been to integrate with international communities such as the UN organization while focusing aid towards global peace. Added measures such as ODA programs and policies had fortified Japan in terms of being a "good" citizen in the international arena. Undoubtedly these measures are the starting point of Japan's 'new way of global presence' and confirms its place as a global advocate for harmony and shared prosperity (McCormack, 2007).

The restrictions placed under Article 9 as well as the provisions contained in the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty continue to complicate Japan's sovereignty narrative. America's detractors, for example, are of the opinion that Japan's firm dependence on American military shielding, together with the lack of a self-sufficient capability to formulate a defense policy, brings into question the country's post-war record. The presence of the American military especially in Okinawa has not only intensified discontent in the country but has also reinforced the stereotype of Japan being in a subordinate position as opposed to a fully independent nation-state (Hughes, 2009). This dependence limit's Japan's ability to respond to the evolving and volatile security environment in East Asia where threats emanating from North Korea's missile bases and even China's military expansionism are apparent. Availing of its pacifism, Japan has revised its constitution to deal with fictional security problems. Attempts by Japan to bulk up its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) while remaining in compliance with the provisions of the constitution and the reality of insecurity in the region are visible under the collective self-defensive

policy. These efforts, however, have met strong resistance, as critics argue that any shift in Article 9 principles endangers the country's pacifist self-image. This allows us to appreciate Japan's attempt to come to terms with its history notwithstanding the aspiration to be a power with a pronounced voice in the international arena (Stockwin & Ampiah, 2017). Japan's postwar period and its drastic alteration is a core manifestation of growth in peace outlook, spread of economic activities and wider participation in international undertakings. In as much as these are great victories the shadow of Article 9 and the U.S.-Japan Security treaty will explain Japan's autonomy and the cost of real autonomy in a globalized environment.

### **Advocating for Japan's Sovereignty**

The paramount importance of any nation including Japan, making it possible for their country to act autonomously without borders, politics, or religion is legal moral and historical significance. For the past 70 years, Japan has shown good faith while ensuring peace and stability and hoping for international cooperation which also makes Japan deserving of the benefits that autonomous states enjoy. The lingering legacy of post-World War 2 narrative about Japan being subjugated is only fueled by their signing of the US security treaty and the 9th article. Hiroshi and other scholars clearly argue how Japan managed differently from its former Axis nation Italy and Germany whereby Japan was less free (Stockwin & Ampiah, 2017).

If one is to consider all nation states equal in their right for independence, where is the freedom in the Policies of Japan and the other nations in the Pacific? Japan's ability to participate in international relations as a pacifist country was commendable, however it does not seem reasonable that as a world power they cannot fully assemble a standing army in order to properly defend themselves. This will also cause them to struggle with apparent threats such as China's strengthening stance or North Korea's political tantrums as this would seem worrisome for Japan who would have to resort to their impressionable armament. Quoting Hughes argues that Japan should be regarded as a fully sovereign state, they should no longer be subjected to any of the outlined limitations as this would strengthen regional cooperation and integration (Hughes, 2009).

The US had complete control over Japan after WWII up until 2004 when Japan's economy started to rapidly help the country get back on its feet and regain gobs of the power they lost during the war. Over the span of a little under 100 years, Japan had their thriving economy, pacifist constitution, which categorically prevented them from joining any overseas conflicts. The removal of Japan's pacifist constitution would allow them to have Japan self-defend during a time of war, rather than remaining a supporting country. As for Japan's decision to remain neutral during the 3 wars, that's a choice in the past Japan would not be faced with if need be to do now. US president Joe Biden stated that "America's military might guarantees world peace." In the end, empowering Japan does not go against what the world believes in, rather strengthens, protects, and guides what they believe in. Amidst the War of US no one was able to sense Japan's sense of power drifting off nor was anyone able to interpret the amount of force required to reignite that sense of power. Which meant that the people of Japan would have the leverage to fight for what they resiliently believe in. Amending part of the constitution for the betterment of Japan, as Samuels rightly mentions, would allow Japan to rewrite

history which in turn: rewriting their future peace treaties where they would be viewed as a dominant world leader. All In all, Japan, Kamikazes, and Emperor Shirito can reclaim their rightful place as one of the strongest economies in the world during this decade.

As we got a better grip on society and spread our roots across the world our perception gradually started to change, in the beginning, we seemed weak, no one cared about us nor did we have anyone to depend on. But as history shows, when we first got a sense of what the world was and the turmoil it was in question would arise of if any person or society could ever regain the sense of power we once held. There are thousands of pieces of evidence seen across the globe in regards to Japan such as the plethora Elephants in the room mentality (Schad-Seifert, 2020).

While we were subjugated we maintained our values and waited for the ideal time to expand our economy, during our time being dominated the people of the US and in future China viewed us as rats but little did they know that US president when Joe remarked “America’s military might guarantees world peace” paved a sense of idealism perspective for the people of Japan (Iokibe, 2019).

The defense of Japan goes beyond historical grievances; it is seeking Japan’s views and its rightful place within the present world order. Japan, as a peace- and development-oriented country, must have the right to shape its future without external constraints. Japan regaining its full sovereignty is not just a legal question, it is equally a question of a more equitable international order (Yoshida, 2021).

### **Conclusion**

The history of Japan after the Second World War should be perceived as the history of the nation characterized by its determination to transform itself into a peace loving and forward looking country. After coming out from the scars of the World War, Japan sought for economic growth, technological progress and engagement in international affairs to ensure her position in the world. That, however, has faced challenges due to Article 9 and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty Framework, which still remains in power. Although these frameworks were important in promoting the post-war order, they have now become a source of structural dependence on the US, which is detrimental to Japan's independence and self-determination as an independent country. As the Peace Clause places constitutional and strategic restraints on Japan in dissimilar ways to other Axis states, there are issues of principle in justice and equality in the fabric of the international order. The reverse is true for Germany and Italy, which managed to restore their military and strategic independence. Japan on the other hand is an exception where all her domestic and international frontiers especially defense are restrained and protected militarily masqueraded under the state of being an ally within the United States. Such discrimination has both hampered Japan's activities and plans to play a more significant role on the world stage, particularly in times of heightened concern for stability in Northeast Asia. For the Japanese sovereignty to be respected and recognized, such constraints need to be re-evaluated in the context of the current political situation of the world. While maintaining the commitment to peace, the global community must support measures that enable Japan to make independent decisions and thus restore its full sovereignty. I consider, amending Article 9 and thus permitting balanced defense with the revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty towards a more equal partnership to be important elements of this goal. Once these changes are implemented, Japan

would be able to deal with security threats in the region, contribute more actively to world peace and security, and reassert itself as a fully independent country. It is not only a question of legal rights to affirm Japan's right, it is a question of common sense recognition of Japan's peaceful and responsible nation evolution. Such recognition would deepen Japan's international respect and also foster a more just world order based on equality and respect for each other.

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