Journal of Asia Pacific Studies (2011) Vol2, No 2, 162-187

Competitive Political Strategy in Japanese Defense Politics: Re-evaluating Koizumi's Legacy[1]

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Abstract: *Several studies have highlighted the political skill of Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (2001-2006) both in domestic and foreign policy (Gaunder, 2007; Kliman, 2006; Mikuriya, 2006; Shinoda, 2003, 2006, 2007). Most of these studies have noted Koizumi's talent for political theater, his skill in using the expanded resources of the kantei, and his willingness to take risks in confronting his own party. This article examines Koizumi's actions in the areas of defense policy and politics in terms of the quality of his political strategy. Though biographical sketches indicate that Koizumi's preferences were mostly Gaullist, the content of his policies on defense varied across the political spectrum. His trip to Yasukuni Shrine, for example, could be labeled Gaullist; his actions with regards to US-Japan alliance maintenance could be labeled military realist; while his dramatic visit to North Korea and acknowledgements of Japanese war guilt could be labeled political realist. Though his policies on defense might be labeled inconsistent, there is nonetheless an important coherence to his choices: each policy made the most of the available opportunity to show off Koizumi's policy acumen and willingness to face down resistance in accomplishing his goals. By demonstrating his efficacy and his independence, his disparate actions in the area of defense boosted his standing with the public, allowing him greater freedom of action in his domestic reform agenda.*

[1] The author would like to thank the Boren Fellowship, administered by the National Security Education Program and IIE, for its financial support for language training during the writing of this paper. The content of this article does not reflect the position or policy of the Government and no official Government endorsement should be inferred. In addition, the author would like to thank Lorna Simons for her time and effort editing the paper. All mistakes, errors, or omissions are, of course, strictly the responsibility of the author.

Key Words: Koizumi Junichiro; Japanese defense policy; political leadership; competitive political strategy

1 Introduction: Koizumi as a Political Leader

Koizumi Junichiro (April 2001-September 2006) is the most studied Japanese prime minister of the post cold war era, and ranks alongside Yoshida Shigeru, Kishi Nobusuke, Tanaka Kakuei, and Nakasone Yasuhiro as one of the most interesting and enigmatic prime ministers in Japanese history. In the post cold war era, Koizumi has had no equal in terms of his leadership prowess. Indeed, much of the scholarly literature shows that Koizumi was an exemplar of prime ministerial leadership in a setting where the general public had become used to weak, consensus-based leaders (Mishima, 2007; Shinoda, 2003, 2007; Hayao, 1993). The tenure of these consensus-based prime ministers tended to be relatively short. Generally, as the public becomes weary of their ineffectiveness, the prime minister usually steps down and allows a new party leader to emerge. Indeed, during the 1990s, Japan had experienced eight different prime ministers during a time of domestic and international turmoil. Though the tenures of these prime ministers varied, the average prime minister during this time period lasted well under two years. By comparison, Koizumi's prime ministership would last five years and five months, outlasting the next most long-lasting prime minister of the post cold war era (Hashimoto Ryutaro) by over one thousand days. His successors would fare little better than the other prime ministers of the post cold war years, with most lasting a little under or over one year in office.

Many expected that the electoral and administrative changes enacted in the nineties had changed the institution of the prime minister for good, and that more Koizumi-like prime ministers would follow his tenure. The 1994 electoral changes, it was believed, would create an atmosphere of more intense competition between parties, thus forcing parties to choose more charismatic, top-down style leaders; the government reforms of 1999 had also lowered the number of cabinet ministers, making it easier for the prime

minister to reach consensus on an issue in the cabinet and had strengthened the hand of the cabinet and legislature in relation to the bureaucracy; finally, the administrative reforms of 2001 had given the prime minister's residence and the cabinet office (collectively known as the *kantei*) greater resources, coordinating power, and institutional support (Shinoda 2003, 2007). Despite expectations of better leadership, strong prime ministers have been just as rare as before Koizumi came to power. This suggests that there was something unique about Koizumi and his politics that set him apart from other leaders.

Much has already been written about the style of Koizumi politics—books on his leadership often note his skillful use of mass media, his talent as a political "entertainer", and his use of simple expressions ("one phrase politics") and appeals to citizens' common sense (Mikuriya, 2006; Iijima, 2006; Otake, 2006; Horiuchi, 2009; Uchiyama, 2010). For some, Koizumi's style of politics was populism of the worst kind (McCormack, 2007; Hosaka, 2005), a form of theater that played on the deep insecurities of the Japanese public rather than addressing the public's true dilemmas. However, beyond the style of Koizumi politics, what this article calls attention to are the fundamental ideas that gave Koizumi's policies coherence. As Rumelt (2011) argues, good strategy frequently coalesces around a single idea, or theory, that is simple yet surprising. This idea then becomes the basis of coherent strategic action. Insider accounts and personal testimony suggest that Koizumi understood that in order to enact controversial policies like postal reform he would have to draw on resources outside of his party (Mikuriya, 2006, p. 32; Iijima, 2006; Tawara, 2006). This necessitated that Koizumi look for support from the pubic by proving his resolve in pursuing his policy preferences and exhibiting publically his acumen in using the policy resources around him to accomplish proximate goals. In short, public successes would be requisite for more dramatic successes.

Though his most dramatic accomplishment was in the area of postal reform, his successes in the area of defense politics were also significant. Despite having a weak power base within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Koizumi was able

to improve ties with the US, enacting legislation to support US missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and lead a dramatic mission to North Korea that led to the return of five of the abductees and their families. In addition, Koizumi was able to help establish a long-term course for greater cooperation and interoperability between US and Japanese military forces. Within the US-Japan alliance framework, Koizumi was able to significantly improve Japan's military capabilities, allowing the military to move toward an operational ballistic missile shield. These moves alone would be impressive. What is most conspicuous, however, is the way Koizumi used these defense initiatives to change the nature of defense politics, enacting significant changes in domestic culture and policy making institutions. Koizumi was able to use changes to defense policy to set the stage for greater participation of the military in policy formation (and the eventual creation of a Ministry of Defense during the Abe Shinzo administration) and a more profound sense of respect for the JSDF among the public. Even though defense policy measures were in large part done under the umbrella of military realism (realism within the confines of the US-Japan Security Treaty), the domestic transformations were toward self-confident nationalism. Thus, as an incremental Gaullist, we might also characterize his defiant trips to Yasukuni Shrine as another form of domestic policy "success." While his trips to North Korea for normalization talks and frequent messages of peace during trips abroad have had a less significant impact, we should nevertheless also see these policies as part of a coherent political strategy set on maximizing Koizumi's political power while minimizing political costs.

Authors such as McCormack argue that Koizumi's "performance made up in emotional force what it lacked in intellectual consistency" (2007, p. 192). What this article argues is that what seem like disparate and incoherent actions were actually part of a consistent and coherent strategy. Each policy act helped the prime minister keep the population engaged, supported his image as a reformer and maverick, and demonstrated his acuity in achieving short-term policy gains--thus boosting his support amongst the population. While this article focuses mostly on aspects of

Koizumi's defense policy, it is important to remember that these policies were not separate from an overall political strategy set on maximizing the prime minster's political support outside of his party.

2. Koizumi's Defense Strategy and Japanese Defense Policy Space

Since the end of the Second World War, various groups in Japan have competed to promote their idea of which defense posture best serves the public interest. Roughly speaking ideas regarding the prospective path of Japanese defense can be divided into four groups:

- **Japanese Gaullists**, who seek an autonomous defense position outside of the US-Japan Security Treaty and a more assertive and "normal" nationalism;

- **military realists**, who seek rearmament and the gradual erosion of pacifist institutions within the framework of the US-Japan Security Treaty;

- **political realists (or civilian internationalists)**, who seek greater regional integration and a lower stance on defense issues through greater peace overtures and eventual resolution of history issues in the region; and

- **pacifists (or unarmed neutralists)**, who see an unarmed, peace-loving Japan as the only assurance against conflict in the region and the rise of militarism within their own country (see Mochizuki, 1983/1984; Mochizuki, 1995; Otake, 1983; Samuels, 2007; Sebata, 2010, p. 53-54; Soeya, 2005).

While political realists were generally dominant during the early stages of the cold war, since the 1980s military realists have been slightly more dominant than their political realist counterparts in mainstream politics. While both Japanese Gaullists and their pacifist counterparts on the other side of the spectrum generally remain marginalized from policy

debates, they still nevertheless play key roles in empowering or obstructing agents in the mainstream.

In terms of Koizumi's preferences on defense, he can best be described as a soft Gaullist or a Gaullist with mainstream political tendencies. Envall's (2008) characterization of Koizumi is as an incremental Gaullist: someone who desired a more "normal" Japan but was content to use the US security relationship to help soften anti-militarist norms and build up Japan's military capabilities. In this way, Envall (2008) compares Koizumi with a Gaullist tradition that includes Kishi Nobusuke and Nakasone Yasuhiro. What is noticeable about these two figures is that both can be seen as policy entrepreneurs; both can be seen as favoring a more "presidential" style prime minister; and both also found themselves, ironically, using US external pressure (*gaiatsu*) to hammer away at the edges of Japan's anti-militarist culture, despite their preference for autonomous defense.

Though some aspects of Koizumi's defense policy clearly fall into the Gaullist and military realist categories, other actions were closer to political realism. For example, while Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine can be counted amongst one of his stubborn Gaullist moves, and his adamant support of the US alliance and his commitment to ballistic missile defense were solidly military realist positions, his trips to North Korea, his consistent renunciations of war, his support of the Murayama apology for Japan's wartime atrocities, and his many visits to war and peace memorials overseas were clearly political realist moves that embraced to a certain extent pacifist content. At first sight, the content of Koizumi's policy decisions might suggest incoherent policy preferences. However, I argue that these various policies can be thought of as a *coherent* strategy and suggest a prime minister who was savvy in identifying and using the opportunities available to him.

As Hayao wrote presciently about the situation of the prime minister, when it comes to the many issues he faces, he may have more of an interest in accomplishing something, anything, than in the actual content of the policy (1993, p. 18). While Hayao was writing about the prime minister's

position as a mediator of disputes, the insight works equally well when it comes to policies the prime minister might choose to champion. The prime minister has an imperative to demonstrate his effectiveness to the public and avoid the policy immobilism that is so frequently the death knell of his contemporaries. A prime minister who is consistently shown on television and in newspapers accomplishing his stated policy objectives and overcoming political resistance is a prime minister who is more likely to maintain higher popularity figures, and thus, resist pressure from the party to step down. For Koizumi, an appearance of effectiveness and constant public attention were essential for him to counteract his own weak support base within the party.

As the next sections will demonstrate, policies that ranged from military realism, to Gaullism, to political realism all in their own way boosted Koizumi's popularity by demonstrating his policy efficacy, his resolve against significant political resistance, or—as was the case with his peace rhetoric—minimizing resistance in the political mainstream. In this way, Gaullist, military realist, and political realist policies were all important in supporting his prime ministerial power.

3. Logics of Military Realism: Embracing the US

The bilateral relationship with the US has been the cornerstone of Japanese defense since the end of the Second World War and an essential element of prime ministerial power. Frequently, the US president is one of the first foreign leaders the prime minister meets, and the tenor of their first meeting typically has an important impact on the prime minister's ability to project leadership domestically and abroad (Hayao, 1993; Shinoda, 2000). Because of the broad consensus among Japanese elites on the benefits of the alliance, there has usually been little question over whether to embrace the US as a partner. The question has been: to what extent and for what purposes. In the case of Koizumi, he chose not only to embrace US policies whole-heartedly, but also to personalize the relationship between himself and the US president in unprecedented ways. Through his

skillful management of the policy process, he was also able to make groundbreaking contributions to the alliance and provide himself a platform for using the threat of American *gaiatsu* to pursue gradual change in military affairs.

The personal relationship between Koizumi and President George W. Bush would come to surpass even the "Ron-Yasu" relationship of Ronald Regan and Nakasone Yasuhiro. Koizumi would be a frequent visitor at Bush's Crawford Ranch in Texas, the beneficiary of several poolside chats, and would even have the honor of listening in on one of the President's Daily Briefs by the CIA (Tawara, 2006, p. 135-136; Iijima, 2007). During the celebration of Bush's 59th birthday, Koizumi would serenade Bush with a verse from Elvis's "I Want You, I Need You, I Love You." The two frequently bonded over their shared love of Elvis and their fondness for Gary Cooper's western classic *High Noon*. In his final trip to the US, Koizumi was not only rewarded with a summit putting a final stamp on the alliance's transformation, but was also treated to a presidential tour of Elvis Presley's Graceland in Memphis, Tennessee (Faiola, 2006, June 27; Iijima, 2007, p. 277-279; Yoshida, 2006, June 29). Despite Bush's unpopularity in Japan, the personalization of the bilateral relationship nevertheless proved a great political success for Koizumi. The close relationship gave the prime minister another arena in which to demonstrate his charisma and flamboyance, and provided him with numerous opportunities to exploit his media savvy.

The substance of his contributions to the US alliance and his skill in manipulating the policy process were no less significant. For example, one of the most studied aspects of the Koizumi administration is his acumen with the resources of the *kantei*. Koizumi would use those resources to help overcome bureaucratic and political obstructions in formulating policy on contributions to the alliance in both Afghanistan and Iraq (Shinoda, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007; Takami, 2006; Kliman, 2006). In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, many Japanese politicians and bureaucrats remembered painfully the "failure" of the first Gulf War, where Japan had been criticized for not providing a "human" contribution to the war, only its large financial

contribution. The "shock" and embarrassment of this incident reverberated deeply in Japanese elite circles and provided permissive conditions for a bolder approach to alliance management should another crisis arrive. Though elite attitudes were pre-disposed to a more active contribution, few would predict the boldness and speed of Koizumi's policy responses in the wake of the September 11th attacks. Koizumi was able to use early public statements pledging concrete support to the US to outpace the bureaucracies, his party, and the Diet. This practice contrasted drastically with the traditional practice of intensive consultation (*nemawashi*) before announcing a policy course. As Kliman (2006, p. 83) argues, by setting high expectations with the US, Koizumi was using the threat of future American *gaiatsu* to overcome complacency and intransigence within his own party and the bureaucracy. Other attributes of Koizumi's policy process were equally conspicuous in their effectiveness: Koizumi assembled the most skilled bureaucrats and experts from the relevant ministries under policy teams in the *kantei* in ways that allowed him to form policy options quickly under his own leadership; he used early negotiations with the LDP's coalition partner the Komeito to help pressure his own party to take action; and Koizumi also framed his contributions in both Afghanistan and Iraq as contributions to international security rather than defining the contributions in collective self-defense terms (Shinoda, 2003, 2005, 2006, 2007; Kliman, 2006; Samuels, 2007).

Dispatches of the JSDF to the Indian Ocean and Iraq would stretch the limits of constitutional pacifism without entirely alienating the Japanese public or breaking the coalition with the more pacifist Komeito. Though both the Anti-Terror Legislation of 2001 and the Iraq Dispatch Legislation of 2003 broke with tradition by dispatching the JSDF for de facto collective self-defense, they nevertheless adhered to Japan's anti-militarist identity in ways that allowed Japan to maintain the façade of constitutional pacifism (Oros, 2008). Japanese JSDF personnel were for the large part kept out of danger, and in the details of JSDF dispatches pains were taken to limit contributions to tasks that were largely humanitarian in nature. Both the Anti-Terror Legislation of

2001 and the Iraq Dispatch Legislation of 2003 also served the proximate goal of demonstrating to the public Koizumi's skill at using the *kantei* to overcome the centrifugal forces of the government. In doing so, he helped avoid the trauma associated with the first Gulf War and strengthened the sense of trust with the US.

Japanese contributions to the War on Terror and the war in Iraq helped put the US-Japanese security relationship on secure footing, thus guaranteeing US extended deterrence against North Korean belligerency and the emerging long-term Chinese military threat. Though Japan no longer had to fear US abandonment, Japanese officials and the public now had to worry about entrapment in US wars. Within the contours of this new special relationship, some believed Japan was becoming the "Britain of East Asia" (McCormack, 2007). Increasingly, joint-statements released by both governments suggested that the alliance was in reality being globalized (White House/ MoFA, 2006, June 29; Nabeshima, 2003, June 2). Just as Prime Minister Nakasone had done in the mid-1980s, Koizumi was using the contours of the US-Japan alliance framework to whittle away at the edges of Japan's anti-militarist institutions (Envall, 2008; Samuels, 2007). Within this new alliance framework, old inhibitions against collective self-defense would fall by the wayside. Japan would begin to acquire the set pieces for an operational ballistic missile defense shield. Building on a formal decision in 1998 to support joint missile defense research, a cabinet decision would be made in December 2003 to proceed with a two-layer system consisting of Standard- 3 missile interceptors deployed on AEGIS-equipped destroyers and ground-based Patriot Advanced Capability-3 missiles (Glosserman, 2004, p. 4; Uriu, 2004, p. 177). The decision by the Tokyo government to deploy a limited missile defense system would require Japan and the US to integrate planning, development, and systems design in unprecedented ways. The missile defense systems would allow Japan access to US early warning intelligence and technology, but also bring up thorny issues of legality. Not only would cooperation require modifications of the ban on arms exports, but it would also require maneuvering around constitutional issues of collective self-defense.

During the Koizumi administration, alliance managers on both sides would continue to reshape the alliance in ways that strengthened Japanese capabilities and immersed Japan further in US technology and US global defense priorities. Indeed, McCormack (2007) would call the 2005/2006 agreement leading to the fusion of command and intelligence functions of US and Japanese forces the most dramatic turn in the alliance since the signing of the security treaty. Joint force modernization plans would include enhanced intelligence capabilities, a coordinated network of satellites, missile interceptors, and radar, as well as increased joint training, and the establishment of the first joint command center (Samuels, 2007, p. 178-179; McCormack, 2007). In short, Japan would continue to benefit from US extended deterrence and technological integration with the US; in exchange, Japan would willingly entangle itself deeper in US defense infrastructure and expand its roles within the alliance.

In siding closely with US, Koizumi demonstrated both the continuing relevance of a mainstream military realist approach to the transformation of military affairs and the importance of the prime minister/ US presidential relationship for prime ministerial power. He also demonstrated the "paradoxical logic" (Envall, 2008) of embracing the US. In short, the more a prime minister embraces the US and earns the trust of its leadership, the more flexibility he has in other areas of foreign policy and defense. Koizumi would after all be able to pursue independent diplomacy with North Korea and the US would turn a blind eye as Japan pursued an energy development initiative worth billions in Iran—despite both of these countries being labeled members of Bush's "axis of evil." The US would also acquiesce to Japanese demands to include the "*rachi mondai*" (abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 80s) on the agenda of six-party talks with North Korea, and would turn a blind eye as Koizumi's trips to Yasukuni Shrine rankled regional stakeholders like China and South Korea.

4. Koizumi the Political Realist: Koizumi's Dramatic Trip to Pyongyang

One of the most dramatic events of Koizumi's administration was his historic meeting with North Korea's leader Kim Jong-Il in September of 2002. Though the decision to visit the leader face-to-face and negotiate the return of Japanese citizens and pursue normalization of ties was characteristic of Koizumi's flare for the dramatic, the move also risked alienating the Bush administration and threatened Koizumi's support from conservative groups on the political right (Iijima, 2007, p. 105). The Pyongyang Declaration required that he admit Japanese guilt for wartime atrocities, apologize for Japanese transgressions, and promise one of Asia's most unstable dictators economic and humanitarian assistance (even if only provisionally). Despite these risks, the trip worked within a larger strategic logic: his visit to Pyongyang to meet Kim Jong-Il was dramatic in a way that both allowed him to surprise the Japanese public and demonstrate once again his maverick credentials, and it also accomplished several important short-term goals that made Koizumi look effective as a national leader. In his first visit, Koizumi was able to bring back five of the abductees and help secure access to more information on the other abductees. The visit also served another important political purpose. It helped Koizumi's popularity figures rebound after the steep drop following the firing of his popular Foreign Affairs Minister Tanaka Makiko.

There was nothing automatic about Koizumi's trip to meet directly with Kim Jong-Il. Throughout Koizumi's term, North Korean ballistic missiles, coupled with the regime's erratic behaviour, represented the most palpable threat to national security, not only absorbing the administration's time and energy, but also capturing the imagination of the public. North Korea's 1998 Taepodong missile tests, the regime's periodically belligerent rhetoric, the revelations of nuclear weapons development, and the details of the abductee cases all contributed to a sense of threat throughout Japan that made direct negotiation with the regime a political hazard.

More importantly, negotiating with the dictator for possible diplomatic normalization seemed to cut across the grain of Koizumi's Gaullist inclinations. Still the opportunity to visit Pyongyang to talk directly with the dictator and to bring five of the abductees back was an opportunity that proved too difficult for the prime minister to pass up. Indeed, accounts suggest that the decision to visit the reclusive country had more to do with the proximate goal of bringing back the abductees than with the opportunity for normalizing ties with the North. Koizumi was reported as telling his associates that if he could bring back even one abductee he would go (Iijima, 2007; Yomiuri Shimbun Seiji-Bu, 2006). The opportunity to visit Pyongyang came after long negotiations between Japanese officials and their North Korean counterparts. For the most part, the details of the meetings were worked out through secret meetings and rendezvous between clandestine contacts and officials on both sides (Yomiuri Shimbun Seiji-Bu, 2006; Tanaka, 2005). For a long time the two sides had negotiated on the issue of the abductees, the normalization of diplomatic ties, and nuclear and security issues. For a great deal of time, fear of a leak had kept Japanese officials from informing their US counterparts. Japanese officials were worried that if there were a leak, the North would back down and the visit would be ruined (Tanaka, 2005). Before the visit, Koizumi would notify the US and later contact President Bush directly to inform him of his intention to meet with Kim Jong-Il. Though Bush was not enthusiastic about the trip, he nevertheless voiced his understanding of Koizumi's visit (Yomiuri Shimbun Seiji-Bu, 2006).

On September 17, 2002, Koizumi made his dramatic trip. He would be the first Japanese prime minister to visit the reclusive country. Despite predominantly being associated with a Gaullist/ nationalist tradition with regards to defense, Koizumi was nonetheless willing to apologize for the "tremendous damage inflicted by Japanese colonialism" (Cha, 2002; Yomiuri Shimbun Seiji-Bu, 2006; Iijima, 2007; Uriu, 2003). In return, Kim Jong-Il apologized for the abduction of thirteen Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 80s. The two parties then signed the Pyongyang Declaration, which consisted of four agreements: (1) the two sides would resolve

to normalize ties; (2) there would be a "settling of accounts with the past" that would include the provision of economic assistance from Japan and in return the North would waive pre-1945 property claims; (3) on abductions, the North Koreans agreed to ensure that no similar incidents would occur in the future; and (4) the two sides agreed to security-related confidence-building measures, and the North Korean side agreed to a moratorium on missile launches in and after 2003 (Stockwin, 2008, p. 112; Cha, 2002; MoFA, 2002).

As a result of Koizumi's visit to North Korea, five of the original abductees were returned. However, the mood of the Pyongyang Declaration was spoiled by the specifics reported by the North Korean officials regarding the remaining abductees. Of the thirteen that were thought be abducted, eight were reported by North Korean authorities as dead. Since the abductees were young at the time, many in the Japanese media speculated that the abductees died by violent means. The issue of the abductees and the specifics of the crime would soon become a media sensation that would overshadow the diplomatic gains of the Pyongyang Declaration. Later revelations that North Korea was enriching uranium and had been continuing with its nuclear program in violation of a 1994 agreement would also dampen enthusiasm for further normalization talks, as would the Bush administration's hardline stance toward the regime (Stockwin, 2008, p. 113; Uriu, 2003). The North's withdrawal from the Nonproliferation Treaty in 2003 would strain diplomacy even further and spur Japan to aggressively pursue a joint ballistic missile defense program with the US.

In May 2004, to break the silence between the two countries, Koizumi visited Pyongyang for a second time. During this meeting, North Korean officials acknowledged that the return of Japan's citizens was permanent and agreed that their families could leave to join them. Koizumi, in return, agreed to provide humanitarian aid and reopen negotiations for normalization of diplomatic ties. Koizumi was also able to get Kim Jong-Il's promise to provide more information on the abductees reported dead. By this point, however, a coalition of powerful pressure groups had emerged on the abductee issue. The net effect of the pressure from these groups was

to strengthen the hand of Cabinet Secretary Abe Shinzo within the government and draw the Japanese position closer to the US. The strange case of Yokota Megumi's ashes would soon push the issue beyond the control of the government. A series of tests done by Japanese scientists showed that the ashes handed over by the North Korean government were the remains of two unrelated people. This news infuriated the Japanese public and tainted the credibility of the North Korean regime in the public's eyes (Hiwatari, 2006, p. 50-51).

After 2004, Koizumi would quietly abandon the North Korean initiative. Realizing that key members of his government, a majority of the public, and Japan's key strategic ally were not supportive of his initiatives, he accepted that there was no longer any benefit in pursuing the issue. Though the primacy Koizumi placed on US alliance management would impinge on his efforts to normalize ties with North Korea, as would the scale of popular revulsion in Japan at the abductee issue, the most important impacts of Koizumi's trip to Pyongyang lay beyond the content of this political realist initiative. Koizumi's trip to North Korea provided another platform for a dramatic display of bold leadership and allowed him to demonstrate once again his ability to accomplish important proximate goals. His trip to Pyongyang helped to improve his flagging popularity figures, strengthened his power base among the public, and helped him continue on his path toward postal reform.

5. Symbolic Nationalism: Yasukuni Shrine Visits as a Matter of the Heart

Perhaps Koizumi's most contentious act in the realm of defense politics was his visit to Yasukuni Shrine every year during his prime ministership. These visits put him at odds not only with China and South Korea, but also with left wing politicians, pro-China business elites, and even during the last year of his administration the US Congress. Despite the lingering questions over the legitimacy of the shrine and its symbolism, Koizumi would frequently characterize his visits

as a domestic issue and "a matter of the heart." In his press conferences and speeches accompanying his visits, he would frequently justify his trips in terms of his desire to pray for the perished war dead, express his puzzlement at negative reactions to his visit, and punctuate his trips with pacifist language that restated his desire that Japan never again embark on the path of war. Polling data from several newspapers, including the Asahi, Yomiuri, and Mainichi Shimbun during this time shows that by the end of his prime ministership Koizumi had turned an otherwise unpopular symbolic act of state into a quasi-popular one (Stockwin, 2008; McCormack, 2007; Mong, 2010). The reversal in popular opinion may have reflected the growing insecurity of the Japanese public against the backdrop of rising Chinese power and the noxious North Korea abductee issue, but probably also demonstrated the public enthrallment with Koizumi's ability to overcome political obstacles. In short, his Yasukuni visits became one more symbol of a prime minister who could stare down opposition.

Yasukuni Shrine was originally established in 1869 by the Meiji government and was maintained by the Army and the Navy up until the end of the Second World War. The American Occupation authorities were responsible for severing ties between the Shinto religion and the state. Despite its status as a private entity, the shrine has been an important symbol for Japan's past, both domestically and regionally. One of the main controversies of the shrine is the "enshrinement" of fourteen World War II class-A war criminals. Nationalists in Japan view Yasukuni Shrine as a memorial to the war dead, but also see it as a symbol of Japan's rise as a modern state from the mid-19th to mid-20th century. Rejecting Yasukuni Shrine would negate this period of national modernization and admit that it was a mistake (Shibuichi, 2005). Koizumi's determination to visit Yasukuni was probably based on his assumption—an assumption that had regularly proven correct—that his reputation as a reformer was tightly bound with his ability to meet the letter of his campaign pledges, and that any retreat from these pledges would be exploited by his political opponents. Before becoming prime minister, Koizumi had promised the powerful Japan Association of Bereaved Families, which

boasts close to a million voters, that he would make a formal annual visit to the shrine (McCormack, 2007, p. 50). Additional pressure was placed on the prime minister by other smaller organizations such as the Military Pension Federation, and the Association of Shinto Shrines, as well as major rightist intellectuals. Leftist groups for their part saw the prime minster's visits as symbols of an outmoded militarism and feudalism that denied Japan's postwar legacy as a state devoted to human rights, democracy, and pacifism. These leftist groups, such as the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), Social Democratic Party (SDP), labor unions, and various NGOs, such as the National Organization of Pacifist Bereaved Families, as well as sympathetic intellectuals and newspapers opposed the prime ministerial visits. In addition to these groups, Koizumi also faced staunch regional opposition to the visits from China and South Korea. In China, the visits usually provoked statements of displeasure from officials in Beijing as well as street demonstrations. South Korea also saw Yasukuni as a sign of Japan's past oppressive rule. South Koreans have not forgotten, for example, that a large number of Koreans were conscripted to fight in WWII and died as a result (Shibuichi, 2005, p. 200-205).

Several explanations have been presented as to why Koizumi chose to visit the shrine. One, that Koizumi was apt to make decisions for emotional reasons, and therefore was greatly moved by his memory of the memorial when he was younger; two, the prime minister was motivated by his political desire to maintain support amongst influential pressure groups on the right; and three, Koizumi's strong feeling that Japan should not simply bend before the criticism of its neighbors (Stockwin, 2008, p. 108; Mong, 2010). While all of these factors probably influenced his decisions to an extent, writers have also pointed out that Koizumi's prime ministership coincided with "a period of rapid growth in the Chinese economy, and fears in Japan that the balance of economic and political influence was shifting away from Japan in favour of China were widespread" (Stockwin, 2008, p. 108). This idea, that Koizumi was adept at playing on the insecurities of the public, has been reflected in the arguments of several other authors (see McCormack, 2007;

Hosaka, 2005; Mikuriya, 2006). While Japanese insecurities about rising Chinese power may have played one important role in Koizumi's political calculations, perhaps the most important aspect was the dramatic and contested nature of the visits. Resistance from leftist groups, business groups with economic interests in China and South Korea, and later even from the US helped to demonstrate Koizumi's resolve to the public. His willingness to visit Yasukuni became a proxy for the larger image of "reform" that was linked with other measures, including his maverick persona and his postal reform measures.

Koizumi was also able to frame the issue of the Yasukuni visits in ways that benefited his maverick persona and downplayed the nationalist character of his visits. Koizumi repeatedly stated that his visits were for purposes of peace and to mourn for the spirit of fallen soldiers. In his press conference on January 4, 2006, Koizumi criticized China and South Korea for turning "a matter of the heart" into a diplomatic issue (Kunimasa, 2006, January 31). These various framings—as a domestic issue, a personal matter of the heart, and as a way of honoring Japan's pledge for peace—were methods of tempering resistance from Japan's political center. The more China and South Korea railed against his visits, the more Chinese and South Korean activists seemed like extremists instead of Koizumi. By using his visits to espouse the virtues of peace, he distanced his own actions from a radical right position. As time passed, public sentiment increasingly backed Koizumi.

In 2006, Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni would come under increased pressure. In May, Koizumi learned that he would not be allowed to address a joint sitting of the houses of Congress unless he pledged to stop his Yasukuni visits (Nakata, 2006, May 17; McCormack, 2007). Additional pressure was also put on Koizumi by the Association of Corporate Executives, and the Asahi and Yomiuri Newspapers would oppose the visits in a rare joint editorial. Perhaps most devastating was the revelation that the deceased Showa Emperor had stopped visiting the shrine because of the enshrinement of the Class A war criminals (McCormack, 2007; Stockwin, 2008). Despite mounting

opposition, Koizumi would nevertheless go forward with his August visit to the shrine. At this point, his prime ministership was in its twilight, and Koizumi no longer needed dramatic acts to increase his power base to challenge his party. This visit was truly a matter of the heart. On August 15, 2006 Koizumi made his final visit to Yasukuni Shrine as prime minister—his sixth in total. As opposed to previous visits, this one was different in that it took place on the anniversary of the end of World War II. A Yomiuri poll taken right after his last visit showed that 43 percent of respondents approved of the visit while 39 percent disapproved (Green and Koizumi, 2006). It is a testament to Koizumi's persistence that a "matter of the heart" would in the end also become another political victory for his administration.

6. Limited Peace Offerings: Low-Cost Pacifist Moves that Adhered to Japan's Anti-Militarist Identity

A frequently overlooked aspect of Koizumi's defense policy is the extent to which he embraced the rhetoric of anti-militarism, pacifism, and reconciliation. Throughout his tenure, the prime minister was very adamant about framing his international activities in the language of Japan's peace identity. On his trips abroad Koizumi would frequently visit memorials and sites associated with the victims of Japan's colonial past and the victims of World War II (Iijima, 2007). During these trips, he would repeatedly pledge that Japan would never again embark on the path of war. Typically, Koizumi's verbal contributions to reconciliation, peace, and anti-militarism have been overlooked because the content of his policies were largely center-right and frequently nationalist in character. His trips to Yasukuni Shrine, for example, were seen as naked attempts to appease supporters on the far right. For these reasons, authors have tended to dismiss Koizumi's apologies as formulaic and insincere (McCormack, 2007). Regardless of Koizumi's sincerity or the formulaic nature of his apologies, Koizumi's pacifist and anti-militarist rhetoric were important aspects of his defense strategy. Overall, his repeated pledges that Japan would never again engage in war, his endorsement of

the Murayama apology for wartime atrocities, and his visitation of sites that related to Japan's wartime past helped dampen criticisms of his regime domestically, assuaging many in Japan's political center, and allowed him to avoid stricter criticisms from countries outside of Asia.

Following his first visit to Yasukuni Shrine in his first year as prime minister, Koizumi was quick to remark that: "We should not engage in such a war ever again. I paid the visit to renew my pledge for peace" (CNN 2001, August 13). Koizumi's pledge for peace and his promise that Japan would never again engage in war were to be repeated not only at future visits to Yasukuni Shrine, but at other functions as well. In the weeks following September 11, the prime minister traveled to Beijing and Seoul and met with his Chinese and South Korean counterparts to convince them that Japanese contributions to the US campaigns in Afghanistan were not moves toward remilitarization. During these visits, Koizumi also visited two symbols of Japan's imperialist past—the Marco Polo Bridge and Sodaemun Independence Park. The diplomatic payoff was that both Beijing and Seoul shelved their criticisms of Japan's contribution to the War on Terror (Kliman, 2006, p. 84; Iijima, 2007, p. 35). During these visits, Koizumi would repeat his pledge that Japan would never again engage in war and offer his "heartfelt" apology for Japan's wartime atrocities (Iijima, 2007, p. 36-37). Koizumi would repeat his apology for the suffering caused by Japan in other settings as well, for example in his dramatic meeting with Kim Jong-Il in Pyongyang, as well as in his visits to Manila Bay in the Philippines and Arlington Cemetery in the US (Iijima, 2007).

Just as Koizumi's "heartfelt" apologies for Japan's wartime atrocities helped to blunt the edge of his Yasukuni visits and made his policies more palatable to Japan's political center and international audiences outside of Asia, he would also use the language of international community and international contribution to soften the sharp edge of contributions to the US-Japan alliance. Throughout his tenure, Koizumi would enact a number of important measures that would lead to greater de facto collective self-defense with the US; however, Koizumi adamantly

characterized these contributions in terms of international contributions and highlighted the humanitarian nature of these operations. The most conspicuous aspect of this framing can be seen in the dispatch of the JSDF to Iraq. In the early stages of the war against Iraq, Koizumi was quick to announce his support of the US war despite a majority of Japanese citizens being against the invasion. Just as in the Indian Ocean dispatch, Koizumi chose roles for the Ground Self Defense Force in Samawah, Iraq that conformed closely to Japan's anti-militarist identity. Thus, activities were limited to humanitarian assistance and rebuilding efforts and great efforts were taken to keep Japanese forces out of danger (Oros, 2008, p. 186). Once the UN resolution authorizing the rebuilding of Iraq was passed, Koizumi made the most of its significance, emphasizing the multilateral character of the operation, the anti-militarist aspects of the dispatch, and the core values of international solidarity and international contribution symbolized by the UN resolution.

Generally speaking, Koizumi could afford to endorse pacifism and anti-militarism rhetorically. There was little political risk in doing so. His visits to Yasukuni Shrine had already mollified his supporters on the political right, and his rhetoric did little to concern alliance managers in Washington. As critics would acknowledge, Koizumi would stop short of pledges to peace that directly addressed Chinese and South Korean fears or anger over the history issue—for example a joint commission with China and South Korea to explore the history issue—and thus, entailed political risks (Iijima, 2007, p. 39-41). Koizumi's example demonstrates to future political leaders that rhetorical pacifism and anti-militarism can be an effective mechanism for winning tacit consent from Japanese audiences in the political center and internationally outside of Asia, even as the content of policies endorse moves on the political right such as greater alliance contribution, rearmament, and symbolic nationalism.

7. Conclusion: The Value of Coherent Strategy

Koizumi's policy accomplishments in the realm of defense were second to none. By the time Koizumi had left office, he had put Japanese soldiers on the ground in Iraq, contributed billions to the US in support of the War on Terror, cooperated closely on ballistic missile defense, brought back five of the abductees from North Korea, and created a permissive environment for greater military and JDA (now MOD) contributions to policymaking. Most importantly, he had conducted his defense policy in a way that strengthened his support domestically, and thus, contributed to his victory in his primary political goal of postal reform. As he went into his final month in office, he enjoyed a support rate of 47 percent—an astounding number considering that many Japanese prime ministers leave office with support rates in the low twenties or high teens (Asahi Shimbun, 2006, August 28).

Some scholars have noted the lack of consistency in Koizumi's foreign and defense policy (Uchiyama, 2010, p. 79; McCormack, 2007). Though Koizumi embraced policies ranging from political realism, to military realism, to Gaullism, his policies were nonetheless logical in one important regard: his actions helped bolster his image as a prime minister who could accomplish goals against great resistance. Whether it was his decision to embrace the US as an ally, his decision to visit North Korea and meet Kim Jong-Il face to face, or his decision to visit Yasukuni Shrine, each of these policies kept Koizumi in the public eye and demonstrated his acumen in achieving proximate objectives. The dispatch of the Marine Self Defense Force to the Indian Ocean was a concrete show of alliance support for the US; Koizumi's face to face meeting with Kim Jong-Il in North Korea resulted in the return of five abductees; the dispatch of the Ground Self Defense Force to Iraq was a "human" contribution that was revolutionary in Japan's postwar era; and his trips to Yasukuni demonstrated his commitment to following through with campaign promises despite stringent opposition. The controversial nature of each of these actions, in turn, helped sustain his image as a "maverick," and thus, helped Koizumi maintain his support base outside of the party.

Throughout his tenure, Koizumi also demonstrated the "paradoxical logic" of pursuing greater diplomatic autonomy through closer relations with Washington. Indeed, Washington stepped aside as Tokyo pursued a normalization track with North Korea and was awarded a contract for developing energy resources in Iran--two members of Bush's "axis of evil." Evidence suggests that the reason Washington did not take a stronger stance on these issues is because of Japan's unflinching political support of the alliance, the outstanding contributions to the War on Terror and the war in Iraq, and the special relationship that Koizumi had built with President Bush.

Through strength of personality and cunning political theater, Koizumi was also able to turn his most unpopular policy moves—his Yasukuni Shrine visits and his dispatch of the JSDF to Iraq—into quasi-popular ones by making them symbols of his own maverick image. While some of his initiatives—for example, the transformation of Japan's defense establishment to allow greater inputs from military officers and force realignments for greater interoperability with the US—have stuck, others have proven less enduring. His most controversial action, prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine, has been by and large neglected by successive prime ministers. This demonstrates the persistence of Japan's anti-militarist culture and the degree to which future leaders have sought to minimize the risks of antagonizing China. In some ways this also demonstrates the limitations of charisma and showmanship in creating long-lasting change in the realm of defense politics.

The Koizumi case teaches us that coherence of design in political strategy is important—but that this coherence need not be faithful devotion to any one line of Japanese strategic thinking (Gaullism, military realism, political realism, or pacifism). In the case of Koizumi, the most important coherence was in terms of the desired end state: higher popularity figures to support his reform agenda. Each of the defense policies pursued above sought to foster Koizumi's image as a politician who could accomplish clear-cut goals against great political odds. This image helped to maintain

his popular support base outside of his political party, and thus, to pursue reform efforts against entrenched interests.

As Rumelt (2011) writes, good strategy is surprising at the time, yet simple in retrospect. Koizumi's key insight was just that. He understood that the Japanese public was eager for a prime minister who could accomplish something (anything!), face down opposition, and represent a more self-confident Japan. For this reason, Koizumi's defense policies embraced opportunities for assertive action, wherever those opportunities may have been.

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