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Abe's Plan For Japan: A Fourth Arrow?

By Naoko Kumada

Synopsis

*Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has repeatedly claimed that Abenomics, represented by 'Three Arrows' of reform, is his highest policy priority. However, his government's controversial passing of the Security Bills suggests that a higher priority is the unpopular goal of re-establishing *jishu kenpō* (自主憲法), an 'independent constitution' in place of the US drafted 'imposed' Constitution. This ideologically driven project, not economic reform, has been the real focus of the Abe administration.*

Commentary

PRIME MINISTER Shinzo Abe came into power for a second time in 2012 with an economic programme purportedly based on three 'arrows' of reform: monetary expansion, fiscal stimulus, and structural reform. The first two arrows of monetary and fiscal stimulus were supposed to pave the way for a crucial third: the long-term structural reform that has eluded Japan over two decades of economic stagnation. However, three years into Abenomics, the Third Arrow is nowhere to be seen.

The renowned economist Mitsuharu Ito argues in his book, *Critique of Abenomics: Breaking the Four Arrows*, that Abenomics is not only misguided as economic policy but also not a genuine priority of Abe's. Instead, Ito claims, Abe's programme contains a hidden 'Fourth Arrow' of political reform: the amendment of the existing Constitution and the 'reform of post-war politics'.

The Fourth Arrow

Ito contends that the defining stance of the Abe administration, which he describes

as 'an exceptionally extreme right-wing administration' in post-war Japan, is its denial that Japan's actions in China leading up to the Pacific War constitute an invasion. Indeed, Abe refused to use 'invasion' or even 'act of aggression' to refer to Japan's historical actions in China in recent statements about the War. Abe's right-wing views are more evident in his books, personal statements and actions such as his visit to the Yasukuni Shrine than in official policy statements.

As John Dower has illustrated brilliantly, the American Occupation left largely intact, for Cold War reasons, the political, economic and ideological elite that had led Japan to war, played down Japan's transgressions in China and Korea, and left territorial issues with them arising from the war unresolved.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) that has ruled Japan almost continuously since 1955 contains a high concentration of the scions of Japan's wartime leadership among its elite. Its co-founder was Abe's grandfather Nobusuke Kishi, architect of Japan's Manchukuo policy. Kishi was detained as a 'Class A' war crime suspect after the War but then released as a promising Cold War ally against Communist China.

Like his grandfather, Abe promotes a strong anti-China stance, that draws on US support, towards the goal of re-militarising Japan. As critics, including Ito, argue, the establishment of the right of collective self-defence is but a step towards the larger goal of dismantling Article 9. He defied massive popular opposition and circumvented Article 9's disavowal of 'the right of belligerency of the state' to pass the Security Bills by first changing the interpretation of the Constitution through a cabinet decision.

Abe has planned constitutional change for many years. Under his leadership in 2007, the Diet passed an Act that clarified for the first time the steps needed to amend the Constitution. He has also often argued that the majority required for constitutional amendment specified by Article 96 should be lowered from the current 2/3rds.

Abe's own intentions echo Kishi's closely and confirm Ito's 'Fourth Arrow' thesis. Abe argues that constitutional amendment is crucial to achieve his oft-stated ambition of a 'break-away from the post-war regime'. He vows to do everything in his power to make this happen. The 'possession of a self-defence army', he argues, should be inserted into Article 9, because Japan needs to defend the life, property, and territory of its citizens in order to become a 'normal nation'.

Constitutional revisionism

In his book, *Towards a New Country*, Abe recalls the LDP's founding objectives of post-war economic recovery and the enactment of *jishu kenpō*. While the former has been achieved, the latter, he says, has been neglected. He explains that the intention of the Americans in drafting Japan's current Constitution had been to 'bind Japan's arms and legs so that Japan can never rise again as a world power' and that Article 9 was inserted 'so that Japan could never again challenge the Euro-American centered order'.

'The use of the right to collective self-defence,' Abe explains, will mean Japan

'becomes an equal of the US, rather than a subordinate'. Abe also states that 'there is no room for diplomatic negotiation' to resolve the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands issue and that only 'physical force' is needed.

According to Abe, the 'bone structure of Japan' (the Constitution) needs to be re-created by Japanese people from scratch. He explains that his slogans 'to break away from the post-war regime' and 'to take back Japan' mean 'to take back Japan from its post-war history and put it in the hands of Japanese people'.

As Ito and others point out, holding these revisionist and revanchist views within the context of the special relationship with the US results in a deep ambivalence towards the East Asian security *status quo* that Abe says needs to be defended against China.

Abe and his ideological circle hold fast to the Security Treaty with the US while nurturing a multi-generational project to reverse the resented 'post-war regime' of which the Security Treaty is a pillar. Starting with constitutional change, they aim to restore a pre-war ideal of Japan and its place in the world.

Stage Two of Abenomics?

On 24 September 2015, soon after the Security Bills passed the Upper House in Japan, Abe announced that Abenomics had now 'entered its second stage'. Stressing that economic policy continued to be his highest priority, Abe unveiled a vague set of 'New Three Arrows' of 'hope,' 'dream,' and 'peace of mind'.

On the same occasion, however, he also stated that his campaign platform for the next Upper House election would be the amendment of the Constitution. A new Constitution that would define 'the ideal shape of 21st century Japan' must be, he said, 'drawn by our own hands'. He referred to the draft for a new Constitution that had been completed in 2012 under former LDP President Sadakazu Tanigaki.

The text of this draft erases the Constitution's 'never again' repudiation of war and revives key features of the Meiji Constitution. The Emperor is once again head of state rather than 'a symbol'. A 'National Defence Army' is back, with the prime minister as commander-in-chief and with its own tribunal. Popular sovereignty and civil rights are curtailed.

Exceptions to the separation of religion and state are carved out for 'social' and 'customary' practices, which, critics contend, are likely to include official visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. To its proponents the new constitution will restore the 'ideal shape of Japan' before it lost the War. The 'ideal shape of 21st century Japan' that Abe and the LDP envision is that of an idealised 1930's Japan.

Naoko Kumada is a Research Fellow with the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
