CHAPTER 3

The International Context of the Creation of the NPR: 1945–1950

In keeping with the overall rationale of this study of providing a complete history of the NPR, the purpose of this chapter is to illuminate the international factors and events behind the decision to create the NPR. The chapter seeks to broaden the existing knowledge of the origins of the NPR, particularly by exploring the non-Japanese organisations which influenced its development. In this the chapter focuses on the neglected area of the American sponsored constabularies which preceded the NPR in Asia and elsewhere. The chapter also includes an examination of the influence of the outbreak of the Korean War on the final decisions behind the creation of the NPR including the influence of the Japanese government. Some attention is also paid, by way of brief summaries, to the international political situation and American attitudes towards strengthening Japan’s security forces.

This approach combines elements of original research with a synthesis of the best of the existing scholarship on the period. As much of the content centres on the international context of the force and has been covered elsewhere, this study seeks to focus on the key concepts which saw Japan become the central pillar of America’s Asian policy. These include Schaller’s ‘great crescent’, Iriye’s observations on the failure of the Yalta system and Sarantakes’ concept of ‘double containment’.¹ The examination presented here of these concepts also reveals that although Japan became central to US Asia policy, no overall American consensus over Japanese security had been reached by 1950. The exploration of the origins of the constabulary structure offered here is an original contribution to the scholarship and reveals in full for the first time a significant influence on the character and creation of the NPR. Despite much of the chapter adopting an approach similar to that of many second generation US scholars in focusing on the international influences on the force, the final section details how these influences interacted with the Japanese government during the creation of the NPR in early July 1950. This analysis, whilst demonstrating the Japanese influence, also indicates that the Japanese government was not ‘ordered’ to create the force, as is argued by many historians.

¹ See below for a full description of each of these concepts/theories.
The International Political Context

The international political situation in the immediate postwar years contributed greatly towards the processes which eventually led to the creation of the NPR. The emergence of the Cold War, the threat of communism in Asia, the collapse of the Yalta system and the Korean War were all instrumental in the birth of the NPR. The history of the Cold War in Asia and its impact upon Japan have been effectively and exhaustively studied elsewhere by many historians, notably Schaller, Sarantakes and Iriye. In the interests of brevity, and in keeping with the aim of this study to focus on the relatively unexplored nature of the NPR rather than the well trodden path of the Cold War in Asia, this section comprises of a brief summary of some of the major scholarly interpretations of the events that influenced Japan's security policy in this period to which this study ascribes.

Michael Schaller’s work plants the roots of the Cold War in Asia firmly within the soil of Japan. Schaller argues that the rise of communism in Asia and the weakness of the European and Japanese economies resulted in American moves to integrate Japan and non-communist Southeast Asia into a trading/security bloc. This aim was somewhat ironic as it closely mirrored the ‘southern strategy’ employed by the Japanese in their drive to create a ‘Greater East Asian Co-prosperity Sphere’ during the Pacific War. American action in Asia was seen as necessary to alleviate the ‘loss’ of Japan’s traditional markets and sources of raw materials in Manchuria and China and in doing so prevent Japan falling to communism. Schaller argues that the integration of the two areas also helped guarantee the pro-western, anti-communist alignment of both Japan and many of the emerging nationalist movements in Southeast Asia. To bolster and defend this non-communist Asian containment sphere Schaller argues that a ‘Great Crescent’ of defensive bases and American military outposts was established, running from the Aleutians through Japan, Formosa and the Philippines.

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