CHAPTER SIX
THE PARADOX OF NON-USE OF “USE OF FORCE” OPTION IN JAPAN’S FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY CONSENSUS

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INTRODUCTION

The foreign and security policies of post-World War II Japan are governed by three key legal instruments, namely, the Constitution of Japan (1947), the Japan-United States Security Treaty (1951, revised in 1960), and the Charter of the United Nations (1945. Japan joined the UN in 1956).\(^1\) To mark a clear discontinuity from the previous Imperialist and military-led authoritarian governance structure, those Japanese political leaders who took the helm of government affairs in the aftermath of war made a conscious choice when it promulgated, concluded and acceded to the respective document with one common underlying goal in their mind: the self-imposed strict limitation to, and preferably the non-use of, the use of military force in the future conduct of its international affairs. It was and continues to be ‘the Gordian knot’ to the Japanese political system.

In retrospect, the idea was pragmatic as much as practical. Practically speaking, there was no choice but to remain a non-military power, as Tokyo, after the total surrender from the war it launched in the Pacific and in East Asia, was completely disarmed and placed under the occupation by the United States-led Allied Powers for six and a half years (August 1945 to April 1952). As we see below, the no-war Constitution was drafted during this period, although Japan subsequently took the steps to “rearm” itself, pushed by the policy change on the part of the U.S. to place Japan firmly in the Western camp as Cold War tension with the Soviet bloc escalated, which was most notably demonstrated by the outbreak of

\(^1\) Basing its foreign and security policies on these three documents, Japan announced the “Three Principles of Japanese Diplomacy” in its first Diplomatic Bluebook published in 1957. They were “the UN-Centrism”, “the cooperation with the (Western) liberal countries” and “A membership in Asia”. Gaimusho (Ministry of Foreign Affairs), Wagagaiko no kinkyo (The Recent Developments of Our Diplomatic Activities), September 1957, pp. 7–8.
the Korean War (1950–1953). It is against this background that Japan established the Japan Defense Agency and the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs) in 1954. At the same time, however, from a pragmatic standpoint, Tokyo explored the way to keep the profile of the SDFs as “modest” as possible, which not only helped Japan looked non-aggressive but also allowed it to concentrate most of its efforts to economic recovery. This is the idea of the Yoshida doctrine, the politico-strategic dictum of light defense burden in favor of fast-track economic development, named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, who set the basic course of the post-War Japan’s foreign and security policies by signing the Security Treaty with Washington.

Contrary to its sense of uneasiness to use its military, however, Japan was heavily dependent on the resources, personnel, equipment and facilities, of the SDFs. It was particularly evident in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11, 2011. On that fatal day, the massive magnitude 9.0 earthquake hit the Pacific Ocean-side of Tohoku (northeastern) region of Japan’s mainland, which caused the most destructive tsunami ever measured in Japan. The disaster claimed the lives of about 19,000 and displaced hundreds of thousands of people. It damaged many cities and even hit the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, which caused widespread radioactive contamination. To counter these multiple challenges, the government of Japan mobilized its ground, maritime, and air SDFs immediately. The SDFs’ largest ever operation, involving 100,000 personnel, helped by the U.S. forces under the Tomodachi (friend in Japanese) Operation, played a critical role in this major disaster relief and humanitarian assistance activities. In a sense, it is a totally unexpected turn of events to find the most sophisticated weapons and most diligently trained troops were used not for the military defense of Japan but to conduct a major operation of humanitarian nature. It certainly helped change the image of the SDFs in Japan and vindicated its reason d’etre. In fact, the approval rating for the SDFs jumped to 97.7% according to an opinion poll conducted by the Cabinet Office of Japan in January 2012.2

Although the use of SDFs’ capabilities for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance is not considered the most traditional nor main role of the military, the efficient mobility of the SDFs and the smooth Japan-U.S. operational coordination demonstrated in the post-3.11 phase did send the

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