

# Japan's Security Policy Making after Political Reforms: Centralization and Constraints since the First Abe administration\*

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## Abstract

Recent research on Japanese politics suggests that institutional reforms in the 1990s led to the increased power of the Kantei (the Prime Minister and his staff) and top-down policy-making, including in security policy. This perspective, however, offers limited explanations of policy making processes after these political reforms: in particular, powerful leadership seemed absent from 2006 to 2012, during which prime ministers changed every year. Focusing on constraints as well as centralization, this article analyzes how security policy was shaped from the first Shinzo Abe administration until his second tenure. While most of the prime ministers and some cabinet members attempted to lead security policy throughout this period, their initiatives were sometimes significantly curtailed by institutions which remained unchanged despite the reforms, coalition politics, and political turmoil due to the enhanced authority of the prime minister. Moreover, there were variations in top-down policy-making processes, and the roles of actors in the Kantei-led politics were not fixed in nature.

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## Introduction

Japan's policy making in recent years has often been described using the term *kantei shudo*, or the "prime minister-led approach." The role of the prime ministerial leadership has grown compared to the period characterized by its powerful bureaucracy as well as political struggle within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and many observers note that policy making has become more top-down in nature. As exemplified by the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, this trend is not exclusive to domestic governance but extends to the realm of national security policy.

This transformation finds its origin in institutional reforms of the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> Electoral reform promoted inter-party competition rather than intra-party competition, which in turn boosted the power of party leadership due to its authority in terms of granting endorsement to each electoral candidate. Administrative reform strengthened the functions of the cabinet as a policy-making and coordinating organ. As a result of these reforms, the prime minister and the Cabinet Secretariat, formerly considered to be "weak" actors, were transformed into powerful actors who could drive policy forward. The magnitude of this shift was so significant that some experts equate it with *de*

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<sup>1</sup> Machidori Satoshi, *Political Reform Reconsidered: The Trajectory of a Transformed Japanese State*, trans. Tobias S. Harris (Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2023).

*facto* constitutional reform.<sup>2</sup>

These changes, however, do not necessarily imply that policies proposed by prime ministers have been consistently realized in security affairs, and there is a need to reconsider how “strong” the prime minister and the cabinet have in fact been following these institutional reforms. While some prime ministers (Koizumi Junichiro and post-2012 Abe Shinzo) appear to have exerted powerful leadership over their lengthy tenures, the other prime ministers were each forced to resign after around one year in office. To what extent the Kantei—the prime minister and his staff—leads policy making throughout the period after political reforms remains an open question. Moreover, with the establishment of the NSC in 2013 and the National Security Secretariat (NSS) in 2014, institutional change has progressed in recent years as well. Although policy-making processes can all too easily be summarized with the term “prime minister-led approach,” it is essential to look at such processes from mid- to long-term perspectives.

This article aims to explore how *kantei shudo*, or the “prime minister-led approach,” evolved in the realm of security policy making. The central arguments of this article are as follows. First, while it has become common that security policy change is proposed by prime ministers, there still exist factors that can impede the realization of prime ministers’ initiatives or force their revision. For example, prime ministers’ leadership is a critical factor explaining why issues like the relocation of the U.S. Futenma Air Station and the right to collective self-defense became salient, yet these two issues were concluded very differently. This difference in outcomes underscores the importance of constraints and limits on prime ministerial power. The growing autonomy of the prime minister may paradoxically impede the realization of policy, and the unchanged nature of the House of Councillors (the “twisted Diet”) and the LDP’s coalition partner, Komeito, can also serve as constraints.

Second, there are variations in the patterns of top-down policy processes depending on the administration. Evidence suggests that most of the administrations analyzed in this article attempted to make policy decisions in a centralized manner. Coupled with institutional change, a broad direction for realizing top-down policy making has taken root in Japanese politics. However, even after the establishment of the new system under reformed institutions, there was no set way of operating this; thus, intensive policy discussions took place at different levels depending on the administration, such as the prime minister, his special advisor, and the cabinet. In this context, the establishment of the NSC and NSS during the second Abe administration may have created a more fixed security policy-making pattern to a certain extent, given the authority and security-focused structure of these institutions.

The remainder of this article is divided as follows. Section 1 discusses how policy-making system in Japan changed before and after political reforms and lays out the framework of analysis. Sections 2-4 are devoted to case studies of policy-making processes under the LDP following the Koizumi administration, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administrations, and the second Abe administration.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 167-168.

## 1. The context of political reforms

### (1) Security policy making and institutional change in Japan

When considering the phenomenon of Japan's "prime minister-led approach" in security policy making, two elements have to be reviewed as a starting point. These elements are, namely, the extent to which politicians are involved in security policy relative to the bureaucracy, and the extent of the authority possessed by the prime minister and his surroundings.

First, politicians' involvement in security policy was limited in comparison with other policy areas until the 1990s. In the so-called 1955 System, the *zoku giin*, or "policy tribe" (LDP politicians possessing specialized knowledge in particular policy areas and close connections with industry and bureaucrats), played an influential role in shaping policies, and their presence constituted a bottom-up policy-making process within the LDP and government. In making of security policy, however, the bureaucracy was a key actor rather than LDP politicians. A study analyzing the Japan-U.S. alliance in the 1990s concludes that policy coordination within the bureaucracy was critical in strengthening the alliance during that period.<sup>3</sup> Research on civil-military relations in Japan also stresses the influence of bureaucracy as a key player in maintaining civilian control of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF).<sup>4</sup>

LDP politicians were less active in security policy partly due to the effects of the electoral system. The multi-member district (MMD) system, which was used in House of Representatives elections until the 1994 electoral reform, did not provide politicians with incentives to become involved in security policy.<sup>5</sup> When multiple candidates belonging to the same political party compete within the same MMD, this creates among them the motivation to engage in pork-barrel politics as a differentiation strategy. Because such candidates broadly share policies at the national level (e.g., security, economy, and social welfare), they were induced to bring particular benefits to their electoral districts, such as the building of roads, bridges and other infrastructure. As security policy is a universal policy affecting the citizenry as a whole, it lacked efficacy as a tool for peddling influence within an electoral district.

In such an institutional environment, the government and LDP posts related to defense and foreign policy were unpopular among LDP politicians during the 1955 System-era. Diet members with strong links to national security (the *kokubo zoku*) did exist, but they were largely former director-generals of the Japan Defense Agency (JDA), rather than a group of politicians who

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<sup>3</sup> Shibata Teruyoshi, *Reisengo Nihon no Boei Seisaku: Nichibei Domei Shinkano Kigen* [Japan's post-cold war defense policy: The origins of the strengthened Japan-U.S. alliance] (Hokkaido Daigaku Shuppan, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> Koide Teruaki, "Sengo no Nihon no Seigun Kankei: Bunkan Yui Seido wo Chushin ni" [Civil-military relations in postwar Japan: Focus on a privileged bureaucratic system], *Kokusai Seiji*, no. 154 (December 2008), pp. 79-154; Hikotani Takako, "The Paradox of Antimilitarism: Civil Military Relations in Post World War II Japan," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2014; Hirose Katsuya, *Kanryo to Gunjin: Bunmin Tosei no Genkai* [Bureaucrats and military men: The limits of civilian control] (Iwanami Shoten, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> Amy Catalinac, *Electoral Reform and National Security in Japan: From Pork to Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Margarita Estévez-Abe, Hikotani Takako, and Nagahisa Toshio, "Japan's New Executive Leadership: How Electoral Rules Make Japanese Security Policy," in *Japan and the World: Japan's Contemporary Geopolitical Challenges*, eds. Kohno Masaru and Frances Rosenbluth (New Haven: Council on East Asian Studies, Yale University, 2009), pp. 251-282; Nagahisa Toshio, *Gemu Riron no Seiji Keizaigaku: Senkyo Seido to Boei Seisaku* [The political economy of game theory: The election system and defense policy] (PHP Kenkyujo, 1995).

had built their careers in the defense-related field since the time they were junior lawmakers.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, as budget formulation by the government became a zero-sum game, the Diet members with interests in both defense and non-defense sectors often focused on acquiring budgetary resources for areas other than defense.<sup>7</sup>

Second, there were institutional constraints on prime ministers' authority. Because electoral fortunes under the MMD system tend to reflect the popularity of each candidate, it was not particularly difficult for him or her to be elected as an independent conservative candidate. Thus, the influence of the party leadership (party president), who had the ultimate authority to endorse candidates, was limited. In addition, the prime minister was consistently checked by factions within the LDP that were much more powerful than today. The cabinet system until the 1990s, which created stronger sectionalism, restricted the prime minister's power too. Based on the principle of appointed management (*buntan-kanri gensoku*), each minister possessed powerful authority for the affairs under his or her jurisdiction; the prime minister's authority on the affairs of each minister needed to be guided by unanimous cabinet decisions (*gogi sei*, or the collegial system). More importantly, until the revision of the Cabinet Act in 2001, it was even unclear whether the prime minister himself was able to propose policies via cabinet meetings, as there had been no legal justification for his doing so.<sup>8</sup>

Even prior to the political reforms of the 1990s, institutional adjustment aiming at more centralized decision making had been carried out. Typical examples of this include the establishment of the Councillors' Office on External Affairs and Security Affairs Office within the Cabinet Secretariat during Nakasone Yasuhiro's administration. However, these offices were set up in the context of crisis management, and the Cabinet Secretariat at this time had only limited authority. Thus, this reform did not result in these centralized offices taking a leadership role in security policy making.<sup>9</sup>

The political reforms in the 1990s brought about real changes in this situation. In terms of policy-making systems, electoral and administrative reforms were crucial. The single-member district (SMD) system that was introduced in House of Representatives elections eliminated intra-party competition; instead, inter-party competition became more intense. This means that acquiring the endorsement of one's party became more important for candidates, including experienced Diet members. The introduction of the SMD system strengthened the power of the party leadership, which possesses the significant authority to decide whom to endorse, enabling a more top-down type of decision making.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Inoguchi Takashi and Iwai Tomoaki, *Zokugiin no Kenkyu: Jiminto Seiken wo Gyuujiru Shuyakutachi* [A study of policy tribes: Major actors ruling the LDP government] (Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 1987), p. 119.

<sup>7</sup> Kent E. Calder, *Crisis and Compensation: Public Policy and Political Stability in Japan, 1949-1986* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 423.

<sup>8</sup> Sambe Natsuo, "Naikaku Sori Daijin no Ridashippu" [Leadership of prime ministers] in *Chuo Shocho Kaikaku: Hashimoto Gyokaku ga Mezashita Kono Kuni no Katachi* [Reforms of central government ministries: The shape of Japan aimed at by the Hashimoto reforms], eds. Tanaka Kazuaki and Okada Akira (Nihon Hyoronsha, 2000), p. 75.

<sup>9</sup> Shinoda Tomohito, *Koizumi Diplomacy: Japan's Kantei Approach to Foreign and Defense Affairs* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), pp. 35-36.

<sup>10</sup> Takenaka Harukata, *Shusho Shihai: Nihon Seiji no Henbo* [Prime ministerial rule: Transformation of Japanese politics] (Chuko Shinsho, 2006); Sasada Hironori, Fujimura Naofumi, and Machidori Satoshi, "Alternative Paths to Party Polarization: External Impacts of Intraparty Organization in Japan," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3 (2013), pp. 409-441.

Administrative reform enhanced the authority of the prime minister. In May 2000, the Cabinet Secretariat was positioned as “the highest-level and final coordinating body under the cabinet,” as the first step in efforts to reform the central bureaucracy.<sup>11</sup> The Cabinet Act revised in 2001 explicitly stipulates that the prime minister is able to propose policies in cabinet meetings, and formally enables the Cabinet Secretariat (which possessed only the authority of inter-agency coordination until 2001) to draft policies independently. In addition, the new post of Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary (a political appointment) was created as a position exercising overall control over comprehensive coordination of policy. Although the basic principles of appointed management and the collegial system of the cabinet were maintained, these new institutions were set out to create a system which would support the prime minister's leadership.

Koizumi Junichiro, who became the prime minister in 2001, demonstrated that the new system worked as intended. In terms of domestic policy, Koizumi dissolved the House of Representatives and called for a general election after the postal privatization bill was rejected in the House of Councillors in 2005, leading to the power of official party endorsement in elections becoming widely recognized. Takenaka Harukata dubs the new political environment after the reforms the “2001 System” characterized by the increased authority of the prime minister, and he argues that the 2005 election brought about the full establishment of this system.<sup>12</sup>

The existing literature also emphasizes the impact of the political reform in security policy. In response to the September 11 terrorist attacks and Iraq War, centralized power largely shaped the course of decision making. Consideration of Japan's contribution began under a task force within the Cabinet Secretariat immediately after the September 11 attacks, and a special measures law passed in the Diet in October, which provided a legal foundation for SDF deployment to the Indian Ocean. Notably, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the JDA, and the ruling LDP were not influential actors over the course of decision making; the Cabinet Secretariat was.<sup>13</sup> The decision to send the SDF to post-war Iraq for reconstruction missions was also formed via similar process. Shinoda Tomohito contends that the strengthened functions of the Cabinet Secretariat made it possible for Koizumi to exercise more powerful leadership.<sup>14</sup>

## (2) Operating the institutions: policy making after the reforms

Koizumi's style of politics and top-down policy making after his period in office are described as *kantei shudo* or the “prime minister-led approach.” Machidori Satoshi has defined “prime minister-led approach” as “a style in which the prime minister, with the assistance of his staff including political appointees, autonomously engages in government administration and policy making with

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<sup>11</sup> Government of Japan, “Seisaku Chosei Shisutemu no Unyo Shishin” [The guidelines for policy coordination system], Cabinet decision on May 30, 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Takenaka, *Shusho Shihai*. For a similar interpretation on the establishment timing of the new political system in Japan, see Kamikawa Ryunoshin, *Koizumi Kaikaku no Seijigaku: Koizumi Junichiro wa Honto ni Tsuyoi Shusho datta no ka* [The politics of the Koizumi reforms: Was Koizumi Junichiro truly a strong prime minister?] (Toyo Keizai Shimbun, 2010), pp. 312-313.

<sup>13</sup> Shinoda, *Kantei Diplomacy*.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

the cabinet and ruling party's leadership as his power base."<sup>15</sup>

Based upon this definition, this article focuses on the nexus of politics and institutions—policy discussions amid a given institutional context and the implications of the political process for institutions.<sup>16</sup> In other words, the issues in question in this article are how institutions are operated; what constraints were imposed by the operation of the institutions; and implications of such processes for policy making and the architecture of new institutions. These perspectives do not only help us to understand the actual state of policy-making processes with greater clarity, but also shed light on the role of institutions in security policy making after the political reforms. An approach focusing on a chain of command from the prime minister to the Cabinet Secretariat, as seen under Koizumi, is one type of policy process. However, different styles heavily involving the prime minister's personal advisors or cabinet members may be observable within the same system, as the institutions per se do not rigidly dictate political processes. All these approaches can be termed top-down in a broad sense, but differing policy processes may have different implications for policy outcomes and the subsequent institutional designs.

Process tracing throughout the period after the establishment of the new political environment serves a better understanding of the interplay of the institutions and policy-making processes. The set of institutional conditions for the “prime minister-led approach” has consistently existed since the 2005 House of Representatives election. However, it would be difficult to assume that all prime ministers since that point have been able to translate their wishes into reality. The prime minister-led approach has been the focus of attention under the Koizumi administration and the second Abe administration. However, looking back on Japanese politics since the political reforms, these administrations were exceptional in terms of their stability and leadership. Exclusively picking out these administrations from the timeline to discuss the typical policy-making pattern in the post-political reforms era runs the risk of overgeneralization from cherry-picked examples. Instead, this article carries out a diachronic analysis which includes the administrations that seldom attract much attention as examples of the prime minister-led approach model. The institutionally-induced centralization is important, but other causal paths in which policy making was impeded *despite* the same set of institutional conditions must be explored to assess institutional effects more accurately.<sup>17</sup>

With these perspectives in mind, the following sections examine the way that the “prime minister-led approach” developed in security affairs. This article looks at the period from the first Abe administration to the second Abe administration, and the Koizumi administration is out of scope of the analysis. This is because Koizumi's achievements in security affairs were concentrated between 2001 and 2003, and the new system engendered by the political reforms was most likely solidified after the House of Representatives election of 2005 as described above.

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<sup>15</sup> Machidori Satoshi, “Minshuto Seikenka ni Okeru Kantei Shudo: Yoto no Menkai Deta Kara Kangaeru” [Prime minister-led policymaking under the DPJ administrations: Data-based discussions of meetings of the party in power],” in *Seiken Kotai to Seito Seiji* [Changes of governments and party politics], ed. Iio Jun (Chuokoron Shinsha, 2013), p. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Sven Steinmo and Kathleen Thelen, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics,” in *Structuring Politics: Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Analysis*, eds. Sven Steinmo, Kathleen Thelen, and Frank Longstreth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 17.

<sup>17</sup> For a similar line of analysis on Japan's party politics, see Hamamoto Shinsuke, *Gendai Nihon no Seito Seiji: Senkyo Seido Kaikaku wa Nani wo Motasashita no ka* [Contemporary party politics in Japan: What changes has electoral reform brought about?] (Yuhikaku, 2018).

## 2. LDP administrations in the post-Koizumi period

### (1) Policy processes during the first Abe administration

Prime Minister Abe, who took office in September 2006, from the outset showed enthusiasm about the notion of strengthening the functions of the prime minister's office.<sup>18</sup> In November 2006, the Council on the Strengthening of the Functions of the Prime Minister's Office Regarding National Security was established, and discussions aimed at the establishment of the Japanese version of the NSC were pushed forward. Motivations cited for Abe in establishing the NSC lay in his experiences during the Koizumi administration. When Abe—serving as Chief Cabinet Secretary at the time—was responding to North Korea's ballistic missile launch in July 2006, he exchanged communications with U.S. National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley. During this process, Abe became aware of the need for establishing an organization equivalent to the U.S. NSC within the Prime Minister's Office, as well as creating a counterpart to the position of national security advisor.<sup>19</sup>

To create the NSC, Abe relied on the newly-established post of special advisor to the prime minister for national security affairs. To create the NSC, Koike Yuriko, who was appointed to this post, also served as acting chair of Abe's council. She called herself the “acting representative” of the prime minister, and held a meeting with U.S. National Security Advisor Hadley to discuss the idea of a Japanese NSC.<sup>20</sup> Immediately after the meeting, however, Chief Cabinet Secretary Shiozaki Yasuhisa told Hadley that “I am your true counterpart,” manifesting some confusion about authority.<sup>21</sup> Looking back on this later on, Abe states that the increased weight on the position of special advisor “did not work because politicians want to make their presence felt.”<sup>22</sup> As explained later, Abe managed to re-organize the chain of command during his second term.

The report submitted by the council in February 2007 noted that “a system for comprehensively and strategically proposing policies on wide-ranging diplomatic and security challenges has not been put in place,” and recommended creating the NSC and establishing the post of national security advisor to the prime minister as a permanent position, to strengthen the overall control functions of the Prime Minister's Office. The report indicated that the Security Council—the predecessor of Japan's NSC established in 1986—was ineffective as it was convened for only limited circumstances with too many participants, and expressed the belief that the NSC would serve as a strategic forum to provide basic guidance to ministries and agencies.<sup>23</sup>

The report cited three important areas to be discussed by the NSC: (1) Basic guidance on foreign and security policy, including the Basic Policy on National Defense (*kokubo no kihon*

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<sup>18</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Japan, “Dai 165 kai Kokkai ni okeru Abe Naikaku Sori Daijin Shoshin Hyomei Enzetsu [Policy speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 165th session of the Diet],” September 29, 2006, <https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/244428/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/abespeech/2006/09/29syosin.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 28, 2007.

<sup>20</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun* (evening edition), October 4, 2006.

<sup>21</sup> Shimizu Masato, *Shusho no Satesu: Posuto Koizumi Kenryoku no Tasogare* [The prime minister's failure: The decline of authority in the post-Koizumi era] (Nihon Keizai Shimbun Shuppansha, 2009), p. 137.

<sup>22</sup> Nakakita Koji, “Kantei Shudo: Kyoryoku de Antei Shita Ridashippu no Joken” [Prime minister-led policy making: Conditions for strong and stable leadership], in Asia Pacific Initiative, *Kensho Abe Seiken: Hoshu to Riarizumu no Seiji* [The critical review of the Abe administration: Politics of conservatism and realism] (Bunshun Shinsho, 2022), p. 120.

<sup>23</sup> Council on the Strengthening of the Functions of the Prime Minister's Office Regarding National Security, *Hokokusho* [Report] (February 27, 2007), p. 3.

*hoshin*) and the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG); (2) Important diplomatic and security affairs falling under the jurisdiction of multiple ministries and agencies; (3) Crisis situations relating to national security, including armed attacks against Japan. It added that “Stipulating more narrowly the key areas to be discussed at the NSC in advance is inappropriate, as this will invite further sclerosis and formulaic behaviors.”<sup>24</sup> The NSC secretariat was designed to comprise 10 to 20 dedicated bureaucrats, and it was made possible for the director-general of the secretariat to serve simultaneously as national security advisor to the prime minister. The report also recommended that two deputy secretary generals of the NSC serve simultaneously as assistant chief cabinet secretary (external affairs and security/emergency management). Taking these recommendations into account, the government submitted a bill for the establishment of the NSC to the Diet on April 6, 2007.

Abe also made an effort to relax the restriction on exercising the right to collective self-defense, which was not allowed under the government’s interpretation of Article 9, the Japanese Constitution. He secretly engaged with senior officials of the Cabinet Legislative Bureau (CLB) to confirm whether there was room for constitutional reinterpretation through a remark in the Diet; the head of the CLB at the time resisted, expressing the intention of resigning from his post if the government forced the reinterpretation of Article 9.<sup>25</sup>

Instead, Abe attempted to drive the discussion through the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, which mostly consisted of security experts. At the first session of the advisory panel in May 2007, Abe brought up four scenarios to be considered: (1) Defense of U.S. vessels on the high seas; (2) Interception of ballistic missiles that could be on their way to the United States; (3) Use of weapons in international peace operations; and (4) Logistic Support for the operations of other countries participating in the same peacekeeping operations.<sup>26</sup> A report of the panel submitted in June 2008 recommended that allowing the exercise of the right to collective self-defense and restrictions on becoming an integral part of another country’s use of force (*ittaiika*) be re-examined, to enable more effective responses to the above four scenarios.

## (2) Setbacks in policy making

As discussions on the NSC and collective self-defense made some progress, a major change was taking place in domestic politics. The LDP’s historic defeat in the House of Councillors election of July 2007 resulted in a “twisted Diet,” and Prime Minister Abe resigned in September of the same year. New Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo made clear in December 2007 his intention of abandoning the establishment of the NSC. Not only was it difficult for him to realize this process in the twisted Diet, but Prime Minister Fukuda himself showed little enthusiasm for the establishment of the NSC. Moreover, differing opinions were heard even within the LDP towards

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>25</sup> Yomiuri Shimbun Seijibu, *Shinku Kokkai: Fukuda “Hyoryu Seiken” no Shinso* [The hollow diet: The deep layer of Fukuda’s “drifting regime”], (Shinchosha, 2008), pp. 51-52; Asahi Shimbun Seijibu Shuzaihan, *Abe Seiken no Ura no Kao: Kobo, Shudanteki Jieiken* [The hidden face of the Abe administration: Documentary on the collective defense right battle] (Kodansha, 2015), p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> The Council on the Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, “Sori no Mondai Ishiki (Boto Hatsugen An)” [The prime minister’s awareness of issues (Draft opening remarks)], May 18, 2007, <https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/243518/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/anzenhosyou/dai1/siryou3.pdf>.



the creation of the NSC.<sup>27</sup>

The issue of collective self-defense also suffered setbacks. Upon receiving the Advisory panel's report in June 2008, Prime Minister Fukuda's lack of interest was clearly articulated in front of media reporters: "I have never discussed [constitutional reinterpretation]. The Constitution is the Constitution."<sup>28</sup> The recommendations of the Advisory panel were effectively shelved, and discussions made no progress during the Fukuda administration. Following this, although the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities (inaugurated under Prime Minister Aso Taro) recommended allowing the exercise of the right to collective self-defense as well, the LDP suffered a major defeat in the House of Representatives election only three weeks after the submission of the report, resulting in a DPJ administration taking power. Policy change in security affairs was minimal during the Fukuda and Aso administrations.

The LDP administrations of the post-Koizumi period were characterized by leadership deficiency and political turmoil. The greater weight being placed on the role of the special advisor to the prime minister brought about confusion in decision making. The strengthened authority of the prime minister can, paradoxically, lead to setbacks as a new leader is able to scrap the policy agenda that was promoted by his predecessor. The twisted Diet from July 2007 to the LDP's defeat in the 2008 Lower House election imposed immense political constraints, because the House of Councillors is almost as powerful as the House of Representatives in terms of enacting laws.<sup>29</sup> While the House of Representatives is able to override the House of Councillors, its doing so is politically costly due to the requirement of the support of two-thirds of the House of Representatives or the so-called "60-day rule."<sup>30</sup> Above all, public opposition is highly likely when the government choose to bypass the Upper House when this is ruled by opposition parties popular enough to win a majority of the seats. Although Fukuda utilized the two-thirds rule to overturn the House of Councillors' rejection of the law extending the SDF fueling operation in the Indian Ocean, his decision divided the LDP.<sup>31</sup>

### 3. The DPJ administrations

#### (1) Attempts to establish new systems: Setbacks in the National Policy Unit vision

The new DPJ administration led by Hatoyama Yukio was inaugurated in September 2009. The "five principles" set out in the DPJ's 2009 Manifesto included "Politician-led politics in which the ruling party takes responsibility," "Integration of policy making under the cabinet" and "The prime minister-led approach."<sup>32</sup> Positioning the previous political system as being "bureaucracy-dependent," the DPJ set out its own approach with the emphasis on the roles of politicians and the cabinet; however, the inclination for top-down decision making represented a continuation of

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<sup>27</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, December 25, 2007; Yanagisawa Kyoji, *Kensho Kantei no Iraku Senso: Moto Boei Kanryo ni yoru Hihan to Hansei* [The Japanese prime minister's office and the Iraq War: Critical reflection and introspection by a former defense official] (Iwanami Shoten, 2013), pp. 137-138.

<sup>28</sup> *Mainichi Shimbun*, August 21, 2008.

<sup>29</sup> Takenaka Harukata, "Evolution of Japanese Security Policy and the House of Councillors," *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, vol. 22, no. 2 (2021), pp. 96-115.

<sup>30</sup> If a bill that has been passed by the House of Representatives is not resolved in 60 days by the House of Councillors, the bill is abandoned.

<sup>31</sup> *Yomiuri Shimbun Seijibu*, *Shinku Kokkai*, p. 219 and pp. 304-306.

<sup>32</sup> Democratic Party of Japan, *Minshuto no Seiken Seisaku* [Manifesto of the DPJ], 2009.

the LDP administrations.

The DPJ proposed to set up the National Policy Unit (*kokka senryaku kyoku*, NPU) as a cornerstone of the new government. Although the NPU was expected to “create a national vision for a new era and formulate a framework for politician-led budget,”<sup>33</sup> the scope of jurisdiction other than budget formulation was contested among the key DPJ politicians. In particular, it was unclear how security affairs were to be handled within the DPJ government. Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio asserted at the Diet that the formulation of basic guidance for foreign policy would be included within the future mission of the NPU.<sup>34</sup> Yet, Minister for Foreign Affairs Okada Katsuya objected on the grounds that “these areas are the job of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Defense,” which brought from Hatoyama himself the response that he was “skeptical about how much point there is in creating the NPU at all then.”<sup>35</sup> DPJ politician Matsui Koji, an architect of the Hatoyama administration’s major policy proposals, states that “Some people might have had an image of the NPU being similar to the U.S. NSC in their mind,” noting that insufficient efforts were made to share the vision behind this unit.<sup>36</sup>

Since the establishment of the NPU required a revision of the law, the DPJ launched a forerunner branch, the National Policy Office (*kokka senryaku shitsu*). It was primarily involved in budget drafting for the government, with the DPJ seeking to elevate its status to “unit” afterward. But this idea failed due to the DPJ’s defeat in the 2010 House of Councillors election, which again created a twisted Diet; this time, the LDP regained control of the Upper House.

Following this, the role that the National Policy Office was expected to play changed again and again. In July 2010, Prime Minister Kan Naoto, with the “Policy Unit” of the U.K. government in mind, announced the intention of transitioning the office into an organization that would serve as a kind of “think tank” providing policy recommendations to the prime minister, rather than day-to-day policy coordination.<sup>37</sup> Two months later, however, it was reported that the government sought to strengthen the office as a body for comprehensive policy coordination (at the same time as offering policy recommendations) aligning with the assistant chief cabinet secretary’s office.<sup>38</sup> Under the Noda administration inaugurated in September 2011, the merger and abolition of various councils got underway, with the National Policy Office now expected to undertake the secretariat functions for the newly-established National Policy Council. Although several recommendations on security affairs were brought together at the National Policy Council, with the inauguration of the second Abe administration about six months later, the National Policy Council and National Policy Office were both abolished.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio’s Answer, Committee on Budget, House of Representatives, no. 2, November 2, 2009, <https://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/#/detail?minId=117305261X00220091102&spkNum=22&current=1>.

<sup>35</sup> *Minshuto Seiken to wa Nan Datta no ka: Kii Paason Tachi no Shogen* [The DPJ government: Testimonies of key persons], eds. Yamaguchi Jiro and Nakakita Koji (Iwanami Shoten, 2014), p. 68.

<sup>36</sup> Yakushiji Katsuyuki, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken* [Testimonies of the DPJ government] (Kodansha, 2012), Kindle edition, location No. 929.

<sup>37</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, July 15, 2010.

<sup>38</sup> *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, September 30, 2010.

(2) The failure of policy initiatives under Prime Minister Hatoyama

During the DPJ administration period, Hatoyama was the prime minister who demonstrated top-down policy initiatives most radically. The issue of the relocation of Futenma Air Station was the prime example of this.

On July 19, 2009, immediately before the dissolution of the House of Representatives, then-opposition leader Hatoyama set out his intention of relocating Futenma Air Station in Okinawa “at least outside of the prefecture.”<sup>39</sup> The rationale behind this statement was partly to reduce the burden on the local population, but he also desired to create a new security architecture in Asia leading to a more equal relationship between Japan and the United States. For Hatoyama’s part, the U.S. base issue and the establishment of a new security order both formed part of a broader vision amid the relative decline of the United States.<sup>40</sup>

The Hatoyama administration considered the Futenma issue via a variety of channels, yet relocation outside Okinawa made little progress. Minister of Defense Kitazawa Toshimi, upon being appointed, immediately indicated his intention of proceeding with the original 2006 plan in which the LDP government agreed with the United States on relocation to Henoko, Okinawa.<sup>41</sup> Minister for Foreign Affairs Okada Katsuya considered merging the air station with Kadena Air Base, and even expressed opposition to relocation outside Okinawa in October 2009.<sup>42</sup> The U.S. side, including U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates who visited Japan in October 2009, continued to urge the Japanese side to proceed with the original plan.

In late 2009, attention focused on whether the matter would be settled within that year or not. During his visit to Japan in November, U.S. President Barack Obama urged Hatoyama to come to a speedy decision, prompting Hatoyama to state “Trust me” in response.<sup>43</sup> During this period, Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano Hirofumi worked to bring about a conclusion within the year based on a revision of the 2006 plan, but Hatoyama was not convinced, objecting to setting a clear deadline.<sup>44</sup> Furthermore, the DPJ’s coalition partner the Social Democratic Party of Japan (SDP) was becoming concerned about an unfavorable decision—the return to the 2006 plan—within the year. SDP leader Fukushima Mizuho, who also served as a cabinet member, threatened to leave the coalition if the decision was made to relocate the base to Henoko, a statement that was responded by Hatoyama with the words “This must be taken seriously.”<sup>45</sup> It was confirmed in December that the conclusion was to be postponed, with the question of an alternative destination to Henoko to be discussed once again through three-party coalition talks.

The new stage of discussions centered on Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirano Hirofumi. Although the decision had been shelved to maintain the coalition, Hirano was the one who believed that the

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<sup>39</sup> Mainichi Shimbun Seijibu, *Ryukyu no Seijoki: “Futenma” wa Owaranai* [The stars and stripes in the Ryukyu Islands: The “Futenma” problem continues] (Kodansha, 2010), pp. 47-48.

<sup>40</sup> Hatoyama had voiced his vision of promoting diplomacy toward Asia to remove U.S. bases in Japan since the 1990s. See, for example, Hatoyama Yukio, “Minshuto: Watashi no Seiken Koso” [The DPJ: The vision for my administration], *Bungeishunju*, November 1996 issue, pp. 112-130.

<sup>41</sup> Mainichi Shimbun Seijibu, *Ryukyu no Seijoki*, p. 86.

<sup>42</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, October 23, 2009. Okada concluded that there was no alternative to the original plan (relocation to Henoko) sometime “from November to early December.” Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 3594.

<sup>43</sup> *Japan Times*, November 20, 2009.

<sup>44</sup> Mainichi Shimbun Seijibu, *Ryukyu no Seijoki*, pp. 129-130.

<sup>45</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, December 3, 2009.

matter would be settled based on the original plan of relocation to Henoko.<sup>46</sup> As 2010 approached, rumors about a wide variety of possible locations began to fly around. Locations such as Camp Schwab, Naval Base White Beach, Tokunoshima Island near Okinawa and other areas outside Japan were all reported and discussed, yet none of these options was realistic due to operational issues and opposition among local residents.

On May 4, Hatoyama announced that the plan to relocate the air station outside Okinawa would be scrapped, during his visit to the prefecture. On May 28, a government policy specifying Henoko as the relocation destination was approved by the cabinet.

### (3) Policy initiatives at the cabinet level

In the DPJ administrations, the top three political appointees in each ministry (*seimu san yaku*; the minister, senior vice-minister, and parliamentary secretary) were to be the key players to exert politicians leadership. The prevailing view of this approach is that it did more harm than good: the three highest ranks were eager to take an outstanding role in policy-making processes, and bureaucrats with expertise in the specifics of policies as well as coordination processes were marginalized.<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, some observers note that the involvement of the top three ranks varied depending on the ministry and the issues concerned, and that some aspects depended on the personal characters of individuals in charge of these posts.<sup>48</sup>

As far as security policy was concerned, the latter perspective is more important. Those who experienced service as minister for foreign affairs and minister of defense deny any notion that there was marginalization of bureaucrats from policy-making processes. Okada Katsuya, who served as minister for foreign affairs under the Hatoyama administration, recalls that the regular meetings between the top three ranks served as venues for administrative communications rather than policy making, stating that “I never considered the idea of making decisions when the vice minister or bureau director-generals of the ministry were not present.”<sup>49</sup> Kitazawa Toshimi, who served as minister of defense from the Hatoyama administration through the Kan administration, states that “My view is that it is better to trust the government officials and create an atmosphere where they can speak freely.” Kitazawa adds that the proactive involvement of the top three political appointees in ministerial discussions in which the upper-ranking bureaucrats and uniformed SDF personnel also took part, “helped to bring in the DPJ’s politician-led policy-making style in a tangible way.”<sup>50</sup> In the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense, there is little evidence that there was any intention of pursuing the politicians’ leadership in the sense of sidelining bureaucrats from policy-making processes.

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<sup>46</sup> Mainichi Shimbun Seijibu, *Ryukyu no Seijoki*, p. 156.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example, Shinoda Tomohito, “Japan’s Failed Experiment: The DPJ and Institutional Change for Political Leadership,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 52, no.5 (September/October 2012), pp. 799-821; Shimizu Masato, *Heisei Demokurashii Shi* [The history of Heisei democracy] (Chikuma Shobo, 2018), pp. 276-279; Machidori Satoshi, “Minshuto Seikenka ni Okeru Kantei Shudo” [The prime minister-led approach under the DPJ administrations], pp. 99-100.

<sup>48</sup> Shiozaki Akihisa, “Political Leadership: The Failure of the DPJ’s ‘Five Measures’” in *The Democratic Party of Japan in Power: Challenges and Failures*, eds. Funabashi Yoichi and Nakano Koichi (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 32-34.

<sup>49</sup> Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 3370. The “vice-minister” (*jimu jikan*) is the top bureaucrat of each ministry.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, location No. 4645-4660.

On the other hand, politicians' leadership was clearly observable in a somewhat different way, and two instances of this stand out. The first example is the formulation of the NDPG announced in 2010. When the NDPG underwent revision for the first time following the administrative reform (the 2004 NDPG), the central actor was the Cabinet Secretariat (the then-existing Security and Crisis Management Office) based on the discussions held among the JDA and a council of experts.<sup>51</sup> A fundamentally similar pattern was evident with the NDPG in 2010.

What is distinctive in the DPJ government is that discussions were carried out also in groups that were separate to the experts' council. At the cabinet level, the "four-ministers meetings" were held, comprising the Chief Cabinet Secretary, Minister of Defense, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Minister of Finance. Moreover, Chief Cabinet Secretary Sengoku Yoshito formed an unofficial "support team" comprising security experts outside the government; this team took part in the four-ministers meetings together with Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuyama Tetsuro, Nagashima Akihisa of the DPJ and senior officials of the Ministry of Defense and Ministry for Foreign Affairs.<sup>52</sup> The draft document for the NDPG was primarily written by the Cabinet Secretariat, but reportedly the "support team" was also involved in part.<sup>53</sup> Kitazawa describes this approach as "ground-breaking," saying that because the participation of ministers from the relevant ministries ensured that the discussion reflected the individual viewpoints of each ministry, and it was ideal from the perspective of civilian control.<sup>54</sup>

The second example is the relaxation of the constraints on arms exports. The transfer of defense equipment and technology from Japan had been restricted by the Three Principles of Arms Control of 1967 and the "unified government view on arms exports" of 1976. Despite these regulations, some exports were exempted from the restrictions on a case-by-case basis, such as heavy equipment used by the SDF in overseas disaster relief activities (transfer to a disaster-affected country after the operations) and Japan-U.S. joint development of arms technology. Exemptions were permitted for 18 cases of equipment export and technology licensing, via statements from the Chief Cabinet Secretary and with the memorandums of understanding among the relevant ministries and agencies.

The revision of arms export control policy began under the leadership of Minister of Defense Kitazawa. Kitazawa publicly alluded to the need to revise the Three Principles of Arms Control in January 2010, worrying that the accumulation of numerous individual exemptions "would gradually make the philosophy of the Three Principles of Arms Control meaningless without our

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<sup>51</sup> Hosoya Yuichi, "Boei Taiko Kaitei" [Revising the National Defense Program Guidelines], ed. Takenaka Harukata; Futatsu no Seiken Kotai: *Seisaku wa Kawatta no ka?* [Two changes of administrations: Did policies change?] (Keiso Shobo, 2017), p. 216. For first-hand observation, see Yanagisawa, *Kensho Kantei no Iraku Senso*, pp. 128-131.

<sup>52</sup> Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 5143-5155; Shinoda Tomohito, *Contemporary Japanese Politics: Institutional Changes and Power Shifts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 198; Hosoya, "Boei Taiko Kaitei," p. 228.

<sup>53</sup> Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 5150.

<sup>54</sup> Kitazawa Toshimi, *Nihon ni Jieitai ga Hitsuyo na Riyu* [Why Japan needs the SDF] (Kadokawa Shoten, 2012), pp. 183-185. Reportedly there was opposition to the involvement of the "support team" within the Ministry of Defense and the SDF. *Sankei Shimbun*, September 16, 2013; Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 5155.

noticing.”<sup>55</sup> Prime Minister Hatoyama had indicated his own view that the existing policies must be upheld by Japan as a peace-loving nation, but with the change to a new prime minister, the work of revising the principles got underway. Prime Minister Kan, upon hearing Kitazawa’s explanation for the relaxation of the Three Principles of Arms Control, declared himself satisfied by Kitazawa’s views.<sup>56</sup> The NDPG announced in 2010 specified the following:

“In contributing to peace and promoting cooperation in international community, there are increasing opportunities to conduct effective cooperation activities through measures such as the utilization of heavy machinery and other defense equipment carried to the site by the SDF and providing equipment to disaster-stricken countries. Moreover, it has become the mainstream among developed countries to improve the performance of defense equipment and to deal with rising costs of equipment by participating in international joint development and production projects. Japan will study measures to respond to such major changes.”<sup>57</sup>

Following this, a statement from the Chief Cabinet Secretary on “Guidelines for Overseas Transfer of Defense Equipment etc.” was announced by the Noda cabinet. Based on this statement, all cases which were connected with Japan’s contributions to peace and international cooperation, as well as all cases relating to international joint development and production of defense equipment for Japan’s security, were comprehensively exempted.<sup>58</sup>

Policy-making processes under the DPJ administrations showed some distinctive features from the LDP administrations. As the concept of establishing the NPU directly under the prime minister suggests, the DPJ’s model of leadership was consistent with the philosophy of the preceded political reforms. In the issue of the relocation of Futenma Air Station, however, the policy-making process strayed off-course as a result of the considerable influence wielded by Prime Minister Hatoyama. This can be seen as an example indicating the paradoxical results that could ensue from the increased leadership powers of the prime minister. The Cabinet Secretariat was the center of formulating the NDPG, but politicians had a high level of influence as well. Another distinctive feature was the fact that the Minister of Defense’s decision-making powers played a large role in the relaxation of arms export regulations.

#### **4. The second Abe administration**

##### **(1) Establishment of the NSC and NSS**

In December 2012, the LDP won a resounding victory in the House of Representatives election, and the second Abe administration was inaugurated. Abe, who had a keen interest in security

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<sup>55</sup> Kitazawa, *Nihon ni Jieitai ga Hitsuyo na Riyu*, pp. 185-186; *Asahi Shimbun* (evening edition), January 12, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> Yakushiji, *Shogen Minshuto Seiken*, Kindle edition, location No. 5211-5228.

<sup>57</sup> Government of Japan, “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY2011 and beyond,” approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on December 17, 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Government of Japan, “Boei Soubihin Nado no Kaigai Iten ni Kansuru Kijun ni tsuite no Naikaku Kanbochokan Danwa” [Statement by the Chief Cabinet Secretary on Guidelines for Overseas Transfer of Defense Equipment etc.], February 27, 2011. The Three Principles of Arms Control was replaced by the new principles under the Abe administration in 2014.

policy, set about making reality the establishment of the NSC and allowing Japan's exercise of the right to collective self-defense, matters which he had not been able to achieve in his first tenure. As a part of these processes, policy formation was carried out through panels of experts and advisory panels, as in the first Abe administration.

At the press conference on the day of his inauguration, Abe explicitly mentioned the establishment of the NSC, and the Advisory Council on the Establishment of a National Security Council was set up in February 2013.<sup>59</sup> The January 2013 attack on Algeria's natural gas plant by extremists, resulting in the hostage incident where seven Japanese individuals lost their lives, accelerated the plan to establish the NSC.<sup>60</sup>

A total of six sessions of the Advisory Council were held, the discussions of which led to the government's submission of the Bill for the Establishment of the NSC to the Diet. The bill was enacted on November 27, and the NSC established on December 4. The NSC had three types of meeting setup (nine-minister meetings, four-minister meetings and emergency response minister meetings); among these, the four-minister meetings were the core of the Japanese NSC concept as a mechanism to enable responsive discussions in accordance with the situation.<sup>61</sup>

On January 7, 2014, the NSS was established as a secretariat organization. Several key differences should be noted in comparison with the original NSC concept of the first Abe administration. Under the 2007 NSC concept, the secretariat had three distinctive features: (1) It was to be established separately from the Cabinet Secretariat; (2) Nevertheless, the chief cabinet secretary was supposed to oversee secretariat work for the meetings to create a linkage with the NSC secretariat and the Cabinet Secretariat; (3) Its role was exclusively that of secretarial functions for the meetings. This proposal did not allow the powerful authority of the Cabinet Secretariat to be utilized, creating concerns that the secretariat "will exist purely to run meeting sessions."<sup>62</sup>

The NSS was designed to be a much more powerful organization than the secretariat in the old NSC bill thanks to the following architecture. First, the NSS was established within the Cabinet Secretariat. As can be seen in government documentation that the NSS was to "specialize in the planning and overall coordination of fundamental policies and key matters relating to diplomacy and defense policy, using the comprehensive coordination authority of the Cabinet Secretariat," the NSS was assumed from the start to be an organization lying within the strengthened Cabinet Secretariat after the administrative reform.<sup>63</sup> Second, the secretary general of the NSS was to assist

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<sup>59</sup> Prime Minister's Office of Japan, "Abe Naikaku Sori Daijin Shunin Kisha Kaiken" [Inaugural press conference by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo], December 26, 2012, [https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8833367/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2012/1226kaiken.html](https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8833367/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2012/1226kaiken.html).

<sup>60</sup> Chijiwa Yasuaki, *Kawariyuku Naikaku Anzen Hoshō Kiko: Nihonban NSC Seiritsu e no Michi* [Changing cabinet security institutions: The road to the Japanese national security council] (Hara Shobo, 2015), p. 205.

<sup>61</sup> For how the Japanese government has utilized the NSC since its establishment, see PHP Soken Kokka Anzen Hoshō Kaigi Kenshō Project, *Kokka Anzen Hoshō Kaigi: Hyōka to Teigen* [The NSC: Evaluation and recommendations] (PHP Soken, 2015); Oguma Shinya, "Roshia ni yoru Ukuraina Shinryaku to Nihon no Shoki Taio no Kettei Katei: NSC ni Chumoku Shite" [Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the decision-making processes of Japan's initial response: Focus on the NSC], *NIDS Commentary*, no. 210 (March 17, 2022).

<sup>62</sup> Kaneko Masafumi, "Iyoiyo Shido Suru Nihonban NSC" [Japan's NSC begins at last], PHP Soken, December 3, 2013, <https://thinktank.php.co.jp/kaeruchikara/939/?Page=1>.

<sup>63</sup> Cabinet Secretariat, "Kokka Anzen Hoshō Kaigi ni tsuite (Setsumeji Shiryo)" [About the NSC (Briefing material)], Distributed material at 6th Meeting of Experts Concerning NSC Establishment, May 28, 2013, [https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8378748/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/ka\\_yusiki/dai6/siryou1.pdf](https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8378748/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/ka_yusiki/dai6/siryou1.pdf); Chijiwa, *Kawariyuku Naikaku Anzen Hoshō Kiko*, pp. 222-223.

the chief cabinet secretary and assistant chief cabinet secretary, while two assistant deputy chief cabinet secretaries were concurrently assigned to the deputy secretary general of the NSS. Third, the scope of jurisdiction of the NSS was expanded compared with that of the secretariat within the old NSC bill. The NSS was to be responsible for basic policy making for diplomacy and defense, and consolidation and organization of information provided by relevant government agencies, as well as secretariat work for the NSC.

This organizational design helped to push forward the centralization of security policy making. Although the old Security Crisis Management Office in the Cabinet Secretariat was involved in the formulation of the NDPG up until the establishment of the NSS, the main focus was on crisis response—chiefly natural disaster-related—and only a few officers were involved in policy formulation.<sup>64</sup> Conversely, the NSS placed a heavy emphasis on a policy-making function as well as inter-agency coordination of policy, and the operational functions for emergency response were fundamentally cleaved off from the organization. The birth of the NSS brought about a system that was able to harness the powerful authority of the Cabinet Secretariat in the domain of security policy.

At the same time as the NSC and NSS were being set up, the position of special advisor to the prime minister on security affairs was created as a permanent post. In contrast to the confusion concerning the authority seen during the first Abe administration, a cabinet decision in May 2014 clarified that the special advisors did not represent any government organization, and was not to give orders to state ministers including the deputy chief cabinet secretary, parliamentary vice-ministers, or to any other staff, or receive orders from any of these officials.<sup>65</sup> This cabinet decision explicitly categorized the post of special advisor as an independent staff directly under the prime minister, while the NSS secretary general was categorized as the post belonging to the Cabinet Secretariat's chain of command.

In parallel, the processes of formulating new NDPG and Japan's first ever national security strategy were also making progress. The venue for discussions on both of these matters was the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities. This council held seven sessions between September and December 2013, but unlike the similar councils that existed before, these sessions did not produce a report. Based on this, it is said that the prime ministers councils for security affairs “changed from a mechanism which set out the orientation of discussions while the Cabinet Secretariat carried out coordination with the Ministry of Defense in the process of creating reports, to a venue for providing direct input to the discussion taking place within the government headed by ministerial meetings.”<sup>66</sup> The new NDPG and Japan's first National Security Strategy were approved by the cabinet following the NSC decision on December 17.

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<sup>64</sup> Kaneko Masafumi, “Boei Taiko wo Do Minaosu Ka” [How the NDPG should be revised], PHP Soken, December 10, 2008, [https://thinktank.php.co.jp/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/policy\\_v2\\_n11.pdf](https://thinktank.php.co.jp/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/policy_v2_n11.pdf), p. 11; Kanehara Nobukatsu, *Anzen Hosho Senryaku* [Security strategy] (Nihon Keizai Shimbun Shuppan, 2021), p. 44.

<sup>65</sup> Government of Japan, “Naikaku Sori Daijin Hosakan Oyobi Daijin Hosakan no Shokumu Suiko ni Kakaru Kihan” [Principles for execution of duties by special advisors to the prime minister and ministerial advisors], Cabinet decision on May 27, 2014.

<sup>66</sup> PHP Soken, *Kokka Anzen Hosho Kaigi*, p. 50. See also Igata Akira, “‘Kokka Anzen Hosho Senryaku’ no Sakusei Katei: Dai 2 Ji Abe Seiken Ka no 3 tsu no Kondankai” [The drafting process of the National Security Strategy: Three advisory panels of the second Abe cabinet], *Kokusai Seiji*, vol. 42, no. 4 (2015), pp. 1-15. The council sessions held for the 2018 revision of the NDPG also did not produce a report.



## (2) Collective self-defense and Legislation for Peace and Security Debates

The significance of the NSS within decision-making processes became immediately evident. Among the relevant examples, a major topic of discussion during 2014 was allowing the exercise of the right to collective self-defense. Quickly after coming to office in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe had touched upon the Advisory Panel on Security, stating “I would like to talk with the experts in the panel originally involved to re-examine the issue [of collective self-defense].”<sup>67</sup> Stating in January 2013 that “reconsidering the constitutional interpretation regarding the exercise of the right to collective self-defense is one of the most important policies of the Abe administration,” Abe re-established the Advisory Panel on Security in February of that year.<sup>68</sup> The officer to be responsible for the panel’s secretariat was Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Kanehara Nobukatsu, who later served as deputy secretary general of the NSS along with this role. The report of the Advisory Panel on Security (submitted in May 2014) is believed to have been led by the Advisory Panel’s Deputy Chair Kitaoka Shinichi (a former University of Tokyo professor), Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretaries and NSS Deputy Secretary Generals Kanehara Nobukatsu and Takamizawa Nobushige; the NSS also directed drafting the text of the cabinet decision allowing the exercise of the right to collective self-defense.<sup>69</sup>

The CLB, which had resisted the collective self-defense reform during the first Abe administration, now approved constitutional reinterpretation under Abe. In August 2013, the administration appointed Komatsu Ichiro (who was serving as Japanese ambassador to France) as Director-General of the CLB—deviation from the standard conventions of CLB personnel appointments. Komatsu had served as director-general of the International Legal Affairs Bureau of MOFA during the first Abe administration, and had been involved in his advisory panel.<sup>70</sup> Following his appointment, Director-General Komatsu confirmed with Deputy Director-General Yokobatake Yusuke that authorization of such a right was to be limited in scope.<sup>71</sup> With Prime Minister Abe also stating no disagreement with the notion of “limited” authorization, the CLB and prime minister were now aligned.<sup>72</sup> This did not change even after Yokobatake took over Komatsu’s post in May 2014.

For a while, differing opinions on the process were heard within the LDP. When Prime Minister Abe said the Diet debate would be preceded by a cabinet decision, a series of opinions were voiced, stressing the importance of prior discussion within the party. However, thanks in part to overtures by LDP Vice-President Komura Masahiko, any dissent within the party had disappeared by the time the LDP set up its dedicated headquarters for the new security legislation on March 31, 2014.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, “Abe Naikaku Sori Daijin Shunin Kisha Kaiken.”

<sup>68</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, January 14, 2013.

<sup>69</sup> *Asahi Shimbun Seijibu Shizaihan*, *Abe Seiken no Ura no Kao*, p. 137, p. 188.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36; *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, October 1, 2022.

<sup>71</sup> *Asahi Shimbun Seijibu Shizaihan*, *Abe Seiken no Ura no Kao*, pp. 53-55.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

Negotiations between the LDP and Komeito were much more protracted.<sup>74</sup> Whereas most of the LDP Diet members were enthusiastic about collective self-defense, Komeito—the self-proclaimed “party of peace”—exhibited a cautious stance on the issue. The stance emphasized by Komura Masahiko, who was in charge of negotiations on the LDP side, was that the exercise of the right to collective self-defense could be allowed if this was necessary for the peace and security of the state. This was based on the Supreme Court’s Sunagawa judgment of 1959, which stated that “It is only natural for our country, in the exercise of powers inherent in a state, to maintain peace and security, to take whatever measures may be necessary for self-defense, and to preserve its very existence.” However, with Kitagawa Kazuo and other Komeito members stating that the Sunagawa judgment referred only to the issue of individual self-defense, a stalemate ensued.<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, a convergence was reached to acknowledge that the Sunagawa judgment did not rule out the right to collective self-defense.

As such discussions got underway, the report of the Advisory Panel on Security was submitted on May 15, 2014. The report mentioned the “Ashida Amendment” theory, the unorthodox constitutional logic that supports virtually unrestricted possession of capabilities for self-defense and participation in collective security.<sup>76</sup> However, Prime Minister Abe explicitly stated that the government would not adopt the “Ashida Amendment” theory, and made it clear that the exercise of the right to collective self-defense would be allowed only limitedly.<sup>77</sup> From this point, the question of where to draw the line in terms of the scope covered by “limited” became salient. Kitagawa, who was dealing with the negotiations on the Komeito side, was not convinced by a condition for collective self-defense written in the panel’s report: a provision that the right may be exercised “when a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan comes under an armed attack and if such a situation could pose a serious impact for the security of Japan” was broad enough to make him call for a more definite brake (*hadome*) on the use of force.<sup>78</sup>

The debate on brakes revolved around the matter of how to revise the existing brakes, the three conditions for the use of force.<sup>79</sup> The proposal initially set out by the secretariat in the ruling parties’ discussions stipulated that the right to collective self-defense may be exercised “in the event that an armed attack takes place against another country, and as a result the existence of Japan

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<sup>74</sup> For seminal analyses on the LDP-Komeito coalition, see Nakakita Koji, *Jiko Seiken to wa Nani ka: Renritsu ni Miru Tsuyosa no Shotai* [The LDP-Komeito administration: The true strength of the coalition] (Chikuma Shinsho, 2019); Adam P. Liff and Maeda Ko, “Electoral Incentives, Policy Compromise, and Coalition Durability: Japan’s LDP-Komeito Government in a Mixed Electoral System,” *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, vol. 20, no. 1 (2019), pp. 53-73.

<sup>75</sup> Asahi Shimbun Seijibu Shizaihan, *Abe Seiken no Ura no Kao*, pp. 109-110, p. 115; *Sankei Shimbun*, April 5, 2014.

<sup>76</sup> Council on the Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, *Anzen Hoshō no Hoteki Kiban no Saikochiku ni kansuru Kondankai* [Report of the Council on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security], May 15, 2014.

<sup>77</sup> Prime Minister’s Office of Japan, “Abe Naikaku Sori Daijin Kisha Kaiken” [Press conference by Prime Minister Abe], May 15, 2014, [https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8833367/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96\\_abe/statement/2014/0515kaiken.html](https://warp.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/8833367/www.kantei.go.jp/jp/96_abe/statement/2014/0515kaiken.html).

<sup>78</sup> Komeito, “Shudanteki Jieiken Rongi no Hokosei” [Orientation on the debate on collective self-defense], May 17, 2014, [https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140517\\_13991](https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140517_13991).

<sup>79</sup> The three conditions for the use of force comprise: (1) the existence of imminent, unlawful infringement; (2) unavailability of self-defense measures; and (3) the measures for self-defense must be limited to the minimum necessary. The LDP-Komeito debate on the three conditions was mainly over the first provision: the nature of infringement that may trigger collective self-defense responses.

could be threatened in terms of its protection of the lives and rights of its citizens,” but Kitagawa sought to narrow the scope of this provision even more.<sup>80</sup> A reference point that both the LDP and Komeito agreed on was the Japanese government's official statement on the constitutionality of the SDF in 1972. It states that measures for self-defense “are permissible only as unavoidable measures for dealing with imminent, unjustifiable situations where citizens' rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness are fundamentally overturned by an armed attack by a foreign power, thereby safeguarding these rights of the people.” This text was then amended to the following text to transform it into a draft condition for collective self-defense: “when an armed attack against a foreign country and as a result threatens Japan's survival and as a result could fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.”<sup>81</sup>

The draft of the three new conditions was presented to the Ruling Parties Committee on Security Legislation on June 13. Following discussions within Komeito, the draft was further revised and revealed in the committee on June 24 as follows: “when an armed attack against a foreign country *that is in a close relationship with Japan* occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses *a clear danger* to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” (emphasis added).<sup>82</sup> The LDP-Komeito coalition finally agreed on this wording, and a cabinet decision was made on the new constitutional interpretation with the revised three conditions on July 1.

After the cabinet decision, the government focused on the new security legislation, a policy package including SDF Law revisions reflecting the new constitutional interpretation. The drafting of the bill was led by a NSS team headed by Deputy Director-Generals Kanehara Nobukatsu and Takamizawa Nobushige.<sup>83</sup> Intensive discussions were held once more between the LDP and Komeito during the process of passing the cabinet resolution for the draft bill. A particular focus of attention was the overseas activities of the SDF, with Komeito stressing legitimacy under international law, the understanding of the public and approval of the Diet, and ensuring the safety of SDF members.<sup>84</sup> The ruling parties agreed on the orientation of the legislation on March 2015, and in May a cabinet decision was made on the legislation. A Special Committee for Legislation for Peace and Security for Japan and the International Community was established in both houses of the Diet to deliberate the bill. Following the passing of the bill by the House of Representatives in July, the bill was passed and enacted by the plenary session of the House of Councillors on September 19.

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<sup>80</sup> Asahi Shimbun Seijibu Shizaihan, *Abe Seiken no Ura no Kao*, pp. 162-163.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 170-172; Komeito, “To Godo Kaigi Komura Shian wo Rongi” [Komeito joint meeting discussions on the Komura proposal], June 20, 2014, [https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140620\\_14280](https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140620_14280).

<sup>82</sup> Komeito, “To Godo Kaigi Komura Shian wo Rongi”; Komeito, “Zacho Shian Buryoku Koshi no Yoken wo Genkakuka” [Chairman's draft proposal tightens conditions for the use of force], June 25, 2014, [https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140625\\_14310](https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20140625_14310). In addition to this provision, amendments were made to the second of the three conditions and text following the third condition as well.

<sup>83</sup> *Sankei Shimbun*, July 3, 2014.

<sup>84</sup> Komeito, “Jieitai Kaigai Haken e San Gensoku” [Three principles for dispatching the SDF], March 21, 2015, [https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20150321\\_16533](https://www.komei.or.jp/news/detail/20150321_16533).

## Conclusion

The institutional reforms in Japan significantly strengthened prime ministerial leadership. Prime ministers after the reforms attempted not just to utilize the authority but to centralize the power even more through making new institutions. Amid this political landscape, the word *kantei shudo*, or “prime minister-led approach,” has been selectively employed—to analytically capture the administration’s stance, to criticize an excessively assertive prime minister, and sometimes as a slogan appealing to leadership. The persistence of these circumstances makes it all the more important to review policy-making processes from a relatively long-term perspective and reassess the true situation. This paper has therefore aimed to set out the reality of the “prime minister-led approach” in the domain of security policy.

Prime Minister Abe, who assumed office in 2006, tackled the establishment of the NSC and collective self-defense issues. However, defeat in the House of Councillors election led to his resigning without having achieved his goals. As Prime Ministers Fukuda and Aso who faced a twisted Diet, Abe’s tasks were left undone. The DPJ government did not succeed in strengthening leadership with the NPU, but strong involvement of the prime minister and cabinet can be observed in the Futenma relocation issue, the formulation of the NDPG, and the relaxation of arms export regulations. However, it must be noted that the involvement of politicians increased through different channels. The leadership of the prime minister himself was powerful in the Futenma issue, while in the cases of the NDPG and the revision of the arms export rules, the influence of cabinet members were significant. Moreover, the Futenma relocation issue underscores a policy failure resulting from the prime minister’s strong initiative without adequate coordination.

Having returned to power in 2012, Abe achieved milestones such as the establishment of the NSC and NSS, constitutional reinterpretation on the right to collective self-defense, and the passage of Legislation for Peace and Security. In particular, the establishment of the NSS transformed policy-making processes by making them more centralized. It is true that the Cabinet Secretariat was partially involved in security policy even before Abe’s reform. However, the NSS began to show a greater presence in terms of scale and authority, and played a powerful role as secretariat in the processes for allowing the exercise of the right to collective self-defense and the Legislation for Peace and Security.

The politics of security policy in the post-Koizumi period offers two important insights. First, both the entrenchment of the prime minister-led approach of policy making and constraining factors on the authority of the prime minister are observable. Some prime ministers faced difficulties in exerting leadership despite the political reforms, suggesting that the systemic power base built on the altered institutions does not necessarily facilitate the realization of policies. As the leeway for the prime minister to make decisions autonomously grew, situations emerged in which policies left unaccomplished by the previous administration were not handed on to the next (as seen in the transition from Abe to Fukuda) and policy strayed off-course such as the Futenma relocation issue. In addition, systems which saw no change throughout the period of institutional reforms also had impact. Japan’s political reforms failed to reach the functions of the House of Councillors, and the challenges posed by the twisted Diet are serious enough to create a deadlock situation. Moreover, as seen in the cases during the second Abe administration, coalition partners also may become closely involved in policy formation led by the prime minister.

Second, different actors exert influences on the policy formation process for different

administrations. During the period analyzed in this article, the top-down policy making was treated as the ideal by Japan's governance system reforms. There was a broad consensus that the Kantei should be equipped with the greater authority, and this is why both the LDP and DPJ aimed at the further centralization through the NSC and NPU. Meanwhile, in reality a number of different patterns are evident in different situations, including a heavy emphasis on the role of special advisor to the prime minister during the first Abe administration and the leadership by the chief cabinet secretary and defense minister during the DPJ administrations. This article has discussed the role of the staff under the prime minister's supervision and cabinet ministers, drawing on Machidori's definition of *kantei shudo*; but the initiative on the political side was demonstrated through a variety of routes, and the actors supporting the prime minister-led approach did not have a single fixed role.

That said, the Kantei have entered a new era thanks to Abe's reform. The establishment of the NSC and NSS signifies the further institutionalization of the Kantei-led policy making, and it is likely that the processes will become fixed to a certain extent going forward. Now that the NSS has been placed at the top of the policy process line in the Cabinet Secretariat unlike Special Advisor to the Prime Minister in an independent staff position, it is likely that the NSS will be deeply involved in processes which require resources, such as planning and comprehensive coordination.

Furthermore, this article offers an important implication on the role of the bureaucracy for the prime minister's leadership. In Japan, *kanryo shudo* (bureaucrat-led approach) and *kantei shudo* (the prime minister-led approach) are frequently used as antonyms, but this is somewhat misleading. When bureaucratic functions are strengthened with the aim of achieving centralization of authority, the bureaucracy and the prime ministerial power increase in tandem. Regardless of how far the authority of the prime minister is strengthened, bureaucrats with the detailed knowledge and coordination skills are indispensable.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, the rise of the Cabinet Secretariat and the NSS in it, which deals with tasks in the positions closer to the prime minister than other ministries and agencies, means that the prime minister's ability to push forward efforts to realize his desired policies are boosted.

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<sup>85</sup> See also Shinoda, "Japan's Failed Experiment", p. 821.

