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## The Philosophy of the Japanese Leader

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# Prime Minister Nakasone: Sengo no Sokessan



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Just prior to the Japanese elections of July 6, several articles appeared in the U.S. press (the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*) claiming that the elections did not command a great deal of attention among the electorate and were being contested on the level of local rather than leading national and international issues. When the well-informed Japanese voters (Japanese daily newspapers average 10 times the number of readers of their U.S. equivalents) turned out in record numbers and gave an unprecedented landslide victory to the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and to Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, who had staked his political reputation on defining a new and enlarged role for Japan in world politics, the same U.S. press responded with stunned silence.

Nakasone is no favorite of the U.S. Eastern Establishment, and first trying to minimize the significance of the dual elections and then being mum about the outcome may have appeared the better part of wisdom to the gentlemen (and lady) of the *Times* and *Post*.

The Nakasone elections in fact may well have been the most important of post-World War II Japanese elections. Nakasone has summarized his political philosophy as *Sengo no Sokessan*—"postwar overhaul." On July 6, Japanese voters overwhelmingly endorsed the concept and expressed their confidence in the prime minister's ability to carry out the implied reorientation of the nation's purpose and policies.

As the Japanese economy has grown to become the world's second largest (behind the United States and overtaking the Soviet Union), *Sengo no Sokessan* means first of all redressing the image of Japan as an *economic* giant but a *political* dwarf. Thus, the Japanese foreign ministry's 1986 *Diplomatic Bluebook* (published July 15, 1986) is subtitled "Contributing actively to the international community and promoting further internationalization." Japan is said to need "a second major opening to the outside world" (the first came in the late 19th century after the Meiji restoration). In particular, since Japan is "now on its way to becoming the world's second-largest economy and one of the principal creditor nations," the *Bluebook* points out the importance of "Japan's

role and responsibilities for keeping the international economic system functioning smoothly."

However, *Sengo no Sokessan* is not limited to or defined by the drive for a greater role in international affairs. It encompasses reassessment and, if need be, revision of all postwar values and institutions, ranging from the educational system to international treaty arrangements and the 1946 Constitution imposed by the American occupation authorities.

There exists a Nakasone political autobiography—*My Life in Politics*—completed in May 1982 not long before he became prime minister. We will quote from it extensively, both to avoid misrepresentation and to preface our assessment of what to expect from Japan during Nakasone's tenure in office.

### Nakasone and MacArthur

"The time was autumn 1945. I had just returned home after fighting in the war as an Imperial Japanese Navy officer. The cities of Japan were in ashes. The economy had collapsed. . . . I felt humiliated that Japan had been defeated and forced into unconditional surrender. The many accomplishments achieved over the two-thirds of a century of modernization and industrialization following the opening of Japan in the Meiji Restoration had been reduced to dust."

In 1947, "I decided to run for a seat in the House of Representatives even though I was very young and had no political support. I traveled about the towns and villages of Gumma Prefecture, giving speeches, going all out to appeal to the young people of the prefecture. . . . I also extended the challenge of a public debate to those Communist Party leaders who were seeking to drag Japan down a disastrous, mistaken road.

"This public debate was very well received, and greatly increased my support. The Communists came with their red flags held high. I went bearing the Japanese flag, the display of which the Occupation authorities had prohibited. . . .

"In April 1947, I won my first election to the House of

Representatives. I was 28 years old, the youngest member of the Diet.

"I was convinced that if Japan was to survive as a member of the international community, it was important that our national pride be preserved and the nation's honor restored. A people who could neither love their own country nor have pride in themselves would not be able to respect other peoples, nor be respected by them. I was convinced that a people that had lost its pride could not fulfill its role as an honored member of international society. This remains my firm belief today. . . .

"In 1951 . . . I addressed a 7,000-word petition to General MacArthur. In it I offered my personal thanks for the successful occupation policies of the preceding five years. But I also pointed out various problems with them. I frankly discussed twenty-one issues of concern, including Japan's national security. . . .

"I next met with U.S. special envoy John Foster Dulles, who was in Japan. . . . I made a special point of asking that Japan be given complete freedom to conduct scientific studies, including the right to study the peaceful use of nuclear energy. . . .

"According to a Japanese reporter who met with Dr. [Justin] Williams [chief of the Parliamentary and Political Division in the Government section of the Southern Pacific Command], General MacArthur read the document with a growing look of displeasure on his face, until he finally folded it up and flung it into the wastebasket. But, so the story goes, the document was too thick, and bounced back out of the rubbish onto the floor. . . .

"I did not disagree with the basic policy of cooperation with the Western world, especially the United States. Nonetheless, I was convinced that complete independence would only come when Japan was capable of administering and defending itself and of contributing in some measure to the security and well-being of other states. For this reason, I called for an immediate revision of the Constitution following independence, and for the establishment of an independent defense system under total civilian control. Even today, I think my proposal was eminently reasonable. However, it led many Americans to regard me as a dangerous individual, steeped in rabid nationalism. . . .

"The peace treaty was certainly fair and magnanimous. But the [U.S.-Japan] security treaty was not. . . . As I saw it at the time, this Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was altogether too one-sided. We relinquished jurisdiction over members of the U.S. Forces stationed in Japan; we permitted U.S. Forces to act against domestic unrest. The treaty lacked an expiration date. The agreement might have been better termed a treaty of protection. . . .

"A people that have become used to the protection of another country soon lose the will to defend themselves. They degenerate into weak and selfish materialists who put the pursuit of economic prosperity above all else. This was the

outcome I most feared when the security treaty was signed. . . .

"Ever since the events I described here, I have made it one of my political goals to transcend the so-called 'San Francisco system' and build a new structure of international cooperation. I have sought to see that Japan plays a responsible role in this new age worthy of the trust of the world. . . ."

Nakasone was also determined to clear the way for the peaceful development of nuclear energy in Japan. "After the Occupation, some Japanese researchers favored research into nuclear power. However, they encountered fierce opposition from leftist academics and journalists, who manipulated the emotional revulsion produced by the tragedy of Nagasaki and Hiroshima to serve the needs of leftist political propaganda. During my study tour in the U.S., I saw just how much progress was being made in developing non-military applications for nuclear power. . . . If we did not begin such work in Japan as quickly as possible, our country soon would be left behind by the coming energy revolution.

"For a country as poor in natural resources and energy as Japan is, the creation of new wealth through scientific and technological progress is essential for national survival. . . .

"In March 1954, I succeeded in persuading the cabinet to earmark 230 million yen for a basic study on the construction of nuclear experimental plants, in exchange for helping get its budget proposal through the Diet. . . . In June 1959 I was appointed Minister of State for Science and Technology and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission in the cabinet of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi. I was 41, and it was my first cabinet appointment. . . .

"I know that there has been pernicious demagoguery in some quarters to the effect that I am an advocate of nuclear armament. These false rumors are based on my long support for the establishment of an autonomous defense capability linked with the United States . . . and my admiration for the political accomplishments of French President Charles de Gaulle in overcoming the Fourth Republic to achieve the rebirth of France. . . ."

"For some people, my desire to see the Self-Defense Force strengthened, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty revised along more equal lines, U.S. forces withdrawn from Japan and a new relationship forged between the two countries has marked me an undesirable nationalist. Yet in the final analysis, what I stand for represents nothing more than the natural desire of an independent state to create an appropriate defense arrangement based on an equal partnership of mutual interdependence with its major ally. . . .

"I would still like to see a new constitution of our own making. But I would not want to rip Japanese society apart over this question. I would like to see a constitution with which all Japanese are in accord. This is my ultimate purpose: A constitution embodying the lofty ideals inherent to the Japanese people.

"If Lincoln's words 'Government by the people' have

any truth, a constitution for the Japanese should be made by the Japanese."

In foreign policy, Nakasone stated his opposition to the Yalta arrangements of 1945. "I reaffirmed my position that Japan would not acknowledge the Yalta Agreement, since it was not a signatory state. It served neither Japan's interests nor the interests of the free world. . . . I pointed to the significance of restoring diplomatic relations between Japan and the Soviet Union. . . . I also called for the rapid return of the four northern islands—Hamomai, Shikotan, Kunashiri and Etorofu—under illegal Soviet occupation since the end of the war. . . ."

In 1970, Nakasone was named head of the Defense Agency in the Sato cabinet. In his first public statement as Defense Agency director general, he said:

"Japan will defend itself by itself. This is our foremost and fundamental principle. When we cannot do everything by ourselves we will join with others. In the past we have often given the mistaken impression that Japan's defense plans exist only as a part of American strategy in the Far East. I believe we must dispel this misunderstanding. We must strive to establish our own basic policy on defense."

In 1972, Nakasone was appointed Minister of International Trade and Industry and Minister of State for the Science and Technology Agency, in the new cabinet of Kakuei Tanaka. As Nakasone continues in his autobiography: "I had been giving considerable thought to the importance and future prospects of the life sciences, and in my new position as head of the science agency I saw to it that this research was elevated to the status of a national program. It was thus through my initiative that Japan's third major area of scientific and technological research came in for powerful government support, as had the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the space program before it.

"My appointment to the post of Minister of International Trade and Industry also proved challenging. Not long after I had assumed my new post, I instructed my staff to arrange visits to Iran, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. . . . The Ministry of Foreign Affairs strongly opposed my plan to visit these Mideast states. . . . I argued forcefully that Japan should work to develop closer relations with the oil-producing nations even as it continued to act in concert with the other oil-consuming nations on oil matters. . . ."

"I am told my actions at this time were not well-received in the United States. At home, some criticized me for having been too bold, given the complications of the international oil situation. It is also true that I had a number of sharp exchanges with U.S. Secretary of State Kissinger. . . ."

"Japan will no doubt continue to be a member of the Western alliance, sharing their belief in freedom and democracy. But at the same time, we must revitalize that alliance. We must sweep away the old mindsets and ways of doing business of the colonial age. We must strive to create a new

international order based on equality and mutual benefit. . . ."

"What judgment will our successors pass on the civilization we Japanese have constructed in the 30 years since the war? Will they see it as a time of overflowing vigor, dazzling freedom and the progressive spirit that at the same time abandoned old social limits and taboos? Will they compare these years with other great periods in Japanese history, the Meiji period, the Genroku period (1680-1704), indeed even the age of Nabunaga and Hideyoshi in the second half of the 16th century? . . ."

"What we Japanese need most today is to frankly acknowledge our own accomplishments, to evaluate them correctly, and to accept the need to develop them further. Today, both from within and without the country, we are facing changes that will shake the very foundations of the civilization we have built so grandly. The failure of the Japanese people to realize the magnitude of their own accomplishments has left them unprepared for the coming age. To date, they have failed to prepare responsibly for the coming challenge. . . ."

"Japan must not act selfishly, out of narrow considerations. Rather, Japan must transform its basic posture, be it on defense or on economic cooperation, to overcome the autism born of its defeat in World War II and the subsequent Occupation years. Japan must fulfill its international responsibilities. Its excessive dependence on others serves only to injure its international credibility.

"I have resolved that Japan should make the greatest possible contributions to international cooperation and the maintenance of peace, to revitalizing and expanding the world economy. It should give its highest priority to the basic goal of breathing new life into the Western alliance."

### **A blow to the 'New Yalta' plan**

It will be clear that a man of Nakasone's political experience and stated political convictions, frankly acknowledging pride in his nation, advocating an independent defense and strategic posture, regarding scientific advancement as the underpinning of economic progress, and rejecting Yalta—the evil cornerstone of post World War II political arrangements—is not to the liking of the "New Age," "New Yalta" protagonists of the Kissinger and Brzezinski variety. That such a man should have received such an extraordinary vote of confidence from what is arguably the world's best-educated electorate came as a shock to the Eastern Establishment's strongholds—from Boston to Wall Street to the State Department to Paul Volcker's Federal Reserve and to Katy Graham's *Post*. Had not Zbigniew Brzezinski expressed his concern about a rebirth of nationalism in Japan, coupled with "ideological radicalism," for which reason Japan had to be tied securely into the trilateral system? (Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Between Two Ages: America's Role in the Technocratic Era*, New York: 1970).

What might become "destabilized" is the entirety of the

postwar system—not just the “Old Yalta,” but also the prospects for its extension on a global scale (as proposed in Brzezinski’s latest book, *Game Plan: A Geostrategic Framework for the Conduct of the U.S.-Soviet Contest*, New York: 1986) and the remnants of the postwar economic system might not just become destabilized, but be altogether swept aside, if Japan’s economic thinking and economic power were to be asserted in political terms to force in-depth revision of the bankrupt present international financial arrangements. Prospects for this are discussed at length in David Goldman’s article below.

Predictably, not only Boston Brahmins, but their discussion partners in Moscow are most upset with Nakasone’s Japan. After the July 6 elections, they will find it exceedingly difficult to uphold the claim that the “conservative Japanese rulers” are out of step with the desires of the Japanese population. Attacks on Prime Minister Nakasone, especially after Japan will sign a cooperation agreement on the SDI with the United States in September, can be expected to be greatly stepped up.

Ammunition for such attacks is usually assembled in the U.S.S.R. Academy of Sciences’ *Far Eastern Affairs* quarterly. In the first two volumes of this year, there is an unprecedented series of articles devoted to the history of “Japanese militarism” and its “new stage” associated principally with Nakasone policies. For reference we list just some of the titles—“The Rout of Japanese Militarism as a Factor that Promoted Popular Revolutions in China, Korea, and Vietnam”; “Militaristic Japan and the End of World War II”; “Forty Years since the Victory over Militaristic Japan”; “Japan: A New Stage of Militarization.” The last of the three pieces, in particular, takes aim at the Nakasone cabinets.

“With the coming to power in November 1982 of the Nakasone cabinet, Japan’s ‘creeping militarization’ has acquired qualitatively new dimensions. . . . The ruling circles in Japan, which sanctioned the extremely unpopular policy of intense militarization, believed that, in order to implement it, they needed a politician who was prepared unhesitatingly to use decisive and even harsh measures against the policy’s opponents. This politician was also to possess the necessary flexibility and a knack for demagogery. Yasuhiro Nakasone was the most suitable candidate.”

The journal also notes: “Referring to Nakasone’s nationalism and his statements concerning Japan’s ‘special role’ in Asia, the *Wall Street Journal* wrote that he was the Japanese Konrad Adenauer, the man who had paved the way to West Germany’s rearmament in the 1950s. But if Nakasone was the Japanese Konrad Adenauer, he was also very likely the Japanese Charles de Gaulle. Previously Japanese policies had been made in Washington. Nakasone wanted them to come from Tokyo. He is, in the words of the *Wall Street Journal*, a long distance runner.”

It is indeed not without interest that before Nakasone, Charles de Gaulle was the last of world leaders on the unde-

sirability of whose policies both Moscow and the U.S. Eastern Establishment could readily agree.

### The challenge facing Nakasone

In trying to consolidate the lasting impact on Japan of his policies and in trying to implement international policies reflecting his political philosophy Prime Minister Nakasone will face numerous obstacles. We shall discuss here only two which jointly constitute the most profound challenge to be encountered.

First, Japanese political leaders in this writer’s observations have not displayed in the past the absolutely indispensable understanding of contending policy factions in the United States without which proper evaluation and response to U.S. foreign and foreign economic policy is impossible. Japanese leaders make the mistake of assuming—perhaps by inference from their own policy formation procedures—that a U.S. policy pronounced by the secretary of state or other leading government official is, in fact, the nation’s policy. Instead, it may very well be—and usually is—only the policy of a specific faction which controls the government office in question. Nakasone is in imminent danger of seeing international policy initiation thwarted, if he should assume that his personal friendship with President Reagan is sufficient guarantee of the bona fides of U.S. foreign and economic policymakers and spokesmen.

Secondly, and im is the readily observable reluctance of Japanese leaders to openly and directly challenge what they perceive to be U.S. policy. A Japanese friend once explained that there exists among policymakers in Japan a deeply felt sense of obligation and gratitude toward the United States stemming from the honorable manner in which General MacArthur handled the postwar occupation. I would reply that in critical situations and when serious policy failures on the part of the United States are only too obvious, it is the overriding obligation of a friend to deliver a strong kick where it hurts. U.S. foreign economic policy, including unconditional support of IMF policy toward the developing sector nations, will sink the world economy, and what is needed from Japan in this area is not support, but a forceful and clearly articulated “no.”

I also suspect that aside from gratitude, there are more prosaic policy considerations which have so far prevented Japan from openly opposing the increasingly destructive economic policy course of the United States since 1980. Japan perceives that the U.S. has the power to close markets to Japanese goods, and Japan continues to depend on U.S. political and military power for the safeguarding of its supplies and its national security.

Whether Nakasone will have the courage and determination to confront U.S. economic policies despite such dependencies and put forward the critically needed alternatives, will be the ultimate measure of his success in defining a new world role for his nation.