



Paul Midford. *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011. 272 pp. \$75.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-7216-7; \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-7217-4.



Reviewed by Alon Levkowitz (Bar-Ilan University)

Published on H-US-Japan (April, 2012)

Commissioned by Yone Sugita (Osaka University)

Can Public Opinion Influence Japanese Politicians and Japan's Defense Policies?

Many years ago, when he was a member of the Israeli parliament, Shimon Peres, Israel's current president, in disappointment over losing the elections while the polls predicted that he would win, said, "Polls are like perfume. Nice to smell, dangerous to swallow." [1] However, one should not disregard public opinion polls as a social science tool to analyze elite perceptions, policymaking, the public's attitude toward policies, and the influence political elites and the public have on each other. In *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security*, Paul Midford assesses these issues in the context of Japanese history. In the second chapter, the author discusses the pros and cons of analyzing public opinion surveys, and presents the framework of his research. He even raises the question regarding if and when public opinion affects policy outcomes. His research shows that in some cases public opinion can and has influenced Japanese politicians as well as Japan's defense policies.

For many years, Japan has been portrayed in the international arena as a pacifist state that made the decision after the Second World War to abstain from any

military conflict. Article 9 of the Japanese constitution prevents Japan from participating in any military conflict, and Japanese public opinion has supported Japan's pacifist policy for many years. In the last decade, a new term was coined about Japan: "Normal" state (Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Re-emergence as a "Normal" Military Power* [2005] and Andrew L. Oros, *Normalizing Japan* [2008]). In his research, Midford proposes that Japanese public opinion began to change after 9/11 from a pacifist public opinion that did not support any military action, to a society that supports the "normalization" of Japan's defense policy. Japanese public opinion began to change toward a "normal" state, or as the author defines it, a "defensive realist" defense policy. The Japanese public supports defensive utility of Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF), as opposed to public opinion polls in the United States that support a more offensive policy and military use (chapter 2), especially during George W. Bush's presidency after 9/11. In chapters 2-3, he states that Japanese public opinion's concept of pacifist attitudes was not truly pacifist. He argues that what was

defined as pacifism was antimilitarist and as distrustful of state, especially after the Second World War. The public was concerned that the state could not control the military. Throughout the years, the fear that the government could not control the army influenced the public's attitudes toward SDF missions abroad, for example. Another factor that influenced the public's attitude toward Japan's defense policy was the fear of being entrapped in an unintentional conflict by the United States. The public, mainly during the Cold War, was concerned that the alliance with the United States might drag Japan into global conflicts in which Washington was involved. This fear has not dissipated and it influences public opinion in South Korea as well.

The First Gulf War is an important case study that the author analyzes in chapter 5. For the first time, Japan was pressured by the United States to send forces to a military operation, even though Washington knew that this request contradicted Article 9 and Japan's defensive security policy. Prime Minister Kaifu Toshiki tried to pass a bill, UN Peace Cooperation Corps, which would allow Japan to dispatch forces to the Middle East. However, the lack of public support that influenced the disagreements within the political arena led to the failure of this bill. At the end of the war, Japan dispatched minesweepers for civilian defense purposes. The criticism in Washington and in the Japanese government enabled the cabinet to convince the public to support this mission. One could say that the extensive support by numerous countries that dispatched forces to the First Gulf War prevented Washington from increasing pressure on the Japanese cabinet and public to send forces to the Gulf, like during the second war.

Would a peacekeeping operation be defined as defensive realism? Would it be beyond the defensive utilities of the SDF? Would it gain the support of the Japanese public? Chapter 6 analyzes the political process and Japanese public opinion on overseas dispatches of SDF. It took the government some time until it was able to approve the law that would allow Japan to dispatch SDF abroad and gain the support of the public for this policy. However, even after gaining support, "a significant portion of the

Japanese public continued to worry about the reemergence of an aggressive foreign policy" (p. 101).

The events of 9/11 were a shock not only for the American people, but for the Japanese as well (chapter 7). However, not surprisingly, the shock did not last as long in Japanese public opinion as it did in the United States. In this case, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro was more enthusiastic and hawkish than the Japanese public in assisting the United States in the war against terror and in Afghanistan.

The Iraq war, or the Second Gulf War as some call it, was a different game. Pressure from Washington was greater on Tokyo than it was in the First Gulf War. Washington demanded that Japan send troops (chapter 8) to Iraq and the Japanese public did not support this demand. Koizumi was able to dispatch forces to Iraq even when the Japanese public was concerned and opposed to the mission. However, although Koizumi was unable to obtain public support for these missions, the public was able to influence the missions themselves

Do public opinions matter in Japan? This book demonstrates that does, although during Koizumi's terms in office its influence was more limited. Will Japan's defense policy change? It is changing gradually and I would add that North Korea's missile and nuclear policy "helped" to "normalize" Japan's security policy through the years. This does not mean that Japan's security policy will become an offensive realism, but the boundaries of its defensive realist security policy will be broader than in the past. This change will coincide with changes in Japanese public attitude.

This book is an important textbook not just for students and scholars in international relations, political science, and Asian studies, but for policy makers in Japan and the United States as well. This book should be on the reading list of anyone wanting to understand the changes in Japan's security policy over the last two decades and how it might influence Japan's future security policy.

Note

[1]. Quoted in *Los Angeles Times*, January 24, 2003.

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Citation: Alon Levkowitz. Review of Midford, Paul, *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?*. H-US-Japan, H-Net Reviews. April, 2012.

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