CHAPTER - VI
CONCLUSION

A sovereign, democratic nation must not entertain taboos. But post-war Japan did until Nakasone Yasuhiro came on the scene, to get people to get into animated discussion on these very subjects. In his view, Japan has not regained the status of a sovereign, independent nation in a dignified manner. Japanese democracy itself was something designed and implemented by the Americans. The Japanese constitution was one drafted and imposed by the Americans. All the political processes had been completed in the seven years of American occupation and handed over to the Japanese as a fait accompli. The Americans also dismantled Japanese military and brought it back in the guise of the Self Defence Forces when they considered it necessary. The Japanese democratic and military system thus did not reflect the free will of the Japanese people.

The Japanese were, in Nakasone’s view, entitled to frame policies for themselves, in accord with modern international law. The first step in that direction would be the revision of the constitution. He even took up the matter with the occupation authorities and came to be branded as an ultra-nationalist.

But the war-weary Japanese people, successfully recovering from the humiliation of defeat and the trauma of nuclear Armageddon, preferred to be anti-war and concentrate on economic prosperity. The constitution was
working smoothly and the country was prospering. They did not see why things had to change. Discussion on issues of defence and security had also become taboo for the same reasons.

REVISION OF CONSTITUTION

After becoming Prime Minister in November 1982, Nakasone tried to raise the issue of revising the constitution, but hardly elicited any response. The proposal caused a great deal of unrest within the LDP itself. Nakasone, therefore, thought it wiser to drop the idea altogether.

DEFENCE POLICY

Nakasone was an ardent champion of an independent and autonomous defence policy for Japan. He had been unhappy about many provisions of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty when it was promulgated in 1952, principally because it looked like a treaty between a victor and a vanquished party. Subsequently some of the irritants were sorted out when the treaty was revised.

Japan enjoyed total protection under the Security Treaty, which in fact generated complacency among the Japanese people and policy-makers. The entire burden of providing protection to Japan resulted in a massive financial cost to the Americans. Japan's own financial allocation for defence remained low in comparison to the developed Western world, of which Japan considered itself a member. The Japanese public as well as the
opposition political parties also remained constantly on guard against any major development of Japanese defence capabilities.

As the front-ranking victor nation in World War II and as leader of the Allied nations, the U.S. had taken upon itself the burden of Japan's defence. But the American taxpayer was no longer willing to shoulder this burden and the American people were no longer prepared to commit their youth for the protection of Japan. The issue had become even more sensitive in the post-Vietnam years, when the Americans themselves had become war-weary and pacifist. The American Congress wanted Japan to take greater initiative for its own defence. The demand became somewhat strident in the post-Vietnam war years, with the U.S. even seriously considering withdrawal of some of its forces from the area.

Nakasone, too, desired Japan, as an independent and sovereign nation, to assume responsibility for its own defence. Japan had attained the stature of an economic superpower, but not of a key political power. The latter would become Japan's due, Nakasone believed, only when Japan learnt to defend itself and take political decisions independently. Its political strength had to be commensurate with its economic and technological status.
FIVE KEY AREAS OF CHANGE

With this aspiration, Nakasone attempted to initiate changes in four defence-related areas. These were: (a) the one per cent of GNP ceiling on defence spending; (b) the transfer of Japan's weapons technology to the U.S.; (c) defence decision making; (d) Japan's participation in the SDI and (e) sea lane defence. He met with positive results in case of the first three issues. The SDI campaign was successful. However, it became irrelevant because of the U.S. decision to drop the programme altogether in the later years. Regarding sea lane defence, he could not achieve much mixed success.

One Per cent Ceiling

It took a long time for Nakasone to break the ceiling of one per cent of GNP on defence spending. The increase in defence spending had become necessary to meet the targets set in the 1986-90 Mid-Term Defence Programme Estimate (MTDPE). Explaining his stand Nakasone said: "I was afflicted with the question of adhering to the one per cent rule or fulfilling the five-year programme. I decided that the build-up programme is a minimum required for the security of the country."\(^1\) The Americans, who had been asking the Japanese government to spend more on defence, were pacified.

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\(^1\) *Tokyo Report* (Tokyo), vol.6, no.52, 31 December 1986, p.5.
Transfer of Technology

The American government agencies and many private companies engaged in defence production were interested in certain technologies developed by the Japanese industries. Until then it had been a one-way relationship, with Japan on the receiving side. Now the U.S. was asking for something. Nakasone worked to facilitate the transfer of weapons technology to the U.S., and made a declaration to that effect during his visit to the U.S. in January 1983.

Defence Decision-making

One reason why defence was a low priority issue on the political agenda of post-war Japan was the lack of proper institutional mechanism in the field of defence decision-making. The state of affairs did not help in the development of a bureaucracy competent in making in-depth analysis of issues related to Japan. The existing National Defence Council (NDC) had lost relevance over the years. Nakasone brought important reforms in the NDC following the recommendations of the Administrative Reforms Commission. The NDC was converted to the National Security Council (NSC) and was brought under the direct control of the Cabinet Secretariat, thus giving the Prime Minister more authority over it. The NSC also worked as a better coordinating agency among all ministers.
Participation in the SDI

The project provided an opportunity for Japan to show its commitment to its alliance relationship with the U.S. as well as the Western alliance system. The SDI was successfully portrayed as an effective and better deterrent system against Soviet missiles. Nakasone worked carefully by sending various delegations, including the private sector to the U.S., to learn more about the project. It was pointed out by these missions that Japan would miss out both financially as well as technologically if it remained out of the SDI. Having done considerable homework, the Japanese government finally pledged commitment to participate in the project.

Defence of Sea lanes

The sensitive issue of the defence of sea lanes remained one area where Nakasone could not bring about any major changes. The Chinese, the Koreans and the Southeast Asian countries reacted sharply to the concept after it was floated by the earlier Prime Minister Suzuki. The memory of World War II was still fresh in the minds of the people of these countries. Primarily, however, the concept suffered from the need for massive investment to look after the defence of 1,000 nautical miles. Nakasone could not make allocations of that magnitude. Only some provisions were made for the procurement of some important equipments. But in the end, the concept remained as elusive as ever.
A major element of Nakasone's defence policy was his strong commitment to the Japanese-American alliance. The U.S. asked Japan in 1983 to assume primary responsibility for three sectors of defence in adjacent waters. These were:

(a) control of the seas south of the Philippines and Guam;

(b) the ability to mine and blockade the straits connecting the Sea of Japan with the Pacific Ocean; and

(c) the building of an air defence screen across the Japanese islands to intercept Soviet long-range bombers, fighter bombers and tactical aircraft.

Nakasone's tenure as Prime Minister witnessed Japan's active defence cooperation with the U.S. Under him Japan started taking a more active interest in the Japan-U.S. alliance. In his first visit to the U.S. as Prime Minister he talked of the Japanese commitment to the Western alliance by acting as "an unsinkable aircraft carrier against Soviet backfire bombers".

Japan under Nakasone moved closer to assuming a regional role envisaged by the U.S. The commitment to sea lane defence was a vital step in this direction. The acceptance of the sea lane defence concept meant that the SDF could operate on sea waters 1,000 nautical miles from the Japanese shores. It was even recognized that the SDF could come to the
rescue of the American troops in the areas outside Japan's territorial waters if the former were carrying goods vital to the Japanese people. Under Nakasone the Japanese government officially accepted the task of mining and blockading the straits leading out of the sea of Japan.²

Inter-operability was another development witnessed during Nakasone's tenure. Japan and the U.S. reached an agreement in 1984 to undertake joint studies to increase inter-operability between their forces in all military-related areas such as tactics, information, communication, logistical support and equipment. Japan started taking a more active role in joint exercises with the U.S. The reciprocity in weapons technology flow was another important aspect of U.S.-Japan defence cooperation.

CLEAR POLICY TRENDS

Broadly, certain clear trends were visible in Nakasone's defence policy. These were: steady increase in defence expenditure, close cooperation with the U.S. and a major effort at public education on the question of Japanese defence.

An analysis of Nakasone's tenure as Prime Minister reveals that in each of the five years defence budget went up as compared to other government expenditures. The achievement was extraordinary, since these increases were made in the face of public opinion polls from his Prime

Minister's Office showing that 54.1 per cent did not want any change in defence spending while 14.2 per cent wanted to increase it and 17.7 per cent in fact wanted to cut it.

Nakasone resorted to a novel way of achieving it. FY 1986 may be seen as a case in point. Takeshita Naburu, the then Finance Minister and a prospective prime ministerial candidate of the Tanaka faction who was likely to succeed Nakasone, opposed the increase in defence budget. Nakasone had put Kato Koichi, a young and ambitious politician belonging to the Suzuki faction, in charge of the Defence Agency. Like Nakasone Kato had also definite ideas on Japanese defence, and wanted Japan to adopt an active defence policy. He was a vigorous and hard-working defence chief. He forcefully represented the case of his agency and after bitter bargaining finally made the Ministry of Finance agree to a defence spending of 3.34 trillion yen, a jump of 6.58 per cent over 1985.3

A DIFFERENT POLITICIAN

Opinion is divided on Nakasone's achievements. Ronald Dore believes that Nakasone's defence policy did not mark any dramatic change from the past, that it was a continuation of policies inherited from the past. He also

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3 Japan Times, 26 December 1985.
notes that Nakasone was forced to back off in the face of domestic pressure, despite forceful rhetoric.  

According to Dore, not only popular opposition, but the nature of Japanese politics itself prevented any major policy departures. Japanese politics is based on consensus and group decision-making, which limits the ability of individual leaders in implementing their agenda without first securing consensus.

Nevertheless, Nakasone met with a fair amount of success in the implementation of defence-related policies. His most notable achievement was that he eminently succeeded in introducing a sense of realism to the defence debate in Japan. His forceful leadership, direct appeal to the people and unambiguous stand did have a strong bearing on this success.

Nakasone set up a very good personal rapport with President Reagan. It was the first time that a Japanese Prime Minister was spoken of very highly by the American officials and the media. His performance at the Williamsburg summit in June 1983 greatly enhanced his stature at home and abroad. His stand on the issue of INF and his declaration about Japan's commitment to play its role as a "full member of the Western bloc" evoked praise from Western leaders. The successful holding of the G-7 summit at Tokyo in May 1986 further enhanced Nakasone's image abroad.

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All this sent a clear message to the Japanese people about the status of their Prime Minister. People came to believe that Nakasone was an important world leader, equal in status to other world leaders and that Japan was a very important member of the advanced Western world. This made Nakasone different from the previous leaders and strengthened his hands in his policy objectives.

Nakasone had to encounter great obstacles from the bureaucracy, the opposition political parties, the people as well as other factions within the LDP. But because of his strong convictions he persisted till the end of his term, which itself was quite remarkable.

Nakasone was different from the typical consensus-oriented Japanese politician. He tried to do more than the prevailing consensus allowed. At times he tried to push through a new consensus. His attempt was to achieve a new consensus away from the one that had been formed by the Yoshida Doctrine to one where Japan played a more active role in international politics.

The Yoshida Doctrine had shaped the post-war defence policy. Nakasone tried to bring greater realism into the policy and reshape it. The early post-war situation had made Yoshida's task easier. People were inclined towards peace and hence the success of the Yoshida Doctrine. The Doctrine had served Japan well over the years. It had taken strong roots. People felt comfortable with the "economy first" approach.
Any talk of moulding a new consensus on defence, therefore, had to encounter lot of difficulties. Nakasone had to face that. But he was willing to take the initiative. Some of his predecessors also tried to take some bold initiatives but failed. Ohira Masayoshi had to drop the plan to introduce a value-added tax system due to electoral setback. Suzuki Zenko, who for the first time used the term "alliance" to describe the U.S.-Japan relations had to retract it because of sharp criticism at home.

Nakasone not only declared Japan’s commitment to its alliance with the U.S. but also went further by describing that Japan and the U.S. shared a common destiny. He took bold initiatives to bring about administrative reforms as well as the privatization of such large monopolies as the Japan National Railways, the National Telephone and Telegraph Company and the Japan Salt and Tobacco Company. His successful privatization of these companies was termed as a "silent revolution".5

An indicator of Nakasone’s uniqueness is the fact that he was the first Prime Minister to have been awarded an extension beyond the maximum designated two terms of two years each. Other leaders were not yet prepared to take over from him. Also, he maintained a high level of popular

support. His "wakari yasui seiji" or easy-to-understand politics helped him establish an excellent rapport with the people.

Different from other Japanese politicians, Nakasone never refrained from airing his views on any issues, including controversial ones. He would appeal directly to the people. He made good use of the media. He induced the people to shed their inhibitions from discussing the so-called taboos.

The 1986 double-election results considerably strengthened his position. The LDP won a landslide victory and his own faction became the second largest faction in the LDP. The LDP had to change rules to allow Nakasone an unprecedented one-year extension to complete his unfinished agenda. Taking advantage of his high popularity, Nakasone took the vital decisions of crossing the one per cent ceiling and also participating in the SDI.

OVERCOMING TABOOS

Nakasone wanted to change the long-standing Japanese consensus on defence. He directly addressed the public, urging them to discuss topics such as revision of Article 9 of the constitution. He urged them to discuss hitherto controversial issues freely. He was of the opinion that there should be no taboos in a free democratic country.

Even on sensitive issues like Korea he did not hesitate to take bold steps. He was the first post-war Japanese Prime Minister to make an
official trip to Korea in 1983 and signed an agreement to supply $4 billion in economic aid. His official visit to the Yasukuni Shrine along with his entire cabinet on 15 August 1985 provoked public debate on the issue. Many political commentators criticized this visit as a political mistake but his purpose had been served. The visit did not seem to have hurt him politically and it did help open up Japan's rather suppressed discussion of responsibility for the war.

Nakasone's defence policy was aimed at raising Japan's international standing. He wanted to create an alliance of equals with the U.S., removing the stigma of dependence but not moving out of the alliance framework. Nakasone envisaged for Japan an active supportive role in an era of U.S. economic decline. This role had both economic and political dimensions. The economic dimension meant internationalization of the Japanese economy and the political dimension meant taking up an appropriate role as a number of the Western bloc.

Nakasone's aim was not to transform Japan into a military superpower, but rather to overcome its peculiar post-war diffidence which inhibited the growth of an autonomous defence concept. Mike Mansfield, the former U.S. Ambassador to Japan who served through Nakasone's term as Prime Minister, commented that the objective was to make Japan
confident of itself, clarifying at the same time that "this confidence should not be confused with a strong military role for Japan". 6

Nakasone's tenure forms an important phase in Japanese politics. None of his predecessors tried to disturb the status quo that had been in existence since the end of the American occupation. Despite the tremendous growth in economy and technology, neither the Japanese people nor the politicians had the confidence to assert Japan's position in the world and take up an appropriate role in world politics. But Nakasone was the first Japanese Prime Minister in the post war years who demanded that Japan should take up its rightful place commensurate with its economics strength. He tried to redefine many crucial issues such as Japan's defence, its relationship with the U.S. and its international role. He succeeded to a great extent in his efforts. Apart from breaking some long held taboos, Nakasone certainly gave a new direction to Japan's defence and diplomatic policies, the most notable ramifications of which could be seen in the later years in the form of its demand for a permanent membership of the UN Security Council and a more activist security role in the surrounding areas as is evident from the 1996 NDPO and the 1997 Japan-U.S. Defence Cooperation Guidelines.

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