Chapter VI
CONCLUSION

The feeling of anti-militarism, that arose in Japan, owing to various reasons like WWII sufferings, including the shattered economy, post-War poverty, and impact of atomic bombs, the US-imposed pacifist constitution, the anti-war movement and so on, is believed to be an integral part of the average Japanese character today. This kind of feeling was imbibed in the Japanese character through the post-War policymaking in Japan due to the Allied Occupation and the reforms carried out under the able leadership of General McArthur. The post-War popularly-elected Japanese leaders also played an equally important role in this regard. No matter which faction or ideology they belonged to, they maintained a low profile militarily, and preferred dependence upon the US regarding security issues. For Japanese policymakers, however, Japan's national interests remained the principal concern and despite, the presence of strong anti-militaristic norms and culture, defense capabilities were enhanced gradually. The incremental change in the security policy has ironed out the hindrances in the way of militarization in Japan. Militarization in Japan so far has been driven by both economic needs as well as security concerns.

Pre-War Japan was a prosperous nation. The victories over China and Russia fortified its ambition of playing the leader's role in the Asia. The civilian leadership in Japan, as found in the accounts of several war time historians, was against war through out but the army enjoyed special status and powers under the Meiji constitution and led Japan to its bloodiest and the most humiliating defeat ever. Militarism in pre-war Japan did not emerge overnight. The Meiji constitution vested special powers in the hands of the military leaders and they were in a way free to take crucial decisions even of waging war by formally consulting or simply by informing the Emperor. The subaltern officials were difficult to administer and time and again they attempted to topple the government, even assassinating high ranking Japanese ministers and officials.

Militarism in pre-war Japan is often equated with the fascism in Italy and Nazism in Germany. This can also be theoretically proven but the difference emerges from the ground realities of these countries. Japan was one of the first countries in Asia to have a
written constitution, a highly literate populace, several codes of conduct, Shintoism as state religion, a popularly elected government, highly industrialized economy, and strong army, navy and air forces. Japan also had the distinction of being the only Asian imperial power before the WWII, when other Afro-Asian and Latin American countries were either colonized or dominated by Western powers. Atrocities such as the Nanjing massacre and comfort women (sex-slaves) still attract criticism from many and have become contentious unresolved issues that emerge every now and then hampering bilateral relationships especially between Japan and its neighbouring countries.

Through the post-war reforms, the flaws of Meiji constitution were eliminated and the pre-war institutions and structures were dismantled or destroyed. With the introduction of new institutions and the imposition of a war-renouncing constitution, the thinking pattern of Japanese was changed. Individualistic lifestyle, western style education when gelled with the rapid industrialization and urbanization resulted in Japan’s emergence as ‘economic super-power.’

Ironically, democratization and demilitarization of Japan during the occupation era still created scope for the remilitarization. Passing through various phases where self-imposed restrictions vis-à-vis defense capabilities became the norm, Japan has now reached a stage where it stands among western industrial-military powers as super-economic power and a potential (super) military power. Japan could achieve so much in so little time because of the post-war policies and also due to the active participation of the people.

However, Article 9 of Japan’s post-war constitution continues to trigger political and constitutional debates as, the constitution prohibits the maintenance of military forces of any type. There exist loopholes providing enough room for different interpretations. For instance in the constitution there no provision for not having the ministry of war or the defense. On the contrary, Article 66 states, “The Cabinet shall consist of the Prime Minister, who shall be its head, and other Ministers of State, as provided for by law. 2)
The Prime Minister and other Ministers of State must be civilians. 3) The Cabinet shall, 
in the exercise of executive power, be collectively responsible to the Diet.”

“The Prime Minister and other ministers must be civilians,” means that the Ministry 
of Defense or Military may be established under the constitutional provision. There exist 
many such provisions within the constitution that allows civilian government to justify the 
presence of the SDF. The other effective provision in the constitution of Japan is amendment 
(Article 96). In fact, the procedure appears to be a difficult one but can nevertheless be 
availed of. Right from the beginning, the creation of SDF was justified simply by 
differentiating between war-making potential with potential self-defense which is based on 
one of the interpretations of Article 9.

It is not an exaggeration to say that despite the strong anti-war and peace 
movements, militarization, a resultant of the gradual defense capabilities build-up, has 
come to stay in Japan. Several anti-war and peace activists, leftists, academics as well as 
politicians criticize the Japanese initiative to participate in world affairs, particularly in 
the conflict-zones as a normal nation. Even within the right-wingers, there are factions 
opposing such moves. Discussing Japan’s status as a remilitarized nation, particularly in 
the present context, becomes more important because of several reasons. The suspicion 
among its neighbours continues to be strong. Japan so far has tried to behave more like a 
significant normal power by shedding its post-War inhibitions as well as US-imposed and 
at times self-imposed restrictions. Japanese society has witnessed various phases of 
transition and its security policy has undergone drastic changes.

According to most opinion polls, the Japanese people have consistently supported 
the idea of keeping the nation’s defense forces at a minimal level (see Chapter 2, 4 and 
5). They also support Japan’s international economic assistance and other contributions in 
the emergency situations. Anti-militarism, in the present study, is dealt mainly at two 
levels – public opinion and government policy. The public opinion supporting the anti-
militarism sentiment was never in full support of remilitarization or rearmament. The 
post-September 11 period has seen a major shift in the public as well as official posture 
on the remilitarization question. The anticipated threat of terrorism or nuclear attack can
engulf Japan too. Japanese public overwhelmingly supported Japanese government’s initiatives and responses to enhance and empower the SDF in an unprecedented manner.

Recent SDF missions abroad, particularly in Iraq, are not free from criticism. However, the Japanese government in its latest policy documents underscored the necessity of peace and stability in the region. The hidden message is that Japan does not want to indulge in any form of military adventures and in order to ensure the smooth sailing for its business and overall national interests, stability in the region in particular and world as a whole is required. For this, Japan is expected to pay a price, including SDF deployment, but only for providing humanitarian aid and reconstruction assistance.

In post-occupation Japan, the Yoshida doctrine and Yoshida’s protégés dominated the political scene. Although, Yoshida doctrine has survived until now, public opinion and policies appear to be changing. A major shift in Japanese public attitude was observed when Yasuhiro Nakasone, who earlier served as the Director General of Japan Defense Agency, was accepted as PM. In fact, it was during his tenure that the self-imposed one per cent (of total GDP) ceiling on the Defense spending was broken. Most of other post-war PMs are criticized for being dovish. In the post-Cold War era, Koizumi was another hawkish PM and one of the most dynamic and vocal ones, introducing several institutional and economic reforms to remove Japan’s own fundamental structural weaknesses. Reforms initiated during Koizumi’s period could not yield the desired results. Nevertheless, they were successful in reviving the recession struck economy on the track. He felt that the Japanese are no more ashamed of glorifying their past, be it rewriting history or of his own official visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. Japanese policymakers seemed to be swayed by his eagerness to revise their war-renouncing constitution.

Shinzo Abe was seen as the leader of the younger generation as he was the first PM of Japan to be born after the World War II. His tenure saw the ill-effects of the Koizumi’s tenure and defeat of the LDP in the upper house. The most remarkable feature of his tenure was improvement in the relationship with neighbouring countries. Yasuo
Fukuda inherited several problems from Abe. In addition, the opposition seems to be getting stronger and there is little or no escape from the rising public apathy for the ruling coalition. Domestic issues have priority over Japan's international concerns for the Japanese people. In the present context, attaining normalcy and revising constitution do not appear to be easy tasks. In addition, the unemployment in Japan is on decline but it does not indicate lessening future troubles. The increasing numbers of freeters, negative population growth, pension, political instability are some of the major concerns for Japanese society and can be viewed as obstacles in the path of militarization and normalization.

A most noteworthy change is that the government's attempts to popularize the Japanese SDF, at various levels, have started yielding results. Japan initially was reluctant to assert itself in the international forums. After taking lessons from the past reluctance to assert itself, particularly as reflected in its negligible physical presence in the UNPKO, Japan recognized the importance of making its presence felt all over the globe especially during times of crisis. Citizens as well as the international community have appreciated and acknowledged the SDF's contribution during various UNPKO missions and natural calamities. Moreover, various wars and crisis-like situations have in fact, helped Japan to promote and expand the jurisdiction and functions of SDF.

Japan's gradual remilitarization process took a long jump forward when the Japanese Diet passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in 2001, providing the SDF with extra powers to actually use weapons. Though this was allowed only in self-defense, it was nevertheless of great significance. Before this, the SDF could carry a weapon but its use was denied to them. For the first time, Japanese SDF took part in providing assistance to fighting US armies during a war. Despite, Japanese claims that it was logistical and humanitarian assistance and rear echelon support to US including refueling of warships a conclusion can be drawn that Japan had participated in a direct war, which its constitution had prohibited. In Iraq, critics have underscored the most visible change in the Japanese security policy when troops were sent to Samawah in Iraq when the war was actually on. Luckily, no casualty was reported but the row over the
kidnapping of three Japanese volunteers in Iraq and their release after paying huge amount of money has definitely put question mark on the intentions of the government.

The security umbrella of the US is the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy. For the US, Japan is a strategic power in the East Asian region. Their economic interdependence can also not be ignored even though Japan maintains amicable relations with nations like Iran which US sees as a potential threat. Though Japan has certain compulsions to follow and endorses the US action in many matters, it has always been careful to keep its own interests at the front.

The dependence of Japan on the US as far as defense of Japan is concerned does not necessarily mean that Japan completely ignores its own security concerns. The various security policies and treaties in the post-Occupation Era have proved Japan’s capacity and willingness to defend not only its economic interests but the borders as well (see Chapter 3 and 5).

The US and its allies are ready to accept Japan as a normal and assertive country playing a significant role internationally. Japan’s strategic, location and vulnerability because of increasing interdependence due to its stake in international trade require it to review and reframe the existing policies, institutions and structures. Recently passed resolutions and defense guidelines express similar views (see Chapter 3 and 5).

As often seen, Japan always followed the US lead, no matter what the situation was, but with certain limitations. Japanese leaders are neither really hawks nor doves but pragmatic. The more proactive Japanese role post-September 11 is based on the general public’s increased support for Japan to be seen as doing something substantial. The long-standing demand of reviewing Article 9 by various individuals and agencies will most likely be fulfilled in a few years time. Even Japanese leaders, instead of exhibiting the usual habit of bypassing Article 9, have initiated the procedure of amending it (see chapter 5). This domestic matter will have international repercussions and may lead Japan to play a more active role as a normal nation in the world politics. Japan’s policies
of internationalization, normalization and comprehensive security have guided Japan through international crisis situations. Japan has asserted itself forcefully and its presence is being felt not only through checkbooks but through the presence of its troops in reconstruction and humanitarian aid missions under the banner of UN and leadership of US. While opposition parties in general endorsed the government’s move of taking various measures to counter international terrorism, the changes in Japan’s security strategy and policies especially those related to the SDF drew harsh criticism among parties and the public at home. However, by deliberately leaving the door wide open on the possibility of participation in future conflicts, the Japanese government has also caused doubts among its Asian neighbours.

The US retaliation in the name of War on Terror and the Japanese response could be justified on many grounds. Conversely, Japanese participation in the Iraq War was criticized by the Japanese citizens as well as its neighbours. By responding to the international crisis caused by terrorist attacks of September 11, Japan made its intentions conspicuous that besides its traditional checkbook diplomacy, it could follow America in what is often termed karaoke diplomacy, and respond in a more active manner. The reactions following the Afghan War and North Korean nuclear test in December 2006 in the Japanese political, diplomatic and military circles are noteworthy and indicates Japanese stand on various issues and the future strategic planning. Even though the possibility of full-fledged war is very slim, Japanese have been blunt in criticizing North Korean policies and even looked into and talked about the possibility of pre-emptive measures if required.

Japan has many pending issues to attend, specifically with the neighbouring giants like China and Russia. With the rising interests in the economic and trade relations, those issues are fading away or have become less significant. Japan has economic and technological edge along with American umbrella to take care of its defense needs over Russia and China. With the disintegration of Soviet Russia and emergence of unipolar world, the post-Cold War world was seen as US-centric. However, with the success stories of the emerging giants like India and China, Japan is rethinking and reformulating
its strategic approach. Neighbouring countries as usual are full of skepticism and any move of Japan towards a more active role, even in the UNPKO, invokes their fury. Critics opine that when these nations are so concerned about their own defense, it is not understandable how they can object to Japan showing concern about its own defense.

Japan is all set to expand its horizon and the process of amending the constitution has progressed remarkably but getting rid of Article 9 does not seem trouble-free even in the future. While policymakers feel that such a move is absolutely necessary for getting permanent seat of UNSC, Japan's plans to play a leading role in the international affairs have been put on backburner due to the ongoing political tussle between the ruling coalition and the opposition.

The end of the Cold War provided Japan a chance to act more freely as far as its foreign policy was concerned. Japan's relations with Russia have improved and are headed in the right direction. Long-standing border issues have been put on backburner and trade and other international issues are given preference by both countries. Given the vast reserves of oil and natural gas, Japan can not ignore Russia. In order to keep Japanese industrialization and economy expanding, Russian natural resources may prove beneficial and provide an alternative to the Japanese reliance on the Gulf region for its energy requirements. Japan, in order to safeguard its long term interests, will most likely adopt a cooperative stand with Russia.

Due to increasing US pressure, Japan may have to sever its trade relations with Iran or other Middle East countries. Although chances are slim, the possibility of such a situation cannot be ruled out. Recently, President Bush criticized Japan and European countries for continuing their business with Iran and other countries apparently sponsoring terrorism.

Will Japan follow its pre-war aggressive militaristic policies once it regains normalcy? As of now, looking at the overall picture of the globe and of East Asia, in particular, despite the North Korean threat, the region is likely to remain peaceful.
Presence of US troops in the region, China's increasing military might and economic power, Russian, Japanese and South Korean business and strategic interests will prevent Japan from following militaristic policies, even if it wants to.

Comparing the international situation now with the pre-War situation will also show that the perceptions and attitudes about the war have changed drastically. And so have the costs and the impact of the weapons and war. More nations today have nuclear weapons and many have the potential of making them even at short notice. The nature of the warfare has changed and terrorism has emerged as a global phenomenon threatening almost all the countries of the world. Nations are also resorting to such covert measures rather than full-fledged war. Thanks to the development of information and technology and other innovations, any tampering with vital lines of information and communication can cripple the entire system.

International organizations are stronger and more influential than in the pre-WWII period. For instance, the United Nations is much stronger and efficient than the League of Nations and keeps a close watch on the developments all around the globe, taking quick action in crisis-like situations. Moreover, the membership of the UN provides opportunities to smaller nations to present their views and problems in front of the world community. The UN plays a vital role in the international conflicts resolutions and Japan, being a member and major donor of the UN and an aspirant for permanent membership of the Security Council, will never initiate any kind of war now or in future, even if it regains normalcy.

Japanese MNCs have a pan-global presence and despite its huge size, the Japanese economy mainly relies on foreign trade. Given the volume of its investment and future interests in the rest of the world, Japan cannot repeat the mistake of the past in the present fast-changing world. It has to stay competitive to survive and to do so, Japan needs favourable world opinion. Japan can influence the policies of several developing countries by investing in infrastructure development, industrialization and overall economic development. Many countries have gained economically from Japanese aid.
including its pre-war colonies, such as the South East Asian nations, South Korea and China. Several other nations including Russia and India can also gain immensely from Japanese, technological and financial aid, and investment.

Notwithstanding, the dominance of conservatives in Japanese politics, the significantly weakened communists and anti-revisionist factions will continue to influence Japanese policymaking. Moreover, unlike the pre-War constitution, the present constitution puts the military under the direct control of the popularly-elected government. Several strategic thinkers and military personnel within and outside Japan think that the civilian control of the SDF rules out any possibility of Japan following pre-war lines. Many other foreign defense officials holding the same view say that although, Japan’s defense capabilities are unmatchable, it cannot wage a war or defend itself without US support. Think-tanks like the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA) have a similar line of thinking. While an aggressive military posture will not be feasible for Japan, Japanese presence will be more obvious in international missions particularly of the UN and, in some cases, US-led ones as well.

Japan has contributed and will continue to contribute to the world community in all possible ways, but only after securing its economic and strategic interests. Japan, moreover, is not immune from the rising threat of terrorism and being a key US ally, the threat increases manifold. Japan has also experienced the threat of terrorism within and outside its boundaries. However, situations like 1995 subway attacks in Tokyo and the seizure of the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Peru, in 1996, and the recent kidnapping of three of its citizens in Iraq, have always motivated Japan to strengthen its information-gathering and cooperation-building activities to tackle international terrorism. Such situations also provide justification to enhance the efforts to secure the interests of Japanese working abroad.

Japan’s leading role in issues of global concern like global warming, international terrorism and NPT deserve appreciation. Japan has all the intention to fight any such threat arising anywhere in the world by enhancing its military capabilities. Natural
disaster mitigation and preparedness for any untoward incident that may take place anytime anywhere can be attributed as prominent reasons for Japan’s attempts to strengthen its military/defense capabilities. The present era of information technology has increased the vulnerability of the nations as is evident from the increasing cyber crime. Japan has to keep itself updated with the happenings and developments in the other parts of the world. Therefore, the strengthening of the intelligence system stands justified.

Japan’s contribution in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and Iraq was not just in terms of financial support. The role played by its NGOs and the special envoy of the Japanese Prime Minister to Afghanistan, Sadako Ogata, also received praise. A recent survey by AsiaBarometer has shown that Japan is the most popular country among the Afghanistan citizens (see chapter 3 and 5).

For Japan, seeking normalcy is still not an easy task. However, post-Cold War Japanese security and foreign policies are drastically changed. Japan cannot suddenly shed the restraints imposed by its pacifist constitution but the incremental growth in its defense capabilities will lead Japan to a more assertive role and status in international affairs. The Japanese response to the events of September 11, 2001, Afghan War, Iraq War and North Korean nuclear tests have provided a series of precedents to be followed during the times to come. Already in possession of one of the most sophisticated defense forces, Japan can emerge as one of the greatest military powers in the world. While Japan’s recent downsizing of its JSDF, including personnel and weapons, is seen as positive developments for the region, the impetus in modern warfare is more on the technology and high speed high-precision weapons than on the conventional military build-ups. Defense expenditure for 2007 is less than the previous years because of the ongoing reforms which shows Japan’s reluctance to shed the one percent ceiling on the defense budget.

Japan is continuously trying to open up security-related dialogues with several countries which were ignored in the past. Japan is also trying to engage more and more nations through talks and bilateral and multilateral agreements. Even the scope of the
defense activities and preparedness for the future international crisis is stressed upon through recently signed agreements with countries like India and Australia. Joint-operability combined exercises have increased in number. The Japanese policy is not to contain but to balance or neutralize the increasing power of China. North Korea will continue to play its nuclear card to get more aid and support from other countries but Japan seems to be prepared for any such situation and with the help of US, can handle any threat arising in the region.

The political Opposition, which was weakening in Japan and posing no stiff resistance to the governmental policies, has been revived under the banner of the DPJ. The transition of JDA into the MOD holds significance not only for Japan but for all those who are interested in and concerned with anti-militarism and remilitarization in Japan. Japan can address all its problems, provided the leaders take a clear stand and the right approach.