



## Cost of Blood

by Yumiko Nakagawa

Recent political and domestic developments have encouraged speculation that Japan is using the military to assume a higher international profile. The dispatch of Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force fueling ships and this week's decision to send an Aegis-class destroyer to assist the U.S. in the Persian Gulf along with the recent Japanese Cabinet decision to extend logistic support for the U.S. war on Afghanistan until May 19, 2003, seems to suggest that Japan is becoming a more "normal" country through the use of its military. If Japan is indeed becoming more willing to speak out and act on behalf of its national interest, then it is becoming a normal nation. This reasoning is further supported by the Japanese public's call for the country to more clearly articulate its national interest: Japan's new tough line against North Korea is one piece of "evidence" for this claim. However, these steps toward normalcy are impeded by a fundamental obstacle - naiveté. The Japanese people are not ready to pursue the national interest if it will result in bloodshed.

Expanding military roles overseas - either through United Nations forces or in alliance with the U.S. - for the sake of becoming a "normal country" ultimately means Japanese soldiers will fight - and die - for the country's national interest. However, the Japanese public seems incapable of dealing with the consequences of such a sacrifice. When UN volunteer Nakata Atsuhito, a member of the UN Transition Authority in Cambodia, was shot by guerillas in Cambodia in April 8, 1993, the entire nation wept. Similarly the North Korean abductees issue has triggered an emotional reaction. The Japanese public has focused on the fate of 13 people to the virtual exclusion of North Korea's nuclear or weapons of mass destruction capability. These international concerns were given virtually no attention in the Japanese media's reports on the abductees. Personal stories overwhelmed discussion of the issue from the broader perspective of national interest.

Weighing national interests against the cost of blood is never easy. Every society treasures the lives of its young soldiers and does not want to send them to die. The shrinking family size in industrialized societies makes their governments even more reluctant to sacrifice its youth. The prospect of casualties has significant impact on military policy planning. The U.S. was reluctant to send ground troops into Bosnia and Afghanistan, instead air strikes were used to minimize casualties. The deaths of less than two dozen U.S. soldiers were enough for the U.S. to pull troops from Somalia. A key question hanging over any attack on Iraq is, "Is getting rid of Saddam Hussein worth our people's lives?"

The pursuit of national interest through military forces tests Japan's democracy. It requires the Japanese public to focus on the national interest when setting national objectives, and weigh them against the human costs when making a policy decision. The

Japanese people need to realize the possible consequences of such decisions and be responsible for them. The democracy that gives the Japanese government permission to expand military roles means the public cannot blame anyone else for unpopular outcomes. Japanese citizens will be responsible for the act of Japanese soldiers. Unlike the previous war, neither the Emperor nor generals can be held responsible. Ultimately, the question involves the accountability of Japan's democracy.

With Japan's nationalism on the rise, it might be natural for some Japanese to expect that the Japanese armed forces will play a more active military role. If the call for such a military role is just an expression of nationalism, the Japanese people need to think more creatively about other options for expanding the country's international presence before concluding that the military option is best. For example, pacifism still can be a source of national pride rather than an obstacle of it - Japan's Pacifist Constitution is a noble pledge not to repeat the atrocities committed by Japan in the past.

By enhancing its diplomatic ability and its defense capability, Japan could take pride in its continuing renunciation of the right to wage aggressive war. Japan's role in nuclear non-proliferation can also be promoted; the test cases being North Korea and the People's Republic of China. Japan should pursue nuclear non-proliferation policy, possibly using foreign aid. Although it needs to be sensitive to its impact on neighboring countries and subject to constitutional and international legal constraints, Japan has a right to play a military role . . . but clearly Japan is not ready to take such a step.

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