

## **The Sun Also Rises: The Dawning of a New Japan Model?**

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**Abstract:** As Francis Fukuyama observes, the legitimacy of America's vanguard role in the Far East has rested largely on Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Japan's interests have also been well served, since its neighbors would never have flocked behind the Japanese "lead goose" if its wings had not been clipped militarily. Thus Washington and Tokyo struck a win/win alliance. This "1955 system" not only turned Japan into a permanent military garrison on Russia's eastern flank, but provided a blueprint for another kind of containment: the replacement of liberal Left reformism by "Asian values" economism. This dual containment would be duplicated throughout the Asia Pacific as the Japan model was adopted by other nations. Thus oppositional democracy was suspended and national security outsourced to the United States. This model remained in place throughout the recovery era and the subsequent "miracle" years. It lasted so long as Japan was an essential piece on the Cold War chessboard.

As the Cold war waned, Japan's regional paramountcy would slip away, while a new Russia was embraced by Washington. Had Russia and America continued their romance, Japan could have been pushed even further off the geopolitical map. But Putin's growing animosity, plus the geopolitical bonding of China and Russia within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), have forced a tacit reassessment in Washington. And for once America and Europe are moving in the same direction. Even France has come on board this time, as Chirac's pro-Russia tilt has been replaced in 2007 with the unabashed pro-Americanism of Nicolas Sarkozy. These tectonic shifts are putting Japan closer to the epicenter of Asian power politics.

Japanese "normalization" was given high priority by Koizumi, and Abe followed suit by raising the Japan Defense Agency to ministry status and announcing plans to revamp its whole concept of security. Both Tokyo and Washington came to see Article 9 as redundant and obstructive. Abe's staff made it clear that Japan was ready to play "a huge great game" in resource competition with China and Russia; and in January 2007, while visiting Europe, Abe drove home the point that under him Japan would be a steadfast partner on NATO's Eastern flank. So too he sought closer security ties with democratic India and Australia. Accordingly he spoke of an "arc of freedom and prosperity" extending from Japan through India and into Europe.

Such rhetoric will mean little, however, if more is not done to advance liberal democracy at home. With Japan reasserting itself militarily and geopolitically, it matters more than ever what kind of country this is domestically. Japan's own political development will decide whether the new Japan model will afford a significant alternative to Asia's more authoritarian models.