

## Japan's Peacekeeping at a Crossroads

by *Hiromi Nagata, Fujishige, Yuji Uesugi, and Tomoaki Honda*

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The book under review, *Japan's Peacekeeping at a Crossroads*, examines Japan's unique and unprecedented approaches to international peacekeeping doctrine. Authored by three distinguished Japanese scholars—Dr. Hiromi Nagata Fujishige, Yuji Uesugi, and Tomoaki Honda—the work provides a comprehensive analysis of Japan's peacekeeping efforts and its evolving role in the global peacebuilding landscape.

Dr. Fujishige holds a Ph.D. in Political Studies from SOAS University of London and a postgraduate diploma in War Studies. Her research interests encompass international peace operations, Japan's peacekeeping and peacebuilding policies, and broader issues in conflict resolution. Dr. Uesugi, a specialist in international conflict analysis, has both academic expertise and practical experience, having served in various peace missions as a peacebuilding practitioner. The third author, Tomoaki Honda, focuses on decision-making processes in international peace cooperation and peacebuilding. Together, these scholars bring extensive expertise to the study of peacekeeping and peacebuilding, particularly in the context of Japan's unique historical and political landscape.

The authors collectively trace the history of Japan's peacekeeping efforts and their gradual evolution within the nation's profoundly ingrained anti-militarism framework. This anti-militarist stance is rooted in the unprecedented destruction and trauma Japan experienced during World War II, particularly the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the United States. The authors argue that, despite significant domestic challenges, Japan has made concerted efforts to adapt to the shifting international emphasis on 'integration' and 'robustness' in peacekeeping operations. However, the growing insecurity faced by United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs) has led developed nations, including Japan as a member of the Global North, to reduce their troop contributions.

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The chronological narrative presented in the book suggests that Japan has reached a critical juncture in its constitutional interpretation regarding its participation in peacekeeping operations, particularly in roles perceived as prohibited under its pacifist constitution. The authors highlight the development of aversive attitudes toward violent conflict within a significant segment of Japanese society, a sentiment shaped by the nation's historical experiences and cultural values. Additionally, the book examines the strategic and incremental measures undertaken by the Japanese government to meet rising international expectations concerning UN peacekeeping operations. By situating Japan's peacekeeping efforts within its historical, constitutional, and societal contexts, the authors provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and complexities Japan faces as it navigates the evolving landscape of international peacekeeping.

The book follows a convincing and well-structured path in developing its central argument. It begins by providing a succinct overview of Japan's national and international orientation within its security paradigm. This is followed by a concise yet comprehensive narration of Japan's inclusion in, and subsequent evolution of, the contested practices of 'robustness' and 'integration' in international peacekeeping. The authors elaborate on the existing international peacekeeping framework while analyzing Japan's responses to these developments.

Chapter 2 chronicles Japan's post-World War II anti-militarist policy, tracing the contested creation of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) in 1954, which originated from the Police Reserve Force to the establishment of the PKO Act in 1992. The narrative highlights Japan's limited role during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, which was restricted to financial contributions. This response provoked dissatisfaction in the United States. It led to a sense of inadequacy within the Japanese government, particularly when Japan's economy was performing exceptionally well, and the nation aspired to be recognized as a global power. This perceived underperformance motivated both the government and the public to consider deploying SDF personnel to United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKOs), albeit under strict conditions. Consequently, the first SDF dispatch occurred in Cambodia, followed by missions in East Timor, Haiti, and South Sudan. These missions led to the evolution of the PKO Act through formal amendments in 1998, 2001, and 2015.

The book provides an in-depth account of the unique terminologies crafted by the Japanese government to align the deployment of peacekeepers with local norms and constitutional constraints. These terminologies include distinctions between 'self-defense' and 'self-preservation,' the concept of 'coming-to-aid duty,' and the hypothetical 'five principles' that must be met before deploying SDF personnel to a foreign country. Japan's troop contributions were suspended following the abrupt withdrawal of the Japanese Engineering Group (JEG) from South Sudan after the outbreak of a *de facto* civil war in 2016. Despite this, Japan has ensured that its withdrawal is not perceived as a defiance of international peace cooperation. Instead, Japan has assumed the role of a capacity-builder by providing advanced training to peacekeepers and continuing its financial support to UNPKOs.

In the concluding chapters, the authors suggest that, in alignment with trends observed in the Global North, it is unlikely that Japan will resume SDF deployments to foreign territories in the near future. However, the possibility cannot be entirely ruled out. The authors express optimism that Japan will enhance and accelerate its capacity-building efforts to support UNPKOs.

The structural arrangement of the book is commendable as it progresses systematically towards its central argument. The authors establish a historical context for Japan and the international peacekeeping landscape, followed by a theoretical foundation supported by substantial evidence. A detailed account of four key case studies is then presented, culminating in a conclusion that integrates theoretical insights with empirical evidence and offers a forward-looking perspective. This approach ensures clarity and coherence, even when addressing the complexities of Japan's responses. The language used throughout the text is accessible and concise, carefully avoiding ambiguity. Context-specific terms are thoroughly explained before their usage, contributing to the overall clarity and comprehensibility of the work.

The book contains instances where certain word choices disrupt the momentum of thought, reflecting a casual representation of facts or phenomena. For instance, while discussing public support for the dispatch of minesweepers within the context of Japan's anti-militarist stance, the authors describe this shift as 'surprising.' Similarly, terms such as 'amazingly' are employed elsewhere in the text. However, social phenomena are rarely sudden or surprising; seemingly abrupt changes often have underlying, unidentified causes that merit exploration. Although the authors later provide an adequate explanation for this 'surprising shift,' the immediate use of a more academically appropriate term, such as 'significant,' 'remarkable,' or 'unanticipated,' would have better preserved the scholarly tone and avoided unnecessary casualness.

The authors also argue that Japan's discontinuation of troop contributions should be considered part of the broader trend of minimal troop contributions from the Global North. This claim raises two critical issues.

First, the concept of the Global North is inherently abstract and contested, often criticized for its discriminatory undertones toward the developing or underdeveloped world. The authors themselves inadvertently reflect such bias when commenting on troop contributions from the Global South, stating that these are primarily of infantry, albeit not at a quality equivalent to those from the Global North. This statement, while bold, lacks sufficient empirical evidence and risks offending readers due to its generalization and implicit bias.

Second, the argument rests on two assumptions: that Japan should be categorized as part of the Global North and that its contributions to UNPKOs are comparable to those of other Global North states. These assumptions are problematic. Japan's national legal complexities, public reluctance, and opposition to military deployments distinguish its context from other Global North nations. These factors also underpin the complete withdrawal of the Japanese Engineering Group (JEG) from South Sudan in 2017, which the authors describe as an 'abrupt termination.' This withdrawal cannot be attributed solely to Global North trends but to deeper, undeclared reasons specific to Japan's domestic context, making the argument look flawed or overly simplistic.

Despite these critiques, the authors provide an extensive and detailed exploration of Japan's uniquely shaped peacekeeping policy, offering readers valuable insights into the complexities of balancing international expectations with domestic constraints. While the book occasionally displays biases toward the Japanese state, it remains accessible and minimizes confusion regarding the intricacies of Japan's approach to military deployment abroad.

The book opens new avenues for research, particularly in analyzing Japanese society to better understand its steadfast anti-militarist stance despite its historical legacy as a powerful empire. Additionally, it raises important questions about the

underlying causes of limited troop contributions to UNPKOs from developed states, avoiding reliance on the contested term ‘Global North.’

Overall, this work is a significant contribution to peacekeeping scholarship. It offers fresh perspectives on state behavior in navigating the tensions between international obligations and domestic public opinion, which often diverge.

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