

opinion

High cost to new neutrality

Yuriko Koike

Throughout the Cold War, the Soviet Union used every imaginable threat and inducement — including the ultimate prize of reunification — to bring about a neutral Germany. But German leaders of both the left and the right, from Konrad Adenauer to Willy Brandt, spurned every Soviet offer.

Will authoritarian mercantilism now succeed where communism failed?

Countries join alliances, or entities such as the European Union, because these groups make the benefits and obligations of membership as unambiguous as anything in international relations can be. For Germany and South Korea, however, relationships with historic allies — NATO and the United States, respectively — appear to be changing before our eyes.

Through their huge purchases of goods, with promises of even more to come, today's authoritarian/mercantilist regimes in Russia and China may be about to achieve by commerce what the Soviets could not achieve by bribery and threats. And the scale of that commerce is breathtaking, with German exports to China growing from \$25.9 billion a decade ago to \$87.6 billion in 2011, while South Korea's exports have increased from \$53 billion to \$133 billion during the same period of time.

A form of stealth neutralism, indeed, appears to be entering both countries' diplomacy. Witness Chinese President Xi Jinping's recent trip to South Korea, German Chancellor Angela Merkel's unwillingness to impose effective sanctions on Russia for its intervention in Ukraine, and the business-only focus of her just-concluded visit to China.

In both Germany and South Korea, the idea that historic alliances may offer fewer tangible benefits than tacit neutrality — particularly in terms of exports — appears to be taking root, especially among business elites.

Xi's visit to Seoul was another bold step in China's systematic efforts to wean South Korea from its commitment to the U.S.-led international economic order. By offering to permit South Korea to settle its bilateral trade accounts in renminbi, and to launch the first-ever Sino-South Korean initiative toward North Korea, Xi is seeking to convince South Korea's leaders that the country's

future, including reunification, will be determined in Beijing.

China's invitation to South Korea to participate in a new Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (alongside other countries in Asia and the Arab world, but excluding Japan and India) furthers Xi's efforts to create an alternative financial system, with the AIIB mimicking the Asia Development Bank's work.

China's embrace of South Korea is part of a long-term strategy to turn it into a subordinate state in terms of foreign and national security policy (much as Finland kowtowed to the Soviet Union in the Cold War). And yet, though courted by all sides in the struggle to maintain stability in Northeast Asia, South Korea now runs the risk of becoming isolated. Every gesture by the South toward one of the protagonists — China, the U.S., Japan and North Korea — elicits so much pressure by the others that its government must then somehow devise a compensatory policy.

For example, following President Park Geun-hye's request that Xi honor the Korean assassin of a Japanese prime minister, to which Xi readily agreed, she began to discuss joining the U.S.-led Trans-Pacific Partnership free-trade negotiations, in order to assuage the U.S.

As China continued to pursue an anti-Japanese propaganda campaign throughout 2013, Park felt obliged to make some effort to revive ties with Japan by sending a private envoy to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to seek talks on reconciling their disputes.

Given its insecurity, a byproduct of the Korean Peninsula's division, South Korea requires, above all, calm and steady partners. But frequent changes in U.S. policy toward Northeast Asia in recent years have disoriented South Korean policymakers, while Chinese policy, though consistent, confronts South Korea's leaders with choices that they appear unprepared to make.

As a result, South Korea's elite appears to be splitting into pro-Chinese and pro-American factions that transcend party lines. Over a period of time, the only beneficiaries are likely to be those who call for "Finlandization" of the Korean peninsula.

Meanwhile, the impact on German foreign policy of the country's deepening economic ties with Russia has been evident throughout the Ukraine crisis.

Though Merkel frequently admonished the Kremlin about its intervention in Ukraine, German public opinion — particularly that of the country's business leaders — tied her hands. Indeed, German big businesses have been the main obstacle to imposing the type of systemic sanctions that might have dissuaded Russian President Vladimir Putin from annexing Crimea and continuing to back the insurgency (which Russia itself incited) in eastern Ukraine.

This is not the only recent case in which Germany has distanced itself from its allies and partners. In Libya in 2011, Germany refused to offer even rudimentary material support to the military intervention staged by its British and French allies.

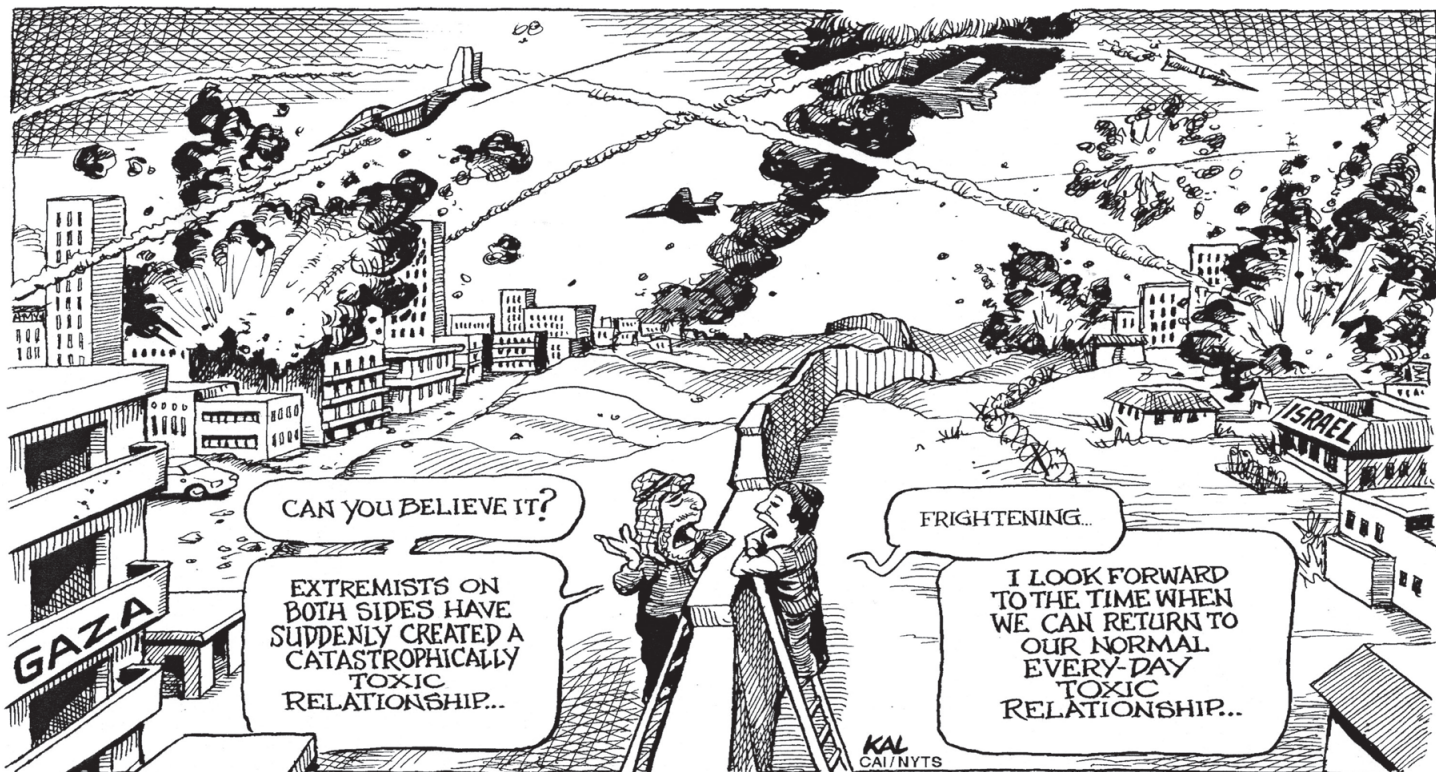
Germany has also continuously failed to meet its commitment to spend 2 percent of its GDP on defense, at the same time that it has insisted that troubled EU economies stick to austerity budgets that limit their deficits to a fixed proportion of their economic output.

Indeed, throughout the eurozone crisis, Germany did the absolute minimum — and always at the last possible moment — to assist its EU partners. And German leaders' obsession with maintaining their country's "golden decade" of exports appears to have gagged them on topics like China's human rights abuses and its aggressive behavior toward its Asian neighbors. That silence is being rewarded with the first-ever joint Cabinet sessions between a democracy and a communist dictatorship, which will take place in Berlin this autumn.

In both Germany and South Korea, economic strength seems to have produced an illusion of policy independence that is opening a chasm between the two countries and their allies — a chasm that revelations of U.S. spying, on Merkel in particular, have deepened.

Germany and South Korea, however, will gain little, and risk much, if they downgrade their alliance ties in favor of commercially motivated, if unofficial, neutrality. Whatever short-term benefits they receive will be more than offset by their strategic vulnerabilities vis-a-vis Russia and China.

Former defense minister and national security adviser Yuriko Koike, is a Lower House member. © 2014 Project Syndicate



World should right Israel's wrongs

WILLIAM PFAFF



Paris

The refusal of Hamas in Gaza to accept the peace talks proposed Monday by the Egyptian government, briefly accepted by the Netanyahu government in Israel, is — in the minds of the Hamas leadership — a victory over their enemy.

The Israeli bombardment of the Palestinians has proven a policy failure, demonstrated by the Israeli government's resumption of bombing. The Israelis tried to give up, but failed.

Forty thousand Israeli military reservists have been alerted in recent days, meant as a threat of ground invasion of Gaza. Reports say the military command opposes new ground operations because of the damage suffered from guerrilla harassment in withdrawing from the "Cast Lead" operation in 2008-2009, as well as the casualties suffered in Lebanon during Israel's 1982 invasion, and its long occupation of Hezbollah-controlled South Lebanon, eventually causing Israeli popular opinion to demand withdrawal.

An Israeli officer is quoted as saying that the problem posed by a ground attack into Gaza today is not the attack and operations inside Gaza, but in getting out.

The rockets from Gaza have never ceased, but the international political costs of the bombing campaign and of the gross disproportion of military means employed, have proven to be considerable, even in the United States, where government and public are both disposed to support whatever Israel chooses to do to the Palestinians, and certainly in most, if not all, of Europe.

Resumption of Israel's attacks means increasing numbers of dead and maimed Gaza civilians and a mounting

casualty disproportion in this "war" of air attacks upon a civilian population essentially unprotected from inevitable collateral damage, whatever the precautions. Whereas the rockets fired from Gaza into Israel — which according to Israel's official statements have amounted to a "terror" campaign — had yet to cause a single fatality as of Wednesday.

Gaza's people have paid a grievous price to give the Hamas leadership this victory, but they paid a far worse price in human lives and physical damage the last time Israel attacked Gaza in an effort to destroy its militants and intimidate the population.

In the Cast Lead invasion of December 2008-January 2009, 1,398 Palestinians were killed and 13 Israeli soldiers. The daily price paid since, under the weight of Israel's permanent sanctions and reprisals, has no real counterpart elsewhere.

This affair is a counterpart in miniature of the whole American-led Western punitive incursion into the Arab world since 2001, itself inspired by the Israeli attempt to expand its legal award of a Jewish Homeland in formerly Ottoman Palestine, promised by the British Imperial authorities during World War I and awarded in 1948 by the United Nations.

The principal Arab states went to war to block that partition, were defeated by the improvised Jewish forces that seized more Palestinian territory than had been officially awarded Israel, defeated the Arab armies, and drove much of the original Arab population into neighboring countries and refugee camps. It seemed too good to be true.

Just as the United States' "Mission Accomplished" in Iraq in 2003, and its launch the year later of a brilliant American-dominated "New Middle East" extending from Baghdad to China's frontiers, now is on fire or is burned-out political ashes, Israel is discovering foyers of fire alight inside and around its claimed territory.

The 1948 victory seemed a brilliant,

even divine, gift to Jewish refugees from war-wrecked Europe, who poured into the new country to create their own pioneering settlements and take over the land's towns and cities, creating an unprecedented modern Jewish urban culture. But the unforgiving Arabs and Egypt attacked again in 1967, with brilliant early successes and then an Israeli rallying and — fatefully — Israel's retaliatory and illegal seizure of still more of the lands and settlements of the new U.N.-defined Palestine, expelling thousands of new refugees. This was the action that created today's war between Gaza and Israel.

When Israel's President Benjamin Netanyahu and his propagandists repeat and repeat that Gaza's Hamas is responsible for this crisis, they are wrong. In Gaza — as on the West Bank — Israel has been and remains in illegal military control of lands and people who, under international law and the 1948 United Nations decision awarding two defined and separate parts of Mandate Palestine to Jews and Palestinians, should be a free people in possession of their own lives and property.

That is why war goes on by embittered Palestinian militants, accompanied by willing hostages who are their own supporters, meeting brutal reprisals from their Israeli jailers.

The U.S. and the nations of the European Union should defend the Arab victims of these events, and not the perpetrators of their oppression. That, paradoxically, is the only thing they can do that might eventually save Israel as well — from itself.

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Richard Fontaine and Jeffrey W. Hornung
Washington/Honolulu
SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

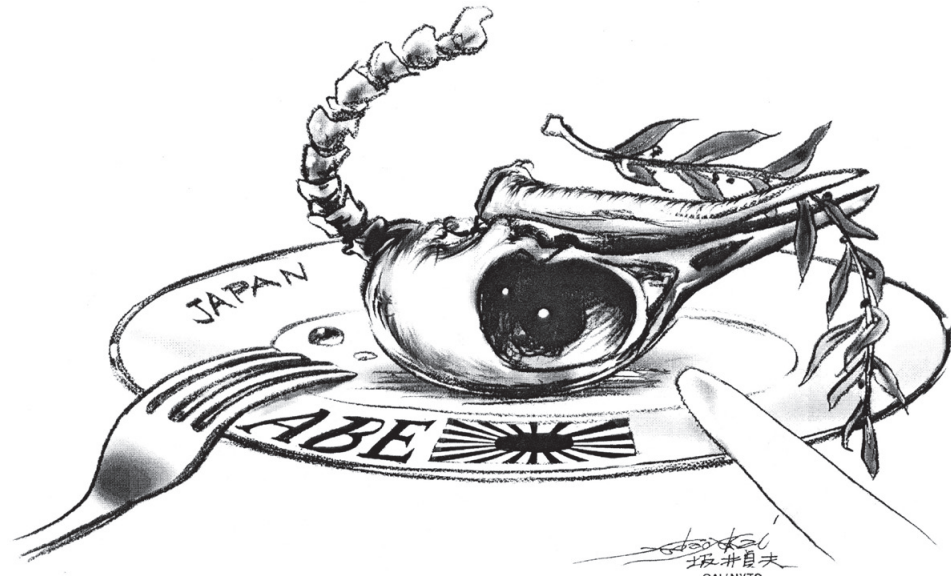
The announcement by Japan's government that it will reinterpret the country's constitution and permit a greater range of military activity has evoked reactions across the spectrum. From outright opposition in Beijing and suspicion in Seoul, to unqualified support in Washington and Canberra, Japan's historic shift has sparked vigorous debate across capitals in Asia and beyond.

And while the decision to permit the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to engage in collective self-defense represents a landmark moment in the country's security maturation, Tokyo's next steps will be more important still. In setting the domestic context for Japan's new military roles, its leaders' stance on historical issues will help determine how far its neighbors and partners will go toward supporting or opposing its security evolution.

Strictly speaking, the reinterpretation is unlikely to change very much in practice, at least in the near term. Depending on the legislation, the SDF will be able to aid the defense of allies or partners if they come under attack, but the conditions under which this can be done are restrictive. The situation must pose a clear threat to Japan — not only to a besieged ally — it must be the last resort, and the use of force is limited to the minimum necessary to protect the Japanese people. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has ruled out Japan's involvement in foreign wars, and SDF troops would not deploy to the Korean Peninsula in a contingency without prior consultations with Seoul. The Constitution's Article 9 — which prohibits Japan from employing force to resolve international disputes — has not changed.

More important than the immediate implications for the roles and missions of the Japanese military is the signal this move sends about the trajectory of Japanese power and national will. Washington, in an era of declining defense budgets and growing war-weariness, has vocally welcomed a more proactive role for its ally. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel noted that the move would permit Japan to "engage in a wider range of operations" and "make the U.S.-Japan alliance even more effective," and a senior White House adviser cited the reinterpretation as emblematic of the "continued maturation of our alliance."

American policymakers have advocated the move for some two decades. The extent to which yet-to-be-submitted legislation permits Japanese forces greater latitude to act internationally



will impact directly the ongoing talks on revisions to the U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines. And at a time when East Asia is replete with simmering tensions that impact Japan's security, from disputes over the Senkaku Islands, to challenges to freedom of navigation, to the latest belligerence in Pyongyang, Japan's appetite for exercising this latitude may come into play sooner rather than later.

This, of course, is what worries neighbors like China and South Korea. In Beijing, a foreign ministry spokesman questioned whether the decision demonstrates that Japan is "deviating from the path of peaceful development." A government spokesman in Seoul expressed concern about whether the change is "in line with the basic spirit of [Japan's] pacifist constitution and in a way that is transparent, dispels neighboring countries' concerns stemming from historical issues and contributes to regional peace and stability." Even in the United States, voices outside official circles expressed concern; the New York Times, for instance, editorialized that "Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has disturbed many in Japan and increased anxiety in Asia by reinterpreting his country's pacifist postwar Constitution."

While Washington's support and criticism in Beijing and Seoul are to be expected, the way in which Japanese leaders deal with other, related issues will help determine the regional and global receptivity to a more militarily proactive Japan. Specifically, a maladroitness handling of historical issues — including comfort women and Yasukuni Shrine — and political insensitivity to the lingering concerns of Asian populations will together hinder the more robust defense posture Abe is attempting to establish. This would represent a set-

back for both Japan and the United States as they seek to maintain stability and promote the rule of law in Asia.

To avoid such a setback, Tokyo should continue to reach out to its neighbors for dialogue and articulate an explicit understanding of the concerns that its military evolution engenders among its neighbors. Continued transparency and efforts to explain Japan's security changes will prove beneficial in this regard.

The constitutional revision is taking place at a time when Tokyo is slightly increasing the defense budget, changing policies governing the export of weapons and military hardware abroad, and beefing up bilateral security and/or strategic ties with countries like Australia, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam. All of these welcome steps will better enable Japan to become a more active supporter of the rules-based international order, in Asia and beyond.

In setting the right context for a stronger, more proactive Japan, its leaders can demonstrate that the constitutional revision will pave the way for the country to serve as an even more positive force in the region. Nearly 70 years after the end of World War II, the danger to Asia does not stem from Japanese militarism. On the contrary, a more robust Japanese military posture will serve not as a problem, but as part of a solution.

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Robert Hardy
Washington
THE GLOBALIST

China is expanding its economic interests in Israel. Its growing portfolio of holdings in high-tech startups, national infrastructure and core industries gives Beijing an expanded strategic presence in Israel.

In Europe, a move is under way to respond to the Palestinian BDS strategy. Some EU companies have withdrawn from Israel's government bidding process to build private ports.

As for the United States, President Barack Obama warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu during his recent visit to Washington that, unless Israel stops building settlements and makes a peace deal with the Palestinian Authority, it will lose U.S. support to fill the void left by the withdrawal of European business from Israel and the gap resulting from the anticipated reduction in U.S. support. China has no moral qualms about investing in Israel and by doing so is increasing its strategic presence. With the support of Netanyahu, China is moving full speed ahead.

Attracted by China's huge market, its willingness to use state funds to encourage state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to invest abroad and its seat on the U.N. Security Council, Netanyahu has given top priority to expanding relations with Beijing. Chinese SOEs, public institutions and private investors are acquiring large positions in key Israeli industries. In the process, China has gained unprecedented access to Israeli technology, innovation and business know-how.

China needs all of these assets to modernize and transform its economy. It has found no better place than Israel — in its growing state of isolation — to

meet its needs in these areas.

As Netanyahu said last December at a joint news conference with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, "Our strengths complement one another. China has massive industrial and global reach. Israel has expertise in every area of high-tech."

He left the obvious unsaid, allowing other nations to read between the lines.

Following Wang's visit, Netanyahu publicly gave China relief from Israeli export licensing restrictions as an essential first step his government is taking to expand cooperation and trade.

In a follow up to Netanyahu's efforts, Israel's National Cyber Bureau announced plans to include China in a Cyber Emergency Response Team to be created next year.

This is a significant step for Israel, a world leader in defeating cyber attacks, to take, because China is a world leader in using cyber penetration of key industries and defense networks to benefit its companies and its defense sector.

As far as high technology is concerned, China has become a close second to the U.S. in the number of projects it is involved in that are co-managed by Israel's Chief Scientist Office.

Israeli officials have said China will soon replace Europe as the second-leading source for investment in Israel's high-tech sector, and could even replace the U.S. in the number one spot.

Israel already awarded the Red-Med mega-project — designed to connect the Red Sea to the Mediterranean coast by high-speed rail — to a Chinese firm. Another Chinese firm recently won the right to build a port at Ashdod, the proposed terminal for the Red-Med rail scheme project.

The Red-Med project — a Chinese-built strategic alternative to using the Suez Canal — helps Beijing cement its presence in Israel for decades to come.