In 2012, the geopolitical sphere of East Asia transformed immensely, bearing opportunities for unprecedented change and the reawakening of old tensions. 2012 was a momentous year for East Asia because the global political climate experienced a change of the guard in leadership: the reelection of President Obama in the U.S.; the selection of princeling Xi Jinping as President and General Secretary of the People’s Republic of China; the election of Park Chung Hee’s daughter, Park Geun Hye, as President of South Korea; and the political resurrection of a once forlorn politician, Shinzo Abe, as Prime Minister of Japan. In December of 2012, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in coalition with the New Komeito Party, secured the majority position in the lower house for the first time in three years. Inoguchi Takashi, a Japanese political scholar, noted that in 2012, conservative and middle of the road voters flooded to the LDP. They disregarded the People’s Life First party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), and other parties that adhered to traditionally left-leaning ideologies. This reclamation of authority served as a conduit for the LDP to reconsolidate power in the House of Councilors of the National Diet (parliament) of Japan, thus restoring the LDP’s fifty-five year political dominance. This unification of conservative forces under Abe’s stewardship was a monumental endeavor because the LDP has been historically divided by severe factional schisms. These camps identify by their ideologies concerning fundraising and the distribution of government and party offices among its Diet adherents. On the other side, LDP rivals, the DPJ
and Social Democratic Party (SDJ), are primarily divided because of internal dissension regarding policy and ideological approaches.\(^3\) However, the true restoration of the LDP came to fruition with the ascension of conservative Shinzo Abe to the premiership. Abe’s meteoric political resurrection and popular support heralded a new era of LDP longevity and fanned the embers of nationalism. After his election victory and subsequent return from political wilderness, Abe’s message to the people of Japan and the world was that “he had returned to rejuvenate Japan by restoring national pride and strength,” thus ensuring the spiritual restoration and creation of a “beautiful country.”\(^4\)

In his book, *Utsukushii Kuni e* (“Toward a Beautiful Country”), Abe presents his political paradigm through a dual-prong approach that advocates for policies that Japan should pursue and hope to effectuate. First, Abe asserts that Japan should celebrate and be proud of itself, its landscape, its culture, and its human resources. Second, Abe contends that Japan must not be chastised by foreign countries and thus needs to transfigure itself into a fully-fledged sovereign country.\(^5\) This particular narrative resonated with the Japanese public in the face of China’s impressive economic ascension. In fact, in 2011 the Associated Press conducted a survey inquiring whether or not Japanese citizens felt Japan was a stronger or weaker international power today compared to 10 years ago. A discouraging 63% of respondents expressed that they felt Japan was a weaker international power compared to 10 years ago.\(^6\) Abe was able to successfully take advantage of a weak sense of national pride to garner a prodigious LDP majority and immense popular support. Consequently, the public has expressed increasing support for his agenda of cultivating a stronger national identity. Michael J. Green, former U.S. National Security Council Director for Asian Affairs stated that, “nationalism characterizes the [Japanese] public mood these days.”\(^7\)

When discussing methods and conditions a nation must possess to ensure the sustainment and health of nationalism, Erich Fromm, renowned sociologist and theorist of the Frankfurt School, argued that “nationalism depended on needs to belong to a group that provided community, pride in membership, and a framework of meaning.” This necessity of engendering a domestic desire to be a contributing and valued member of society represents a key facet of Abe’s agenda. Luckily for Abe, Japan is a nation-state of immense ethnic and cultural homogeneity that boasts a 99.8% Japanese population. As the nation progressed from the 13th century, it further consolidated and developed; the *genrō* (elder statesmen) of the Meiji Restoration period burgeoned and solidified this sense of national identity through a systematic social reconstruction. This solidification and social reconstruction laid the foundation for the ascension and eventual usurpation of jingoistic militarism in the Showa period that implemented the bellicose style of foreign and military policy, which plunged Japan into the alliance with the Axis Powers. Because of these policies, many political analysts draw disquieting parallels with Abe’s agenda of resurgent nationalism. Abe has approached his goals in a more calculated and cautious manner to dissuade these arguments and prevent the derailment of his agenda and political exile.

In a display of pragmatism and desire to protract his tenure, Abe has taken an approach to his nationalistic agenda that is “carefully calibrated to evoke nostalgia for the past with references to the ‘beautiful country’ an image of a mythical pure Japan.”\(^8\) Aware of these parallels but not discouraged by them, Abe has utilized his capacity as prime minister to play on this
national identity and thus galvanize support of the state secrecy law, textbook revision, and constitutional revision. However, Abe’s current political trajectory of pursuing this nationalistic agenda and protracting his tenure appears to have come at the increasing cost of domestically eroding essential democratic institutions and internationally exacerbating old wounds.

“Abe’s plan of building a sovereign nation not humiliated by foreign nations relies upon the grassroots cultivation of patriotism and pride in Japan’s youth”

On April 2012, Abe and conservative Diet members from the LDP convened for a high level discussion with members of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) to examine the adoption of new textbooks MEXT had approved for publication. However, during this meeting Abe and the other legislators fervently berated MEXT for approving textbooks that described the government sanction of the forced sexual servitude of Korean women (comfort women) during WWII. Abe retorted to MEXT’s presentation by stating, “when I was Prime Minister [in 2007], I made it clear in the Diet that there was no forceful recruitment of comfort women by the Imperial Japanese Military or by the Military Police. Since when has this official stance changed? Why did you ignore my official government statement?” Abe’s loyal LDP supporters lashed out at MEXT in conjunction with Abe through a battery of incredulous and hostile questions. Abe’s acrimonious meeting with MEXT and his election shortly thereafter portended the revitalization of the LDP’s virulent campaign for the adoption of revisionist history textbooks. Thus, the first arrow of Abe’s nationalist agenda for Japan’s restoration focuses on textbook revision and the upheaval of the local level apparatus that opposes the adoption of revisionist textbooks.

The adoption of revisionist textbooks in school districts across the country serves as a critical interest to Abe. “Classrooms are one place where he can appease ultraconservatives by taking a more firmly nationalist stance,” and thus inculcate nationalistic fervor in younger generations. As scholars Elie Podeh and Zheng Wang note, the educational system and textbooks have become “another arm of the state or agents of memory” whose primary goal is to ensure and facilitate the dissemination of approved knowledge to the younger generations. Thus, textbooks function as a kind of “supreme historical court whose task is to decipher, from all the accumulated pieces of the past, the true collective memories, those that are appropriate for inclusion in the canonical national historical narrative.” Consequently, Abe’s plan of building a sovereign nation not humiliated by foreign nations relies upon the grassroots cultivation of patriotism and pride in Japan’s youth. The adoption of these revisionist texts that “white wash” the heinous atrocities perpetrated during WWII is a critical facet of Abe’s agenda as “denying Japanese guilt for the war is seen as a key step in rebuilding national pride, and establishing independence from the United States.” However, progressive educators and local school boards have served as the most prodigious impasse to textbook revision since the inception of the conservatives’ initial campaign for the adoption of history textbooks that omit “unsavory” accounts of Japan’s Pacific military engagement. Until recently, the adversarial teachers and regional board of educators had successfully quelled all attempts to alter the way the Japanese educational system teaches
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students about Japan’s aggression in the Pacific Theater. In 2001, the progressive coalition of local educators subdued a resurgent campaign for textbook revision through their staunch opposition against the LDP and its coercive tactics. However, Abe and his conservative alliance sought to get a revisionist textbook into 10% of junior high schools. However, much to their dismay, the end result was a mere 0.039% adoption by academic institutions.

Abe’s adept utilization of political stalwarts has slightly splintered this formidable coalition of progressive educators at the subnational level as “conservative mayors and governors across Japan began to appoint handpicked revisionists as education board members” who adopted revisionists textbooks authored by conservative publishers. Despite the staunch and formidable opposition by local educational officials and teachers, Abe has implemented a two-pronged approach “to promote an emphasis on patriotic educational content and closer control over the national curriculum as an antidote to the ‘infection’ of progressive teaching methods, which [he] blame[s] for destroying discipline in schools.”

The first approach Abe has utilized revolves around his longstanding alliance with the Society for History Textbook Reform (Tsukurukai) and its leader, Fujioka Nobukatsu, as a viaduct for the galvanization of grassroots support and private sector pressure among publishing companies. Tsukurukai firmly adheres to the ideology that “because of the way history has been presented, generations of young Japanese have grown up ashamed of their heritage, creating a Japan that can neither defend itself nor act assertively on the world stage.”

Tsukurukai has repeatedly asserted that its primary purpose “is to influence mainstream war memory and to push for [a] more robust military build-up, allowing Japan to be more assertive in its dealings with China and both North and South Korea.”

Despite the low adoption numbers of its MEXT-approved revisionist textbooks, Tsukurukai’s success in changing Japan’s educational paradigm has primarily comprised of its claim that current social studies and history texts have propagated a “masochistic view of history.” Tsukurukai’s campaign for the condemnation of historical masochism in conjunction with burgeoning LDP support has fostered a trend of “self-censorship” that has “rippled through the textbook industry and amplified the revisionist voice.”

Through its coercion with the support from Abe, Tsukurukai created an environment where “other textbook publishers began to reform their own editorial guidelines for fear of being labeled masochistic and thus inviting the ire of conservatives or reducing their market share.” Consequently because of the joint campaign led by Tsukurukai and Abe for textbook revision, publishing companies have ultimately acquiesced to Tsukurukai and its conservative political alliance, forging a precedent for further deference to the Japanese Government and ultimately hindering the dissemination of historical truth.

Furthermore, this rampant “self-censorship” by the publishing community has limited the

A Japanese textbook only mentions the Nanjing Massacre in one footnote.
number of critical texts and thus ensured that students are inculcated with an unbalanced and distorted understanding of history.

Abe’s second approach is unilateral top-down disruption of the local autonomy of school boards through his new Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education. In support of Tsukurukai’s sensationalization of a “masochistic view of history”, a subcommittee of the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education expressed its position that its primary objective is to supplant “masochistic” historical perspectives in textbooks with the recently revised new Fundamental Law of Education: “to foster [in students] an attitude to respect our traditions and culture, [and to] love the country and region that nurtured them.”

Aside from personally creating the Headquarters, Abe has further consolidated his influence in the textbook revision campaign by appointing Shimomura Hakubun, chairman of the Headquarters for the Revitalization of Education that authored the education reform proposal, as the new Minister of Education. This appointment follows a series of ardent Abe allied appointees into high-level ministerial positions. This personalization of the ministries and Diet by Abe serves as another installment of the entrenched collusion and political insulation that curtails the authority and outlets of critics of Abe’s administration.

In June 2013, in a move devised to cripple local level progressive educational boards, the Headquarters issued a request that delineated a series of stipulations for the renovation of the educational system such as: “the textbook examination standards should require publishers to mention government views and Supreme Court rulings where applicable; a new law, provisionally called ‘the textbook law,’ should be passed to legally re-define what textbooks should include, what the authorization requirements are, and who should decide what textbooks are to be adopted and how.”

This request effectively solidifies a policy that eradicates the views of authors critical of Japan, thus ensuring a system where young Japanese students only know what the government wants them to know. This dissipation of free speech in history textbooks would guarantee the imposition of a diluted government-approved historical narrative that would most likely omit the empire’s numerous crimes against humanity such as: the mass enslavement of Koreans for excruciating labor, the kidnap of Korean women to work in government sanctioned brothels as “comfort women”, the destruction and massacre of Nanjing, and instances of cruel and torturous biological tests conducted on captured Chinese civilians.

Consequently, this suppression of academic and scholarly publication serves as a reversion of Japan’s progress towards peace as generations of Japanese youth would be unaware of the immensely sensitive historical wounds that have effectuated East Asian foreign and security policy. When discussing the East Asian political climate, Chunghee Soh explained that “Koreans harbor a deep sense of victimization in their memories of their checkered historical relationship with Japan, which has generated a nationalist sentiment toward Japan’s ethnocentric representations of bilateral and regional events in its history textbooks.”

Therefore, Prime Minister Abe’s educational initiatives have showcased to the citizens of Japan and to the world that he is...
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willing to implement policies that jeopardize critical democratic principles and Japan’s international progress in the future.

On December 6 2013, the right of free speech was dealt another devastating blow as Abe and his LDP cadre successfully passed an ambiguous state secrecy law. Abe’s latest legislative success serves as another example of the augmentation of government authority at the expense of individual constitutional rights and government transparency. The adoption of this bill serves as an immense personal achievement for Abe. During his first term as PM in 2007, he “proposed an American-style national security council during his first term, but was unable to pass legislation.” However, the new bill’s impetuous and relatively clandestine passage was lauded by the United States but widely condemned by both domestic and international observers. The law mandates stringent punitive measures such as an incarceration period of ten years for civil servants who divulge classified information and an incarceration period of five years for citizens convicted of abetting those leaks. According to Article 3 of the secrecy law, the law confers “all major government agencies the power to designate a broad range of information as secret and imposes heavy criminal penalties on government officials and others who leak such information and on journalists and others who use ‘inappropriate’ means to persuade them to do so.” This allowance for the designation of state secrets by Abe’s cabinet represents a concerning and substantial set back of democratic principles as Abe has personally stocked his cabinet with extremely loyal conservatives that defer to his direction. Thus, Article 3 of the law insulates Abe and facilitates Abe’s influence in determining what the government conceals from its citizens and the world. The law further undermines the health of Japan’s representative democracy by diverting influence and power from elected representatives and instead bestowing it to unaccountable and unelected bureaucrats who can seal virtually any documents for up to 60 years.

In response to these disturbing legislative provisions and the laws lighting passage, Abe stated, “to protect lives, we must prevent intelligence from reaching terrorists. To secure life and property, we had to enact the secrecy law as quickly as possible.” Despite Abe’s assertion that the bill was meant to counteract terrorism, many observers have retorted that these “terrorists” are merely political opponents and those critical of Abe’s resurgent nationalism and consolidation of authority. This notion of Abe’s suppression of opponents to his administration is further substantiated by the fact that “the law does not excuse whistleblowers that uncover corruption, threats to public health or the environment, or otherwise act to serve a public interest.” The paucity of government protection for whistleblowers is concerning as Michael Cucek, a Tokyo-based research associate with MIT’s Center for International Studies, notes, “in a historical view, we (Japan) have no Aldrich Ames, we have no [Edward] Snowdens in Japanese history — people who gave up secrets for money or fame.” Abe’s trend towards soft-authoritarianism and the dissolution of individual rights is again evident in the law’s explicit allowance for the government to prosecute offenders and whistleblowers without proving that government interests were threatened from the information’s release.

The expansion of unbridled and unaccountable executive authority was further solidified in Article 23 of that law that ensured courts do not possess the inherent ability to inquire whether or not Abe’s cadre fairly and properly designated information as state secrets. By codifying the exclusion
of the court’s review of state secrets, Abe has essentially ensured the unilateral execution of arbitrary discretion, disregarding the inherent democratic principles of checks and balances. The removal of judicial oversight further exacerbates Japan’s already weak judicial system that usually defers to the Prime Minister as the court “holds that the judiciary should not intervene in the decisions of the legislature or executive branches of government” despite its exclusive ability of judicial review.29

In the seven decades since its inception in the late 1940s, Japan’s Supreme Court has declared only 20 existing laws unconstitutional. Correspondingly, courts in Japan have in fact never rendered judgments in favor of media outlets in contentions surrounding journalistic freedom. In regards to the freedom of the press, the Supreme Court of Japan has only established a sole precedent that “upheld the conviction of a journalist on national security grounds” despite the journalist publishing information that had already been declassified by the U.S. and was available through a Freedom of Information Act request.30 To combat the immense domestic and international criticism of the law, Abe invited commentary from the public for a period of two weeks in September shortly after the law’s summary was released. During this two week period, Abe’s government received 86,000 comments of which, 70,000 (77%) opposed the then proposed secrecy bill.31

The release of the law’s summary in September spurred the convergence of over 10,000 demonstrators who stated the legislative proposal was a direct attack at the constitutional rights of citizens and the objectivity of media outlets. In response to the tremendous demonstration denouncing the law, Ishiba Shigeru, LDP Secretary-General and ally to Abe, expressed that he believes “the strategy of merely shouting one’s opinions at the top of one’s lungs is not so fundamentally different from an act of terrorism.”32 Ishiba’s remarks are especially unsettling as counterterrorism is one of the classifications for the designation of subject matter as a state secret. Thus, his remarks possibly portend the increase of Abe’s restriction of anti-government demonstrations as acts of “terrorism”. Furthermore, this type of government repression of demonstrators has an established precedent stemming from the arrest and detainment of activists who opposed PM Koizumi’s deployment of Self Defense Forces to Iraq in 2004.33 Aside from the widespread public condemnation of the bill, international organizations such as Human Rights Watch, International PEN Club, and the Open Society Justice Initiative have expressed disapproval and outrage towards Abe’s beloved secrecy law.34 After the release of the law’s summary in September, Abe and the LDP quickly railroaded the law’s passage in only three months despite ubiquitous public denunciation, requests from opposition parties to include an independent oversight body, and insufficient time for extensive study and debate over law in the Diet.

A rising sun flag with an image of Shinzo Abe and Chinese characters that read “shame” is burnt during an anti-Japan protest in Hong Kong, in September 2013.
Abe's disregard for international and public concern has also blatantly contravened international democratic standards for government transparency. The Global Principles on National Security and the Right to Information (the Tshwane Principles) "provide the most comprehensive and detailed guide to balancing government secrecy needs against the people's right to know presently available." Despite the existence of these international democratic standards and conferences, Japanese legislators neither attended these conferences nor considered them before drafting and passing the secrecy bill. Ultimately, these critical international 'principles' were ignored by the Abe administration.

Consequently, this dismissal of democratic principles by Abe has been ironically celebrated by the United States but decried by international observers and political scholars. Navi Pillay, UN Human Rights High Commissioner, lambasted Abe by stating that the Prime Minister "should not rush through the law without first putting in proper safeguards for access of information and freedom of expression as guaranteed in Japan's Constitution and international human rights law."

Pillay's statement reflects the genuine concern over Abe's ardent political augmentation and his increasing push towards an authoritarian-style limitation of constitutionally endowed rights. In the Japanese Constitution, Article 21, clearly state that citizens are guaranteed the right of freedom of speech and expression. Abe's secrecy law, however, virtually diminishes this constitutional right and protection to "the simple requirement that state authorities show hairyo (due care) for such fundamental rights as they go about their business." The concern over Japan's democratic regression, Abe's trajectory towards soft-authoritarianism, and erosion of the constitution has drawn a myriad of outrage from scholars of politics and democracy. Takahashi Tetsuya, University of Tokyo philosophy professor, expressed concern over the LDP's increasing diminution of the constitution through the secrecy law when he asserted, "the great difference between the current constitution and the LDP revision plan is that the LDP plan is not based on 'natural rights' by which all people have human rights when they are born. Their thinking is 'top-down.' They think human rights only exist when they are recognized by the state."

In regards to Abe's nationalistic agenda, Takahashi expressed his belief that Abe will utilize a series of statutes similar to the secrecy bill in order to gradually burgeon the power of the prime minister and cabinet to facilitate the eventual revision of the constitution.

Thus in Takahashi's view, Abe could ensure his goals of a stronger consolidated state, expansion of his personal authority, and diminished constitutional rights for individuals. Concerning the state secrecy law's marginalization of constitutional rights, Professor Tajima Yasuhioko, fellow scholar and media law expert, stated, "the secrecy law imprints a stamp of approval on 'press release
journalism (happyo hodo) the practice whereby they publish as news the information released by bureaucrats, as-is. This will accelerate the transformation of news organizations into public relations agencies of the government. Professor Tajima’s statement illuminates the prevalent and entrenched triangular collusion between politicians, bureaucratic officials, and news outlets, where journalism refrains from government criticism in exchange for access to information and government insiders. As a result, the secrecy law empowers and sanctions this apparatus of media manipulation by high political figures and a reactive media that merely serves as a government mouthpiece. Thus, this law represents the erosion of fragile legal protections for the citizens of Japan in favor of decreased transparency and accountability for the policies of Abe’s government. This particular piece of conservative LDP legislation explicates Abe’s trajectory towards soft-authoritarianism by ensuring a virtual ‘chilling effect’ where citizens and media critics are coerced into submission for fear of the state’s extreme reprisal.

“The conservatives think human rights only exist when they are recognized by the state”

The triumphant progress Abe has enjoyed after the revitalization of the textbook revision campaign and passage of the state secrecy law has provided him with the political inertia necessary to effectuate tangible changes to Japan’s iron pacifist constitution. In addition, unlike his previous tenure as PM in 2007, Abe now has an impenetrable LDP majority in both houses. Furthermore, Abe’s “personalization” of the cabinet comprising of members who are resolute supporters of his nationalistic ideology serves as another essential facet and pragmatic move as it is the cabinet, not the Diet, that primarily drafts bills and thus a future constitutional amendment.

Abe’s ‘no-nonsense response’ in regards to the containment of China and the reassertion of Japan comprises the principle that “Japan must loosen the pacifist constitutional bonds that have held it in check since 1945 and stand up forcefully for its interests, its friends and its values.” When analyzing constitutional revision in Japan, Hugo Restall acutely notes that constitution revision is “an idea paralleled by a sense of emergent nationalism and calls of revitalized Japanese militarization.” Consequently, Abe’s successful cultivation of domestic nationalism is absolutely imperative for swaying the generally pacifist population into a population that supports military rearmament and is genuinely fearful of an unwarranted attack by China. Changing staunch public opinion is an immensely formidable task as “the Japanese people, the major arbiter of constitutional reform, do not respond favorably to constitutional reform as part of a nationalist platform.”

On July 11 2013, the Pew Research Center asked Japanese citizens whether or not they “favor or oppose changing article 9 of the Japanese constitution so that Japan could officially have a military and could declare war?” The profound adherence to a pacifist Japan was evident as 56% of respondents expressed their opposition towards changing Article 9. The pacifist Constitution, has represented arguably the largest anathema of the right-wing nationalists in Japan, who have fervently strived for its revision since the early 1950s. Despite the myriad attempts for constitutional revision, virtually all efforts have been devastatingly thwarted and silenced by leftist oppositional
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parties such as the DJP and SDJ. Furthermore, the LDP has faced internal dissension concerning the revision of the constitution as many moderates within the party such as the New Komeito Party, adhere to the Yoshida Doctrine of tabling polemical and divisive issues for a focus on revitalizing the civilian economy. LDP moderates argue that pursuing the expansion of Japan’s military would divert government expenditures to unproductive and remunerative sectors of the economy. Consequently, Abe asserts that he intends to “make Japan a force for peace and stability” through the pursuance of collective defense with the United States. Abe has repeatedly stated that his constitutional revision emphasis is merely to ensure Japan can be reactive and assist the U.S. if it were to be attacked by North Korea or China.

Since the defeat of Japan in WWII and its subsequent democratic reconstruction by U.S. Japan has supported the U.S.’s military endeavors in Korea, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan within the parameters of its pacifist constitution. Despite Abe’s assertions, many Japanese citizens and citizens in neighboring countries view any augmentation of the Japanese military as a direct violation of Article 9 that explicitly states, “the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.” Abe’s position for the pursuance of collective defense has garnered immense support from the United States especially as a result of the Obama administration’s “pivot” towards Asia. On October 3 2013, the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) convened in Tokyo to reaffirm both Japan’s and the U.S.’s vision for an increased strategic and robust military alliance that ensures a more equitable distribution of security responsibilities. During this meeting, the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense, along with their Japanese ministerial counterparts explored various tactics to “upgrade significantly the capability of the U.S.-Japan Alliance” and evolve the “security environment in the Asia-Pacific region.” Despite the U.S.’s explicit support for Japan’s military expansion, many critics suggest that this support is merely a pragmatic decision by the U.S. to reduce its massive military expenditure and ensure the cessation of Japan’s “chequebook diplomacy”. International concern over Abe’s agenda for constitutional revision has flourished as Beijing and Seoul stringently “profess to perceive Abe’s collective defense efforts as a viaduct for Japan’s assumption of bigger role on the world stage, forge security and defense ties with south-east Asian neighbors, and strengthen the U.S. alliance as intrinsically threatening – a throwback to the bad old days of Japanese imperialism.”

The increasing international suspicion surrounding Abe’s attempts to revise pacifist constitutional provisions has been exacerbated by the fact that the Self-Defense Force operates within a constitutional gray zone that neither truly defines nor restricts its role. Many critics in East Asia decry the existence of the SDF as a brazen violation of the constitution that lucidly prohibits the maintenance of “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential.” In 2004, with the U.S.’s engagement in Iraq, PM Koizumi deployed a division of troops to Iraq despite oppositional parties exclaiming that Iraq’s physical territory was a war zone. Although the deployed troops primarily assisted the U.S. with the distribution of provisions and other logistical support, Koizumi’s decision to deploy Japanese forces called into question the constitutionality of the SDF and to what extent the SDF could be utilized. Tensions between Japan and its East Asia neighbors flared once again when it was
revealed that Taro Aso, Deputy-Prime Minister and member of Abe’s nationalistic inner cadre, asserted that Japan’s initiative for constitutional revision should focus on “doing it quietly, just as in one day the Weimar constitution changed to the Nazi constitution, without anyone realizing it, why don’t we learn from that sort of tactic?” Aso’s remarks reignited fears that Abe’s true goal for constitutional revision was actually the full rearmament of Japan’s army, and thus he was only utilizing the angle of collective defense to dissuade skeptics. Despite fear in East Asia of a resurgent and assertive Japan bolstered by the reinstatement of its military, Abe’s iron grip on the Cabinet and Diet, staunch U.S. support for Japan’s military expansion, and growing domestic support of Abe’s nationalistic agenda means there is little to stop Abe from actually drafting a constitutional amendment in the near future. It seems Abe has all the necessary requirements to finally launch the final and most paramount arrow of his nationalistic agenda.

The execution of Abe’s nationalistic agenda for the restoration of Japan has indubitably come at the price of jeopardizing the health of Japan’s democratic institutions, the erosion of the constitutionally endowed rights of Japanese citizens, an imposition of a grossly distorted view of history in schools, and the reduction of Japan’s delicate diplomatic progress and relations. Abe’s unilateral cultivation of domestic nationalism has ensured a system where his political opponents and critics are intimidated into silence while he continues to further consolidate power and insulate himself. Abe’s strategic reduction of moderate and leftist voices in the public, Diet, and history books further exemplifies his trend towards soft-authoritarianism. As Francis Fukuyama notes, Abe’s nationalistic push “toward a beautiful country” actually showcases his commitment of “building an assertive and unapologetic Japan.”

Furthermore, Abe’s extensive ‘personalization’ of his Cabinet and the Diet with fiercely nationalist conservatives has ensured a dynamic where “the entire LDP does what Mr. Abe wants to do” and as a result, “policies are adopted smoothly, as very few people talk back to Mr. Abe.” Consequently, Abe’s calculated efforts to ensure the uninterrupted protraction of his tenure and nationalistic ambitions have secured the steady degradation of Japan’s democratic principles and its refusal to promote peace through the acceptance of its past. According to John Paul Lederach, the peaceful reconciliation of past wrongs “requires the identification and acknowledgment of what happened (i.e. truth) and an effort to “right” the wrongs that occurred (i.e. justice) and forgive the perpetrators (i.e. mercy).” It appears, however, Abe’s push “toward a beautiful country” is in fact pushing Japan back into the shadows of authoritarianism, international isolation, and democratic dissolution.

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The Three Arrows of Abe's Nationalistic Agenda
By Rayne Sullivan

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