The Relationship Between Narratives and Security Practices: Pushing the Boundaries of Military Instruments in Japan

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Japanese security policy has undergone significant changes lately. Japanese policymakers have recently argued over advancing Japan's Self-Defense Forces with new weapon systems. In particular, the Abe government has decided to purchase long-range cruise missiles for its new F-35A jetfighters, and to reconstruct a newly-built helicopter carrier into an aircraft carrier. While specific policy proposals continued dividing policymakers and other stakeholders, the underlying story specifying Japan's place in East Asia, the rise of China, the threat of North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, the tight security relationship with the United States and the vulnerability of the Japanese archipelago has faced little core criticism. The lack of alternative national security narratives suggests the emergence of a Japanese security consensus in the mid-2010s. The strength of the narrative in deterring policymakers to refrain from critique, through the significant costs incurred by opposition, could also suggest a hegemonic narrative (but not necessarily a consensus). We find that the dominant narrative provided a necessary foundation for unorthodox policy proposals, which arguably enabled the Abe government to push through military instrument expansions in the Self-Defense Forces, a move far from politically sustainable only a decade earlier.

Keywords: *security, narratives, military instruments, foreign policy, Japan, U.S.-Japan alliance.*

Japanese security policy has undergone significant changes during the second Abe government from 2012 and onwards. While introducing collective self-defense in 2014/2015 was certainly a milestone, Japanese policymakers have continued expanding the boundaries of Jap-

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anese security policy by taking on more unchartered policy territory, namely the acquisition of weapon systems formerly not possessed by the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Specifically, the Abe government decided in December 2017 to purchase long-range cruise missiles from the Norwegian producer Kongsberg for its new F-35A jetfighters and in December 2018 to reconstruct a newly built helicopter carrier into an aircraft carrier. Although specific policy proposals continue to divide policymakers and other stakeholders, the underlying story of Japan's place in East Asia, the rise of China, the threat of North Korean proliferation, the alliance with United States, and the vulnerability of the Japanese archipelago has faced little core criticism.

In this article we hypothesize that the current dominant security narrative has made the expansion of the boundaries of military practices possible in Japan. We test this hypothesis through analyzing recent national debates over providing the SDF with new weapon systems. These military instruments are controversial in Japan because they relate to Japan's strictly defensive security posture after World War II. We study two prominent fields for political-ideological debate—the Japanese parliament or Diet and Japan's national media—from December 2017 to July 2018. Although this period is relatively short, it spans a period of heated exchanges about the future of the SDF and the handling of the security situation in Japan's neighborhood.

Our findings suggest that the dominant narrative—a narrative that even disagreeing contestants find themselves coerced to operate within (see, e.g., Krebs 2005; Krebs and Jackson 2007)—provided the necessary foundation for unorthodox policy proposals. This enabled the Abe government to push through military instrument expansions in the SDF, a practice move far from politically sustainable only a decade earlier. The lack of alternative national security narratives hints at the emergence of a Japanese security consensus in the mid-2010s. Alternatively, the strength of the narrative in deterring policymakers from developing critiques, through the significant costs incurred by opposition, also suggests a hegemonic narrative (but not necessarily a consensus). Since it is impossible to infer exactly what politicians and other stakeholders believe and think, distinguishing between consensus and hegemony is not viable. The public contests that take place in democracies when unorthodox policies and practices are proposed, however, provide ample opportunities for accessing empirical data on the degree of hegemony/consensus with respect to the underlying stories about the external world and self within a political community.

Our article begins by placing our contribution within the landscape of arguments and analyses on Japanese security policy. In the following section we outline our theoretical approach to understanding the nexus of narratives and military practices. We then present our identification and textual analysis methods and empirical data. After this, we conduct an analysis of debates in the parliament (the Diet) and media data. We conclude with a discussion of our key findings.

The Literature on Japanese Security Policy

The end of the Cold War ignited a spectacular debate between realists and constructivists over why Japan did not translate its economic muscles into military significance. While structural realists predicted that in the new unilateral world order Japan would seek independence from the United States and even acquire nuclear weapons (Layne 1993; Waltz 1993), norm constructivists foresaw a continued reluctance in Japan to beef up its military capacities due to an "antimilitarism culture" (Berger 1993, 1998). Moreover, the constructivists argued that structure of the Japanese government and the rigidity caused by contested norms in the area of military security would also constrain offensive military acquisitions (Katzenstein and Okawara 1993). Neoclassical realists eventually proved better at explaining the Japanese "exception" than their structural cousins. Huntington (1993) argued that the Japanese had developed a peculiar type of realism, "mercantile realism," whereby they accepted all of the assumptions of realism but applied it only to the economic sphere. Heginbotham and Samuels (1998) built on Huntington's thesis to argue that the Yoshida Doctrine was a realist strategy that balanced Japan's need for military security and economic interests:[1] the Japanese traded autonomy in the field of security for a strong focus on technology, industry, and finance. Based on psychological theory on reassurance, Midford (2002) contended that Japanese security policy was centered on "defensive defense" because of an interest in assuring its neighbors that Japan did not (anymore) have any offensive ambitions. Lind (2004) tested the norm constructivist position against the realist theory of "passing the buck," finding empirically that whenever the United States pulled away from Japan, the Japanese responded by strengthening security policy. Finally, nearly a decade after their seminal contribution, Katzenstein and Okawara (2002) introduced "analytical eclecticism"—the need to combine the theoretical paradigms of international relations (IR) theory, including realism.

In the past decade, both norm constructivists and realists have produced impressive accounts of Japanese Cold War and post–Cold War security policy. Hughes (2009) shows how Japan has gradually removed self-imposed constraints in its security policy. Despite being realist in his emphasis on how the external world—North Korea and China—pressures Japan to change, Hughes acknowledges the value of norms and institutions in explaining developments in Japan. Samuels's (2007) realist account of how Japan is updating its security policy to secure itself in a time of a rapidly changing security environment in East Asia presents the most empirically rich investigation to date. Midford's (2011) study of public opinion shows how the public constrains policymakers in Tokyo in the shaping of Japan's foreign policies, but also proved that scholars have incorrectly conflated Japanese pacifism with the fear of entrapment. On the other side of the debate, Oros (2008) updated the norm constructivist perspective by emphasizing the existence of a Japanese "antimilitarist" identity, institutionalized in Japanese politics and bureaucracy to the extent that opposition became too costly. The identity was based on three principles: no traditional military forces, no use of military force to solve international conflicts, and no participation in foreign military conflicts. In contrast to the Yoshida Doctrine, Oros claims that the US-Japan alliance was contested throughout the postwar period, and thus not part of the identity. Izumikawa (2010) builds on analytical eclecticism when he illuminates the various aspects of antimilitarism in Japan, showing that both realist concerns and domestic political norms played a role in postwar and post–Cold War security policy in Japan.

With the advent of the second Abe Cabinet's (2012–) expansion of the boundaries of Japanese security policies, the newest contributions try to explain among other things the introduction of collective self-defense, the establishment of a National Security Council, and the first National Security Strategy. Heginbotham and Samuels (2018) go a long way to claim the changes are caused by the rise of China. Lande (2018) too argues that Japan is currently responding to China's expansion of military power. While in early work Oros (2008) emphasizes stability in Japanese "antimilitarist" security identity since the 1960s, Oros (2017, x) argues that Japan has updated its security identity the past decade as "Japan adjusts to new power realities in its region." Despite belonging to different paradigms in IR, these scholars share the belief in change in Japan due to developments in its environment. The tremendous increase in China's economy and military expenditures or North Korea's nuclear weapon and missiles programs are not in themselves, however,

sufficient to explain change in a country's security stances. These developments need to be interpreted as (possible) threats to Japanese security in order to trigger such reactions. Likewise, Japan's own behavior may influence its Northeast Asian neighbors. If we take human agency and the undetermined nature of world affairs seriously, there is nothing certain about East Asian relations seen from the point in time of decision making (although decisions in hindsight may seem natural).

While realist and norm constructivist contributions may be right that security concerns about China have played a major role in Japan's security upgrades, it is not clear exactly how and why Japan responds as it does to international developments. Critical contributions on Japanese security policy have however unpacked the mechanisms that create the possibility of policy changes in Japan. Lindgren (2018) explains the possibility of the Abe government's new security posture as a response to the successful securitization of China's rise and maritime advance as well as a growing fear of abandonment by the United States among the Japanese security elite. Poststructural approaches have argued that Japan's construction of a Japanese self through differentiation from its neighbors, in particular China and North Korea, has influenced its foreign policy approaches (see, e.g., Hagström and Gustafsson 2015; Hanssen 2017). Elsewhere we have shown that Japanese identity making after incidents in the East China Sea in 2010 and 2012 was heavily concentrated on constructing China as the subordinate other to Japan's peaceful, democratic, transparent, and law-abiding self (Yennie Lindgren and Lindgren 2016, 2017). This suggests that the specific way China is understood in Japan justifies a stronger military posture while being able to maintain the "peaceful self."

National Security Narratives and Military Practices: The Relationship between Language and Doing

Public legitimation of changes to military and security practice is necessary in most political communities (Krebs 2015a, 2015b, 2015c). Legitimation efforts by the political parties in government will often therefore result in public contests, as politicians, media, intellectuals, interest groups, and other stakeholders support or fight the proposed practice change. When public debate over foreign and military policy and practice occurs, the participants may arm themselves with ammunition from national security narratives. While issue-focused debates about changes

in policy and practice do not necessarily display the full-fledged national narratives, we expect excerpts from the narratives to be implicitly or explicitly present in such debates.

We define national security narratives as coherent stories about the nation's performance in the past, present, and potential futures, its "failures" and "triumphs" (Krebs 2015b, 3), subject to the actors and activities of the international environment. Causal claims make up a key ingredient, the glue so to say, in narratives. Indeed, storytelling to explain the world seems to be a natural trait in humans.[2] Kenneth Burke (1969) defines narratives as constituted by act (what is happening?), scene (where is the action taking place?), actors (who is acting?), agency (what means or methods do agents employ?), and purpose (what are agents' motives or reasons for action?) (derived from Krebs 2015b). Narratives offer meaning about the world and self, and it is through national security narratives that international events, other countries' actions, and world affairs more generally are interpreted. Obviously, important events and processes on the international scene may influence national security narratives, but such events "do not speak for themselves" (Krebs 2015b, 2). Instead, proponents of specific national narratives participate in a domestic struggle to shape the public understandings of international developments, events, and trends. Power to shape the narratives can transform to power to shape policies and practices.[3] Public contestants who are able to draw upon dominating narratives have the upper hand because in such narratives, the social relations and knowledge produced is seen as commonsensical. Such narrative power is not omnipotent, however, and hegemony does not preclude the possible defeat against heterodox narratives.

Krebs (2015b) combines three elements in his study of the puzzle of why some narratives rise to dominance: (1) the rhetorical demands of the environment (structural context); (2) the material, normative, and institutional power speakers bring to bear (narrative authority); and (3) the rhetorical modes they adopt (rhetorical strategy). The potential for narrative challenge and transformation is related to *when* contestants speak: in "settled" narrative situations, the rhetorical structure is tight and public contestants challenge each other within the same dominant narrative, while in "unsettled" times, there is more openness toward new heterodox narratives. Politicians, political parties, bureaucrats, government institutions, media, interest organizations, intellectuals, and other stakeholders participate in public contests. In a democracy like Japan, there is a plurality of media and other institutional channels from which actors can speak from, enabling a range of actors to the table. There is,

however, significant heterogeneity in the narrative authority of the various contestants. The prime minister, defense minister, and foreign minister wield significant narrative authority when speaking security. While this does not secure complete support for their stories and policies, it does facilitate reaching wider audiences by giving space and time to the discussion of the issues. Furthermore, *how* contestants speak matter too: are combatants predominantly invoking *arguments*—instrumental or normative—or *storytelling*? In the study of Japanese debates on offensive weapons in 2017 and 2018, the structural context leaned toward the structured and settled situation, as the dominant narrative underlined the speech acts of nearly all participants in the debate. Most of the debate concerned arguments for or against specific military instruments. Surely, a dominant narrative rarely translates into consensus on policy or practice choices, but it limits the options deemed reasonable, smart and possible (Neumann 2008; Krebs 2015b).

Within the public contests about military instruments, we expect to see securitization attempts, meaning utterances about existential threats to the Japanese nation (here the referent object) legitimizing the military instruments as means to counter the threats (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). We also expect to find uses of "rhetorical commonplaces"—argumentative appeals linking the debate participants' arguments to "the commonsense of their audience" (Jackson 2003, 238). The rhetorical strategy of commonplaces is to be understood as cultural resources that the agents can draw upon in order to "render the policy in question possible, acceptable, and even inescapable" (Jackson 2003, 238).

Methods and Data

Our starting point is that discursive constructions—narratives and arguments—need to be studied in their concrete manifestations in writing and speaking by Japanese political contestants. The political-ideological struggle to shape Japan's security practices takes place in several political fields. Here, we study two of the most important fields for public contests: the political field (House of Representatives, HR) and the media field (Japan's two most widely circulated newspapers). We have selected the case based on a specific interest in *how* it was possible for Japan to expand its security practice. That said, our study should be considered within the universe of how dominant security narratives make certain policy and practice changes reasonable, smart, and efficient.

The Japanese political system is characterized by parliamentarism, meaning that the executive power—the Cabinet—emanates from the legislative power—the parliament. In national elections, the Japanese electorate vote in parliamentarians, and then the prime minister and his (yet not her) Cabinet rely on sufficient support in the parliament. The current Abe Cabinet is a majority coalition government in which the major partner Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the minor partner Kōmeitō cooperate. The Abe Cabinet's substantial majorities in both houses of the Diet influence its capacity to push through legislation and budgets.[4] The LDP is however a multifaceted political party divided between factions and on policy positions, and Kōmeitō publicly professes reluctance to expand security boundaries (Ehrhardt et al. 2014; McLaughlin 2015; Lindgren 2016). For change to take place in Japan's security practices it was necessary for the Abe Cabinet to secure acceptance for the legitimacy of the expansions through public legitimation efforts.

Within the HR, we study both the Security and the Budget Committee. The sessions debating missile acquisition and helicopter vessel reconstruction spanned a four-month period (December 2017 to March 2018).[5] The Budget Committee sessions concerned reviewing defense budget proposals as part of the overall 2019 national budget review. The Security Committee sessions concerned general and specific debates about the security and defense of Japan.

For the newspapers, we cover editorials and news reports. National newspapers in Japan are highly ideological-political in their daily editorials on and coverage of domestic politics. Since the major newspapers are key players in the continuous battle to shape Japan's future, we expect the newspaper media to partake in the national undertaking of shaping the boundaries of Japanese security practices. When the national newspapers are placed along a continuum from liberal to conservative, *Asahi Shimbun* is the most liberal, while *Yomiuri* is considered somewhere in the middle of the continuum. Japanese national newspapers enjoy widespread circulation and consumption, and Japanese media conglomerates are powerful players in media and politics. *Yomiuri Shimbun* is the largest newspaper in terms of circulation, while *Asahi Shimbun* is the second largest. *Yomiuri* has in fact the world's largest circulation of around twenty million readers daily, while *Asahi* has around fourteen million (*Yomiuri Shimbun* 2017).

Concerning our identification method, the Japanese-language sources analyzed were all accessible online: the transcripts of the parliamentary debates through the Diet web page and the *Yomiuri Shimbun*

and *Asahi Shimbun* newspapers through electronic databases. To identify relevant texts, we used the search words "long-range cruise missiles" (*chôkyori junkô missairu*), "Izumo" (*izumo*), and "F-35B" (*F35B*/*F san-jûgo B*) during the seven-month period December 1, 2017, to June 30, 2018.

The searches yielded six days of debates in the Security Committee, three days of debates in the Budget Committee, and nearly 150 newspaper articles, including 10 editorials. We then applied qualitative textual analysis to the source dataset consisting of Diet debates and newspaper articles. Specifically, we looked for *arguments* and *narratives* in the texts. In addition, we looked for securitization attempts and use of rhetorical commonplaces. The narrative structure discussed in the theory section, derived from Burke (1969), is used here for narrative analysis. If statements could be grouped within act, actors, scene, action, or purpose, they were categorized as a narrative component. Any other pro et con argument concerning the military instruments was categorized as arguments. We considered coding our assessments, essentially transforming the interpretation into quantitative data, a method referred to as content analysis (Krippendorff 2002; Neuendorf 2016) as this would have allowed for explicit reliability testing (Krippendorff 2004; Hayes and Krippendorff 2007; Krebs 2015a). However, since we study a short time period, we were able to read and analyze the texts without needing to transform them into quantitative data. The methods applied here are nevertheless inspired by the approach to reliability in qualitative-quantitative content analysis: the authors first read all sources independently before jointly discussing the narrative and argument content in the Diet debates and newspaper editorials and news reports. Though we were able to map the content individually, being two provided an additional measure that secured replicability.

Discussion and Findings

The topics of purchasing long-range cruise missiles and the reconstruction of the Izumo helicopter transport vessel into an aircraft carrier are contentious in Japan due to its war and imperial history and its postwar Constitution and defense practices. The interpretation of Article 9—the "peace clause" of the Japanese Constitution—severely limits Japan's military practice.[6] Past governments have reiterated that the SDF is legitimate if it avoids offensive weapons, sometimes explicitly described as avoidance of aircraft carriers, inter-ballistic missiles, and long-dis-

tance strategic bombers.[7] Discussions about the acquisition of long-distance cruise missiles and the transformation of Izumo were therefore pushing the boundaries of Japanese military capabilities and practices.

The suggestion to acquire long-range missiles and the idea of transforming Izumo to an aircraft carrier also involved Japan's close security relationship with the United States. The US-Japan alliance has played *the* key role in Japanese security policy since the end of the Allied occupation in 1952. The United States has numerous bases on Japanese soil, and the structure of weapon systems in the Japanese SDF is highly integrated with the US capacities in the region. By allowing for the attachment of long-range cruise missiles to the new F-35A jet fighters, the SDF enhances capabilities to a level that may change the practices of how the SDF operates in cooperation with the United States in the defense of the Japanese archipelago. First and foremost, the missiles will enable the SDF to hit targets farther away than before, including enemy bases. The decision to purchase a different version of F35, namely F35-Bs, which are able to land and take off vertically, and transform Izumo into an aircraft carrier, will also have consequences for SDF's defense practices and the relationship with the United States, as it enables Japan to project air power in new ways. Acquisition of long-range cruise missiles and Izumo transformation indicates a changing environment for both security debates and practice in Japanese society.

Moreover, the debates concerning the upgrade of the Izumo helicopter carrier to an aircraft carrier in combination with a purchase of F-35B jet fighters signal the political will to redefine the limits of Japanese military practices.

The Parliament

The debates between the Abe Cabinet and the opposition parties in the Budget and Security committees were predominantly concentrated around pro et contra arguments. The underlying story about Japan, its neighbors, and the United States in East Asia was present in the debates but never challenged at its core. When the security narrative was invoked, it usually concerned the severe security environment surrounding Japan. While the media also reported on China's maritime advance, the Diet debates emphasized the threat of North Korean nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and more vaguely referred to threats posed by other countries around Japan. Defense Minister (DM) Onodera defended for instance his pro-missile position with the argument that the

defense threat "is not limited to the threat of North Korea" but relates to various countries who are upgrading their "air fighting power" and exhibiting "remarkable" progress in doing so.[8] Vice-prime minister Asō Tarō, DM Onodera, and Prime Minister (PM) Abe painted Japan as vulnerable in a threatening security environment, with particular references to North Korea as "the most serious and imminent threat ever."[9] The entire spectrum of politicians in the Diet seemed to agree more or less on the vulnerability of Japan when facing a North Korea with modern nuclear weapon and missile technology and a rising China advancing into the maritime sphere. In the debates, even opposition politicians admitted "the Japanese security environment is extremely tense."[10]

The number of securitization attempts in the Diet was high during the debates. In previous research, one of the authors has shown that a major difference between PM Abe's first (2006–2007) and second (2012–) cabinets was the degree of securitization about the need to introduce collective self-defense with allies (Lindgren 2018). While collective self-defense was also debated in his initial period as prime minister, it was only first during the campaign to return as president in the LDP fall 2012 that Abe initiated his tirade of securitization attempts. The findings from our study of long-range cruise missiles and the review of Izumo as an aircraft carrier are along the same lines but go one step further: not only were members of the Abe Cabinet relentlessly securitizing Japan's existential threats in "a severe security environment," but the opposition also contributed with similar speeches. Furthermore, as we discuss below, national media also played the same securitization melody.

Opposition politicians opposed the decision to purchase long-range cruise missiles and the review of transforming Izumo into an aircraft carrier. They did so with a number of arguments. The first key argument, arguably the most powerful one, revolved around invoking the Constitution and the peacefulness of Japan. If Japan acquires such weapons, can it truly still be peaceful? The Abe Cabinet responded by emphasizing that the military instruments were not offensive and thus did not challenge Article 9 of the Constitution. A director general of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau in the Office of the Prime Minister affirmed that "under no circumstance (*ikanaru baai*) is the SDF allowed to hold so-called offensive weapons—weapons that can be used only for the devastating destruction of the opponent's territory that only holds capability, although the constitution allows for the necessary minimum force and even individual weapons."[11] Those supporting the new weapon systems needed to stay within the boundaries of the Constitution, but also formulated attempts to shape the meaning of what the Constitution allows

for. As such, both the government and the opposition parties struggled to dominate the meaning making of Article 9 and Japanese peacefulness. In Japan, the "Constitution" and "Peace" are key commonplaces that public contestants spend considerable time and energy shaping. The government added additional meaning to these commonplaces by emphasizing that the military instruments eased the security of not only Japan but also the SDF. In the case of the long-range cruise missiles, the Abe Cabinet argued that the acquisition relates to the SDF being able to do their job of securing Japan through exclusive defense and to do it under the safest circumstances possible. Diet Member DM Onodera emphasized this point numerous times during a budget committee session, referring to the SDF as "also children of the people" and arguing that they too need to be defended while doing their job.[12]

The alliance with the United States—which Oros (2008) reminds us has been a contested aspect of Japanese security policy throughout the postwar period—is accepted by government and opposition parties, with the occasional exception of the Communist Party, as legitimate as long as it maintains the orthodox split of roles: Japan's role is defense—the "shield"—while the United States has the offensive capacities—the "spear." Hence, the opposition parties were concerned that the missiles giving Japan the capacity to attack enemy bases would transform the burden sharing aspects of the US-Japan Alliance. DM Onodera explicitly confirmed multiple times in the February Budget Committee Session that the government is "not thinking about changing the basic role sharing between Japan and the United States in the future" and thus Japan is not in a position to attack anyone.[13] DM Onodera further argued that missiles are crucial to "further improve deterrence and the coping ability of the US-Japan Alliance."[14] In particular, the threat of North Korea requires "strong deterrence" by the alliance, and thus deterrence capacity is enhanced by "the establishment of peace and security legislation and various Japan-US joint drills."[15]

In the government's dominant narrative, new military instruments strengthen Japan's deterrence.[16] The third key argument related therefore to the security dilemma. Although the opposition never challenged the overarching security narrative of an increasingly tense security situation due to regional threats, they did argue about the best way to address it. Some argued that the acquisitions could cause neighboring countries, such as Russia, to feel "an aggressive threat"[17] and thus only propel a worsened security situation. This flip side of the security dilemma, where Japan becomes a threat by trying to protect itself with military expansion played a major role in postwar Japan's defense posture and

arguably also in postwar security narratives, similar to Midford's (2002) reassurance argument. Today, however, pointing to the security dilemma made the contribution a stand-alone argument without the necessary storytelling effort needed to elevate it to a challenging narrative about Japan's position and role in East Asia.

A series of arguments related to the form of the debate rather than the content. On the topics of missiles and aircraft carrier, the opposition expressed concerns about rushing through the budgeting process and deliberation on the issues. They argued that there was "no time for consideration" in the case of the long-range cruise missiles and that it was researched all along with the United States and Norway without the opposition knowing and then "decided suddenly" by the Cabinet meeting with an approximate request.[18] The handling of the missile case was cited as precedent for why the opposition had concern about the process around the Izumo transformation study. The opposition also wanted more information about the Izumo review as they felt the government kept all of the information to themselves.[19]

Other opposition arguments were related to the capabilities needed to go along the new instruments and the financial burden of them. The Izumo reconstruction was seen as an upgrade that would require more acquisitions in order to be effective. Without such acquisitions, an aircraft carrier would be useless.[20] The additional acquisitions needed to make a transformation of the helicopter transporter make sense were in particular seen as a very expensive ordeal.[21]

The dominant narrative was, as seen, present in all Diet debates, in both the Security and Budget Committees, but arguments, not narratives, constituted the main mode of challenge of the Diet debates. Most opposition politicians contributed to the reproduction of the dominant security narrative. This meant that the participants reproduced the dominant security narrative of Japan being threatened by its neighbors. Though there was significant opposition, concerning pro et con arguments, for example, maintaining Japan's peacefulness, upholding correct procedures, and hindering financial costs, the critique still operated within the dominant narrative. There were however speech initiatives that invoked remnants of former, powerful security narratives in Japan. Parts of the pacifist narrative are present in the opposition's attempts to shape the commonplaces of the Constitution as sacredly securing Japan's exclusive defense. For instance, they suggest that Japan has a unique role in leading the world to peace by displaying the (economic and cultural) greatness of a phoenix reborn as a peaceful nation. Other attempts exposed remnants of the once-powerful narrative of holding

back on military spending to assure its neighbors (most of them former colonies) of its peaceful intentions. The emphasis on the flip side of the security dilemma can be seen as a version of this narrative, but the security dilemma argument may also stand alone as the Japanese realist interpretation of world affairs. When it comes to the various narratives of Japanese political discourses of the past, we find no references to the third once-powerful Japanese security narrative: the fear of the military complex. While this particular narrative used to be persuasive, even far into the conservative core of the LDP (Pyle 1996), the disappearance of it in current debates suggests a gradual change in Japanese security discourse, enabling the current government's expansion of the boundaries of Japanese security practices.

This means that opposition politicians predominantly faced the majority-holding Abe Cabinet within the dominant security narrative. While we cannot know, and what is indeed scientifically impossible to access, is whether these opposition politicians actually believed in the security narrative they operated within, or if they felt obliged to reproduce it. The distinction between these two separate situations is important. The former situation signifies a security narrative consensus, the latter a security narrative hegemony. In the case of consensus (most) politicians agree on the fundamentals of self and others, world events, and the past and future. Contestants are not obliged to recite the dominant narrative but do it on the basis of their beliefs. Public contests then concern disagreement only about arguments, for example, cost benefits or whether the policy or practice increases the prestige of the country or not. In the case of narrative hegemony, politicians who do not agree on the narrative are coerced to play along partly because of the cost of opposition is deemed too high.[22] Material, normative, institutional, and discursive factors influence the cost of opposing narratives. The concept of a "dominant" narrative leans toward a hegemonic situation, but we make no attempt to empirically distinguish the two theoretical scenarios in this article. In our view, the theoretical distinction is fruitful for understanding the potentialities in the relationship between narratives and security practice. Future research should investigate whether the fields of military and security policy and practice in contemporary Japan are characterized by consensus or hegemony. In any case, in settled times, we expect there to be consensus or hegemony because the dominant discourse is, as Krebs reminds us, "the only plausible arena of struggle" (Scott 1990, 102). To be clear, in the cases we are studying, the opposition politicians played on the home turf of the Abe Cabinet.

National Media

In this subsection we study security narratives in newspaper editorials and news reports. Since the editorials constitute a space and format for editors to reflect on current developments in the region and Japan, we expected a higher degree of storytelling here than what is possible for politicians in their daily activities in the Diet. Furthermore, while a number of the reports are fact-oriented listings of political events and quotes from interview subjects and press conferences, some of the newspaper articles offer reflections on the facts and decisions and thus reproduce and challenge security narratives and arguments ("narrating" news reports).

There are three clear tendencies in the newspaper material. First, in its efforts to support the Abe Cabinet, the center-conservative *Yomiuri Shimbun* reproduced and strengthened the dominant narrative's presence in the public, while the liberal *Asahi Shimbun* challenged the specific military instrument proposals but failed to bring a counternarrative to the table. Just like the debates in the Diet, therefore, the newspapers battled rhetorically on the narrative turf of the Abe Cabinet. The securitization attempts present in the Diet debates are continuously repeated in the newspaper editorials as well, including in *Asahi Shimbun*, signaling the successful securitization attempts by the Abe Cabinet in Japanese society (Lindgren 2018). The second tendency is, as expected, that the editorials have a higher degree of narrative rhetoric than the Diet debates; yet, the editorials leave space for arguments as well. Typically, the first few paragraphs of an editorial engage in narrative efforts, while the more detailed pro et con arguments take place in the middle and last parts of the editorials. While editorials are relatively narrative heavy, we still conclude that the rhetorical mode was predominantly argumentative; this means however that Krebs's definition must be genre relative. The third tendency concerns news reports only (not editorials): in several instances *Yomiuri* reflected the dominant narrative, while *Asahi* stayed in a more descriptive mode in the sense that narrative elements did not make it into the reporting. In other words, the journalists in the more center-oriented newspaper exploited the chance to push the Abe Cabinet agenda in normal news while liberal *Asahi* seems to have avoided this.

Yomiuri Shimbun's editorials on the studied topics not only relied on but also reproduced the dominant security narrative. For *Yomiuri*, there is no question about what threatens Japan: North Korea and China make up "the severe security environment."[23] Deterrence is the rhetor-

ical commonplace: "To hold the means to reliably counter-strike with long-range missiles is connected to the improvement of the deterrence power that makes the enemy give up its attacks."[24] Since China's acquisition of the Liaoning aircraft carrier and the domestic development of several new carriers, a strong sign of China aiming to become a maritime powerhouse, Japan needs, according to *Yomiuri*, to respond by strengthening the Maritime SDF with aircraft carriers as well.[25] New military armaments will make Japan a safer place in a threatening security environment. They will also improve cooperation with the United States.[26] So the story is told.

Asahi challenged the specific practice discussions that the LDP and the Abe Cabinet brought to the fore in Japanese politics, yet did not suggest an alternative security narrative. Instead, *Asahi* kept the critique predominantly within the rhetorical mode of arguments. In the first editorial after the Abe Cabinet notified the Diet of its intention to purchase long-range cruise missiles, *Asahi* admitted "certainly the security environment around Japan is severe. It is necessary to constantly re-examine the capabilities of the SDF."[27] The overall narrative of Japan living in a threatening world is thus not entirely challenged. *Asahi* questioned only once whether the Abe Cabinet may be exploiting the threats from China and North Korea to expand the practice repertoire and get rid of exclusive defense.[28] The role of the United States in defending Japan was never questioned. In fact, when criticizing the purchase of long-range cruise missiles, *Asahi* expressed a strong belief in the US-Japan alliance: "it cannot be said that 'there is no other means' [other than purchasing long-range missiles]. The reason is that the US military is obliged to defend Japan under the Japan-US Security Treaty,"[29] referring to Article 5. Just as *Yomiuri* also emphasized, the idea that SDF needs to play the role as a "shield" and the US military the role as a "spear" was narrated.[30] While *Yomiuri* expressed that the fundamental roles are enhanced with new military instruments, *Asahi* warned of the consequences of breaking with this fundamental position as it may expand a potential war.[31]

Though the editorials supported the underlying security narrative, they also offered arguments. *Yomiuri* argued that the long-range missiles had diverse uses,[32] that they were cost-effective,[33] that the missiles and aircraft carrier were legitimately within the boundaries of exclusive defense,[34] that there was less reason to critique Japan for purchasing long-range missiles, since they are also held by European countries and the United States, as well as China and South Korea,[35] that the "financial situation of the country" required scrutiny with respect to how to spend

the defense budgets in efficient terms,[36] and finally that it was important that the government "explains carefully to the people and broadens their understanding"[37] and "clearly states the purpose of the reconstruction, avoids useless misunderstandings, and explains politely."[38] When *Yomiuri* was in argumentative mode, it emphasized only positive characteristics about the military instruments, but also reminded the public of the form-type arguments about correct political procedures that opposition parties complained about.

Asahi on the other hand emphasized the negative aspects of the weapon systems: it claimed that new weapon systems were expensive to purchase but also to maintain and repair,[39] and should be weighed against increased social security spending in a low birth rate society,[40] that they were not worth the huge costs,[41] and that the missiles were unnecessary.[42] Furthermore, *Asahi* proposed that the United States should not excessively influence Japan's decisions,[43] that the Diet should debate this thoroughly regarding how to deal with the security environment,[44] as well as engage in "sophisticated discussion" on the limits of the role of the military,[45] and how to maintain being a country with an exclusive defensive posture.[46] The newspaper argued that the long-range missiles and Izumo aircraft carrier could hardly be defined as defensive,[47] and the breaking of the boundaries of exclusive defense would destroy the meaning of Article 9 as a mechanism for creating stability and peace in the East Asian region essentially "alleviating military tension in East Asia" by proving to its neighbors that Japan will never become a military threat again.[48]

Interestingly, while *Asahi* assured its readers that it agreed with the "severe security environment" narrative, when in argumentative mode, *Asahi* criticized the consequences of expanding the boundaries of Japan's military practices. If such expansion included offensive weapons for the SDF, the pacifism of Article 9 would lose its meaning and neighboring countries would question Japanese peacefulness and reflections on its prewar history.[49] Thus, *Asahi*, similar to some opposition politicians in the Diet, invoked remnants of two once-powerful narratives: the pacifist narrative and the reassurance narrative. The pacifist narrative concerns Japan as a "phoenix reborn as peaceful nation," with a special mission in East Asia and the world to spread pacifism and peacefulness, while the reassurance narrative is about Japan not inviting a "fruitless arms race competition with surrounding countries."[50] The presence of these two narratives, albeit only as pieces without the whole narrative, within texts initiated with acceptance of the dominant narrative, signals either a peculiar narrative mix or coercion into playing by the rules of

the dominant narrative. The former situation means that *Asahi* partly joins a greater consensus on how Japan is "severely threatened" by its neighbors, while the latter indicates that *Asahi* is forced into paying lip service to a narrative they hardly believe in.

The arms race argument represents the flip side of the security dilemma, placing the Abe Cabinet's need for beefing up the military capabilities in a different light. *Asahi* went beyond the military side of the equation; to *Asahi*, it was important to stay unambiguous about its reflections of its past in its own right. *Asahi* also used historical ammunition against the aircraft carrier by presenting aircraft carriers as a "wish" that the Maritime SDF inherited from the former Navy.[51] It harshly criticized the ambitions in the current SDF by linking it to the imperial Japan by invoking the contentious actions of Imperial Navy, an entity often understood as being eager to pursue war and self-driven while undermining civilian control.

The news reports can also be studied as concrete manifestations of narratives and arguments concerning future security practices in Japan. *Yomiuri* openly securitized Japan's neighboring countries in its news reports. The prose in many of the news reports is rather pointed about the threat that North Korea and China pose to Japanese security. An aircraft carrier, albeit small, would help Japan cope with its security threats, according to *Yomiuri*. Such a military instrument would not only support Japan's capacity to attack enemy bases in North Korea, but also provide deterrence toward China, a country that "is actively advancing into the ocean and has a remarkable increase in military power."[52] *Yomiuri* wrote that Japan introduces state-of-the-art equipment with "North Korea's nuclear and missile development in mind" but also to "strengthen the response to China's ocean expansion."[53] *Yomiuri* concludes in its news report that, facing such threats, "the introduction of state-of-the-art equipment has become indispensable in Japan."[54]

Conclusion

The goal of this article was to test the hypothesis that the dominant security narrative shapes the security debates and military practices in contemporary Japan. Since discursive constructions—narratives and arguments—need to be studied in their concrete manifestations, we chose two specific topics: the debates regarding the decision to purchase long-range cruise missiles and the review of transforming the Izumo helicopter transport vessel into an aircraft carrier. Through our analysis of Japa-

nese sources, we found that the dominant security narrative was invoked but rarely challenged. This signals a major change from postwar Japan but also from most of the post–Cold War period. Moreover, a great deal of the political debate concerned arguments rather than challenges to the overarching security narrative. The most prominent arguments on both the supporting and challenging sides of the debates concerned Article 9, Japan's peacefulness, and the notion of exclusive defense. These arguments relate to former powerful narratives—the pacifist narrative and the reassurance narrative. Still, opposition politicians and the liberal newspaper expressed acceptance of the dominant narrative. Some of the arguments concerned the debate's form instead of its content. This may be a key part of Japanese political culture (Lindgren 2016), but may also signal impotence when facing a powerful security narrative.

The study's findings indicate that the dominance of the security narrative among the security elite in Tokyo made it possible to expand the boundaries of security practices in Japan, both directly as in the purchase of missiles, and indirectly by enabling the reconstruction of Izumo into an aircraft carrier.

Over its six years of leadership thus far, the Abe Cabinet has initiated numerous contests and public legitimation efforts in order to reshape the boundaries of Japanese security practices. The public contests studied here show six specific characteristics: First and foremost, the national security narrative of Japan living in a threatening environment was invoked but never truly challenged. While specific policy proposals continued to divide policymakers and other stakeholders, the underlying story specifying Japan's place in East Asia, the rise of China and its maritime advance, the threat of North Korea's missile and nuclear programs, and the importance of the tight security relationship with the United States faced little core criticism. The dominance of the security narrative means that its invocation renders other possible practices less meaningful. Surely, the dominance of a security narrative does not mean monolithic policy debates; it implies however that the spectrum of options being publicly sustainable is limited. As we have shown, neither all politicians nor all newspapers agree with the purchase and possible reconstruction of the military instruments.

Second, the security narrative of Japan being threatened by its neighbors dominated the public discourse, in the sense that only occasionally were antagonists to the weapon systems able or willing to contest the storytelling with alternative narratives. The presence of the remnants of former powerful narrative signal however that the dominance is not unchallenged. The dominance of the security narrative and arguments

being the primary rhetorical mode signify that the narrative situation was settled in the period we study (Krebs 2015b, 42). This means that the opposition played on the home turf of the Abe Cabinet. That the security policy field in Japan in 2018 is in a settled narrative mode means either that there is a strong narrative consensus or that the security narrative is hegemonic. If the former is true, then most politicians and media agree on the story, while if the latter is true, the costs of challenging the narrative is too high to make narrative struggle a viable option. Krebs (2015b) has suggested that public contests in settled modes fall within what Krebs and Jackson (2007) define as "coercion." While it is not possible to conclude here whether a consensus or hegemony characterize Japan today, a distinction would make it possible to answer for instance whether LDP's minor coalition partner Kōmeitō was coerced or persuaded regarding the security policy and practice change during the PM Abe's second government (see Lindgren 2016).

Third, the debates are ripe with securitization speech acts (Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde 1998). Going beyond the current literature on securitization in Japan (Lindgren 2018), we find that not only did PM Abe, DM Onodera, Vice-PM Asō, and other members of the Abe government securitize China's maritime advance and North Korea's nuclear program and ballistic missiles, but the opposition parties and news media played the same securitization melody. The dominant security narrative is indeed prone to securitization since the main content is constructed around the threats to the Japanese nation, its islands, its people and the SDF. The proposals to expand the military instruments in SDF's repertoire are discursively linked to the need to defend Japan from its existential threats. The Abe Cabinet's ability to push through a missile purchase and aircraft carrier review signals highly successful securitization efforts in the latter half of the 2010s.

Fourth, the boundaries of Japanese military practices are continuously reproduced and challenged with the Constitution and its Article 9 as a focal point. The rhetorical struggles to protect or redefine the meaning of the Constitution and Japanese peacefulness resemble Jackson's perspective on public contests as legitimation efforts to shape the boundaries of policies and practices. In doing so, the contestants draw upon and shape the meaning of commonplaces, for example, the Constitution, deterrence, and Japan, ultimately construing the military instruments as "possible, acceptable, and even inescapable" (Jackson 2003, 238). Both sides of the debates, the Abe Cabinet versus the opposition, *Yomiuri Shimbun* versus *Asahi Shimbun*, struggled to give meaning to the commonplace of Article 9. No one argues against the prominence of

the Constitution or the importance of staying within exclusive defense. Instead they all try to shape the meaning of a peaceful and defensive posture in Japan's security practices. That is, only in this way can politicians and the media render specific stances on concrete security policy and practice acceptable and legitimate.

Fifth, the study illuminates the important relationship between political actors and the language employed in public contests in Japan: commonplaces and narratives wield power over political agents by delimiting the potential space for speaking security. At the same time, there is a continuous struggle to push the boundaries for what is possible to utter in public by shaping the meaning of commonplaces and the content of narratives. Ultimately, dominating the story making and the meaning content of commonplaces eases the implementation of expansions in security policies and practices.

Sixth, the Abe Cabinet, including PM Abe, DM Onodera, Vice-PM Asō, and top Ministry of Defense bureaucrats, as well as other top LDP politicians, possess the authority to speak security, translating into narrative authority. PM Abe has made changes in Japan's security posture a top priority, on par with his economic policies. PM Abe's family background also suggests substantial capital in the field of security, albeit an ambiguity hangs over the perceptions of his grandfather in contemporary Japan (see Yennie Lindgren 2018). Though the narrative authority of the Abe Cabinet does not translate into immediate breakthroughs in policymaking, the members' words weigh more heavily than those of most other speakers of security in Japan.

Notes

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1. The Yoshida Doctrine emanated from a set of pragmatic policies that put a primary focus on economic regrowth while relying on the United States for security to allow for Japan's economic renaissance and the promotion of a symbiotic alliance throughout the postwar period (Pyle 1996).

2. See for instance the behavioral studies concept of the "narrative fallacy," that is, homo sapiens' tendency to (unconsciously) impose causality between two events that take place after each other in time (e.g., Taleb 2007).

3. Narrative power belongs predominantly to the "productive power" category as this power type works through "social relations of constitution" and is a "diffuse type of power," according to Barnett and Duvall's (2005, 55) seminal contribution on the taxonomy of power.

4. Together, the position parties control around two-thirds of the seats in the House of Representatives (313 of 465) and slightly over 60 percent of the seats in the House of Councilors (150 of 242). The main opposition parties are the Constitutional Democratic Party of Japan (55/23), the Party of Hope (50/6), the Japanese Innovation Party (11/11), the Japanese Communist Party (11/14), and the Democratic Party for the People/Shin-Ryokufukai (0/24).

5. Our research project lasted until June 2018. In December 2018, the modification of the helicopter carrier became a reality when the ruling coalition approved the new defense policy outline. Thus, at the time of conducting the research for this article, the Izumo reconstruction was still under review. Although subsequent debates about Izumo are not covered in this article, we expect our overall findings to still be valid, in the sense that the public contestants mainly debate within the dominant security narrative.

6. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution states that "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." This means that Japan cannot possess or use force except for strictly defensive purposes, according to the Japanese government's interpretation.

7. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.

8. Security Committee, March 20, 2018; Budget Committee, February 7, 2018. The reference is obviously meant for China, but Japan's most formidable neighbor is

not mentioned. The potential threat from China's maritime advance was however invoked in debates about other security topics during the same sessions, signaling that it is politically possible to tag security policies and practices to the Chinese advance but perhaps that it is easiest to remain nonspecific here. The Japanese language is often vague about protagonists because of its peculiar habit of omitting pronouns and others. Our impression is however that policymakers in debates employ country protagonists whenever it is necessary to avoid misunderstanding.

9. Budget Committee, January 26, 2018; Budget Committee, February 28, 2018; Security Committee, March 20, 2018.

10. Security Committee, March 22, 2018.

11. Security Committee, March 22, 2018.

12. Budget Committee, February 7, 2018. See also Security Committee, March 20, 2018, and Budget Committee, February 7, 2018.

13. Budget Committee, February 7, 2018.

14. Budget Committee, February 7, 2018.

15. Budget Committee, February 28, 2018.

16. O'Shea (2018) investigates a more specific part of the dominant security narrative, namely the "deterrence" narrative, in Japanese news media, and shows that it rendered the contested US Marine bases on Okinawa as "indispensable."

17. Security Committee, March 20, 2018; Budget Committee, February 7, 2018.

18. Security Committee, March 20, 2018.

19. Budget Committee, January 30, 2018.

20. Budget Committee, February 28, 2018.

21. Budget Committee, February 28, 2018.

22. See Krebs (2015b) concerning narratives or Oros (2008) for a similar argument but applied to security identity.

23. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017. See also *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 1, 2018.

24. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017, p. 3.

25. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 1, 2018.

26. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 8, 2018.

27. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 2017.

28. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.

29. *Asahi Shimbun*, March 31, 2018.

30. *Asahi Shimbun*, March 31, 2018.

31. *Asahi Shimbun*, March 31, 2018.

32. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017, p. 3; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 1, 2018; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January, 8, 2018.

33. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017, p. 3.

34. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017, p. 3; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 1, 2018; *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 8, 2018.

35. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 13, 2017.

36. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 8, 2018.

37. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, January 8, 2018.

38. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 1, 2018.
39. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 23, 2017.
40. *Asahi Shimbun*, May 4, 2018.
41. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 23, 2017.
42. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 2017.
43. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 23, 2017.
44. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 2017.
45. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.
46. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.
47. *Asahi Shimbun*, December 13, 2017; *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017. See also *Asahi Shimbun*, March 31, 2018.
48. *Asahi Shimbun,* June 3, 2018. See also *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.
49. *Asahi Shimbun*, May 4, 2018.
50. *Asahi Shimbun,* June 3, 2018. See also *Asahi Shimbun*, December 28, 2017.
51. *Asahi Shimbun,* June 3, 2018.
52. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 26, 2017, p. 3.
53. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 23, 2017, p. 4.
54. *Yomiuri Shimbun*, December 23, 2017, p. 4; see O'Shea (2018) for a similar discourse.

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