

Old and New Regimes in East Asia:

Japan, Korea, and Okinawa¹

Gavan McCormack

Emeritus Professor, Australian National University

Introduction

We live in perilous times, beneath a nuclear sword suspended by only the flimsiest of threads and facing the ravages of climate change that sharpen year by year. No previous generation has contemplated the threat of extinction, as does ours now on these two fronts. The nuclear Doomsday Clock was re-set at the beginning of 2019 at two minutes before midnight. Meanwhile, the oceans rise, acidify, and groan from the spread of plastics and other types of pollution, species are lost, glaciers melt, deserts spread, and the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere rise, evidently almost uncontrollably.

States in East Asia do not measure up well in the face of such immense challenges. The institutional framework governing them remains as it was set around seventy years ago, in the wake of the cataclysmic Second World War and the subsequent San Francisco Treaty (1951), at a time when the US was the undisputed master of the world, the treaty system that it constructed its strategy for consolidating and preserving that dominance.² At this time, China was divided and excluded, Korea divided and at war, Japan divided (Okinawa having been severed from it) and occupied, and the apparatus of occupation, bases, and US hegemony was assumed to be crucial in maintaining regional and global “security.” Yet the world has moved on since then. In 2018, the San Francisco Treaty system was shaken by events unimaginable even a year earlier. Koreans from both the south and the north began to seize the initiative to negotiate their way towards a Korea that was at peace, de-nuclearized and subject to multilateral security guarantees. Meanwhile, across the East China Sea, Okinawans continued their seemingly interminable struggle against the Japanese state to prevent the further militarization of their islands.

If the Cold War knots that were tied by the San Francisco settlement, especially tightly around the Korean peninsula and the Okinawan archipelago, can be untied and foreign troop occupations

¹ This paper draws on material discussed in my recent book, *The State of the Japanese State – Contested Identity, Direction and Role*, Folkestone, Kent: Renaissance Books, 2018.

² Kimie Hara, ed., *The San Francisco System and Its Legacies: Continuation, Transformation, and Historical Reconciliation in the Asia-Pacific*, New York and London, Routledge, 2014,

ended, the door to a comprehensive, post-San Francisco Treaty, post-Cold War, even post-US hegemony, regional order may be opened. Only if this happens are the nuclear and climate change challenges noted above likely to be met. This paper briefly considers such prospects, focusing firstly on Japan, then Okinawa, and finally, if only briefly, Korea.

Japan

“Peace State”

In the wake of its decade and a half of 20th-century warfare that left its cities levelled and its people, soldiers and civilians alike, exhausted and impoverished, Japan in 1946 adopted a fresh constitution that entrenched the three democratic principles of popular sovereignty, fundamental human rights, and pacifism. The last of these, to which the famous Article 9 was devoted, was unambiguous. It read:

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, 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.

In order to accomplish the goal of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

One would expect, therefore, that such a country would be at the forefront of the struggle to universalize the principle of peace, (along with democracy and human rights). Yet the constitutional commitment to pacifism began to soften almost as soon as the ink had dried on the document. Re-establishing military forces under the title “Self-Defense Forces,” during the Korean War, Japan gradually rose to become the world’s eighth-ranking nation in terms of military power, its 247,000-strong armed forces (Self-Defense Forces) larger than those of the UK, Germany, or France, the nation subsidizing the Pentagon annually to the tune of an additional \$6.76 billion (as of 2016).³ The six years of Abe Shinzo’s second term (from 2013) saw a steady rise in Japan’s defence expenditure, the relaxation of the ban on arms exports and, in March 2017, the scrapping of the long-standing self-imposed expenditure limit of 1% of GDP. In 2018, the LDP called on the government to *double* its defence expenditure to the (nominal) NATO level of 2% of GDP.⁴

Japan is now committed to building its first aircraft carrier. It purchases large numbers of stealth F-15 fighters and missile and anti-missile units. It despatches the Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) to the South China Sea 3,000 kilometres away, and even to Japan’s first post-1945 overseas naval base, at Djibouti, located 10,000 kilometres away. It also builds and refurbishes a lavish chain of bases for US forces and hosts 50,000 US troops. Many of these troops were despatched at will to battlefronts in Korea and Vietnam during the 1950s, and many more have been sent to the Middle East and North Africa from the 1970s through until the present day.

³ McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, p. 186.

⁴ “Boeihi ‘tai-GDP 2%’ meiki, jimin boei daiko teigen no zenyo hanmei,” *Sankei shimbun*, 25 May 2018.

Those forces are given free range as to how and where they function, and Japan turns a blind eye to the danger, noise and nuisance that they inflict on neighbourhood communities adjoining the bases.

Under Abe Shinzo, Japan is increasingly driven by military priorities. Visiting Tokyo in November 2017, US president Trump spoke in the following terms to Abe:

“So one of the things, I think, that’s very important is that the Prime Minister of Japan is going to be purchasing massive amounts of military equipment, as he should. And we make the best military equipment, by far. He’ll be purchasing it from the United States. Whether it’s the F-35 fighter, which is the greatest in the world -- total stealth -- or whether it’s missiles of many different kinds, it’s a lot of jobs for us and a lot of safety for Japan and other countries.”⁵

Abe responded, saying, “we will be buying more from the United States. That is what I’m thinking.” After their meeting, he lost no time in showing that he would be as good as his word.

At the core of Japan’s national defense policy are nuclear weapons. These are not Japan’s own, but are maintained by the US under what it calls its defense umbrella. Japan also sits on an enormous stockpile of plutonium (with thirty-six tons of the substance held in Britain and France and eleven tons in Japan), enough to produce approximately six thousand nuclear bombs, with the prospect of increasing the quantity as more reactors are switched back on, and in the absence of any plans for waste disposal.⁶ From 2017, Japanese Self-Defence Force units have joined multilateral, US-led regional exercises rehearsing for a new Korean War.

While international attention is focused on the North Korean nuclear threat and Japan escapes close international scrutiny, it was from Japan, not North Korea, that the region faced its most serious nuclear threat since Hiroshima and Nagasaki. In March 2011, Japan’s Fukushima nuclear power plant spewed the equivalent of 168 Hiroshima bombs into the atmosphere. Since then, it has accumulated hundreds of tons of contaminated wastewater, placing intolerable pressure on the life environment of much of the country.⁷ It was only by falsely claiming to the IOC in 2013 that the nuclear problem was “under control” that Japan was able to secure the rights to stage the 2020 (Tokyo) Olympic Games. Fukushima is not safe. Even robots are unable to approach the melted reactor cores. Prime Minister Abe lied to the world.⁸

⁵ “Remarks by President Trump and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference,” Tokyo, Japan,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, November 06, 2017, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2017/11/06/remarks-president-trump-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press/>

⁶ The Associated Press, “*Japan Pledges to Reduce Plutonium, but Doesn’t Say How*,” *New York Times*, 31 July 2018.

⁷ Koide Hiroaki, “The Fukushima nuclear disaster and the Tokyo Olympics,” translated and introduced by Norma Field, *Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 1 March 2019. <https://apjjf.org/2019/05/Koide-Field.html/>

⁸ French authorities harbour strong suspicions that Japan secured the votes of a number of countries on the IOC by outright bribery. (“Gov’t concerned about French probe into 2020 Olympic bid; link with Ghosn case suspected,” *The Mainichi*, 12 January 2019), https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20190112/p2a/00m/0sp/014000c#cxrecs_s See also Kiriyama Keiichi, “Goon jiken to hitoshichi shiho no yami,” *Sekai*, February 2019, pp. 42-49.

In 1967, Japan adopted what it called the “Three Non-Nuclear Principles,” but from 1969 it was party to secret understandings with the US as to how the principles might be evaded. In a February 2009 document, headed “Japan’s Perspective on US’s Extended Deterrence,” the then Aso Taro government urged the United States not to cut back, but to diversify and reinforce its nuclear weaponry and to reserve an entitlement for their pre-emptive use.⁹ It found the idea of storing nuclear weapons (previously withdrawn upon Okinawa’s “reversion” to Japan in 1972) at Futenma (and at the US Air Force base at Kadena) again to be a “persuasive” one. Part of the works that are underway at Henoko today involve the expansion and upgrading of the Ordnance Depot, one of the very places where nuclear weapons were stored in the past.

In 2017, Japan stood together with the nuclear “great power” states and against the small and middle powers of the General Assembly in opposition to a nuclear ban treaty adopted by a General Assembly majority. Ratification of that treaty, which declared everything connected with nuclear weapons – their possession, manufacture, threat of use, or actual use – to be illegal, now proceeds, country by country, in the face of intense opposition from nuclear powers and “umbrella” states. Once the treaty is formally ratified, it will become law.

When the Trump administration published its “Nuclear Policy Review” in February 2018, insisting on the right to develop “flexible,” “credible” (i.e., usable) nuclear weapons,¹⁰ Foreign Minister Kono expressed Japan’s strong appreciation.

Clientelism

I have been writing about the notion of Japan as “client state” for more than ten years, and continue to do so. By “client state” I mean one that adopts a posture of structured and chosen submissiveness [to the United States].¹¹ Japan’s post-1945 leaders, from Hirohito to Abe, have committed the country to a clientelist path of submission with respect to the global super-power (in Japanese, *zokkoku*) on the understanding that the US global dominance of 1951 would continue. But today, the economic underpinnings of that assumption have been rudely shaken. The US, now with a mere 16% of global (PPP) GDP, is expected to see its share decline to 12% by 2050. Meanwhile China, its economy astoundingly having grown fifteenfold in the two decades from 1995, already accounted for 18% of global GDP by 2016. Its share is expected to continue to rise, the OECD predicting that it will reach about 27% during the 2030s before slowly declining to around 20% in 2060.¹² In comparative terms, China’s GDP grew from being

⁹ This document is known as the “Akiba Memo” (from Akiba Takeo, then Minister at the Japanese embassy in Washington and as of 2018 Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs). For photographic reproduction of the document, Haruna Mikio, “Akiba Memo – Amerika kaku senryaku e no Nihon no kakusareta yokyu,” *Sekai*, April 2018, pp. 69-78. For discussion, see Gregory Kulacki, “Nuclear hawks take the reins in Tokyo,” Union of Concerned Scientists, 16 February 2018.

¹⁰ Department of Defence, *Nuclear Posture Review*, Washington, February 2018.

¹¹ McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. xi, 45-6.

¹² OECD, *The Long View: Scenarios for the World Economy to 2060*: <http://www.oecd.org/economy/growth/scenarios-for-the-world-economy-to-2060.htm/>

one-quarter that of Japan in 1991, to *surpassing* it in 2001 and trebling (or even quadrupling) it in 2018.¹³

It is the shift in *relative* weight vis-à-vis the US and China that disturbs and challenges Japan. The worry is beginning to spread within government circles in Tokyo that two centuries of Anglo-Saxon hegemony may now be coming to an end. The phenomenon sometimes described as Abe “nationalism” is actually non- or anti-nationalism, placing the nation’s fate in the hands of Japan’s supposedly all-powerful and benevolent patron.

The more that the United States grows feeble and flounders, the closer it seems that Japan wants to cling to it. The more servile Japan becomes, the more it strives to compensate by asserting its ineffable, superior “Japanese” quality. Thus Prime Minister Mori’s 2000 reference to Japan as “the emperor-centred land of the gods” and Abe’s attachment to the uniquely “beautiful Japan.” The clientelist Abe state rests, however improbably, on the two pillars of the imperial institution (with its sustaining Shinto myths of uniqueness and superiority) and the doctrine of “America first.” But the bitter truth is that Japan cannot be simultaneously “glorious” and “servile.”

The People and the One-Strong (Ikkyo) State

The paradox of today’s Japan is that the Japanese electorate chooses a government that prioritizes a military (including nuclear) build-up, secrecy laws and nuclear energy over peace-oriented policies or policies that address climate change. The two-thirds majority that Abe and his government enjoy in 2019 while promoting such policies does not signify a high level of support for them, but rather the lack of a viable alternative.¹⁴ Since half of the eligible population does not exercise its right to vote, a parliamentary contest can be won with a relatively small proportion of the total vote.¹⁵ In October 2017, it was sufficient for it to gain 61.1% of the parliamentary seats based on only 17.9% support from the electorate (48.2% of the vote) in the small seat electorate division.¹⁶

Such is the degree of concentration of power in the hands of the executive and the enfeebling of the elected parliament that government under Abe is sometimes referred to as “*ikkyo*” (“one strong”) rather than “*minshu*” (democratic or popular). The Japanese term “*ikkyo*” or “one strong” captures the concentration of state power in the hands of the Prime Minister and his close associates. From a narrow electoral base, during his second term of office following the general elections of December 2012, Abe moved to concentrate an unprecedented measure of control over the levers of state, nominating his cronies to special policy advisory committees and to head

¹³ Terashima Jitsuro, “Noryoku no ressun,” No 192, “Chugoku no kyodaika kyokenka wo seishi suru, Nihon no kakugo,” *Sekai*, April 2018, pp. 42-47 at p. 42. See also IMF, World Economic Outlook, 2018. The *CIA World Factbook* for 2017 has China already 4.5 times Japan, \$21.27 trillion to \$4.92 trillion.

¹⁴ Had the main opposition parties, Constitutional Democrats (19.9 per cent) and Hope (17.4%) joined forces in a single liberal party, the overall outcome might have been different.

¹⁵ The voting rate in 2017 was 52.66%, down from 69.28% in 2009.

¹⁶ “75% say their trust in gov’t shaky after labor data scandals,” *The Mainichi*, 3 February 2019.

<https://mainichi.jp/senkyo/articles/20190203/k00/010/146000c/>

the Cabinet Legislative Bureau, the National Security Council, the Bank of Japan, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and the national broadcaster (NHK).

Roughly half of Japanese people oppose Abe's core concern, constitutional revision, and especially as it relates to Article 9.^{17 18} An even higher percentage (75%) opposes the country's reliance on nuclear power, although the government is committed to reviving (and expanding) much of the national nuclear grid by 2030. Over 80% disbelieve the Prime Minister in relation to one or another ongoing scandal, and when Abe declared early in 2019 that an economic recovery was underway that was the longest in post-1945 history, 74% of people disagreed.¹⁹ From late 2018, faith in government diminished with the revelations of data fixing by ministries to suit the Abenomics "story" of rising wages and good times, even as wages and conditions actually worsened.²⁰

A steady stream of revelations of what appeared to be high-level corruption and influence peddling rocked the government in 2017-2018. Suffice it here to mention the Moritomo and Kake cases. In the former, a plot of national land was sold at one-tenth its value to close allies and personal friends of the Prime Minister and his wife who shared the Nihon Kaigi world view²¹ and promoted, inter alia, the values of the 1890 Imperial Rescript on Education – according to which the greatest glory came from sacrifice in the imperial cause. In the latter case, involving Kakegakuen veterinary school, the "Prime Minister's will" was said to have been a key factor in determining the success of the Kake group in securing the national certification of the institution as a veterinary school. In this latter case, the government seems to have been successful in fending off charges of impropriety, not least because it deliberately (and, of course, illegally) destroyed documents that might have thrown light upon the negotiations.²²

Less well-known but of perhaps even greater significance is the case involving a massive project by JR Tokai's involving the construction of a linear (magnetic levitation) super express rail link between Eastern and Western Japan (Tokyo and Osaka). Construction commenced early in 2016 on a deep, mostly underground (at depths to 1,400 metres) route, along which linear trains would travel at speeds up to 505 kph. The project is to cost at least nine trillion yen (over \$80 billion). The first section, which links Tokyo with Nagoya, is not scheduled to be finished until 2027, the expected completion date having being brought forward from 2045 following the grant of three trillion yen in low interest (0.8%) credit by the national government (with a thirty-year period of grace before any repayment was required).

¹⁷ Support LDP constitutional revision 36.7%; oppose: 49.0% ("Jiminto kaiken-an hantai wa 5-wari 9-jo ikasu koso ga taisetsu da," Kyodo, reported in *Ryukyu shimpo*, 28 August 2018).

¹⁸ With smaller, right-wing-inclined parties included, the pro-revision forces constituted a bloc with 80% strength in the Diet, but among the public at large, 53% oppose revision, and an even greater proportion (67%) see no need to rush it. (Utsunomiya Kenji, "Kaiken ni hatsugi o yurusanai arasoi o," *Shukan kinyobi*, 19 January 2018, p. 9.)

¹⁹ "75% say their trust in gov't shaky," op. cit.

²⁰ Multiple media reports, late 2018 and early 2019. See, for one example, "Abe administration should probe, punish officials responsible for labor statistics fiasco," editorial, *The Mainichi*, 18 January 2019.

²¹ On Nihon Kaigi, see McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 29-30.

²² On these cases, McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 201-216.

Such an arrangement entails huge risk. In August 2018, the national economic daily, *Nikkei Bijinesu*, referred to the linear project as a “land-based Concorde” and pointed out that JR Tokai’s head, Kaneko Shin, had met with Prime Minister Abe on no fewer than forty-five occasions during the decision-making process,²³ thus suggesting that the affair should be viewed through the same lens as the Moritomo and Kake cases, as a further example of rampant cronyism. Unlike the Moritomo or Kake cases, however, the linear shinkansen project is a gigantic, hubristic plan of such scale that its failure (and perhaps even its “success”) would plunge the state, and the country - into crisis. One judicious recent account in English concluded that it is “deficit-breeding, energy-wasting, environmentally-destructive, and technologically unreliable ... a guaranteed fiasco.”²⁴ Yet it proceeds, without serious national or (at least until the Nikkei analysis in August 2018) media attention.

The correlative of “One Strong” has to be “many weak” and endemic social impoverishment. “Abenomics” floods the country with yen, driving down the exchange rate, boosting exports and ratcheting up the stock market (doubling it from 10,600 to 20,000 in the two years from 2013,²⁵ while disposable household income shrinks,²⁶ the indirect (consumption) tax is raised (initiated at 3% in 1989, raised to 8% in 2014, with a further rise, to 10%, projected for 2019), and regular jobs are replaced by part-time, temporary, or non-regular ones (accounting for twenty million people or 38% of the labour force). Salaries are reduced, while the health and welfare systems that previously served as models for other nations has deteriorated to the point where 1.6 million households subsist on welfare.²⁷ While the nominal unemployment rate has remained low (3.1% as of January 2017 and falling to 2.4% early in 2018) the ranks of the full-time employed who are paid less than two million yen (roughly \$16,000) per year had risen by 2017 to 1.2 million (24% as against 17.5% in 1999), with a further 33% of the work-force employed on an irregular basis (in low-paid, part-time, insecure employment, earning an estimated 1.45 million yen (\$12,000) for 1880 hours worked.²⁸ Households with zero savings, numbering 13.6 million in 2012, had increased under Abe to 14.5 million by 2016.

What this means is that the “precarariat” is slowly assuming the centrality once enjoyed by the middle class, while virtually anyone in the middle class is at risk of falling into poverty.”²⁹ Under the vicious economic cycle of Abenomics, priority is attached to stock inflation and big business profits, both feeding salary reduction, and in turn feeding welfare and education cuts, reduced consumption, and economic stagnation. The socio-economic transformations of neo-liberal downsizing feed feelings of frustration and insecurity that, in turn, help consolidate Abe’s support base and justify further militarization. The political dynamics that in the US produced the Donald Trump phenomenon and across Europe Brexit and a wave of right-wing neo-

²³ Forty-five occasions since the formation of the (second) Abe government in December 2012 (Kaneda Shinichiro, “Zaito 3-cho en tonyu, rinea wa dai-3 no Mori Kake mondai,” *Nikkei Bijinesu*, 2 August 2018). See also my own analysis (McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 183-4).

²⁴ Aoki Hidekazu and Kawamiya Nobuo, “End game for Japan’s construction state – The linear (Maglev) Shinkansen and Abenomics,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 15 June 2017.

²⁵ As of February 2019, it was around 22,000.

²⁶ Inoue Nobu, “Suji de wakaruru nihon keizai o suitai sasete abenomikusu,” *Shukan kinyobi*, 20 January 2017, pp. 18-19.

²⁷ Hiroko Nakata, “Under ‘Abenomics’ rich thrive but middle class on precipice,” *Japan Times*, 7 April 2015.

²⁸ Kawazoe Makoto, “Seidoteki sabetsu to shite no keizai kakusa,” *Sekai*, March 2015, pp. 94-100, at p. 95.

²⁹ Nakata, op. cit.

nationalist governments and leaders, in Japan reinforce the existing conservative LDP-Buddhist bloc, as well as the religious extremism of Nihon Kaigi (Shinto) and Komeito (Buddhist).

Disaster Scenarios

In common with humanity in general, Japan faces the grim consequences of climate change, including an inexorable rise in ocean levels that threaten the major conurbations built along the sea-front, global warming, species depletion, and ecological crisis. Japan is periodically stricken by unpredicted, unpredictable disasters. At the time of the Kyoto Climate Protocol of 1997, a carbon concentration of 400 ppm was thought to be the red line beyond which humanity might not survive, but we are now approaching an anticipated 2019 average of 411 ppm.³⁰ Experts now doubt that humanity can succeed in preventing an increase in global temperatures of less than 2°C during this century. Human prospects are steadily darkening.

During the Northern Hemisphere summer of 2018, reflecting a general global pattern, Japan suffered intense heat (reaching an unparalleled 42°C degrees in the vicinity of Tokyo), accompanied by severe storms and floods. In the Southern Hemisphere summer that followed, the Australian capital, Canberra, lived through its hottest spell on record, including four successive days of 40°C or more. This phenomenon was followed by savage floods in the north of the country (Queensland – in some cases, following up to seven years of crippling drought) and fires in the south (Tasmania).³¹ Meanwhile, the Great Barrier Reef and the Murray-Darling River system are collapsing.

Independently of human-induced climate change, Japan is periodically stricken by unpredicted and unpredictable disasters, notably:

the Great Hōei Earthquake of October 1707 (Magnitude: 8.7, 5,000 plus deaths);
the Great Kanto Earthquake of September 1923 (Magnitude: 8.3, 142,800 deaths);
the Great Hanshin Earthquake of January 1995 (Magnitude: 7.3, 6,434 deaths);
the Great Tohoku Earthquake of March 2011 (Magnitude: 9.1, 15,896 deaths); and
the Hokkaido Eastern Earthquake of September 2018 (Magnitude: 6.7, 35 deaths).

Volcanic eruptions and typhoons also occur with little warning and similarly catastrophic consequences, from the eruption of Mt Fuji that followed some weeks after the Hōei earthquake in 1707 and spread lava across the Kanto plains around Tokyo to Typhoon 21, a massive storm that caused the partial submergence of Kansai International Airport and put much of it out of action during the summer of 2018.

³⁰ Damian Carrington, “Worrying rise in global CO2 forecast for 2019,” *The Guardian*, 25 January 2019. For my earlier discussion of these matters, see *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 171-2.

³¹ For an impassioned plea for the Tasmanian wilderness, see the renowned (Tasmania resident), novelist Richard Flanagan: “Tasmania is burning: the climate disaster future has arrived while those in power laugh at us,” *The Guardian*, 4 February 2019. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/feb/05/tasmania-is-burning-the-climate-disaster-future-has-arrived-while-those-in-power-laugh-at-us/>

Scientific estimates now place the probability of a magnitude-8-plus quake occurring directly beneath the capital (along the Nankai Trough) at 60-70% during the next thirty years and at 90% during the next fifty years, with expected deaths in the latter case numbering around 323,000 and predicted economic damage totalling around 220 trillion yen (or roughly 40% of GDP).³²

According to Meguro Kimiro, professor of earthquake mitigation engineering at the University of Tokyo, “If we have a disaster on this scale now, the country will go under. There are plenty of examples of this in world history.”³³

No country on earth is so ill-suited, due to its inherent geological and climatic instability, to housing a nuclear complex than Japan, yet its government refuses to allow the catastrophic sequence of events (earthquake-tsunami-meltdown) in 2011 to stand in the way of a nuclear-powered future. Even as it contemplates continually rising carbon emissions and a worsening climate crisis, it continues to designate fossil and nuclear fuels as its core energy sources for the future, planning for 53% reliance on fossil fuels (oil, coal, and gas), 22-24% reliance on renewables, and 20-22% reliance on nuclear energy by 2030, in the case of the latter in spite of strong national sentiment against a revival of the nuclear sector (which, as of 2017, was providing just 2% of electric power).³⁴

People/Population

An inexorable force of another kind also challenge Japan, in the form of the steady attrition of its people. Japan’s population rose from an estimated five or six million in the year 800 to 7.5 million as of 1192, 12.2 million in 1603, 31.2 million in the early 18th century, remaining roughly stable for several decades (33.3 million in 1868), later rising to 72.0 million at war’s end in 1945, and reaching a peak of 128.0 million in 2010. Decline then set in, with the population predicted to fall to 116.6 million in 2030, and 97.0 million in 2050. The high, medium and low level projections for the year 2100 are 64.8, 49.5 and 37.9 million respectively.

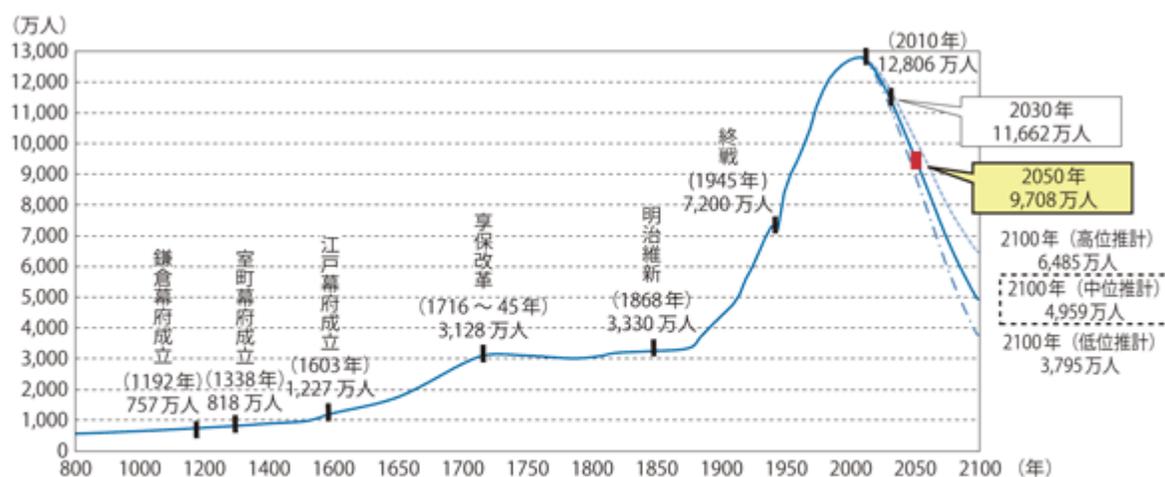
Japan’s Long-Term Population Trends ³⁵

³² Robin Harding and Steve Bernard, “Japan: The next big quake,” *Financial Times*, 18 May 2016. <https://ig.ft.com/sites/japan-tsunami/>

³³ Quoted in Harding and Bernard, *ibid*.

³⁴ World Nuclear Association, “Nuclear Power in Japan,” updated September 2018. A recent survey, consistent with the general trend post-Fukushima, showed 11.4% support for an immediate nuclear shutdown and 63.6% support for staged reductions leading to a gradual shutdown. (“Datsu genpatsu wa habahiroi shiji,” *Okinawa taimusu*, 4 March 2018). See also Tatsujiro Suzuki, “Six years after Fukushima, much of Japan has lost faith in nuclear power,” *The Conversation*, 10 March 2017.

³⁵ Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport, White Paper, 2014 <http://www.mlit.go.jp/hakusyo/mlit/h25/hakusho/h26/html/n112000.html/>



資料) 2010年以前は総務省「国勢調査」、同「平成22年国勢調査人口等基本集計」、国土庁「日本列島における人口分布の長期時系列分析」(1974年)、2015年以降は国立社会保障・人口問題研究所「日本の将来推計人口(平成24年1月推計)」より国土交通省作成

Note:

The above table, compiled from official governmental sources, shows the population of Japan from A.D. 800 through until 2100 (incorporating estimates for the period after 2015), with a peak of 128 million reached in 2010.

This means a population loss of around eleven thousand per week, rising to nineteen thousand per week around the middle of the current century, the total falling by then below the 100-million line. Of that total, half a million will be centenarians and thirty-eight million aged sixty-five or more.³⁶ Tokai University's Kusaki Toshio notes the decline in the working-age population is so precipitous that, "if we want to keep the working age population at around the same as [the] 2015 level, we will have to accept 700,000 foreign workers a year for the next 25 years." That, he adds (perhaps unnecessarily) "would be a preposterous figure."³⁷

No country has achieved global great-power status while its population is in freefall, so the government of Japan is striving desperately to persuade more women to reproduce, declaring the goal of having them "shine," and appointing a special minister of state to advance the cause of reversing the population decline. Just to maintain current population levels would call for a TFR (total fertility rate, or number of births on average per woman) of 2.1 (210 births per one hundred women), whereas the current rate is 1.4.³⁸ Yet, despite the talk of "shining," in the World Economic Forum's "Gender Gap Report" for 2018, Japan ranked an unimpressive Number 110 (among a total of 149) countries, the lowest in the OECD. The Inter-parliamentary Union in 2019 ranked Japan at Number 165 among 193 countries in terms of women's parliamentary

³⁶ Terashima Jitsuro, "Noryoku no ressun," No. 184, "Tokubetsuhen" "Shiruba demokurashi saiko," *Sekai*, August 2017, pp. 28-34.

³⁷ Toshio Kosaki, "Is an increase in foreign workers Japan's unavoidable path? The major problems facing a society with a shrinking population," Tokai University, *The Mainichi*, 1 March 2019. <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20190226/hrc/00m/070/003000d/>

³⁸ McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 175. (The EU average is just 1.58 and that of South Korea is reported to have fallen even lower, to an astonishing 0.96, during 2018.)

representation.³⁹ In a society marked by widespread complaints by women of sexual and power harassment, government directives to reproduce are not taken seriously.

The government and the country's business leaders recognize this. Given the multiple millions of people around the world fleeing war, famine, and disaster of one kind or another, one way to address the problem would be to adopt a national policy of pluralism and multiculturalism and to admit significant numbers of those fleeing persecution or disaster. But such a path is not favoured by the Japanese government or the corporate sector. The barrier to entry to Japan for people in flight is higher in Japan than elsewhere,⁴⁰ and the conditions attaching to admission stricter. The "foreign technical trainee" program has constituted one kind of opening, but it is widely reported to have been "rife with allegations of human rights violations including below minimum wages, bullying and sexual harassment by employers along with harsh working conditions."⁴¹ The data evidently show widespread abuse of the system, including payment at rates below the prescribed minimum, and sixty-nine deaths, including some suicides, over the latest, three-year period.⁴²

Despite this, Japan continues to see the problem of its shrinking labour force as one to be addressed via the import of labour on a conditional, limited term basis, while holding on to the principle of a mono-cultural, mono-ethnic nation. Under legislation forced through the Diet in November 2018, 350,000 people are expected to be admitted over the five years commencing April 2019. They will be unmarried and will lack adequate social security or pension rights. As such, they will essentially be at the mercy of their employers, protesting abuses only at the risk of suffering immediate cancellation of their visas and deportation. And, regardless of the intention of legislators to maintain the temporary and conditional nature of their admission, many of them will stay, as did many of the *Gästarbeiter* who came to satisfy German labour needs from the 1950s and who eventually had to be recognized, Germany redefining itself (in 2005) as "a country of immigrants."⁴³

There is, of course, an earlier precedent for the introduction to Japan of substitute labour, and it is not an encouraging one. As millions of Japanese were conscripted and sent to war under the National Mobilization Law of July 1939, hundreds of thousands of Koreans and Chinese were brought to Japan to replace them in factories, mines and large-scale construction projects. Seven or eight decades later, the demand for redress for the abuse and exploitation of such "forced labour" continues to be the subject of court proceedings up to the level of the Korean Supreme Court. This shadow from the 20th-century remains long today, and it would be too much to

³⁹ "Josei giin, Nihon wa 165-i," Kyodo, 6 March 2019.

⁴⁰ In 2017, 19,628 persons applied for asylum in Japan, of whom just twenty were successful.

⁴¹ Tomohiro Osaki, "Japan passes controversial immigration control law paving way for foreign worker influx," *Japan Times*, 7 December 2019. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/12/07/national/politics-diplomacy/japan-set-enact-controversial-immigration-bill-paving-way-foreign-worker-influx/#.XFojsIVOKUk/>

⁴² For discussion, Jinbo Taro, "Media hiho," No 134, *Sekai*, February 2019, pp. 254-261, at pp. 255-6. (Jinbo adds that after the legislation was in due course adopted, it was revealed that there had been 174 deaths among trainees over the preceding eight-year period.)

⁴³ Satoshi Sugiyama, "Japan's denial of immigration reality echoes Germany's experience with 'guest workers'," *Japan Times*, 31 December 2018.

expect such a government to adopt a human rights-based approach to the new types of labour about to be introduced (from 2019).

Okinawa

Okinawa's confrontation with the Japanese nation state is rooted in the unique experience of incorporation by violence – into the early modern state in 1609 and into the modern state in 1879.⁴⁴ This was followed by the overwhelming catastrophe of war in 1945, the ensuing severance from Japan, US occupation between 1945 and 1972 as Japan's "war state," matching the mainland-Japan "peace state" under the San Francisco Treaty determination of 1951, and the fierce, ongoing confrontation with the national government over the latter's insistence that the key national policy for Okinawa from 1972 had to be the servicing of US military demands.⁴⁵

For one example of what this meant, while Okinawa was under complete US control in the 1950s and 1960s, up to 1,300 nuclear weapons were stored there. Pentagon planners at that time assumed a major role for Okinawa in scenarios involving the destruction of *all* major cities in the then Soviet Union and China, involving the killing of around 600 million people (sic) and very possibly bringing human civilization itself to an end.⁴⁶ Okinawan people of course did not know about this in detail, but they knew enough to be fearful and to seek relief from military oppression. "Reversion" to Japan in 1972 was only partial. Semi-occupation continues, and while Okinawa accounts for a mere 0.6% of the total national land area, it hosts over 70% of the US military facilities in the country. Okinawan officials have no jurisdiction whatsoever over these base lands. US control amounts to colonial extraterritoriality.

The modern Okinawan movement can be traced back to successive phases of deprivation and deception. During the early years of US occupation, Okinawan farmers resisted the appropriation of their land and believed that, if only Okinawa were to be restored to Japan, the principles of the constitution would ensure recognition of their democratic rights and the winding back or return of the bases. It was a vain hope. Instead, the process known in Okinawa as the terror of "bayonet and bulldozer" expropriation proceeded inexorably. After the reversion (in 1972), US hegemony, and the associated priority given to its military, simply became entrenched.

With the end of the Cold War, Okinawans again began to hope for a "peace dividend" via the return of their land. Not only was this not to be, but the infamous rape of a twelve-year old Okinawan girl by three US servicemen in 1995 stirred deep anger and sadness that threatened the base system. The two governments sought to quell these sentiments by promising that Futenma Marine Air Station would be returned within "five to seven years." But, like the "reversion" of Okinawa itself in 1972, this promise proved deceptive. Futenma would only be returned once a substitute facility (grander, more modern and multi-functional) had been constructed, and this substitute, it soon became clear, would have to be in Okinawa. This proposal was rejected, firstly

⁴⁴ See my "Ryukyu/Okinawa's trajectory: from periphery to centre, 1600-2015," in Sven Saaler and Christopher W.A. Szpilman, eds., *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese History*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018, pp. 118-134.

⁴⁵ For details, McCormack and Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands*, op. cit.

⁴⁶ See the reminiscences of Daniel Ellsberg, *The Doomsday Machine: Confessions of a Nuclear War Planner*, Bloomsbury Publications, 2017, and Ellsberg's interview with Fairfax media's Peter Hannam, "Setting the world alight," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 March 2018.

by a Nago City plebiscite in 1997, and then by numerous resolutions of the Okinawan parliament and successive Okinawan governors. The two governments remained committed to carrying out their plans.⁴⁷

Following the agreement of the two governments on the grand design for “Realignment of US Forces in Japan” (2006), and preliminary survey works at the designated site, Henoko on Oura Bay, the issue moved to the top of the agenda of Okinawan politics. A governor committed to stopping the proposal, Nakaima Hirokazu, was elected in 2010, but he reversed his position three years later under heavy pressure, agreeing to the reclamation of Oura Bay and the construction of the new base. Denounced by the Prefectural Assembly, he was voted out of office the following year (2014). In his stead, Onaga Takeshi was elected on a pledge to stop the works. He did indeed stop them through court actions during much of 2016, but the Supreme Court ruled against him in late 2016. Preliminary construction work resumed in April 2017, continuing through 2018. In July 2018, Governor Onaga launched formal proceedings to rescind the original, problematic reclamation license issued by his predecessor. But, shortly after doing so, Onaga suddenly died (on 8 August). The prefecture continued with the process of revocation, and works were suspended from 31 August. Again, however, the state moved to strike down the prefecture’s protest. The (government’s) Okinawan Defence Bureau called on Ishii Kei-ichi, Minister of Land, Infrastructure, and Transportation, to review the prefectural revocation under the Administrative Appeal Act and issue an order cancelling its effect.

On 30 October, Minister Ishii did what was required of him, finding the rescission “unreasonable” and “likely to undermine relations of trust with Japan’s security ally, the United States,”⁴⁸ and suspending the effect of the prefectural revocation order. Brushing aside outraged Okinawan protests, the ODB (for the government) ordered works at Oura Bay to be resumed. After a two-month suspension, this happened on 3 November. Work continues to this day. Three months later, in February 2019, a panel for the resolution of disputes between central and local governments turned down an Okinawan prefectural government plea to overturn the Ishii order on technical grounds.⁴⁹

In the interim, despite an unprecedented level of national government intervention to try to secure the election of an amenable candidate, on 30 September 2018, Tamaki Denny was elected governor by a massive (eighty-thousand-vote) margin on a platform of preventing the Henoko reclamation/construction works. Within days of his election, however, the Abe government declared that it intended to proceed regardless of prefectural sentiment. To Abe, Okinawa was a patch of enemy territory within an otherwise submissive domain.

Thus, all attempts by the two governments over a period of decades to persuade, buy off, or intimidate the people of the Okinawa islands into submission to the clientelist, military-first prescription failed. The Okinawan resistance movement opposed not only the Henoko

⁴⁷ For details, McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, and McCormack and Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands*, 2018, *passim*.

⁴⁸ Kyodo, “Okinawa governor meets top gov’t official over US base transfer,” *The Mainichi*, 6 November 2018.

⁴⁹ On the grounds that the prefecture’s suit was based on the Administrative Complaints Review Act, but that the tribunal only had jurisdiction over complaints under the Local Autonomy Act (“Dispute resolution panel throws out Okinawa request to reinstate landfill ban,” *The Mainichi*, 19 February 2019).

reclamation and construction works on Oura Bay, but also the steady advance of militarization in the form of Osprey aircraft encroachment into Okinawan skies and SDF military and missile bases on the various islands of the East China Sea, from Mage through Amami to Ishigaki and Yonaguni. Modern Japanese history has no precedent for the phenomenon of a prefecture saying “No” to the authorities of two of the world’s great powers over a period of decades.

The Henoko-Oura Bay project becomes steadily more improbable, for technical reasons as much as political or ecological ones. Structural engineers doubt that the massive concrete and steel structure that has been planned – twin, “V”-shaped, 1,800-meter runways on a platform projecting ten meters above the sea, plus ancillary deep-sea port and storage facilities – could be stably imposed on the designated site. For it to proceed, the original design would have to be fundamentally redrawn to take into account factors such as the soft “mayonnaise-like” floor of Oura Bay and the active fault line that bisects it.⁵⁰ The Abe government learned of the sea floor weakness in its preliminary environmental impact study of 2014-2016, but only after environmental NGOs gained access to the details of that survey under Freedom of Information did the government, late in 2018, concede that it would have to seek approval by Okinawan Governor Tamaki for a major redrawing of the reclamation design.

In December 2018, the government made it known that it wanted to bolster the soft sea-floor by inserting forty thousand sand compaction piles deep into it. In January, it raised the number to sixty thousand, and within a few more weeks to 76,999, while increasing the depth to which they would have to be inserted from sixty to ninety metres (thirty in water and sixty in sludge).⁵¹ On 15 February, the government submitted to the Diet documents reckoning that new “bottom enforcement” works would take an additional three years and eight months, so that, even according to the “best” scenarios for construction, the date for reversion of “the most dangerous base in the world” would be pushed back from the current estimate of 2022 to 2025 or 2026. Ginowan city residents will thus have to put up with the risk and nuisance of Futenma for at least six more years.

It soon became clear not only that neither Japan nor any other country had the engineering skills or experience for the task that was now required. Contesting the government’s sanguine expectation of an extension to the construction plan of under four years, Okinawa prefecture estimated that construction could now be expected to take at least thirteen years, and – if indeed it could be carried out – would cost around two and a half trillion yen (\$23 billion), or ten times the original estimate.⁵²

Prime Minister Abe made a remarkable admission to the Diet on 30 January 2019 that he could neither say when the project would be completed nor how much it would cost. Recalling that the promise of the return of Futenma “within five to seven years” was made in 1996, already twenty-

⁵⁰ McCormack, *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 246-7.

⁵¹ “Nanjaku jiban ni kui 6 man bon, koto mukei na koji o yameyo,” editorial, *Ryukyu shimpo*, 3 February 2019. <https://ryukyushimpo.jp/editorial/entry-870361.html/>, and for the 76,999 and ninety metre figures, “Asase mo kui 1.3 man bon, nanjaku jiban koji kei 7.6 man bon Boei kyoku hokokusho de hanmei,” *Ryukyu shimpo*, 9 February 2019. For lucid analysis in English, Hideki Yoshikawa, “Abe’s military base plan sinking in mayonnaise: Implications for the US Court and IUCN,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 15 February 2019.

⁵² “Okinawa says new base to cost 10 times what Tokyo estimated,” *Asahi shimbun*, 12 December 2018.

three years ago, and that governments had constantly repeated that the high level of danger attaching to it was such that reversion at the earliest possible moment was essential, it was a remarkable admission. Were it located in the continental US in such a high-risk setting, Futenma Marine Air Station would have been closed forthwith for safety and environmental reasons.

Ultimately, however, the national government disdains legal niceties and has made it clear that it will press ahead with construction, with or without prefectural permission. In January 2019, it commenced seawall construction on a new sector (N4) of the reclamation site. It did so just weeks before a 24 February prefectural referendum designed to show the level of opposition to the project among the Okinawan people. In the event, just over 72% of voters (434,273 people) said No to the project, far outweighing the 19% in favor of it (or the 8.7% who voted “neither”).⁵³ Unmoved, the government’s position was, in effect, that even if every single Okinawan were to say “No,” it would still insist that the new Marine Corps base be built on the reclaimed Henoko site.

As of early 2019, the government finds itself in the invidious position of insisting that it could dig 77,000 holes deep into the bay floor, insert a ninety-metre-high pillar of sand into each one, using untried engineering techniques, in a time frame and at a cost that it could not estimate,⁵⁴ without seriously affecting the bay as an eco-system for countless biota. Even if it were technically possible, it would involve massive disruption to Oura Bay and be incompatible with its grade-one ranking in terms of bio-diversity. Kansai International Airport’s construction carried a grim lesson for the government. It too had been built on a reclaimed island (offshore in Osaka Bay), at a cost of around \$20 billion (therefore, roughly comparable), and, although also reinforced by the insertion of multiple piles, it continues to slowly sink, needing to be closed when it was almost submerged by storms in 2018.

The government of Japan has repeatedly made it clear that when military priorities compete with climate change and species depletion policies, it would give priority to the former. It thus marked 2018 (which happened to be the International Year of Coral) by setting about reclaiming (filling) much of one of its most prolific and bio-diverse coastal coral reef zones, killing off unique colonies of coral and other marine species in the process. Prime Minister Abe went even further, falsely assuring the Diet that endangered coral from the construction site had been safely transplanted. In fact, just nine *Porites Okinawensis* colonies from other parts of the site had been relocated, of a total of 74,000 needing transplant, none from the “Landfill zone 2-1” where reclamation works were underway. Prefectural permission (unlikely to be granted) is required for this, and the coral survival rate is very low.⁵⁵

Cost overruns at Henoko are of no concern to the Pentagon, since Japan foots the bill, but delays and safety of the end-product are a different matter. Lawrence Wilkerson, a former senior advisor to Colin Powell in the George W. Bush administration during the early 1990s now says that the time for building military bases on sea-front sites has passed, due to the risk of disaster from rising ocean levels caused by global warming. Already, he notes that even the major naval

⁵³ Eric Johnston, “More than 70% in Okinawa vote no to relocation of US Futenma base to Henoko,” *Japan Times*, 24 February 2019.

⁵⁴ Abe to the Diet on 30 January 2019: “Koki ya hiyo ni tsuite kakutaru koto o moshiageru koto wa konnan.”

⁵⁵ “For Henoko land reclamation, Prime Minister Abe claims, ‘The coral there is being relocated,’ however the reality is no such activity is taking place in the landfill area,” *Ryukyu shimpo*, 8 January 2019.

shipyard at Norfolk, Virginia, might become unusable thirty years from now, and the same fate awaits the projected Henoko base “in 60 or 70 years.”⁵⁶ As the problems mount, more experts are likely to come to doubt the Government of Japan’s competence and the viability of its scheme. Such doubts may indeed already be spreading, as the editorial board of the *New York Times*’ unusually harsh denunciation of the base construction project in October 2018 as “an unfair, unwanted and often dangerous burden on Japan’s poorest citizens” suggested.⁵⁷

Within Japan, a statement was issued in October 2018 bearing the signatures of 110 administrative law specialists declaring the government to be acting “illegally ... lacking in impartiality or fairness,” and failing “to qualify as a state ruled by law.”⁵⁸ Two months later, on 24 January 2019, 131 constitutional law specialists, academics and lawyers, published a similar statement declaring the government’s actions a matter of the fundamental human rights of the people of Okinawa, and the Henoko project both illegal and unconstitutional.⁵⁹ Although Prime Minister Abe often insists that Japan is a country governed by law, as one representative of this constitutionalist group put it, “What the Abe administration is doing in Okinawa is, precisely, trampling on the ‘rule of law’.” It is as if the people of Arizona or New York City were repeatedly to say “No” to projects to turn the Grand Canyon or Central Park into a military base but the government were repeatedly to overrule their objections. The national daily *Asahi* editorialized that the Henoko project was “clearly doomed” and that it was time to “to open talks with the US.”⁶⁰

Korea

The often fractious relationship between post-1945 Japan and South Korea is rooted in their different experience: the defeated enemy Japan, on the one hand, treated to a soft peace and granted a privileged position as US subordinate within the San Francisco Treaty system, and Korea on the other, a Japanese colony no sooner “liberated” than divided and subjected to harsh, often brutal, suppression of its incipient democratic movement. While Japan thereafter gradually deepened its character as a client state, South Korea as divided state went through successive mass uprisings, in 1960, 1980, 1987, and finally, and perhaps decisively, in 2016-7, rejecting military dictatorships imposed and maintained by the US (and aided by Japan) for four and a half decades, establishing a democratic regime that could be seen as the fruit of the “candlelight revolution” (as theorist of Korean democracy Paik Nakchung suggests the democratic mass movement of 2016 should be known),⁶¹ and, from 2016, attaching the highest priority to addressing the root of the Korean problem: national division.

⁵⁶ “Koron, Henoko, Beikoku kara mita, Rorensu Uirukason san, Jemusu Schoff san,” *Asahi shimbun*, 22 February 2019.

⁵⁷ The Editorial Board, “Toward a smaller American footprint on Okinawa,” *New York Times*, 1 October 2018.

⁵⁸ “Henoko shin kichi, gyoseiho kenkyusha 110 nin no seimeibun zenbun,” *Okinawa taimusu*, 31 October 2018.

⁵⁹ “131 constitutional scholars speak up against Henoko base construction,” *Ryukyuu shimpo*, 24 January 2019. (Words quoted from Iijima Shigeaki of Nagoya Gakuin University).

⁶⁰ “Henoko project clearly doomed; time to open talks with the US,” *Asahi shimbun*, 23 February 2019.

⁶¹ Paik Nak-chung, “South Korea’s candlelight revolution and the future of the Korean peninsula,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, 1 December 2018.

While now the political, bureaucratic, and police authorities of the South Korean state fostered by US and Japan (including two former presidents) languish in prison, those they once imprisoned and tortured now run the government, and the good name of many of those once maltreated or even executed on framed charges has been restored.⁶² A relatively mature Korean civil democracy now addresses Japan, the United States, and the other countries with a stake in the future of the peninsula.

The 27 April 2018 meeting at Panmunjom between the leaders of South and North Korea and the 12 June 2018 meeting in Singapore between the US President and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un brought the two Korean parties to the cusp of ending the curse of the “division system,” declaring peace, “normalizing” diplomatic relations on all sides, demilitarizing the peninsula and its surrounds, and removing all foreign military installations. In September 2018, South Korean president Moon addressed a mass rally (attended by an estimated 150,000 people) at May Day Stadium in the North Korean capital of Pyongyang, drawing applause for his references to “a future of common prosperity.” Moon was not exaggerating when he told a Japanese newspaper, “A big transformation in world history has begun on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia.”⁶³

For any resolution of the Korean division, the UN will have to play a role. This is appropriate not just because of the immensity of the task, but also because as an organization it bears a peculiar responsibility for creating the problem in the first place, by dividing the country and establishing an anti-communist bastion in the south in 1947-48,⁶⁴ and then by going to war against North Korea in 1950 (entrusting military and political control to the United States), this war generating some three million dead and reducing North Korea to rubble.

In the first year of the war alone, about 100,000 people were massacred by “our” (i.e., US, South Korean and other) forces under the UN flag, and many of the overall casualties were victims of carpet bombing, or the destruction of the infrastructure of daily life, including dams, dykes and power stations, inflicted by “our” side, each such incident likely constituting a war crime. The most horrendous incidents of massacre, which were then simply blamed on the “communists,” were revealed much later to have been committed by “our” side.⁶⁵ After the war, in breach of the Armistice agreement, the US refused to engage in peace talks, and then (1958) introduced nuclear weapons to South Korea in an attempt to intimidate and compel North Korea to submit.

⁶² Apart from Lee Myung-bak (2008-2012) and Park Eun-hee (2013-2017), who are serving fifteen- and twenty-five-year sentences respectively for crimes including bribery, embezzlement, tax evasion (Lee) and abuse of power, bribery, and coercion (Park), both Chun Doo-hwan (1981-1987) and Roh Tae-woo (1988-1993) were tried and sentenced to death (Chun) and 22.5 years’ imprisonment (Roh) for multiple crimes including murder, insurrection, and conspiracy, but were reprieved by their successor.

⁶³ “Moon vows utmost efforts for denuclearization,” *The Japan News (Yomiuri Shimbun)*, 15 May 2018 (interview on 8 May), <http://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0004421425/>

⁶⁴ The UN could only do this because two countries on the UN Temporary Commission for Korea (UNTCOK), Australia and Canada, reversed their position and bowed to US pressure to endorse separate elections in South Korea. See my *Cold War Hot War – An Australian Perspective on the Korean War*, Sydney, Hale and Iremonger, 1983.

⁶⁵ Kim Dong-choon, *The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Korea: Uncovering the hidden history of the Korean War*, *The Asia-Pacific Journal – Japan Focus*, March 1, 2010. <http://apjff.org/-kim-dong-choon/3314/article.html/> For a full study of these grim events, see Su-Kyoung Hwang, *Korea’s Grievous War*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016.

Thereafter, the US refused to take seriously its obligations under the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968 to “negotiate in good faith to achieve a precise result – nuclear disarmament in all its aspects,” and included North Korea on its nuclear target list, also in breach of the Treaty. It persisted in unremitting nuclear intimidation of North Korea thereafter. The UN has never repeated its Korean experience of waging war, but neither has it ever acknowledged responsibility for the war crimes committed both during and after this conflict.

After suffering the devastation of war, North Korea rebuilt and set about defending itself against any recurrence of the horrors of the 1950s, learning from modern world history the lesson that the only credible deterrence is that which comes from possession of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems. North Korea is not bound by the Non-Proliferation Treaty (having withdrawn in 2003) and is in the unique position of being a state that has been subject, for nearly seventy years, to the threat of nuclear extermination and might therefore be able to claim justification for the “threat or use of nuclear weapons” under the World Court’s 1996 “Advisory Opinion” that refers to an “extreme circumstance of self-defence, in which the very survival of a State would be at stake.”⁶⁶ In other words, while the unlawfulness of all the other nuclear weapon countries is plain, North Korea, uniquely - though universally excoriated - might have a case to justify possession.

In the decades to 2017, tensions on the peninsula escalated almost uncontrollably. By threatening North Korea with “fire and fury, and frankly power the likes of which this world has never seen before” (sic), abusing Kim Jong-un in the General Assembly of the United Nations as “rocket man . . . on a suicide mission,” and threatening to “wipe out” North Korea, “totally destroying” it unless it submitted, President Trump in 2017 was in breach of the UN Charter’s Article 2 (3) and (4) requiring disputes to be settled by “peaceful means” and forbidding “the threat or use of force.”⁶⁷ The US position was to tolerate nothing short of North Korean surrender and submission, conducting regular “war games” rehearsing invasion just offshore from North Korea, including “special operations” designed to “decapitate” the North Korean regime (i.e. to capture and/or assassinate its leader). That he could stand before the UN General Assembly to threaten North Korea with genocide without stirring outrage was a measure of the degree to which the global system of governance had degraded.

While the United States (closely followed by Japan) refuses to be bound by any international law, or indeed by any law at all, national or international, North Korea, for its part, has been a nuclear *victim* state (subject to nuclear intimidation) from 1950 onwards, with few breaks up to the present day. If anything might be calculated to drive a people “mad,” feeding an obsession with security, it must surely be prolonged exposure to such existential threat. But so long as the threat was directed *at* North Korea, not *from* it, the world showed no interest. Only when North Korea succeeded in developing its own deterrent, signalled by a flurry of tests in 2017, would the world pay serious attention.

⁶⁶ International Court of Justice, “Advisory opinion on the legality of the threat or use of nuclear weapons,” 6 July 1996, <http://www.icj-cij.org/en/case/95/>

⁶⁷ Article 33 further specifies the obligation of parties to any dispute likely to endanger international peace and security to “first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, inquiry, mediation, conciliation . . . or other peaceful means of their own choice.”

From time to time, North Korea has engaged in negotiations under which it suspended and promised to negotiate away its nuclear weapons and programs in return for peace and security, for example between 1994 and 2002 under the so-called “Agreed Framework,” or from 2003, and especially in 2005-6, under the Beijing Six-Party Conference Agreement. Until 2018, it was rebuffed by the US, Japan, South Korea, or all in concert. South Korea’s chief negotiator at the Six-Party talks in 2006 and 2007, Chun Young-woo, spoke of his sense that the North Korean participants felt “besieged, squeezed, strangled, and cornered by hostile powers,” and noted the tone of “visceral aversion” or “condescension, self-righteousness or a vindictive approach” on the part of the major parties (by which he plainly meant, first and foremost, the United States.)⁶⁸

The sanctions imposed by the Security Council culminated in 2017 in measures that amounted to economic and financial strangulation, involving the banning of virtually all North Korean exports (including labour) and major industrial imports. Heavily influenced by the US and Japan,⁶⁹ the Security Council strove to make it impossible for North Korea to engage in international trade or banking *at all* [italics added]. When Acting Assistant Secretary of State Susan Thornton called for “for all countries to cut trade ties with Pyongyang to increase North Korea’s financial isolation and choke off revenue sources “ and to “cease normal political interactions,”⁷⁰ she was, in effect, calling for the kind of embargo that had been applied (with catastrophic consequences) to Japan in 1941, and was referring not to sanctions but to a blockade. A blockade is an act of war. Then US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson expressed his satisfaction early in 2018 that sanctions were working by referring to the increasing number of North Korean “ghost ships” washed up on Japanese shores, often carrying only dead bodies (of crew who had starved because they lacked sufficient food or fuel to get back to their bases).⁷¹ Yet the legal position is clear. While the UN may impose sanctions, they must be targeted, not indiscriminate or punitive.

2018, however, brought astonishing change. President Trump, responding to North Korean overtures, set aside his abuse and intimidation and began to treat North Korea with respect, endorsing the need for a treaty to end the Korean War. The Koreas of North and South, together with US President Trump - defying his national security staff - took the initiative, agreeing on their shared strategic objective – peace, denuclearization, and comprehensive cooperation for the Koreas. The spectacle of the two Korean leaders chatting in the spring sunshine of 2018 at Panmunjom, escorting each other back and forth across the line dividing their two zones, was as astonishing as if they had both sprouted wings and flown across the sky.⁷² Shortly after meeting with Kim Jong-un in Singapore in June 2018, Trump declared, “We will be stopping the war

⁶⁸ Chun Young-woo, “The North Korean nuclear issue,” speech to Hankyoreh Foundation Conference, Busan, 25 November 2006.

⁶⁹ Japan was a “non-permanent” member of the Security Council in 2016-2017.

⁷⁰ Susan A. Thornton, “North Korea policy,” Statement before the House of Foreign Affairs Committee, September 12, 2017, <https://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2017/09/274003.htm>

⁷¹ Reuters, “Rex Tillerson Says There Is Evidence That Sanctions Are 'Really Starting to Hurt' North Korea,” *Time*, 18 January 2018.

⁷² President Moon handed Chairman Kim a USB containing multiple plans and suggestions for a united future, something unthinkable at any time in the past seven decades. Equally unthinkable, Kim Jong-un accepted it and it undoubtedly informed subsequent ongoing South-North discussions.

games, which will save us a tremendous amount of money ... Plus, I think it's very provocative.”

⁷³ He went on:

“The past does not have to define the future. Yesterday's conflict does not have to be tomorrow's war. And as history has proven over and over again, adversaries can indeed become friends. We can honor the sacrifice of our forefathers by replacing the horrors of battle with the blessings of peace. And that's what we're doing and that's what we have done.”

Months later, Trump declared his “love” for North Korea's leader.⁷⁴

Suddenly it seemed that war preparation could give way to peace, cooperation and the break-up of long-frozen diplomatic logjams. Expectations were high when President Trump and Chairman Kim Jong-un had their second meeting, in Hanoi in late February 2019, that the relationship might move to a new level, perhaps by the adoption of a joint declaration of an end to the Korean War or by the opening of liaison offices in both capitals. But it was not to be. Even as the celebratory lunch was being prepared, the meeting broke up. US national security staff appear to have seen North Korean readiness to negotiate as a sign of weakness, and have stepped back from the president's Singapore commitment to step-by-step confidence-building measures. Instead, they demanded thorough-going submission as part of the long-term goal of regime change. Trump may also have sought to play North Korea as a card in efforts to negotiate his own survival as enemies on multiple fronts circled his Washington wagon.

The contradiction is clear between the Trump press conference of the early afternoon of 27 February before he flew out of Hanoi in which he said

“It was about the sanctions ... Basically, they wanted the sanctions lifted in their entirety but we couldn't do that.”

and the North Korean account, as given ten hours later by Foreign Minister Ri Yong-ho in an extraordinary late night Hanoi hotel press conference. Ri insisted that North Korea, in the spirit of the 2018 Singapore meeting had offered for the first time “permanent dismantlement of the Yongbyon nuclear facilities,” including inspections, verification and a joint work process involving the US,⁷⁵ in return for *partial* (italics added) sanctions relief, notably the lifting of five of the eleven sanctions imposed in 2016 and 2017 that went beyond military and luxury items and targeted the civil economy and people's livelihood.⁷⁶ Punitive and indiscriminate, they were designed to inflict social pain. Faced with the offer to abolish the country's major facilities and permanently freeze most if not all of its weapon and missile works in return for partial sanctions

⁷³ Press Conference by President Trump, Singapore, June 12 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/press-conference-president-trump/>

⁷⁴ For the remarkable you-tube coverage of this speech, 30 September 2018, see <https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=trump%2c+kim+jong-un%2c+%22love%22&view=detail&mid=2C5079B1CC64334C9DB02C5079B1CC64334C9DB0&FORM=VIRE>

⁷⁵ Lee Je-hyun, “Kim Jong-un proposes continuation of dialogue after Hanoi summit,” *Hankyoreh*, 2 March 2019.

⁷⁶ According to multiple media accounts, including Noh Hyun-woong, “Analyzing the type of sanctions relief that North Korea wants,” *Hankyoreh*, 2 March 2019.

relief, the Trump team offered nothing at all and, when their demands were not met, simply got up and walked away.

Later reports left little doubt that the North Korean account was closest to the truth, but there were at least two additional, complicating factors. Firstly, it seems that the US side had introduced a demand, not part of prior negotiations or agreement, for the opening of a further unspecified weapons site, and North Korea had refused to consider any such “last-minute” demands.⁷⁷ Secondly, Trump may also have realized that sanctions imposed by the Security Council could only be lifted by the Security Council.

For now, the momentum of events on and around the Korean peninsula has slowed, but it has not reversed. The United States and South Korea agreed that large-scale US-led war games around North Korea’s frontiers would remain suspended indefinitely, while North Korea made it clear that it remained committed to its freeze on nuclear and missile testing, and was ready for further talks.

At this point, it may be both appropriate and necessary for the forum to be widened. Both the United Nations and the states neighbouring North Korea (South Korea, Russia, China, and Japan) have a large stake in resolving the current standoff, and all understand that so long as global attention is focused exclusively on North Korean de-nuclearization, there will be no resolution. Even Japan, the country most reluctant when it comes to “normalization,” fears exclusion from a multilateral resolution, and all sides understand that any settlement would involve infrastructural investment coming in substantial measure from reparations to be paid by Japan for the four decades of its colonial rule.⁷⁸

Furthermore, all four neighbour states have shown strong interest in projects for regional cooperation and development in which North Korea could play a pivotal role. The scenarios they have discussed include high speed rail, mineral extraction and processing, gas and oil pipelines, port development, shipbuilding and fisheries.⁷⁹ The shift in negotiating framework from a bilateral one to a multilateral one would also be appropriate in the sense of returning to the UN the problem it created by dividing Korea in the first place in the late 1940s, and it could raise the issue of responsibility for the genocidal manner in which the Korean War was fought by the US-led coalition and for the nuclear intimidation that has underpinned US (and therefore also UN) attitudes to North Korea ever since.

North Korea has been a kind of pariah state for almost the entirety (since 1948) of its existence, and may be the most reviled country in modern history, the ultimate “other” to which the word “evil” has commonly and unquestioningly been applied. However, while the condition of human rights in North Korea may be deplorable, and the threat of its nuclear and missile systems to the

⁷⁷ According to South Korea’s Unification Minister, Chung Se-hyun, this additional demand was pressed by John Bolton, national security adviser and well-known hard-liner who replaced Trump’s close adviser on North Korea, Stephen Biegun, for the negotiating session on the morning of 27 February. (Tom O’Connor, “Donald Trump’s North Korea deal fell apart because of John (“Bomb ‘em”) Bolton, experts say,” *Newsweek*, 28 February 2019).

⁷⁸ Agreed in principle during the visit to Pyongyang by then Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro in September 2002.

⁷⁹ McCormack, “Russia and the Putin plan,” *The State of the Japanese State*, pp. 145-149

region and the world real and serious, these are essentially the symptoms of the underlying problem of Korean division. The demand that North Korea makes of the world is for a peace treaty to end the Korean War, the “normalization” of relations with Japan and the United States, and a lifting of the multiple punitive sanctions under which it labours.

Conclusion

This paper began with the proposition that the great challenges of our age are nuclear weapons and climate change. On the former, South Korea, long on the front line of potential nuclear exchange, now attaches the highest priority to the de-nuclearization of the peninsula, while Japan, by contrast, strives to uphold its US nuclear privilege and the “umbrella.” Once the nuclear ban treaty is ratified, likely during 2019, Japan will no longer be able to base its security on American nuclear weapons. The Japan that today strives to water down its constitutional commitment to pacifism, to maintain the “umbrella” of extended deterrence provided by US nuclear weapons and to block UN moves for a total nuclear weapon ban, defies the current of our times.

As for climate change, it has to be said that the fate of the human species does not rank highly on the agenda for either Korea or Japan. For South Korea, the overwhelming policy objective of the Moon government is to resolve the long frozen and blocked national question. As for Japan, the Abe state’s oxymoronic blend of national glory and national abasement, its clientelism long contained within the San Francisco Treaty/Cold War system, has no room for climate change or civilizational sustainability. However, as the scientific consensus grows around the likelihood of global warming by at least two, and likely even three, degrees celsius by the end of the century,⁸⁰ it means “the ice-sheets will begin their collapse, bringing, over centuries, fifty metres of sea-level rise.”⁸¹ In that case, much of Japan’s ocean-front cities, from Niigata to Naha, will become uninhabitable, and regional waterways will be clogged with environmental refugees fleeing their sinking cities in the great conurbations of Korea and China. No amount of military might will be of use then.

How to get governments that will overcome the barriers of clientelism in Japan and division in Korea and advance the goals of humanity for survival in an era of deepening nuclear and climate change threats is the problem the Japanese and Korean people face.

Postscript

Prime Minister Abe represents Japan to multiple audiences, including the United Nations and the US Congress, as a democratic, law-governed, constitutional state, but my work over half a century leads me to the view that the Japanese state rests on unstable foundations and is heading

⁸⁰ Josh Holder, Niko Kommenda, and Jonathan Watts, “The three-degree world: the cities that will be drowned by global warming,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 3 November 2017.

⁸¹ David Wallace-Wells, “The coming fire,” *The Guardian Weekly*, 8 February 2019.

in a dangerous, un- or anti-democratic direction. Mine is not a common view among Western scholars, but it is not uncommon within Japan itself. Thus:

*Kagoshima University historian Kimura Akira believes that “Japan is already no longer law-governed or democratic and is moving towards becoming a dark society and a fascist state.”⁸²

*Tokyo University philosopher Takahashi Tetsuya attaches the label “extreme right” to early 21st-century Japan.⁸³

*Filmmaker and journalist Soda Kazuhiro sees what he calls a “fascism of indifference,” in which Japanese voters are like frogs in slowly heating fascist water.⁸⁴

*Kyoto University scholar of German literature Ikeda Hiroshi points to similarities between Abe and Adolf Hitler.⁸⁵

*Hosei University political scientist Yamaguchi Jiro feels “a sense of crisis that Japan has begun a steep decline towards civilizational collapse.”⁸⁶

*Author Yamaguchi Izumi sees a “fundamental corruption of politics” spreading through every nook and cranny of Japanese society.⁸⁷

*A group of intellectuals and writers calling itself a “committee of seven appealing for world peace” declared (in June 2017) “the political system of this country has become entirely the private property of Prime Minister Abe ... Japan is in this way a fascist state.”⁸⁸

*Kyoto Seika University’s Shirai Satoshi argues that there is a close correlation between the emperor-centred *Kokutai* or national polity of pre-war (fascist) Japan and today’s US-dominated Japan. He sees both polities as absolutist and in time becoming exhausted, plunging Japan into existential crisis.⁸⁹

⁸² Kimura Akira, “Hatoyama seiken hokai to Higashi Ajia kyodotai koso – atarashii Ajia gaiko to ampo, kichi seisaku o chushin ni,” in Kimura Akira and Shindo Eiichi, *Okinawa jiritsu to Higashi Ajia kyodotai*, Kadensha, 2016, pp. 202-230, at p. 230.

⁸³ Takahashi Tetsuya, “Kyokuu ka suru seiji,” *Sekai*, January 2015, pp. 150-161.

⁸⁴ Soda Kazuhiro, *Nekkyo-naki fuashizumu – Nippon no mukanshin o kansatsu suru*, Kawade shobo shinsha, 2014. Also, “Nekkyo-naki fuashizumu e no shohosen,” *Sekai*, February 2015, pp 81-95, at p. 89.

⁸⁵ Ikeda Hiroshi, “Hitler’s dismantling of the constitution and the current path of Japan’s Abe administration: what lessons can we draw from history?” *The Asia-Pacific Journal - Japan Focus*, 15 August 2016, <http://apjif.org/2016/16/Ikeda.html/>. See also Ikeda’s earlier, “Nachi-to dokusai unda kiken na kokka kinkyuken,” *Tokyo Shimbun*, 26 February 2016.

⁸⁶ “Bunmei no owari?” *Tokyo shimbun*, 22 May 2016.

⁸⁷ “Matsurowanu kuni kara no tegami,” *Ryukyu shimpo*, 21 October 2016.

⁸⁸ Sekai heiwa appiru shichinin iinkai (The Committee of Seven to Appeal for World Peace - Mushakoji Kinhide, Tsuchiyama Hideo, Oishi Yoshino, Konuma Michiji, Ikeuchi Satoru, Ikebe Shin-ichiro and Takamura Kaoru), “The parliamentary system of Japan is about to die,” 10 June 2017, <http://www.worldpeace7.jp/>

⁸⁹ Shirai Satoshi, *Kokutairon – Kiku to Seijoki* (National Polity theory – Chrysanthemum and Stars and Stripes), Shueisha shinsho, 2018.

Onaga Takeshi, Governor of Okinawa, 2010-2018, referred variously to the Government of Japan as: “condescending, unreasonable, outrageous, childish, depraved, [one that] ignores the people’s will, and ...[is] completely lacking in ability to say anything to America.”⁹⁰

⁹⁰ All words taken from various statements and speeches by Onaga Takeshi. See McCormack and Norimatsu, p. 279.