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I would like to talk about Japan's defense and security policy of today and civil society and the peace movement's response to it.

The new Prime Minister Kishida came into power earlier this month, after his predecessors Abe and Suga both stepped down as Prime Minister under strong public mistrust of their counter-Covid measures. Kishida Fumio, elected from Hiroshima, has been known as the leader of a relatively moderate, liberal camp within the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Japan's major ruling party, in contrast with Abe Shinzo, who is internationally known as a right-wing, hawkish nationalist.

However, after Suga announced that he would step down last month, Kishida needed to gain support to win the Presidential election of the LDP not only from his own moderates' camp but also largely from the hawks' camp, which actually is the mainstream of the LDP today after Abe's rule that lasted for about 8 years. As the result, Kishida's new cabinet and the LDP leadership are both heavily influenced by Abe and his camp, represented by such persons as the new LDP Secretary General Amari Akira and Policy Chief Takaichi Sanae. Both Foreign and Defense Ministers have been continued from the previous Suga administration. These facts tell that the Kishida administration will basically continue the foreign and defense policies of the Abe and Suga administrations.

Let me highlight four points regarding Kishida's anticipated foreign and defense policies – assuming that the LDP will keep the majority in the House of Representatives, even if they may lose a significant number of seats, in the upcoming general election due to take place at the end of this month.

First, the Kishida administration may adopt a policy, possibly by revising Japan's National Security Strategy, to obtain the capacity to attack enemy bases. This includes an option of deploying long-range missiles in Japan that can be launched immediately upon detection of any move on the side of enemy for a missile attack to Japan. To date, Japan's defense policy has been provided as “purely defensive” to be in accordance with Article 9 of the Constitution. Japan's Self-Defense Forces have been limiting themselves as “shields” while Japan relies on the US military for attack capability as a deterrent. If Japan were to obtain such an attack capability of its own, this would be a historic, fundamental change of Japan's security posture. The proponents of this policy argue that it is very necessary because the threats of North Korea and China are both increasing and that missile defense systems may not always work. They also argue that it is still consistent with Japan's “purely defensive” policy, because it conducts attacks only after the detection of hostile action initiated by the enemy. Yet, as we all know, this is the recipe for a further arms race and escalation of attack preparedness on both sides.

Second, the new concept of “economic security” has been adopted and Japan now has a new Economic Security Minister. This concept of economic security, which has been vocally promoted by the new LDP Secretary General Amari, has not been firmly established. But it is understood as having a couple of key elements. One is that the government actively protects and promotes key

strategic industries, including the semiconductor industry, and will somehow nationalize the supply chain, ensuring key strategic supplies do not have to rely on China.

The other is that the government not only support its defense industry but also facilitates industrial-academic cooperation on military and security technologies. A concept of a new Cold War between the American and Chinese camps is implied here. It can be said that a Japanese style of military-industrial-academic complex is being pursued in the name of economic security. To date, Japan's defense budget has been almost 1% or less of its GDP under a soft rule since the 1970s. But the LDP is currently promoting the new practice of 2% or even more. This rise of the defense budget can also be understood in the context of such a government-sponsored promotion of the defense industry.

The third is the question of constitutional revision. Hailing from Hiroshima, Kishida had been known as a moderate who spoke highly of the pacifism of the 1946 Japanese Constitution. But recently, and notably after being elected as Prime Minister, he is taking active gestures toward a constitutional revision in line with what Abe had proposed about four years ago. The proposal is to keep the wording of general pacifism under Article 9, but expressly provide for the Self-Defense Force in the Constitution. This proposal is much softer than the previous LDP proposal of 2012, which aimed to establish a National Defense Army by overwriting Article 9. Abe, whose life-long political goal is to realize constitutional revision, had changed his tactics, as he saw that the public remains very supportive of Article 9, and adopted a softer approach. Kishida is following up on this, and may try to raise it as a real political agenda within his coming four year term.

The fourth issue is nuclear weapons. Kishida has been proclaiming, as a statesman from Hiroshima, that nuclear disarmament is his “life work.” He was the Foreign Minister who guided Barack Obama when he visited Hiroshima in 2016, the very first time for a US President to do so. Kishida has used the photo with Obama in Hiroshima on his website, in his office room, and in many other places, emphasizing to the public that nuclear disarmament is his priority. Upon inauguration, he again emphasized this in his first press conference and Diet speech. Also in their first summit telephone discussion, Prime Minister Kishida and President Biden agreed to closely coordinate in their efforts toward “a world without free of weapons.”

However, in real terms, Kishida's nuclear disarmament policy is not differentiated at all from the traditional Japanese conservative lines: It refuses joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons nor its Meeting of States Parties that will take place next March in Vienna, even as an observer. Kishida is also reluctant to support a no-first-use policy of nuclear weapons, which is now being debated in the context of the US Nuclear Posture Review. Against the perceived increase of threats by North Korea and China, Japan's security planners are trying to keep the US nuclear deterrent as strong and credible as possible. Kishida's cosmetic display of his Hiroshima roots has not made any difference to this, at least so far.

In response to all of these issues, civil society groups and opposition parties are coordinating with each other, especially towards the general election at the end of this month. In September, four opposition parties, including the largest opposition Constitutional Democratic Party and the Japanese Communist Party, and the “Civil Alliance for Peace and Constitutionalism,” made a set of policy agreements. These laid out:

- the cancellation of the unconstitutional section of the 2015 Security Law that allows the exercise of the right of collective self-defense;
- peacebuilding in Asia based on the spirit of Japan's Peace Constitution;

- participating in the Meeting of States Parties to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons as an observer with a view to ratifying the treaty in the future; and
- cessation of the construction of a new base off Henoko, Okinawa.

It is remarkable that the opposition parties have formally accepted these policies, which Japan's civil society groups have been calling for. Cooperation among opposition parties and civil society groups has been well facilitated in the electoral campaign. It is expected that this opposition force will increase its number of seats, even if it may not as many as to be able to take over power. The upcoming election result will define Japan's direction from here – whether to continue along Abe's militarist agenda of competition with Asian neighbors, or to somehow modify it, going instead in a more moderate, cooperative manner with neighbors.