ARTICLE 9 AND THE MILITARIZED WORLD - WHAT CAN WE DO?

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While it does not seem likely that the Japanese government will in the immediate future abrogate or even modify Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, largely because of recent domestic political developments, peace activists cannot afford to be complacent about the danger of the emergence of a militarized Japan pursuing the militarized agenda of a militarized world.

This concern about a militarized Japan will be analyzed by first examining those forces that are determined to persuade Japan to assume an overt military role in future conflicts in the region and the world. It will be followed by reflections on some of the countervailing forces in the region and the world that may help to check this militaristic push. We shall then propose concrete measures that various civil society actors can adopt in order to strengthen peace. An attempt will be made to highlight the special role that religion --- in our case Islam--- can play in this endeavor. In our conclusion we shall give some attention to moves to prohibit war and how such moves can bring the different religious communities together.

A Military Role

Within Japanese society there has always been a nationalistic, militaristic tendency associated with the political right. Groups that reflect this tendency are of the view that only a militarily strong Japan will be able to protect the nation's economic assets and defend a somewhat vulnerable insular society. Besides, military muscle will also ensure that Japan has the capacity to secure oil and other much needed natural resources for a natural resource deficient nation.

Many of those who think along these lines are also critical of Japan’s military dependence upon the United States and would like Japan to be a military power in its own right. But there are also those who see a militarily strong Japan as enhancing the US’s military hegemony. Indeed, the US’s own desire to strengthen Japan’s military hand is yet another factor driving Japan in the direction of militarism. Why would the US that had insisted upon disarming Japan in the wake of the latter's defeat in the second world war now want to rearm Japan? There is no need to emphasize that it is because of the US’s current policy of seeking to contain China. For some Washington elites, a militarily powerful Japan would not only serve as a counterweight to China but may even be able to thwart its ascendancy. This is why the US is so keen on the abrogation of Article 9.

Both militarism within Japanese society and the push from the US should be viewed in the context of some larger regional and global developments. A number
of countries in the region such as China, North and South Korea, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, India and Pakistan have all in the last decade or so increased their military expenditure for a variety of reasons. The growing economic prosperity of some of these countries may witness an escalation in such expenditure.

This is also happening at the global level with the US leading the world in military spending. It is estimated that annual global military expenditure now stands at 1.2 trillion US dollars. The arms trade continues to flourish with a number of new actors joining the game. Newer and deadlier weapons are being manufactured. Research in weapons technology has reached new heights.

Global militarization has become an even more serious threat to humankind since it has now found a new raison d’etre. This is the US led global war on terror. Though sophisticated weaponry is of little help in the fight against terrorism, militaristic elites and arms merchants are using the war on terror as an excuse to expand military budgets. At the same time, they refuse to address the root causes of global terrorism which are related directly to US occupation of foreign lands, its establishment of foreign bases, its usurpation of oil, and its endorsement of Israeli subjugation of the Palestinian people. As a close ally of the US, Japan is also not willing to come to grips with the underlying causes of global terrorism. In fact, Japanese leaders have often alluded to the threat of global terrorism as one of the principal justifications for rescinding Article 9.

**Article 9 and Peace**

If this is how Japanese elites and elites in the US and other parts of the world feel about militarization, what hope is there for the preservation of Article 9 and the maintenance of peace? Within Japanese society itself there is ---in spite of everything--- considerable support for Article 9 and the Peace Constitution. This support comes from people in all walks of life. Because of the terrible catastrophe of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, a significant segment of the Japanese national community is averse to war and remains deeply attached to the ideal of peace.

Outside Japan, in the rest of Asia, especially in Northeast and Southeast Asia, both governments and peoples are inclined towards political stability and economic prosperity which they know are only possible if there is no war or armed conflict. Indeed, for more than two decades now the whole of the East Asian region stretching from China and Japan to Indonesia and the Philippines has experienced relative peace and tranquility. Steady economic development achieved within an environment of stability and security has become the dominant ethos of the region. It explains to some extent at least why the rest of East Asia rejects almost instinctively the thought of a militarily resurgent Japan. Besides, it brings back bitter memories of a tragic past.

East Asian states are also acutely aware of the mortal danger posed by a militarily resurgent Japan forging an even stronger security alliance with the US.
They have no doubt that it will trigger a response from China. It could lead to tensions in the region which would surely impede East Asian economic advancement. In other words, East Asia has a direct stake in the perpetuation of Article 9.

It is not just East Asia which fears war. The world as a whole is weary of war as demonstrated so vividly in the massive global opposition to the US led invasion and occupation of Iraq in March 2003. It was arguably the biggest--- and the most extensive---anti-war, pro-peace movement in human history. The protests revealed a profound yearning for peace which has expressed itself on other occasions in the last four years.

**Peace Proposals**

It is this yearning for peace that civil society should harness in the struggle against war, violence and militarization. Article 9 could serve as the rallying point for it embodies an unambiguous renunciation of “war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling disputes.” Parliaments of the world should be persuaded to adopt resolutions which renounce war and the use of force as envisaged by Article 9. Political parties should also be encouraged to adopt a similar stand. Trade unions and business organizations should also join the effort. All sectors of society should be mobilized to the hilt to oppose war and militarization.

**Islam’s Contribution**

It is in this regard that we visualize a special role for religion. Islam, like other religions, is orientated towards peace and justice. There is no need to emphasize that the term ‘Islam’ itself implies peace through submission to God. The Qur’an eulogizes peace as a noble goal and implores humankind to strive to create harmony and understanding among nations and peoples. It is because peace is only attainable if there is justice that the Qur’an pleads for justice. This is also why it deplores aggression and oppression since aggression jeopardizes peace and oppression repudiates justice.

Because aggression and oppression are anathema to the religion, Islam expects its followers to resist aggression and oppression. Resistance is vital for the protection of one’s honor and dignity. These principles were embodied in the life and mission of the Prophet Muhammad. He defended his nascent Muslim community against aggression and oppression but at the same time did his utmost to avoid violence and bloodshed. Peace through justice was his cherished objective.

**Prohibiting War**
It is because peace is such an exalted ideal that Muslims have from time to
time sought to translate this ideal into concrete reality. One such attempt was a
proposal to repudiate war as a means of resolving inter-state disputes which I had
put forward on the eve of the Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Kuala
Lumpur in February 2003. In a letter to the media dated 2 February 2003, I
suggested that “to be non-aligned today is not to be aligned to war. There are two
advantages in defining non-alignment in this manner. It distinguishes—and
distances--- NAM as a collectivity from Washington’s formidable war machine while
eschewing war as a tool of foreign policy. It also serves to remind NAM members
themselves that they should not resort to war and violence as a means of settling
conflicts”.

I went on to argue that “to be non-aligned is not only to repudiate war but
also to affirm faith in peace. After all peace was one of the most powerful
motivations for the establishment of NAM. In both the 1947 Asian Relations
Conference in Delhi and in the 1955 Bandung Conference --- widely recognized as
precursors of the 1961 Belgrade meeting at which NAM was officially launched ---
peace was proclaimed as one of the cardinal goals on non-alignment”.

By a happy coincidence the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr. Mahathir
Mohamad, who presided at the NAM Summit used the occasion to also urge the
world to prohibit war as a means of settling conflicts. Since retirement, Mahathir
has launched a movement to criminalize war. It has not gained much momentum
partly because the mainstream global media has chosen to ignore the movement.

One is not surprised by the media’s attitude. The mainstream media is after
all integral to the US helmed global power structure which seeks to perpetuate its
hegemony through war and violence. It is simply not in the media’s interest to
criminalize war.

This is why we have no choice but to turn to the new media. Through the
new information and communication channels available to us --- such as the
internet and the DVD--- we should raise public awareness of the importance of
combating war.

Indeed, criminalizing war should emerge as that fundamental mission that
unites people of different faiths in a common struggle. No religion regards war as a
virtue. The death and destruction that accompanies war is a denial of life and the
sanctity of life that all religions cherish in different ways.

In the ultimate analysis it is because life is sacred in the eyes of each and
every religion that the preservation and perpetuation of Article 9 has become such
a blessed endeavor.

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