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US Goading Japan into Confrontation With China

By John V. Walsh

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At the height of the 2012 election campaign in late October, a U.S. delegation tiptoed into Japan and then China with scant media coverage. It was "unofficial," but Hillary Clinton gave it her blessing. And it was headed by two figures high in the imperial firmament, Richard L. Armitage, who served as Deputy Secretary of State for George W. Bush; and Joseph S. Nye Jr., a former Pentagon and intelligence official in the Clinton administration and Dean Emeritus of Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. The delegation also included James B. Steinberg, who served as the Deputy Secretary of State in the Obama administration and Stephen J. Hadley, Bush Two's national security adviser.

The delegation was billed as an attempt by the U.S. to defuse tensions between Japan and China over a number of small islands both claim. But was it? What is the outlook of these influential figures? Interestingly, Armitage and Nye provide us with a partial answer in a brief paper published the preceding August by the Center for International and Strategic Studies (CSIS), entitled "The Japan-U.S. Alliance. Anchoring Stability in Asia," the carefully crafted fruit of a CSIS Study Group they chaired. The strategy proposed therein, as outlined below, should be very distressing to the Chinese – as well as to the Japanese and Americans.

The Armitage/Nye paper addresses itself to the Japanese themselves, the target audience, in the Introduction as follows:

"Together, we face the re-rise of China and its attendant uncertainties.....

Tier-one nations have significant economic weight, *capable military forces* global vision, and demonstrated leadership on international concerns. Although there are areas in which the United States can better support the (Japan-U.S.) alliance, we have no doubt of the United States' continuing tier-one status. For Japan, however, there is a decision to be made. Does Japan desire to continue to be a tier-one nation, or is she content to drift into tier-two status? If tier-two status is good enough for the Japanese people and their government, this report will not be of interest." (Emphasis, J.W)

Read that carefully. It is a thinly veiled appeal to the worst aspects of Japanese militarism and nationalism, which for good reason are so reviled in East Asia. It is done in the context of the "re-rise" of China, a phrase that invokes China's past world supremacy and Japan's inferior status at the time. What sort of beast is this disturbing plea designed to awaken?

Again in the Introduction, the authors make the military dimensions of their appeal quite specific, writing: "Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF)—now the most trusted institution in Japan—are poised to play a larger role in enhancing Japanese security and reputation *if anachronistic constraints can be eased.*" (Emphasis, J.W.) What are these "anachronistic restraints"? As the authors later make clear, they are embodied in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, written under the tutelage of MacArthur's occupying forces. The Article so irksome to Armitage and Nye reads:

"ARTICLE 9. 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. (2) To accomplish the aim 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."

This is a breathtakingly appealing, pacifist statement; and there is a brief, worthwhile account of Article 9 here. Article 9 is extremely popular in Japan, and eliminating it from the Constitution would not be easy, as Armitage and Nye recognize (1). Moreover, Armitage and Nye concede that Article 9 prohibits collective self-defense, which involves joint military action by the U.S. and Japan . As they say in their paper:

"The irony, however, is that even under the most severe conditions requiring the protection of Japan's *interests*, our forces are legally prevented from collectively defending Japan. ... Prohibition of collective self-defense is an impediment to the (U.S.-Japan) alliance." (Emphasis, JW. Note that the authors do not say protection of Japan but of Japan's "interests.")

What then is the U.S. to do? Armitage and Nye see a solution in the joint rescue operations mounted by the Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) and U.S. forces (Operation Tomodachi, meaning "Operation Friends") in response to the earthquake, tsunami and Fukushima disaster of March 11, 2011, know as 3-11 in Japan. There, the joint rescue efforts were not opposed by those who favor Article 9 and the spirit it embodies. Armitage and Nye suggest that Operation Tomodachi simply be taken as a precedent to justify future joint operations. In other words, the Japanese Constitution is simply to be ignored, pretty much the tactic that Truman inaugurated in the U.S. to plunge the country into the Korean war and the tactic Barack Obama has used in

interventions like the one in Libya. Simply ignore the Constitution and its requirement that the U.S. Congress alone can declare war. This is an example, as if another were needed, of how our elites view the "rule of law" to which they appeal so often. (And one wonders whether from the outset Operation Tomodachi was viewed in part in this way by its architects. How many other U.S. humanitarian missions might have ancillary covert purposes, one might ask?)

Armitage and Nye also mention that the Yanai Committee report of 2006 notes that the prime minister could by fiat put aside the Article IX prohibition, as in antipiracy efforts in Djibouti. But this report has been seen as an effort to subvert the Japanese Constitution. As Prof. Craig Martin of Washburn School of Law, an American expert in these matters, wrote at the time, "the exercise of using an extra-constitutional body to advance a 'revision' of the interpretation of the Constitution, was illegitimate on a number of levels, the most important being that it was an end-run around the amendment provisions in the Constitution." But then that is precisely what Armitage and Nye are up to.

Article 9 remains popular in Japan although its popularity has been substantially eroded in recent years. The reasons for this and the forces behind it deserve some careful examination in light of the U.S. Empire's "pivot" to East Asia. But so long as the Japanese Communist Party and Japanese Socialists remain a force in government and society there is little chance that Article 9 will be repealed, making the end run necessary if Japan is to be remilitarized. The very existence of the JDSF in fact can be seen as illegal under the provisions of Article 9, which is why the JDSF was originally dubbed a National Police Force. Armitage and Nye sum up the military aspects of their report in the following recommendation to Japan: "Japan should expand the scope of her responsibilities to include the defense of Japan and defense with the United States in regional contingencies. The allies require more robust, shared, and interoperable ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance) capabilities and operations that extend *well beyond Japanese territory*. It would be a responsible authorization on the part of Japan to allow U.S. forces and JSDF to respond in *full cooperation throughout the security spectrum of peacetime, tension, crisis, and war.*" (Emphasis, JW.) For diplomats that is about as specific and concrete as it gets. And it is very troubling since it is hardly a plan for peace.

The Armitage/Nye paper contains much more. Japan is urged to participate more fully in forums involving the Philippines, India, Taiwan and the Republic of Korea (ROK), i.e. South Korea. China is not mentioned in this regard – not surprisingly. Armitage and Nye know that this is a tough sell for the citizens of the ROK with vivid memories of Japanese conquest and atrocities in WWII. But Armitage and Nye hope it can be engineered.

The report also has an economic dimension. The idea of using India as a battering ram against China, which was popular in the Bush administration and which was aided by Israel, is not really viable. India is riven by internal disputes, corruption, religious divisions and a Maoist rebellion over a large part of its territory. And economically it is wanting. Military power grows from economic power and so the U.S. needs the aid of a powerful regional economic power in its drive against China. That is the role of Japan in the eyes of Armitage and Nye. Thus, to be useful to the U.S., Japan must restore its economy, now in decline. This is really a tall order since Japan's main trading partner and the principle destination for its exports is China. That became evident in the recent Chinese boycott of Japanese goods as the dispute over the Diaoyou/Senkaku

island intensified recently, which hurt Japan greatly but had little effect on the Chinese economy. But again Armitage and Nye hold out hope. Their solution is for Japan to restore and expand its nuclear power. (One wonders why the U.S. environmentalists have not spoken out about that and whether the Japanese environmentalists have knowledge of these plans for Japan, hatched in the U.S.) In addition Armitage and Nye offer Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) and other petroleum products from North America as more largesse to link Japan closer to the U.S. As they write: "The shale gas revolution in the continental United States and the abundant gas reserves in Alaska present Japan and the United States with a complementary opportunity: the United States should begin to export LNG from the lower 48 states by 2015, and Japan continues to be the world's largest LNG importer. Since 1969, Japan has imported relatively small amounts of LNG from Alaska, and interest is picking up in expanding that trade link, given Japan's need to increase and diversify its sources of LNG imports, especially in light of 3-11." Again one wonders where the voices of U.S. environmentalists are on this matter.

The idea of Japan outdoing China in East Asia economically is a pipe dream, with or without the U.S. China has a population of 1.3 billion and Japan 130 million. To expect Japan to emerge as a serious challenge to China in the long term is like hoping that in the immediate future Canada with its 34 million can challenge the U.S. with 315 million. And China has a vibrant economy, an educated workforce and a culture to be reckoned with, from which Japan's emerged and followed until it was "Westernized."

So what is Japan's protection to be in the face of such a large and powerful neighbor? For one thing, Japan certainly has the wherewithal to deter aggression from any quarter with its advanced technology and its potential for nuclear weapons development. For another, China has no record of expansionism overseas even going back to 1400 when it was the world's premier naval power but never conquered or established colonies or took slaves. But a large part of Japanese security lies in an increasing respect for international law with its emphasis on sovereignty. The concept of sovereignty in international law is the protection of small nations from the depredations of large ones. And ironically the principal threat to the idea of sovereignty comes from the United States and the West with their pre-emptive wars and "humanitarian" interventions, which trash the classical concept of sovereignty. Japan should be wary of dealings with such powers and supporting such ideas.

For Japan to take the bait and be the cat's paw for U.S. schemes in East Asia borders on the insane. And diplomatic exchanges between China and Japan in recent weeks following the Japanese elections show that many Japanese recognize this. They and the Chinese seem increasingly willing to work out differences in a structure of peace. We should hope so – and so should the Japanese. He who takes the bait is often left holding the bag.