

# Japan Protest Movement against Growing Militarism: Are These the Last Days of Japan's Prime Minister Abe?

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*His battle may have been won, but his war to change pacifist Japan lost. Shinzo Abe may be repeating the mistakes of his grandfather as thousands of protesters take to the streets.*

TOKYO — When the Walt Disney of Japan, [Hayao Miyazaki](#), turns against you, you've lost the war for public support in Japan. You may win a few more battles, but in the court of public opinion you're good as gone.

Today should have been a triumph for [Prime Minister Shinzo Abe](#), who saw his long-sought security bills, enshrining "[collective self defense](#)," pass a special committee and get ready to be rubber-stamped in the lower house tomorrow. However, it eerily echoes the great failure of his grandfather, [Nobusuke Kishi](#), 55 years ago. There is something oddly poetic about it.

The popularity of his cabinet is sinking, the majority of the population now opposes the legislation, over 90 percent of Japanese academics, and former prosecutors as well, have condemned the proposed legislation as unconstitutional. The media is turning on him. Even heavy hitters within his own Liberal Democratic Party are voicing disapproval. Its former secretary general, Makoto Koga, called the Abe regime "dark and creepy" in a recent interview.



Reuters Staff/Reuters

A poll by Nippon TV saw disapproval ratings for the Abe government rising higher than its approval for the first time since he assumed power in December 2012. Support for the cabinet is 39 percent; disapproval 41 percent. Some 59 percent of those polled oppose passage of the Legislation for Peace and Security” (aka the War Bill). Only 24 percent actually supports the bills. It may be the beginning of the end of his reign.

Fifty-five years ago to this day, on July 15, 1960, Kishi’s cabinet resigned en masse following the forced ratification of the revised U.S.-Japan security treaty. The furious opposition against Kishi’s reactionary politics at the time made even discussion of changing Japan’s peace constitution a taboo for decades.

Abe has long admired his grandfather. Kishi was Japan’s minister of munitions during World War II, but he was also arrested as a war criminal after the war, and had a penchant for associating with yakuza (Japan’s underworld). Kishi raised Abe in lieu of his real father, installing in his grandson the dreams that he could not fulfill—making Japan a military power again and throwing off the yoke of the U.S. pacifist constitution.

In his defense of the security bills in *Will* magazine this month, Abe can’t but help mention his grandfather within the first paragraphs. That’s how close they were—and still are.

Abe seemed from early on to have had a plan to covertly alter Japan’s war-renouncing constitution. Early in his administration, in 2013, his handpicked vice prime minister, Taro Aso, suggested that the ruling party should learn from the Nazi Party and [just change the constitution before people realize it](#). Two cabinet members also associated with a Neo-Nazi party leader and sang the praises of the book *Hitler’s Election Strategy*. That plan seemed to go well for a while.

What went wrong?

When did the blitzkrieg cease to work?



Thomas Peter/Reuters

Abe and the LDP put a leash on Japan's already lap-dog media after coming to power. They pumped up nationalism. They rammed through an odious State Secrets Acts that severely threatened press freedom.

When Abe and the LDP called for general elections last year, they masterfully controlled the coverage.

However, these last few weeks have seen Team Abe make a few colossal screwups that have forced his administration to rush the legislation through as fast as they can, before public opinion completely sours and the minions get nervous about re-election.

The legislation the Abe government submitted was in line with their views of "collective self-defense," which would enable Japan to fight along with the U.S. in certain wars. All that needed to be done was a formal debate to give the appearance of discussion.

However, on June 4, at a lower house session on the security legislation, three constitutional scholars, including one handpicked by Abe's own adviser, surprised everyone by stating the bills were unconstitutional.

The impact was immense.

Politics Professor Koichi Nakano from Sophia University notes, "The weight of the testimony from the scholars was great because the study of the law is very authoritative and well-respected in Japan, in a way that is almost akin to natural science."

The media coverage was fierce. *Asahi Shimbun* polled more than 100 constitutional experts and they were [nearly unanimous that the security bills are unconstitutional](#).

The outcry was loud.

So was the public satire. The Diet testimony debacle turned out to be so devastating that it inspired a viral parody of the movie [Der Untergang](#) (about the last days of Hitler) with Abe as the Führer lamenting the failure of his commanders to find obedient scholars to parrot his opinions. In the brilliantly subtitled piece entitled "[The Führer seems angry about the Peace and Security Legislation Deliberations](#)," there are scenes of top commanders reporting the sad state of the front lines to "Abe," that are not only funny but accurate, "Over 80 percent of the people feel there has been insufficient explanation. The opposition is strengthening their attack by saying the war bills are in violation of the constitution."

When "Abe" asks everyone to leave the room that doesn't feel the laws are constitutional, only three loyal souls remain.

One scene has Abe/Hitler screaming, "Why the hell am I spending time eating Borsche with the press!" referencing his habit of wining and dining the media elite for favorable press

coverage.

The LDP is not happy with how the press has reported the criticism of the bills. At a June 25 “study meeting” held at party headquarters, four members made remarks blaming the media for weak public support for the national-security legislation. One suggested, “We should punish the media by putting pressure on their advertisers. Cut off their funds.” There were also suggestions that two newspapers opposing the military bases in Okinawa should be “crushed and put out of business.”

Abe reluctantly apologized and the offending LDP members were given “a very stern warning.” Not just a stern warning but a “very” stern warning.

However, what Abe has now discovered is that even with a lapdog press, if you kick too many times, they will bite. A furor ensued.

The Editorial Affairs Committee of the Japan Newspaper Publishers and Editors Association said in a statement, “Comments that trample upon freedom of expression that are protected by Article 21 of the Constitution could lead to denial of freedom of the press... we strongly protest.”

In the end, the newspapers, the magazines, and every publication protested. Not only did the newspapers protest, the general public is now protesting as well—even Japan’s normally complacent students. Every day, huge demonstrations take place in front of the National Diet. One demonstrator held a sign parodying Abe’s “Take Back Japan” election slogans by adding, “Take Back Japan—To The Pre-War Era?” with the almost inevitable Hitler mustache on Abe’s face.

Even Japan’s allegedly independent public broadcaster NHK has been unable to ignore the demonstrations as the numbers rise past 10,000.

But perhaps the greatest blow came Monday. At a press conference—for the foreign press—at the world famous Studio Ghibli, Miyazaki, the white-bearded and staunchly pacifist director of such animated classics as *Totoro* and Oscar-winning *Spirited Away*, roundly condemned Japan’s growing militarism and had choice words for Abe. “He thinks he will go down in history as a great man who changed Japan’s [pacifist] constitution. Tomfoolery. ”

The Japanese press overwhelmingly ignored those pointed remarks.

The actual Japanese word he used: 未熟 (oroka) has many meanings including: “not being sufficiently thought out,” “immature” and “stupid.” The term as it was used by itself could refer to the legislation, or Abe, or both.

In his hourlong Q&A, Miyazaki, 74, reminded the public of the great human suffering inflicted on the world during Japan’s 15 years of warfare and said that the peace constitution was like “a ray of shining light” to a devastated Japan. Unlike Abe, Miyazaki—Japan’s God of Anime—has known hardship and actually remembers the war. His words carry weight. So when he declares something to be tomfoolery in his Obi-Wan Kenobi voice, the Japanese people listen. Abe has staked all of his political clout on the passage of these security bills. He may not be willing to listen to constitutional scholars, but perhaps he should listen to Japan’s Walt Disney.

Professor Nakano contends that ultimately Abe and the LDP may fail simply because those

who don't study history, or just try to revise it, repeat the same mistakes. "Fifty-five years ago, Kishi's reactionary politics forced the LDP to accept the constraints of the peace constitution and give up on its ambition to revise it. Abe is now trying to get rid of that constraint by breaking, rather than amending, the constitution—by enabling Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense through a mere reinterpretation of the constitution. It is a critical day, arguably the worst day, for democracy and constitutionalism in postwar Japan. It could also be the beginning of the end of Abe government, if his unconstitutional and undemocratic move leads to a greater awakening of Japan's civil society."

— *Louis Krauss contributed to this article*

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