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### THE ELECTION OF ISHIHARA: A SYMBOL OF RISING NATIONALISM IN JAPAN?

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**I**ntroduction - Ishihara Shintarô, known for his strong views particularly on Japan's relationship with the United States, became Governor of Tokyo on 11 April 1999. This paper considers the significance of his election, and whether it symbolizes a rise in nationalism in Japan.

The paper, based on a presentation given at the Royal Institute of International Affairs on 22 July 1999, looks first at the issue of nationalism, both from a theoretical point of view and more specifically in terms of how nationalism is viewed in Japan. It examines Ishihara's background and ideologies, before assessing the possible effect of his election upon the future direction of politics and nationalism in Japan, and Japan's relationship with other countries.

**W**hat is meant by nationalism? - Discussions about nationalism often become confused with discussions on race and racism. It is important to understand that there are essentially only three main races in the world – Negroid, Mongoloid, and Caucasoid.<sup>1</sup> However, there is a tendency, at least at a popular level, to treat nationalities as races. As a result debates on the issue can become even more emotive than normal. Moreover, 'racism' essentially means 'anti (other) races', and so is treated negatively; by extension, 'nationalism' is sometimes thought of as being 'anti (other) nations'.

Nationalism is not an easy concept to define in a few sentences. Indeed, one has to question where the border lies between certain types of 'nationalism' and what is thought of as 'patriotism', which usually does not carry with it any of the emotional baggage that nationalism does and tends to be seen as a positive quality. For scholars such as Hans Kohn, nationalism is basically a subjective 'state of mind'; for others such as A. D. Smith it is primarily an ideological movement. Nationalism can be a latent phenomenon expressed mainly as pride in the nation's history and way of life, or it may develop as a dynamic force demanding strenuous efforts and immense sacrifice on the part of the members of the nation.<sup>2</sup>

Many see 'nationalists' as tending to support their own country and seeing any criticism of it (particularly by its own people) as unacceptable; 'patriotism', generally speaking, is seen as an ideology whereby one is supportive of one's own country, but is prepared to criticize (and allow others also to criticize) aspects of that country at times. However, what is often referred to as 'nationalism' in the case of Japan, and throughout this paper, should perhaps be best understood as a form of patriotism.

In terms of nationalism in Japan, the study conducted by Yoshino Kosaku is particularly interesting as it undertakes a comparison with nationalism in the United Kingdom rather than the United States. Yoshino found that whereas many British people, when asked what it meant to be British, answered in terms of cultural aspects such as drinking tea, going to the pub, eating fish and chips and watching cricket, for Japanese people the central issue is that of blood (although the problems of *kikokushijo* and *Nikkeijin* mean that this is not a clear-cut issue).<sup>3</sup>

The issue of 'nationalism' presents another major problem with respect to Japan – namely, the experience of the rise of nationalism before the Pacific War. This nationalism, known as *kokka-shugi* in Japanese, is undoubtedly something that most would not like to see re-emerging in modern Japan. To try to distinguish it from more acceptable, contemporary forms of nationalism, the terms used by former Prime Minister Nakasone – 'healthy nationalism' – are useful. In Japanese he used two words for 'healthy': *kenzen* (literally 'healthy') and *tadashii* (literally 'correct' or 'justifiable'). Nakasone believes that this kind of nationalism is necessary and desirable so as to 'reconcile nationalism and internationalism' and so that Japanese people have a better understanding of their identity.<sup>4</sup>

So what is 'healthy nationalism'? Nakasone gave an explanation at an LDP seminar in Karuizawa in 1987:

To give a simple definition, it is when a race or group of people who share a common destiny are aware that they share a common destiny and make every effort to enable the country to grow and prosper politically, economically, and culturally. It is when they have their own identity, or sense of self, in the world politically, economically, culturally, and otherwise and co-operate to contribute to that identity. Without this, there is no way that a nation will be able to stand on 'its own two feet'.<sup>5</sup>

It is perhaps the last sentence that is of particular importance, as what has appeared to concern nationalists in Japan is that in some countries, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, a certain amount of nationalism is not only expected, but also seen as desirable, and yet in Japan any person who attempts to introduce such behaviour is seen as a threat. For example,

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 109 and 115–29. *Kikokushijo* are children who return to Japan after studying abroad for some time (usually because their father has been posted abroad on work); *Nikkeijin* are primarily Latin Americans of Japanese descent.

<sup>4</sup> Nakasone Yasuhiro, *My Political Philosophy*, LDP, Tokyo, 1987, p. 14. Nakasone referred to the ideology as '*tadashii nashonarizumu*' (justifiable nationalism) and as 'necessary' in an interview on 1 December 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>1</sup> Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, Routledge, London, 1992, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> See *ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

when considering attitudes to the national flag (an issue which will be dealt with in greater detail below), in the United States people are often expected to stand hand-on-heart and sing the national anthem when the flag is raised, whereas the same behaviour in Japan has been seen with concern not only outside Japan, but even by some within Japan.

It is important, therefore, to understand that 'nationalism', in Japan at least, goes together with 'internationalism'. The belief is that for Japan to become a truly international society, it is both desirable and necessary for the people to be aware of their own identity and culture. Naturally, when politicians and other opinion leaders speak of nationalism in Japan without reference to this relationship with internationalism, it can cause concern, particularly for Japan's neighbours. However, there is little, if any, evidence to suggest that these politicians would ever consider a return to Japan's militaristic and imperial past. The fact that statements by politicians can be misunderstood in this respect is largely a result of sensationalist reporting by the media and a lack of understanding of the politicians and issues by the population as a whole. Ishihara is among those accused of being nationalists and as a threat, so, given his return to political prominence, it is important to understand more about his background and ideologies.

### Who is Ishihara?

When he was just 21, Ishihara Shintarô won two literary prizes for his novel *Taiyo no Kisesetsu* (*Season of the Sun*). This and all his subsequent novels became popular movies, in which his brother, Yujirô, starred. Yujirô, often referred to as 'Japan's James Dean', remained a very popular actor, and his death from cancer in 1987 led to a situation where the Japanese mourned 'as if the entire nation has lost a member of the family'.<sup>6</sup>

Ishihara moved into politics at the end of the 1960s. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP, *Jimintô*) was beginning to struggle as its core support, the rural vote, was increasingly moving to the cities. So the LDP tried to recruit some 'tarento'<sup>7</sup> to its ranks to help bolster its support. Ishihara was one of their catches, and he was elected in 1968, winning more votes than any other candidate across the whole country.

<sup>6</sup> Ezra Vogel, Foreword in Ishihara Shintarô, *The Japan That Can Say No*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1989, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Derived from the English word 'talent', to refer to authors, actors, singers and such like.

Ishihara has remained in politics ever since and has twice run for the governorship of Tokyo (losing on the first occasion in 1975 despite getting more than two million votes). He resigned from the LDP in 1995, disappointed with his position. During his political career he has been Minister of Transport and has worked in cabinet with the then Chief Cabinet Secretary and present Prime Minister Obuchi Keizô. Ishihara is also a friend of Kajiyama Seiroku, who came second to Obuchi in the race to become LDP President in 1998. Ishihara himself has run for the presidency of the LDP, in 1989 (if he had won, he would have become prime minister), and this probably increased the interest in his most infamous book, *'No' to ieru Nihon* (*The Japan That Can Say No*).

This book was originally written in Japanese and was a collection of seminars and presentations made by Ishihara and Morita Akio, chairman of Sony. An unauthorized translation of the book appeared in the United States and created an uproar before Ishihara had been able to publish an authorized version, in which he had wanted to tidy up the 'somewhat fragmentary nature' of his part of the book which was 'liable to cause misunderstanding'.<sup>8</sup> The unauthorized translation was, in the words of Ishihara, 'full of mistakes, some laughable and some very serious, and many parts of the original were omitted'. It later transpired that the translation was actually the work of the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency!<sup>9</sup> Morita, for obvious reasons, did not want to be associated with the book any further and so his contributions do not appear in the authorized translation (by Frank Baldwin) – although he had often made his views about American economic problems known in speeches in the USA.

The most controversial part of the book surrounds Ishihara's comments about the possibility of Japan selling its state-of-the-art computer chips to the Soviet Union rather than the United States, which is dependent upon their supply – which would seriously affect the balance of world power. He also asserts that the realization of their need for Japanese technology led to the two superpowers calling off the arms race.<sup>10</sup> Many have also concluded that Ishihara is anti-American, although more careful analysis of the book suggests that his stance is more critical of Japan than of the USA.

<sup>8</sup> Ishihara Shintarô, Introduction in *The Japan That Can Say No*, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1989, p. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

As Ezra Vogel points out in the foreword to the authorized translation:

Ishihara's book should not necessarily be read as a guide to how present-day Japanese politicians are likely to behave, but rather as a reflection of deep currents of popular Japanese thinking about the United States. Japan's political leaders are more pragmatic and more cautious than Ishihara. ... Ishihara is complaining less about the United States than about Japan's obsequious leaders who don't stand tall when they should. And in that respect, he has his finger on the pulse of a growing segment of the Japanese population.<sup>11</sup>

Since Vogel wrote this, Ishihara has become a leader – albeit as a governor rather than a prime minister – so his views have become even more significant.

### How did Ishihara get elected?

The battle for the governorship of Tokyo in early 1999 was unusual in many respects, though perhaps unsurprising in others given the nature of politics in Japan in recent years. In February 1999, the media believed that the election would focus on the battle between Akashi Yasushi, the former United Nations Under Secretary, who was backed by the LDP, and Hatoyama Kunio, who had the support of the Japan Liberal Party. At this stage Ishihara and Masuzoe Yoichi, a scholar of international politics, were referred to simply as 'other candidates', and it was believed that Ishihara's candidacy would 'only confuse things'.<sup>12</sup> Kakizawa Koji also ran and was also backed by the LDP.

Masuzoe gained the support of some important sections of the LDP that appeared to be siding against Prime Minister Obuchi's choice of Akashi, so the LDP was split between three candidates. On top of this some LDP politicians such as Kamei Shizuka, whose faction merged with Nakasone's faction in March, decided to support Ishihara, who ran as an independent.<sup>13</sup> Kamei may also have been seeking to strengthen his position in the party through his role as a go-between facilitating communication between Ishihara and the non-cooperative elements of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly that do not want to deal directly with him.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the

<sup>11</sup> Ezra Vogel, Foreword in *ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Iwase Totsuya, editorial, *The Weekly Post* on the internet (<http://www.weeklypost.com/>), 15–21 February 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 15–21 March 1999.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 12–18 April 1999.

battle for the governorship of Tokyo was as much an internal LDP struggle as an election to decide the governorship *per se*. One thing that became clear during the election campaign was that the media were focusing a lot of attention on the people involved, but were not reporting on the important issues facing Tokyo.<sup>15</sup>

Ishihara won the election with approximately 30 per cent of the vote (about 1.6 million votes). Although this was almost double the number of votes of the second-placed candidate (Hatoyama), fully 70 per cent of those who voted (57.9 per cent of the electorate – significantly up on the previous two elections) voted against Ishihara, which suggests that most were not supportive of Ishihara and his agenda.<sup>16</sup>

One of the significant elements in the election of Ishihara was the religious vote. *Sokagakkai*, Japan's largest religious group, supports *Kōmeitō* (which is in a coalition with the LDP at the national and local level) and in Tokyo accounts for 700,000 votes. Three other religious organizations united against *Sokagakkai* and supported Ishihara, accounting for some 350–450,000 votes. Ishihara's problem is that the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, like the government, is under the control of a coalition made up of the LDP and *Kōmeitō*.<sup>17</sup>

Besides the split vote among the LDP-backed candidates and the help of the religious votes, one factor that cannot be overlooked is the 'name value' aspect. Without doubt, Ishihara was the most well known of the candidates, although Akashi also enjoyed a high profile owing to his previous role in the United Nations. Ishihara also gained from his success in public relations, at least in terms of getting people's attention with catchy phrases and speaking about issues that were bound to interest the media, even if some of his statements caused him problems. Two of his campaign slogans were 'Clearly yes, clearly no' and 'Revolution from Tokyo against the old politics'.<sup>18</sup>

However, Japanese people do not tend to vote on the basis of ideologies or issues – although they do so more in local elections than in national elections. Thus the actual significance of Ishihara's views may not be as great as might be expected in an election in a democratic nation. In an exit poll, only 13 per cent said that they

had voted for him because of his policies.<sup>19</sup> Does this mean, therefore, that nationalism is not an issue? To answer this question, we now need to turn specifically to Ishihara and discover more about his ideologies, what he campaigned for and what he has done since the election.

### Ishihara's agenda

This section addresses some of the many issues with which Ishihara is associated, particularly those he has spoken out about during his election campaign and since his electoral success, as he has declared that he 'will take action on everything I promised to Tokyoites'.<sup>20</sup>

#### Yokota air base

Perhaps the most discussed issue has been that of Yokota air base in Western Tokyo prefecture. This air base is used by the United States forces in Japan. The concrete runway at the base is 3,400 metres long and 60 metres wide – compared to the 4,000-metre runway at Narita and 3,500-metre runway at Kansai International Airport (Kankū),<sup>21</sup> and the base occupies 4 square miles of land.<sup>22</sup> The runway is used by several types of military aircraft, such as C130 and C5 transport planes as well as planes from an aircraft carrier anchored at Yokosuka naval base in Kanagawa Prefecture.<sup>23</sup>

Ishihara has long called for the return of the air base, or at the very least for Japan to be given part-use of it and access to it. In 1994 his demand for the return of the base, with the support of the Transport Ministry and aerospace industry, was criticized by the then US Ambassador Walter Mondale; he complained to the LDP, which had to issue an apology.<sup>24</sup>

After his election Ishihara was reported to have 'apparently sought to calm worries over his nationalist views, saying his demands for the return of a U.S. air base were a "bluff"'. However, the same article also pointed out that he told the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* that he would continue to pursue the plan.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>19</sup> *Asahi Shimbun*, 12 April, 1999

<sup>20</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 19–25 April 1999.

<sup>21</sup> *Daily Yomiuri* on the internet (<http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/newse/0617so11.htm>), 17 June 1999.

<sup>22</sup> Asiagate on the internet, 27 May 1999. This article also describes the runway as being 3 miles long; other articles have suggested various other lengths for the main runway.

<sup>23</sup> *Daily Yomiuri* on the internet, 17 June 1999.

<sup>24</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 12–18 April 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted on internet page <http://library.advanced.org/18730/stories/4-14/story22.htm>

Yokota air base also made the headlines in mid-June when it was announced that for the first time a 'fun run' event would be held there as part of its annual open day on 1 August. However, Ishihara cannot take any credit for this story, as the decision was actually made in January 1999 by Col. Mark Volcheff, who took command of the base in August 1998. The Transport Ministry was apparently 'surprised' at the decision, saying that such an event could not be held at a civilian runway owing to checks that needed to be made on the runway.<sup>26</sup>

Apparently the US Embassy in Tokyo prepared a report for Secretary of State Albright regarding the election of Ishihara; this indicated that the 'State Department [was] concerned' about the support for Ishihara 'who has been a hard liner against the US', that his victory would 'invoke Japanese nationalism against the US' and that the report would also look at the issue of Yokota air base.<sup>27</sup>

The national government has denied any interest in seeking the return of Yokota.<sup>28</sup> However, some believe that there is an excellent chance that Yokota will be returned, 'perhaps even with the next three to five years'.<sup>29</sup> This view has been strengthened by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly's unanimous adoption of a statement demanding that the central government take measures to bring about a return of the air base. The statement also called for the return of the large Tama Hills recreation facility in Western Tokyo (used by US military personnel), demanding access for Tokyo citizens until its full return. However, joint use of the air base faced opposition from some members of the Assembly and so was not called for in the statement.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to understand that Ishihara is more concerned with the whole issue of defence in Japan and Japanese relations with the United States regarding defence, than with the air base *per se*. This issue has always been sensitive, and particularly since the rape of a young girl in Okinawa by some American servicemen in September 1995 led to a full review of the arrangements between the two countries. Ishihara's comments on Yokota are likely to fuel the debate further, and it is probable that a popular movement will support the adoption of a more active

<sup>26</sup> *Daily Yomiuri* on the internet, 17 June 1999.

<sup>27</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 12–18 April 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Asiagate on the internet, 27 May 1999; *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 19–25 April 1999.

<sup>29</sup> Asiagate on the internet, 27 May 1999.

<sup>30</sup> *Japan Times* on the internet (<http://www.japan-times.co.jp>), 14 July 1999.

<sup>15</sup> Iwase Totsuya, editorial, *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 15–21 February 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Election data taken from *Asahi Shimbun*, 12 April 1999.

<sup>17</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 12–18 April 1999.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

role by Japan and its Self Defence Forces.

Some have argued that the stance taken by Ishihara further reveals him to be anti-American. However, such a view is simplistic and fails to recognize fully that what Ishihara is seeking is a more mature relationship between Japan and the US, and a more active role for Japan in the defence of its islands.

### China

Whereas the degree to which Ishihara is anti-American is questionable, there can be little doubt that his comments on China have been much more controversial. During the election campaign he referred to China as 'Shina', which is considered to be a derogatory term. However, he claimed: 'Somebody told me just recently that when China wanted to rename itself after the revolution of 1911, the Japanese government did not approve of it, claiming that 'Shina should remain Shina'. I had not been aware of that part of its history.'<sup>31</sup> Ishihara has also made comments regarding Japanese aggression in Nanjing, in particular in raising questions about the reliability of reports surrounding the numbers of deaths, that have angered Chinese officials, who 'urged Japan to adopt a "factual" version' of its history.<sup>32</sup>

Although agreeing to use the correct term for China, Ishihara has also made his views about the Beijing government clear: 'I do not like or approve of a nation under a communist dictatorship.' He also added that he was not interested in exchange programmes between Tokyo and Beijing (one of Tokyo's sister cities). His views are apparently influenced by some Tibetan friends who have provided information about China's human rights violations.<sup>33</sup> However, Ishihara wrote to Beijing's mayor to mark the 20th anniversary of the sister-city relationship,<sup>34</sup> although he turned down an offer from the capital of nationalist-controlled Taiwan to establish sister-city relations with Tokyo, saying that there was a problem of 'diplomacy' surrounding the offer.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Interview with *Japan Times* quoted on internet page <http://library.advanced.org/18730/stories/4-14/story22.htm>

<sup>32</sup> Quoted on same internet page.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with *Japan Times* quoted on same internet page.

<sup>34</sup> *Inside China Today* on the internet (<http://www.insidechina.com/news/>) on 14 June, 1999.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

### The national flag and anthem

The recent debate on the legalization of the Japanese national flag and anthem (*hinomaru* and *kimigayo*) appears to have started with the education reform process that has been going on in Japan since 1984. This process was initiated by the then Prime Minister, Nakasone, and although it was thought to have achieved little at first, the agenda was set and many changes are now occurring as a result. These include the increase in 'nationalist' teaching to give the Japanese a better understanding of their identity and how to improve international relations, the greater emphasis on *hinomaru* and *kimigayo*; and the growing 'liberalization' of the system, opening more areas of the system to competition, choice and privatization.

This paper has already touched upon the fact that Ishihara's views are not dissimilar to Nakasone's (although Ishihara has criticized Nakasone for pandering too readily to US demands). Since becoming governor, Ishihara has indicated his interest in reforming the education system in Tokyo, for example through further steps to promote greater competition between schools.<sup>36</sup> Education reform is particularly significant because of its potential influence in shaping the ideologies and 'norms' of future generations.

Although not related to Ishihara as such, the issue of *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* has recently been making headlines and is worth further discussion. Although these terms are referred to as the national flag and anthem, there is no legal basis for this definition. However, following the demands of the education reform, their use at school ceremonies has increased significantly over the past decade. Opposition to their use has continued, particularly in certain prefectures (for example, Okinawa, Hiroshima and Kyoto), and in February 1999 a school principal in Hiroshima prefecture committed suicide after a dispute with teachers over whether they should be used or not. Largely in response to this – although the moves are probably primarily an attempt to prevent a split within the LDP and the creation of a new party around Kamei and Ishihara (see below) – the LDP has, in a very rushed manner, begun moves to have the legal status of *hinomaru* and *kimigayo* established. The bills passed the Diet and became law in August 1999. The significance of this will be dealt with in the concluding section.

<sup>36</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 17–23 May 1999.

### Other issues

Among many other issues, Ishihara has been concerned with the development of Tokyo Coastal City. This project entailed an investment of \$25 billion, but made a huge loss. The degree to which the project was debated and the details of the companies involved have never been made public. The bureaucrats are keen to keep it this way.<sup>37</sup> However, Ishihara is unlikely to allow this situation to continue.

Ishihara has also been concerned with ending *amakudari*, the process by which bureaucrats retire and take up positions in private companies, often closely associated to areas of business for which they have been responsible. Ishihara has also been looking to promote younger bureaucrats and force the retirement of some of the older ones.

Ishihara will also have to deal with Tokyo's enormous financial problems. The city gets much of its revenue from corporate taxes, which have fallen owing to the recession. Tokyo is now facing an estimated ¥620 billion (US \$5.6 billion) deficit. Ishihara is looking at establishing a junk bond market for small and medium-sized companies (with a credit rating of BB or less), in order to help kick-start the Tokyo economy. This in turn would help the Japanese economy and probably also reduce the amount of money that leaks from Japan to the US (another of Ishihara's concerns).

Ishihara's goal appears to be to change Japan at the national level by making changes at the local level. Although this is an ambitious aim, the importance of Tokyo and the charisma of Ishihara, coupled with the present political and economic climate, may mean that he will be at least partly successful. Ishihara is aiming to solve the bulk of the problems by 2002, and says that 'it doesn't take that much time if you have a decisive leader with imagination'.<sup>38</sup> However, he has called for a year to have the opportunity to study how things work.<sup>39</sup> This raises some question marks over his knowledge of local politics and whether he will be able to achieve his goals in the time-scale he has set himself.

### Future prospects and conclusions

One must not overlook the significance of Ishihara's election. His strategy is to 'Renovate national politics from the Tokyo municipal office'<sup>40</sup> and one cannot deny

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12–18 April 1999.

<sup>38</sup> *Japan Times*, 3 April 1999.

<sup>39</sup> *Nikkei Shimbun*, April 1999.

<sup>40</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the Web, 19–25 April 1999.

that he is already beginning to have some effect in this respect. Quite apart from his current and potential future influence, there appears to be a strong possibility that a new political party may be created around Ishihara.

Soon after his election some politicians began to speak about the creation of a new party with Ishihara as its leader.<sup>41</sup> Although some see this as a regional party, the recent trend of party splits suggests that part of the LDP (which has traditionally grown to incorporate all views), headed by Kamei Shizuka, may break away. Although Ishihara has apparently no interest in creating a new party,<sup>42</sup> his election may end up being the catalyst for greater change at the national level.

Despite his impact at the national level, at the local level Ishihara has not found it easy since his election. Many, including LDP members, within the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly were opposed to his election; without their support, he will find it difficult to accomplish much.<sup>43</sup> In July 1999 his choice for third vice governor, Hamauzu Takeo, was voted down by the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, though Ishihara said he would submit the plan again at a later date.<sup>44</sup>

Without doubt Ishihara's views at times seem a little far-fetched. However, such a reaction may, in fact, reveal more about the Western attitude than anything else. For example, the idea that the Cold War ended owing to the United States' and Soviet Union's realization of the dominance of Japanese technology and the reliance of the superpowers' intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) upon it seems a little extreme to most Western ears. However, this may be due to the lack of information provided by Western countries about the real situation and admission that such a situation exists. (In fact, according to Ishihara, a Pentagon report supports his belief in this area<sup>45</sup> – though such reports are not widely read or publicized in the West.) It may also be due to the reluctance of many people in the West to accept that Japan may be in a more dominant and influential position than their own country.

Indeed, Ishihara also points to the racial problems that still exist. He does not believe the problems of distrust shown by Americans towards Japan can be put down

merely to the lingering memories and effects of the Pacific War, and asserts: 'Whatever the reason, Japanese should not forget the Caucasians are prejudiced against Orientals.'<sup>46</sup> Ishihara is not alone in Japan in believing that the United States did not use atomic weapons against Germany because it was another Caucasian nation, but had no such reservations about using the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Ishihara believes that 'American racism stems from pride in cultural superiority'.<sup>47</sup> The fact that Ishihara believes that Americans are racist does not make him anti-American, as some concluded after reading his comments. As one newspaper article commented: 'The book struck many as being anti-American but it was in fact a nationalist's expression of Japanese grievances at being accorded the status of junior partner in relations with the US.'<sup>48</sup>

It is very sad when a person such as Ishihara stands up and starts an important but controversial debate, but gets slated as being a 'racist' simply because people do not like to hear what he has to say or are not prepared to admit that there may actually be some truth in what he is saying. While it may be the case that Japanese politics will appear to be comparatively 'immature' while politicians choose not to express their opinions or stand up for what they believe, what can be said about a country that criticizes the politicians of another country without attempting to understand the issues? Surely it is better for global stability that each nation makes its objectives clear, so that debate can be engaged in, so that, where necessary, compromise can be sought. As pleasant as it may be to be a citizen of a dominant nation to which other nations kow-tow, this can hardly be the basis of a healthy long-lasting relationship. If politicians like Ishihara do not have the opportunity to flourish, and are not encouraged by all to do so, the danger is that someone much more radical and dangerous could appear on the scene and gain a position of great influence when the Japanese people's frustration reaches a point where they finally seek to redress the situation.

Ishihara is critical of Japan also – even within his book *The Japan That Can Say No*. Indeed, the book is primarily aimed at Japan, and his criticisms highlight his belief that Japan needs to change in order to cope with the changing world and Japan's position within it – for example, he argues

that the Japanese 'must become more cosmopolitan and less insular'.<sup>49</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s, the '*Nihonjinron*' boom saw a huge increase in the number of books that dealt with issues surrounding the debate on Japanese nationalism and 'uniqueness'. In more recent years there were calls among some Japanese football supporters to have the national shirt changed for the 1998 World Cup so that the Japanese flag would be over the heart rather than on the sleeve.

However, there is no easy, reliable and accurate method for measuring nationalism and changes in levels of nationalism. A crisis can often cause a rise in nationalism. Although the economic problems of recent years do not appear to have had an effect, the continued nuclear threat from North Korea is very significant. Sato Seizaburō has described the Japanese as being 'unconscious nationalists'. This suggests that nationalism could rise and become expressed if there was something (or somebody) to trigger it.

I conclude with three points. First, a former US Ambassador to Japan, M. Amacost, commented on the importance of Ishihara: 'The US government must take Mr Ishihara positively if they want to build better US and Japanese relations for the new century.'<sup>50</sup>

Second, following the establishment of the legal status of *hinomaru* and *kimigayo*, assuming all other things remain the same, it seems probable that there will be calls for a reform of the Fundamental Law of Education, which has long been a concern of the right wing of the LDP. The key, yet again, is that the LDP needs the support of this section of the party to hold on to power and so is likely to continue to bend to its demands to keep it from breaking away to create a new party. After this, and with the possibility of increasing nationalist feelings owing to Japan's hosting of the 2002 World Cup, constitutional reform may be a very distinct possibility.

Finally, although, according to some, Ishihara is 'tapping a rich vein of growing nationalism among many disaffected Japanese',<sup>51</sup> his election should probably not be seen as a symbol of rising or already risen nationalism, but rather as a factor that could prove to be a catalyst in a further growth of nationalism in Japan.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> *Japan Times* on the internet, 14 July 1999.

<sup>45</sup> Ishihara Shintarō, *The Japan That Can Say No*, p. 21.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Asiagate on the internet, 27 May 1999.

<sup>49</sup> Ishihara Shintarō, *The Japan That Can Say No*, p. 30.

<sup>50</sup> *The Weekly Post* on the internet, 19–25 April 1999.

<sup>51</sup> Asiagate on the internet, 27 May 1999.

Since this briefing paper was originally presented at the Japan Discussion Group within the RIIA's Asia Programme, which meets once a month, Dr Christopher Hood has been appointed as an Associate Fellow in the Asia Programme. He will be conducting further research on important contemporary political, economic and social issues relating to Japan.

For further information on ongoing and potential research on Japan, please contact Dr Hood at the address below, or email: [chood@riia.org](mailto:chood@riia.org), or phone +44 (0) 20 7314 3633.

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