TOKYO HAS FOR MOST of the postwar period enjoyed a reputation as one of the safest and most secure metropolitan areas in the world. Perhaps it was this reputation that made the March 20, 1995, attack on the Tokyo subway system by Aum Shinrikyo (hereafter, Aum) such a shock to domestic and international audiences alike. Releasing packages of sarin gas on different subway trains converging on Kasumigaseki Station, the subway stop for Japan’s major bureaucratic organs, the religious cult fortunately managed to kill only 12 people. Roughly 5,500 were injured, however, with many of them still suffering from the effects of the gas attack years after the incident. This was not the first time that Aum had engaged in an attack with chemical weapons. On June 27, 1994, the group used sarin in Matsumoto City in Nagano Prefecture (north of Tokyo) in an incident that killed 7 and injured nearly 150. At the time, police had been mystified by the incident and had not blamed Aum.¹ Nor did the group plan to stop its attacks. After the subway incident, police investigators found that the cult had developed other chemical agents, such as VX gas, tabun, and soman,
and had also grown biological agents like the anthrax bacillus and Clostridium botulinum.

The attacks could have turned out to be much worse than they ultimately were. After all, Aum was prepared to kill indiscriminately and had the means to do so. The subway incident has forced Japanese law enforcement authorities to reevaluate the nation’s preparedness against terrorism, a problem that had until then seemed largely irrelevant on Japanese soil. Moreover, the attack has clearly served as a catalyst to encourage a rethinking of security policies in other nations, including the United States. After all, the lessons of the Aum experience were not limited to Japan, nor can we assume that counterterrorism specialists were the only ones paying attention. Groups with an inclination to develop weapons of mass destruction for terrorist violence must also have watched the developments in the Aum case with great interest.

Japan’s apparently lax stance toward terrorism was further challenged less than two years later when a left-wing Peruvian organization, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), raided the Japanese ambassador’s residence in Lima during a party to celebrate the Japanese emperor’s birthday. Taking nearly seven hundred hostages, including prominent officials from Japan, Peru, and other nations, the group made four principal demands to the Peruvian government: the release of all MRTA colleagues held in Peruvian jails, safe transport to the central Amazon region, changes in economic policy, and payment of a war tax. The MRTA captors released hostages in stages but still held key personnel for 127 days. Then, on April 22, 1997, Peruvian forces raided the compound, freeing the seventy-one remaining hostages and killing all of the MRTA rebels. One hostage and two members of the rescue party were killed in the attack. The MRTA’s demands did not focus on Japan. Instead, the group took advantage of the close ties between Japan and Peru and the relatively light security surrounding the party in order to capture hostages that might make the Peruvian government blink. Even so, the crisis convinced the Japanese government of the need to improve its security and counterterrorism measures for Japanese nationals and Japanese interests overseas. In spite of Japan’s economic importance, its low political profile had evidently lulled the government into a more easygoing security stance than
was required; the Peruvian case has now forced the Japanese government to reevaluate its stance.

Even armed with this incentive, however, the Japanese government’s steps toward counterterrorism policy have been tightly constrained by institutional legacies, political disputes, and constitutional restraints. Because of the strict limits on police and military power in postwar Japan, the government can shift policy even on such an important topic as terrorism only incrementally. In this essay, we examine the nature of these constraints, documenting as well the nature of the terrorist attacks that have provoked revisions in the government’s approach to domestic and international terrorism. Although Japan’s counterterrorist capacities are still nowhere near as extensive as those in the United States, for example, the country has made some changes that—even if they are subtle and minor when viewed from overseas—demonstrate a dramatic rethinking of the problem among key policymakers in the Japanese context. Moreover, the organizational structure displays another, potentially more serious problem: because of the way in which security and police roles are limited, terrorism is not treated as a discrete political issue requiring a response but rather as a subset of other types of crises, which include natural disasters and accidents. As a result, some of the main responses in recent years have bracketed terrorism as part of a larger series of challenges facing Japan rather than a narrowly construed security threat that might deserve a more focused strategy.

In the remainder of this essay, we trace the evolution in the police and military roles in postwar Japanese politics, showing first that these two institutions operate in a constrained legal and political environment. We then discuss specific terrorist threats to Japan and the main legislative responses to them. After detailing the changing organizational structure of the Japanese government with regard to counterterrorism, we turn to some of the specific capabilities of these organizations, focusing especially on changes in intelligence analysis, law enforcement, and military potential. Finally, we examine the importance that the Japanese government places on its international relationships, which the government uses in part to offset its limitations and domestic challenges. Although these diplomatic efforts might normally be seen to be at best tangential aspects
of a counterterrorism stance, Japan’s political and legal environment enforces on decision makers constraints that can in some ways be overcome only through coordination and cooperation with other actors. Japan’s security vulnerability thus pushes the government toward nuanced strategies that are designed to mitigate the consequences of a limited military and police role by making incremental improvements where possible and cooperating with other governments to the fullest extent possible.

THE POLICE AND THE MILITARY IN POSTWAR JAPANESE POLITICS

By 1947, when the Japanese Constitution was enacted, Japan was struggling to rise from the ashes of defeat. Written by the U.S. Occupation authorities with input from Japanese leaders, the Japanese Constitution aimed at both democratization and pacification. It established the concept that sovereignty resides with the people rather than the emperor (who is relegated to purely symbolic status), that the citizens of Japan would enjoy democratic civil liberties (which are actually more clearly articulated in the Japanese than in the U.S. Constitution, in part because of the progressive instincts of the Occupation authorities), and that—most famously—the Japanese government would forever renounce the right of war. Enshrined in Article IX of the Constitution, this aspect is one of the foundational elements of postwar Japan’s political system. Between this renunciation and the guarantees of liberty (including freedom of religion, assembly, association, speech, press, and expression), the government faces significant constraints on the types of counterterrorism strategy it can pursue.

Japan’s is a parliamentary system, with supreme legislative authority resting in the bicameral Diet, especially in its more powerful Lower House. The prime minister—chosen from the party or coalition with a majority of seats in the Lower House—selects a cabinet, which is constitutionally entrusted with the main administrative rights of the government. These cabinet ministers usually serve for short terms, generally of only a few years per position, limiting their expertise in comparison with the highly professional bureaucrats who work beneath them. And so, while the Constitution guarantees
that the Diet has supreme authority because of its ability to establish by proxy a cabinet that oversees the organs of the state, as a matter of course the bureaucrats are in a position to affect policy by writing the texts of the laws that are submitted to the Diet by cabinet ministers. This does not mean that they can run roughshod over the Diet; the Diet can, of course, reject laws as easily as it can pass them. The general pattern that has emerged in postwar Japan has been of a large, professional, organizationally oriented bureaucracy that proposes administrative solutions to problems but is mindful of key fault lines in the Diet that might lead to the embarrassing rejection of legislative proposals.

In the postwar period, no division has been more clear than that over the role of the military. In 1960, demonstrators took to the streets to protest the extension of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which included in it guarantees of Japanese Self-Defense Forces’ (SDF) involvement in the defense of Japan. The left-wing Socialist Party attempted to blockade the Diet floor, leading Prime Minister Kishi to order their arrest; the extension thus passed easily, with the largest opposition party out of the picture. Although successful, Kishi faced such condemnation that he had to step down, persuading subsequent Japanese prime ministers and cabinets that—whatever else they did—they would have to be very, very careful about extensions of military or police power.

The situation has not been purely static, of course. Japanese governments have successively encouraged reinterpretations of the Constitution to allow for a more expansive Japanese role in international security, particularly in response to the heavy criticism Japan faced due to its relative inaction in the Gulf War. Moreover, heavy criticism of fraud, waste, and mismanagement in the government generated calls for administrative reform, which involves the fundamental recasting and consolidation of key ministries. Even so, this pattern of policy-making and its bias against a more expansive role for the Japanese state in security are among the enduring features of postwar Japanese politics.

This modus operandi appeared to be highly stable during most of the thirty-eight-year reign of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which fractured in 1993 and suffered its first Lower House defeat since 1955. Since then, the alignments of parties have been highly unstable and, although a new electoral law was predicted to create
pressures toward the formation of a two-party system, Japanese law-
makers and bureaucrats alike have labored in the late 1990s and the
early twenty-first century under conditions of intense instability.
With the LDP recently in a curious and unwieldy coalition with New
Komeito (a party tied to a religious sect with both conservative so-
cial views and strong pacifist tendencies) and the small Conserva-
tive Party, and confronted by growing but still ideologically diffuse
parties like the Democratic Party, few seem willing to promote bold
revisions of sensitive political topics such as military force or an ex-
tension of police powers. In particular, Prime Minister Mori’s popu-
ularity has been so weak that potentially divisive political issues like
these must seem like unacceptable risks for legislative action.

These divisions have been critical in recent developments in
Japanese counterterrorism policy, which we will later examine in
more detail. To give an illustrative example, however, the LDP tried
to extend the government’s counterterrorist capabilities after the
Aum attack in 1995 by introducing new bills to enhance the coun-
try’s security stance. By adding new laws and revising the Police
Act (the basic law governing the National Police Agency), the LDP
tried to strengthen the hand of law enforcement authorities against
the possibility of future terrorist violence. Clearly, this would have
been the time to make such changes (which were of course desir-
able to the bureaucrats helping to write the revisions), given the
public mood toward Aum and terrorism in general. Even so, a gov-
ernment proposal to pass a wiretapping bill and to apply the Anti-
sabotage Law to Aum met with intense criticism in the Diet. In par-
ticular, the Democrats and the Communist Party insisted that the
bill would lead to abuses by the authorities, who would leap at the
chance for more discretionary authority. Both parties explained
that this growth in state authority would deprive Japanese citizens
of fundamental political and human rights. The LDP countered that
“wiretapping is part of public welfare” but said that it would “take
fundamental human rights . . . into full consideration” by establish-
ing stringent procedures governing the conditions under which the
law could be invoked. When the LDP introduced a bill to curtail
Aum’s activities, informally dubbed the “Anti-Aum bill,” opposition
parties once again rallied against it. The LDP revised it substan-
tially, narrowing its scope to only “those organizations that have
committed indiscriminate mass murder,” stating quite clearly that
the law targeted Aum and no one else. We will return to this legal
development.

The point here is not to castigate either side but simply to point
out the tension involved in Japanese counterterrorism policy. Be-
cause of the memory of extensive police and military power in pre-
war Japan and the country’s pride in a nonmilitarist Constitution
that guarantees extensive democratic liberties, policymakers face
tight limits on what they can do in the fight against terrorism.

**JAPAN’S POSTWAR EXPERIENCE WITH TERRORISM**

These limits strike many observers as mystifying, in part because
Japan has faced significant terrorist threats that in other countries
might have provoked more extensive revisions of counterterrorist
document. We turn now to Japanese terrorist violence as well as the
threat of attacks against Japan, detailing particular public and legal
responses to specific acts. The next section discusses in more
deepth the overall rubric of Japanese counterterrorism policy.

The Japanese Red Army’s Early Violence

In particular, the Japanese Red Army (JRA) was long regarded as one
of the world’s most dangerous terrorist organizations because of the
unpredictable and astonishingly violent nature of its attacks.
Founded by Fusako Shigenobu, Tsuyoshi Okudaira, and others in
Lebanon in 1970 as the Kyosando Sekigun-ha (Communist League—
Red Army Faction), the early JRA began operating internationally im-
mediately with its ambitious “Plan of International Bases,” which
were to be used in a conflict against global imperialism and capital-
ism.³ The first terrorism attack caused by the Kyosando Sekigun-ha
at this time was the Japan Airlines jetliner (Yodo-go) hijacking case.⁴
From their Lebanese base, the group made contact with Palestinian
terrorist organizations, like the Popular Front for the Liberation of
Palestine (PFLP). By May 1971, the group had been joined by future
leaders and strategists Koji Wakamatsu and Masao Adachi and would
in 1972 form a coalition with another leftist organization in Japan it-
self. During a hostage crisis in Nagano Prefecture (where Aum would
later test its sarin gas in its initial attack), the Japanese police
arrested the members of the JRA’s allies in Japan, discovering that the group had even killed twelve of its own members. Losing their organizational infrastructure in Japan, the nascent JRA temporarily renamed itself the Arab Red Army and issued a statement of farewell to its colleagues in Japan. Within days, it carried out the infamous Lod Airport Massacre in Tel Aviv on March 30, 1972, and would commemorate the date as the “birthday of the Japanese Red Army.”

The JRA’s attacks have been legendary for their ambition and shock value, especially in the early to mid-1970s. In the Lod Airport Massacre, for example, JRA members sprayed the airport lobby with gunfire, also throwing grenades into the crowd. Fourteen people were killed, out of a total of roughly one hundred casualties. Two of the assailants were themselves killed in the attack, and the third was arrested by Israeli authorities and sentenced to life in prison, although he was released in a prisoner exchange deal with the PFLP; he then rejoined the JRA.

In 1973, JRA member Osamu Maruoka and four Palestinians hijacked a Japan Airlines (JAL) jetliner bound for Tokyo from Paris. After stopovers in the United Arab Emirates and Syria, the plane arrived at its final destination in Libya. Releasing the hostages, the group blew up the plane and surrendered to the Libyan government. At the same time, JAL headquarters received a ransom demand, although the crisis ended before the deal would have been made.

Using plastic explosives, two JRA and two PFLP members blew up storage tanks of a Shell Oil affiliate in Singapore and seized the company-owned ferry. They demanded that the Singaporean government provide an airplane for safe passage. A week later, five Palestinians, acting in concert with the terrorists in Singapore, stormed the Japanese embassy in Kuwait, taking sixteen embassy staff members hostage, including the ambassador. They demanded safe passage by air for the four people in Singapore and themselves. The Japanese government finally accepted the demands, claiming that its highest priority should be to secure the lives of the hostages. The government then sent a special JAL plane to pick up the terrorists in Singapore and Kuwait, flying them to South Yemen, where they all surrendered to local authorities.

Although the Japanese government had not been the target of either the Lod Airport Massacre or the Dubai incident, policymakers felt that they had no choice but to negotiate with the terrorists in
the Singapore and Kuwait actions. Perhaps setting for itself a dan-
gerous precedent, the Japanese government acceded to the de-
mands. Although it may not have been considered part of Japanese
doctrine on the issue, the government’s willingness to negotiate es-
ablished a pattern of protecting the lives of citizens, even at the ex-
 pense of credibility or the ability to crush terrorism, that would
have ramifications for future options.

Japan dodged a bullet in 1974 when the French government un-
covered a plan to abduct Japanese diplomats and representatives
of major trading firms in Europe; twelve JRA members were appre-
hended, and eight were deported by the French. In August, how-
ever, the Japanese government was forced to release five JRA pris-
oners in exchange for fifty-three hostages taken by the JRA at the
consulate section of the American embassy in Kuala Lumpur. To-
gether with their freed colleagues, the terrorists were flown to
Tripoli, where they surrendered. The French government would
have a less favorable encounter with the JRA later in 1974, when
four of the group’s members took eleven hostages, including the
ambassador, at the French embassy in the Hague. The French gov-
ernment released one of the terrorists who had been taken in the
earlier plot and provided an escape plane; the Dutch government
paid a $300,000 ransom to the group, which ultimately had to fly to
Syria to surrender to cooperative authorities.

In spite of these problems, it would take the hijacking of another
JAL flight, this one from Paris to Tokyo via Bombay in September
1977, to initiate a fundamental rethinking of Japanese counterter-
rorism policy. The JRA members forced the plane to land in Dacca,
Bangladesh, and demanded a $6 million ransom and the release of
comrades held in prison in Japan. Fearing that the 151 passengers
and crew would be killed, the Japanese government paid the ran-
som and attempted to release all of the JRA prisoners, although two
refused to go. The JRA released most of the hostages and flew to
Kuwait and Syria, where they freed several more. They released the
remaining passengers and crew upon their arrival in Algeria.

A Tentative Shift in Policy

The willingness to pay ransom to ensure the safety of the hostages
was publicly supported at the highest levels of the Japanese
government. Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda, for example, remarked that “a life is heavier than the earth,” meaning that the protection of life ought to be afforded nearly sacred priority. On one level, this seems like a natural response for a pacifist country trying to escape a militarist past. But Germany, with which Japan’s behavior has often been compared, has adopted a different stance. When the West German Red Army Faction hijacked a Lufthansa airliner at roughly the same time as the Dacca incident, the West German government declared that, “for the sake of freedom and democracy,” it would not negotiate with terrorists. It carried out a successful rescue operation with a special military unit, GSG9, saving all of the hostages. Although other governments negotiated with terrorists under certain conditions, the inability of the Japanese government to conceive of an alternative strategy suggests that the Japanese stance was distinctive.

The Dacca incident, however, represented a turning point. Justice Minister Hajime Fukuda resigned to take responsibility for the incident, and his successor, Minister Setoyama, said in his first press conference that “it is regrettable that our constitutional, law-abiding system, which has been established only with the enormous efforts of the Japanese people, would be destroyed by violent acts of small terrorist groups. We have to show our determination to protect our society at any cost in such cases.” Pointing out that the release of prisoners clearly violated Japanese law, Fukuda told the Diet’s Lower House Justice Committee that “as a law-abiding nation, we should never again make a decision that is inconsistent with our laws. We should stand by that policy even if it results in the sacrifice of some lives.”

Setoyama’s strident message was not necessarily popular among Japanese citizens, many of whom believed that the government really should protect life at all costs. In a poll conducted by the Prime Minister’s Office after the Dacca incident, respondents were asked to comment on the government’s decision to effect an extralegal release of prisoners and to pay ransom. In the poll, 64 percent of respondents supported the government’s position, saying that it had had no choice. Only 23 percent argued that the government should not have made the concessions. With regard to government priorities in future hijacking cases, 62 percent said that “the government should make the lives of hostages its priority,”
while 24 percent said that “the government should take a stern approach to protect law and order, even though lives may be lost.”

The subsequent Bonn Summit in 1978 placed international terrorism, especially hijacking, onto the agendas of the world’s leading industrialized democracies, leading them toward a more focused stance against terrorism. In an effort to bring Japan’s standards and practices into line with those discussed at the summit, the government created a special task force on sabotage, including hijacking, and established a special policy “to act against hijacking and other violent activities.” Stating clearly that Japan would not negotiate with terrorists, the government made a radical shift in its counter-terrorism stance and was able to weld its position more tightly to those increasingly evident in the other advanced industrialized nations. Subsequent summits (the sixth in Venice, the seventh in Ottawa, and the tenth in London) produced further statements and declarations of international cooperation against terrorism, and these have been made every year since the twelfth meeting in Tokyo. At the thirteenth summit, in Venice, the “no concessions” principle, which had been under discussion for years among the nations, was clearly articulated. This principle has formed the core of international cooperation against terrorism and has since underscored the basic approach of the Japanese government. But the view among Japanese citizens that the government should negotiate rather than lose lives would of course make the reaction to a hostage crisis more problematic for a Japanese administration.

The Fate of the JRA

Since the Dacca incident, which forced this fundamental shift in Japan’s approach to terrorism, the Japanese government has been fortunate in that its resolution on the issue has not been tested. The JRA attempted to rename itself the Anti-imperialism International Brigade (AIIB) and fired projectiles into the Japanese and American embassies at Jakarta in 1986, also detonating a car bomb in front of the Canadian embassy. A year later, during the Venice Summit, the AIIB launched projectiles into the American and British embassies in Rome, also using another car bomb in a parking lot near the American embassy. In 1988, a car bomb outside of a United Service Organizations (USO) club in Naples exploded, killing five people,
including an American serviceman, and injuring seventeen others. This time, a group calling itself the “Organization of Jihad Brigade” claimed responsibility. Although none of these has been linked definitively to the JRA, its members are the prime suspects in all three incidents. Moreover, the JRA is believed to have been involved in a November 1986 crisis with the communist New People’s Army of the Philippines, when militants took hostage the general manager of the Manila office of a major Japanese trading firm.

The JRA has not disappeared. Although apparently it has not carried out any terrorist attacks since the bombing in Naples, a number of its members are at large. The U.S. State Department still lists the JRA as a “foreign terrorist organization,” pursuant to the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, and its aging members still appear to be committed to the fight. Others, however, have been arrested around the world. One was seized in Tokyo as he tried to enter the country with a forged passport. Another was arrested in New Jersey in April 1988 and is still being held in the United States. The end of the Cold War, progress in the Middle East peace process, and the subsequent closing of the group’s base camp on the Bekaa Heights, Lebanon together conspired against many of the remaining members. In 1995–96, three more were detained and/or arrested in Peru, Bolivia, and Nepal, with two returned to Japan for arrest and the other deported to the United States for trial.

In February 1997, the Lebanese government arrested five JRA members in Beirut on a number of charges unrelated to terrorism. After sentencing them to three years in prison and, in some cases, heavy fines, the Lebanese authorities decided that they would be deported upon their release. After several appeals, the Lebanese Supreme Court upheld the decision to deport them, although one of the members, Kozo Okamaoto, was given political asylum in Lebanon. In response to their deportation to Japan on March 18, 2000, a group supporting the JRA wrote on its Web site, “Our four comrades were deported to Japan by force. We will never forgive the Japanese government. Their return marks a beginning of a new round in the fight.” Their anger was probably exacerbated by the November 2000 arrest of Fusako Shigenobu, the JRA’s founder, in Osaka. This leaves only seven JRA members (Junzo Okudaira, Kunio Bando, Norio Sasaki, Hisashi Matsuda, Ayako Daidoji, Akira
Nihei, and political exile Okamoto), who are believed to be free in Lebanon.

Time has not been kind to the JRA. A changing international political context, one that is less tolerant of terrorism as a component of superpower rivalry, together with international cooperation has made life more difficult for the organization. The remaining members are in their fifties, and most of their terrorist acts are probably behind them. Even so, they are still apparently determined to fight and ought to be considered a threat.

The Reorientation of Japan’s Stance toward Terrorism

The Japanese government’s position vis-à-vis terrorism is stated in the 1995 edition of its Gaikō Seishō (Diplomatic Blue Book), published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In a section entitled “Terrorism and Japan’s Position,” it clearly says:

In the event that Japanese nationals are taken hostage by terrorists who make unlawful demands of the government of Japan, the government, of course, will make the utmost efforts to ensure the release of the hostages in cooperation with the foreign government [on whose soil the crisis takes place] that has primary responsibility. At the same time, in order to prevent similar incidents in the future, it is necessary to take a firm stand based on the “no concessions to terrorists” principle, which has been confirmed repeatedly at the G-7 Summit meetings.

In the twenty years after the Dacca incident, the Japanese government fortunately avoided any instances that might have put its resolution to the test. But the Lima crisis of 1996–97 challenged its convictions. Although the MRTA made no direct demands of the Japanese government, the large number of Japanese lives at stake affected the government’s stance vis-à-vis the Peruvian government and its planned response. The Japanese government’s basic position was that “securing the lives of the hostages, while not giving in to terrorism, is the highest priority. We will make the utmost efforts to achieve a peaceful solution with the release of all hostages as soon as possible, trusting that the Peruvian government is also committed to solving the crisis peacefully.” Of course, the Peruvian government’s stance was different, and it soon began planning a dramatic
rescue operation. While it maintained an emphasis on its attitude against any negotiation with terrorists, the Japanese government seemed to place far more emphasis on “the safety of the hostages” and the importance of a “peaceful resolution.”

To a large degree, its nervous stance reflected public opinion. A poll conducted by a television network in the early days of the hostage crisis revealed that 55.2 percent of respondents agreed with the statement that the government should “make concessions with terrorists to protect the lives of the hostages,” while only 40 percent encouraged the government “to refuse to give in to terrorism and to carry out rescue operations.” A subsequent poll displayed a slight shift in favor of the latter position, but one cannot deny the marked tendency of citizens to prefer the protection of innocent life even at the expense of the “no concessions” principle.

In accordance with G-7 and G-8 agreements, the government’s stance on terrorism is clear: that it is “opposed to all forms of terrorism, that it must fight against terrorism in a resolute manner, that it must not make concessions to terrorists, and that “it must bring terrorists to justice for their crimes.” Japan’s commitment to its no concessions policy, however, was sorely tested in late 1999, when members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) kidnapped four Japanese geologists, among other hostages, during a raid in Kyrgyzstan. The Japanese hostages were released unharmed after two months, and Japanese newspapers reported rumors of a ransom deal by the government. The Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs has adamantly denied that a ransom was paid and has pointed out that political contacts were made in order to ensure a peaceful resolution to the matter without violating Japan’s core policy on concessions. Even so, the widespread belief among newspaper readers that a deal was made points out the difficulty the Japanese government faces in its counterterrorism stance. Because so many Japanese citizens believe that concessions are acceptable if they save the lives of citizens, peaceful resolutions to hostage crises will almost certainly involve questions of whether the government adhered to its stated policy or capitulated to a public preference for prioritizing the lives of hostages over abstract principles of counterterrorism policy.

Equally important, the Japanese government cannot prevent private citizens from making their own deals to rescue employees or
loved ones. During the standoff in Peru, a number of hostages, including Americans and Europeans, were released by the MRTA, which claimed that it had no quarrel with these nations. Some Japanese hostages, mainly employees of Japanese companies, were also released, and there were unconfirmed reports that their firms had paid a ransom to release them. Although we cannot know what happened, Japan’s no concessions policy, like similar policies in other countries, constrains only the activities of the government and not those of firms or families trying to rescue their employees or loved ones. In other words, even if the government faithfully holds the line on refusing concessions it cannot—in the absence of repressive laws—prevent private citizens from negotiating settlements in order to return their loved ones, especially because there is no social consensus that negotiating with terrorist groups to save lives is wrong. The Japanese government can try to make a credible commitment with regard to Japanese officials stationed abroad, but private citizens are another matter.

This is assuredly one of the continuing problems for Japan. Although Japan lacks the political profile of, for example, the United States, its citizens are vulnerable to attack overseas because of the country’s position as a visible economic superpower. As business-people, tourists, scholars, and the like, private Japanese citizens live all over the world without any Japanese military or security presence; they are easy, visible targets. In fact, during the MRTA’s siege of the Japanese ambassador’s residence, its commander, Nestor Cerpa, reportedly spoke with the hostages about the role of the Japanese government in Peru; with the support of President Fujimori, he claimed, Japanese companies were exploiting Peruvian workers and sending their money to Japan. Moreover, Japan’s role as a major aid donor will likely only increase its vulnerability because of the possible view among revolutionary organizations that “Japan is supporting our government” or “Japan is exploiting our citizens in sweatshops.” With the possibility of easy scores through the kidnapping of Japanese, especially private citizens who might be ransomed by their employers or families, it is clear that Japan needs to think more cogently about international terrorism than its leaders have generally believed. At present, eight hundred thousand Japanese live overseas and annually more than sixteen million travel abroad, not only in Asia but across the globe. Japanese nationals
are, more than ever, likely to be involved in cases of international terrorism for which the government is inadequately prepared.

THE ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF JAPAN’S COUNTERTERRORISM PROGRAMS

Among the difficulties faced in Japan’s efforts to combat terrorism is the way in which “terrorism” is, as a conceptual category, collapsed into other political and policy problems. Perhaps because of the postwar allergy to the use of military and police force, the Japanese government has not traditionally viewed terrorism as a discrete phenomenon requiring a special set of solutions. Instead, terrorism is perceived as an issue for “crisis management,” and the structure of Japanese counterterrorism programs displays some of the peculiar consequences of this way of categorizing the threat. We discuss in this section not only the overall thrust of Japanese counterterrorism policy—which is integrated into larger crisis management concerns—but also the nature of recent changes in Japan’s organizations that deal with terrorism. Some of the shifts have clearly been responses to the Aum incident and perceived shortcomings in Japan’s counterterrorism capabilities. Other, more recent developments, however, reflect a larger public policy initiative toward administrative reform. Although the reform effort is not directly tied to concerns over the government’s counterterrorism capabilities, the remarkable consolidation of Japan’s public policy organizations in 2001 may have lasting effects on the way the government deals with terrorism.

The Aum attack was not the only calamity faced by Japan in 1995, and the release of sarin gas on the subway only served to deepen a sense of complete crisis among policymakers and citizens alike. In addition to the deepening economic recession and the continued problems of successive coalition governments, Japan also experienced the catastrophic Kobe earthquake, in which more than five thousand people were killed. Even more so than with the Aum attack—after which legal authorities would face tough questions over why they had failed to scrutinize the cult more effectively—the Hanshin earthquake raised alarms over the government’s slow pace in dealing with the disaster. Its tardiness may have been partly re-
sponsible for the great loss of life. Interestingly, in part because the sarin attack and the earthquake occurred only months apart, the two have been almost inextricably linked in the Japanese public imagination. That is, for most people the Aum attack was not an example of inadequate public order or security policies and the earthquake’s death toll was not accepted as the simple cost of residing along the seismically frenetic Pacific Rim. Instead, both events cemented among many the sense that the Japanese government was ill equipped to handle crises or deal with rapid, cataclysmic events in a way that might minimize the loss of life.

And so, in spite of the legislative proposals put forward after the Aum attack, many of the lasting changes in Japan’s stance vis-à-vis terrorism reflect the government’s efforts to handle crises more effectively and convincingly. In April 1997 (only three months after the government’s appalling handling of a Russian oil spill in the Sea of Japan, which only placed further pressure on it), the new position of deputy chief cabinet secretary for crisis management was created in order to consolidate Japan’s ability to deal with problems like these in the future. This new emergency secretariat was centered around the Cabinet Office for National Security Affairs and Crisis Management and includes the Cabinet Information Research Office, the Cabinet Councillors’ Office on Internal Affairs, the Cabinet Councillors’ Office on External Affairs, and the Cabinet Public Relations Office. In other words, in the event of another terrorism crisis these organizations were supposed to play a fundamental leadership role within the Japanese government, a capacity that the nation had essentially lacked during the 1995 Aum events. The secretariat, when not faced with emergencies, has conducted case study research, compiled crisis management manuals, and built networks with research institutes in Japan and abroad. A massive administrative reform program (to be discussed) has, however, shifted these functions so much that the shape of Japanese crisis management policy in the future is difficult to predict.

At present, the National Police Agency (NPA) and, on the sea, the Japan Coast Guard are the front-line organizations for gathering and analyzing information on terrorism and for responding to specific threats. The Aum Shinrikyo affair made the NPA painfully aware of its intelligence capabilities as well as its lack of knowledge regarding chemical and biological weapons. As a result, one of the NPA's
key goals in the past few years has been the improvement of its information-gathering and analytical capabilities. Moreover, it has been trying to upgrade its equipment and criminal identification capabilities. It has also created Special Assault Teams (SATs), which can be dispatched in the event of a terrorist incident. Unlike special forces teams of other nations, however, the SATs probably cannot be used overseas given current constitutional restrictions against the use of Japanese force. The Japan Coast Guard has created a Special Security Team (SST) with similar capabilities.

Additionally, the Aum Shinrikyo attack produced calls for Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (which it maintains in lieu of a true military) to take measures against terrorism. The Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF)—Japan’s version of an army—is now establishing a special research headquarters to examine possible measures against, for example, terrorism with biological weapons as well as other nonconventional and asymmetric modes of warfare. There are also plans to establish a special team to deal with cyberterrorism and possibly others that will be specifically antiterrorist and antiguerrilla units.

The Aum attack also inspired other policy organizations to think about how they might be able to contribute to Japan’s ability to handle these crises in the future. Like the First Responder program in the United States, these efforts have focused on the challenges that would face national and local administrative bodies in the event of a chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) attack on the nation. For example, Japan’s Ministry of Health and Welfare has created a research group to study ways of dealing with the large-scale biological infection that might result from a terrorist attack using bioagents. During the Okinawa G-8 Summit in July 2000, this group drew up a counterterrorism plan and conducted a simulation of biological and chemical terrorism. Moreover, the Tokyo Fire Department set up a program in 1996 to train personnel to handle chemical disasters. It currently provides information on sarin gas and other poisonous substances and has been preparing rescue equipment for these kinds of crises.

As noted, however, the loss of faith among Japanese citizens in the government’s ability to handle crises has dovetailed with larger public concerns over the state’s almost hallucinatory mismanagement of the economy in the 1990s and repeated corruption scandals.
that would have made even the most hardened member of Tammany Hall blush. And so these efforts to improve the government’s ability to handle terrorist crises have been overshadowed by larger administrative reform initiatives. The most striking of these occurred in January 2001, with the twenty-one cabinet-led ministries and agencies being consolidated into a collection of only twelve ministries and agencies in total. The decisions about which functions would continue to exist and which would be absorbed into new administrative programs were of course subject to heated political debate and bargaining. We will now sketch some of the relevant changes in the structure of Japan’s counterterrorism policy, but we cannot predict how the government’s overall abilities will be modified by these shifts.

The cabinet crisis management offices have been radically altered. For example, the Cabinet Office for National Security Affairs and Crisis Management, the Cabinet Councillors’ Office on Internal Affairs, and the Cabinet Councillors’ Office on External Affairs have been abolished and their functions and personnel are supposed to be integrated into the larger Cabinet Councillors’ Office. The Cabinet Public Relations Office and the Cabinet Information Research Office will continue to exist, but their personnel system will be shifted away from the linear/hierarchical form common to Japanese public policy organizations and will emphasize instead lateral postings among organizations in order to generate some “cross-pollination” for policies. The recently established office of the deputy chief cabinet secretary for crisis management will still handle emergencies, but it is supposed to be staffed in a “flexible” manner in response to circumstances.

The National Police Agency and the Defense Agency (which is in charge of the Self-Defense Forces) will both be placed under the Cabinet Office. The Japan Coast Guard will be absorbed into the new Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, while the Ministry of Health and Welfare (which is responsible for some of Japan’s programs with regard to the public health consequences of a CBRN terrorist attack) will be reorganized into the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare. Other counterterrorism programs, including those related to responses to fire departments’ handling of chemical weapons incidents, will be subsumed under the new Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, and Posts and Telecommunications.
One of the goals of the overall drive toward reform in Japan’s public administration system has been to reduce the bureaucratic divisions that have hampered public policies in the past. Just as American bureaucracies have been described as “stovepiped,” referring to the tendency to divide policy initiatives and administrative goals, Japan’s bureaucracy has often been categorized as a *tatewari- gyōsei*, or “vertically segmented administration.” In other words, the intense organizational loyalty and professionalism of Japanese bureaucracies have traditionally made it even more difficult for policymakers to overcome divisions between, for example, the Ministry of International Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Transport. If these administrative reforms are successful, the efforts to promote the posting of officials in organizations other than their career homes may help to facilitate the generation of better policy ideas, which will ostensibly be more manageable when the smaller number of large bureaucratic organizations can consolidate plans more quickly. That said, the program itself is too new for anyone to be able to judge its effectiveness, and the shifts in personnel chains, lines of command, control over budgets, and professional training may be so complex as to make responses to terrorist crises in the next few years more difficult rather than less so.

We raise these issues not only to make the usual caveat: that predictions are difficult. At a more fundamental level, we cannot know what effects the administrative responses to the Aum affair might have had because Japan has suffered from few terrorist events since the 1997 changes and none on Japanese soil. As a result, perhaps the instructive developments were not in the institutional responses but rather in the types of questions and concerns that were raised. That is, with new institutional homes some of the programs face uncertain futures. But the prevailing sense that the Japanese government must upgrade its crisis management capabilities has not disappeared, and it still seems to be an important element in critiques of Japanese administrative practices. In other words, bureaucratic reorganization can produce serious difficulties for any researcher attempting to predict how the government will react to events in the future, but the social and political pressures behind the various counterterrorism programs have not dissipated. There is reason to believe that the memory of the Aum incident is fresh enough to ensure that, even in new environments, policymak-
ers will consider the improvement of the government’s crisis management capabilities to be one of the paramount responsibilities of the Japanese state.

**LIMITED INTELLIGENCE CAPABILITIES**

Japanese officials dealing with terrorism will continue to operate in an environment that constrains their ability to create an aggressive counterterrorist stance. In addition to the constitutional limits on police and military authority, the government grapples with weak intelligence-gathering capabilities that hamper proactive efforts to track and defend against potential threats. Japan does not possess intelligence-gathering organizations that can perform the roles of America’s Federal Bureau of Investigation or Central Intelligence Agency. In the prewar period, the police elements of the powerful Home Affairs Ministry worked in concert with the military government, cracking down on free expression and thought, and as a consequence they were abolished during the U.S. Occupation. After the return to political independence, a number of suggestions were made to improve Japan’s investigative and intelligence-gathering capabilities, but a national “allergy” to such activities is clear in public opinion and in the strong statements made by opposition parties. As a result, Japan’s intelligence-gathering capabilities are highly constrained.

The Japanese government does maintain some intelligence-gathering organs in the NPA, the Ministry of Justice, the Defense Agency, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (among others). The coordination and use of the intelligence are, however, tightly circumscribed by constitutional limits as well as public opinion. Because of these constraints, new legislation has appeared that proposes greater flexibility for the government to investigate private communications in the investigation of crimes. Furthermore, the kind of nationwide intelligence-gathering organization that the FBI in some ways represents in the United States is absent in Japan. And, with the constitutional limits on the military, the role of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces is even more tightly controlled, with its intelligence-gathering office limited to a staff of one hundred. They even acknowledge that their most important source is “newspaper clippings.” As a consequence, Japan’s
intelligence-gathering capabilities are extraordinarily insufficient, especially with regard to foreign countries. Japan has no choice but to rely on its global allies for primary intelligence support.

The primary intelligence resource for the government has been the Cabinet Research Office, which is legally mandated to gather and analyze information related to important policies of the cabinet. Many of these have taken the form of survey research on Japanese social and economic policy, but among the office’s 120 staff members are security specialists and officials on loan from the National Police Agency and the Defense Agency. In the event of an emergency, such as a terrorist event, the deputy chief cabinet secretary for crisis management is supposed to take charge of this office to coordinate the collection of information on the crisis. As of 1996, again in response to criticism over the Aum incident, the office has a Situation Center that is manned at all times and is responsible for communicating emergency information to the deputy chief cabinet secretary. Additionally, the office has been working to upgrade its intelligence-gathering capabilities; there are plans to launch, between 2002 and 2007, two information-gathering satellites, which will be used in part for national security and crisis management purposes.

Of rather more importance to Japan’s counterterrorism programs, however, is the ability of the National Police Agency to gather and analyze information that might help in suppressing political violence against Japanese. In response to the Aum attack and the Peruvian hostage crisis, the NPA has implemented various organizational reforms and new counterterrorist measures within the agency. An internal review conducted by the NPA after the Aum attack concluded that the agency lacked adequate knowledge of science and technology (especially regarding sarin gas, VX gas, and so on) and had had little information regarding antisocial criminal organizations, at least those unrelated to the violent leftist groups of the 1960s and 1970s.

To correct these deficiencies, the NPA undertook a number of reforms. First, as a way of strengthening its investigative capabilities pertaining to science, it established new forensics units and a chemistry section to study the properties of sarin gas and other poisonous substances. In accordance with tightened legislation on the use of chemical weapons, the NPA has also established an In-
vestigation Office for Special Cases, which is responsible for incidents such as the one involving Aum. A new Office for Counterterrorism has been established in the NPA’s Foreign Affairs Division, and it also gathers, classifies, and manages information regarding terrorism by foreign nationals or Japanese based overseas.\textsuperscript{11} Moreover, the NPA’s Security Bureau now has a new Special Investigation Office for Suspicious Groups, which monitors the activity of those organizations considered likely to turn toward terrorism. A new Psychology Section also provides research regarding the behavioral patterns of suspects and victims of terrorist assaults. This section is primarily designed to handle kidnapping and hostage situations, their investigations, and their aftermath. To manage the NPA’s intelligence capabilities, a new position—chief executive analyst—was established in the Security Bureau, and this official is expected to handle the intelligence functions that previously had been highly decentralized.

The Ministry of Justice also maintains a Public Security Investigation Agency (PSIA), which contributes somewhat to Japan’s intelligence capabilities in counterterrorism. Especially with regard to new legislation against organizations that have engaged in indiscriminate mass murder (the terminology used to write a law that would provide investigators with more power vis-à-vis Aum but narrowly enough construed to avoid a veto by left-leaning parties in the Diet), the PSIA collects information in urban areas and on groups like religious cults.\textsuperscript{12} This marks a shift in its orientation, away from the rural and suburban investigations of radical leftist organizations of the 1970s and 1980s. Additionally, the agency is reported to have increased its investigations of the movements of foreign nationals who enter and remain in Japan illegally as well as the movements of members of international terrorist groups who have entered Japan. Besides providing information gained from these investigative activities to relevant parts of the government, at the end of each year the agency publishes “Public Security in Japan and Overseas,” a summary of public security trends in Japan and abroad. It also compiles and makes public such materials as the “Survey of International Terrorism,” “Public Security Worldwide,” and “Trends in International Terrorism.”

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) includes an Intelligence and Analysis Bureau. The Intelligence and Analysis Bureau was
established in 1993, when the Information Research Bureau, which handled policy planning affairs, was reorganized to concentrate primarily on the collection and analysis of information. The new bureau includes three divisions and uses as its primary sources written reports and telegrams from embassies and other overseas posts, foreign newspapers, magazine articles, and the like. Its emphasis is on broad, mid- to long-range reports that differ from the daily administrative handling of policy decisions.

Finally, the Defense Agency also maintains limited intelligence capabilities in addition to those of the Self-Defense Forces. The agency established in 1997 an integrated Information Headquarters, which combines some of the intelligence functions of the SDF and the Defense Agency. Of its sixteen hundred personnel, roughly one thousand work at six communications facilities around Japan, primarily to monitor radio communications.

Again, most of these offices are rather broadly targeted at collecting information on all manner of threats, developments, political changes, and the like. Japan does not possess intelligence capabilities rivaling those of, say, the United States, and it lacks the specific counterterrorism abilities displayed in something like the Counterterrorism Center (CTC) at the CIA. Even so, the Aum affair and to a lesser degree the Peruvian crisis have instigated a fundamental rethinking of how far the Japanese state can go in monitoring its citizens and foreign nationals in the goal of protecting national security.

**CHANGING LAW ENFORCEMENT AND MILITARY CAPABILITIES**

Japan has never faced a terrorist challenge that has risen to the level of a crisis for the state itself, and, as noted, political realities there tend to constrain the state in its use of military or police power. Perhaps for these reasons, Japan has never passed a law like America’s Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act or the United Kingdom’s Terrorism Countermeasures Act. With the power of public opinion and moderate and left-leaning parties to undermine political stability, the LDP has had a difficult time trying to change the environment in which law enforcement agencies and the military coun-
sters terrorism. This does not mean, of course, that the police and the military are powerless. For example, the Anti-subversive Activities Law enables police to prevent groups that are known to use political violence from demonstrating, holding assemblies, and the like. Promulgated largely to deal with left-wing threats in the 1960s and 1970s, however, this law turned out to be useless in preventing Aum from organizing and was almost equally so in cracking down on the cult even after the attack. According to the head of the PSIA, the government clearly needed new legal tools with which to fight Aum.

The outcome of this challenge is somewhat instructive. As noted, this legal initiative was informally dubbed the Anti-Aum law. In Japan, as in other democracies governed by the rule of law, it is of course improper to have a law that specifies one target and neglects others; it must classify and categorize if it is to have a lawlike quality rather than a simple directive of political or personal vengeance (President Bush cannot, e.g., push Congress to enact an “anti-Clinton” law). Yet the Japanese moderate and leftist parties displayed their usual allergy to the growth of state police and military power by pushing for a narrow law. In other words, it could neither be a law against religious cults (which might presumably have infringed upon the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion) or for sterner, more general counterterrorism capabilities. Instead, to pass the bill the LDP—along with NPA and Ministry of Justice analysts—was forced to narrow it to the point where, although Aum is not named, there could be little doubt as to the law’s target. The Law to Control Organizations That Engage in Acts of Indiscriminate Mass Murder (a name every bit as unwieldy in the original Japanese as in translation) therefore gives police broad powers of investigation and control vis-à-vis groups like Aum, though fortunately there are no other groups like Aum in Japan.

In other words, Japanese parties are sufficiently distrustful of police authority to ensure that, at least for the time being, changes in the Japanese legal environment for the investigation and prosecution of terrorists will be incremental at best. To be sure, the constraints forced on the Japanese government help to ensure the maintenance of Japan’s vibrant civil liberties. But earlier laws, narrowly tailored to deal with leftist organizations that had used political violence in the 1970s, were of virtually no help to the Japanese
authorities in tracking a religious cult that had developed weapons of mass destruction and was able to use them at least twice, killing nearly twenty people and injuring hundreds. The legal developments in the wake of the Aum incident therefore leave us with an important question: will changes in the Japanese legal environment be similarly useless in preventing future attacks?

Although the Japan Coast Guard is responsible for counter-terrorism measures at sea and the Japan Defense Agency has a limited but growing role as well, the NPA is clearly the first line of defense against terrorism, and it is the organization most affected by the stringent political environment of postwar Japan. Until recently, the NPA lacked both national investigative rights and special action units for terrorism, meaning that police units in local prefectures tended to have jurisdiction over terrorism cases. One of the lessons of the Aum example is that Japan’s complicated prefectural systems are poorly suited to the task of dealing with large-scale terrorist attacks or criminal actions because of the “rough going” that attends any sort of large-scale investigation. As a result, in recent years there have been revisions in laws governing the NPA in order to grant it more investigative powers and also to create antiterrorism posts and special forces around the country to prepare for the further possibility of a large terrorist attack. There have been suggestions that the NPA should have direct control over special antiterrorist forces, but because of the role of the police in state repression in the prewar period there has also been considerable opposition to this idea. As a result, the NPA’s capabilities are still limited.

Because it has been so difficult to strengthen the NPA’s hand, it is unclear how Japan will react to unconventional terrorist attacks in the future. In its planning for these kinds of crises, however, the NPA has been creative, at least within the tight constraints of Japan’s legal environment. In addition to the Special Action Teams (which have now been dispatched twice to deal with hijacking cases, though in neither case were they actually used in a takedown), the NPA has added newer units. After the Peruvian hostage incident, the Emergency International Terrorism Team was established, and it can be dispatched to the site of crises involving Japanese nationals to consult with the host government. At other times, it prepares strategies for coping with hostage crises. The Aum attack served as
a wake-up call regarding the possibility of future assaults using nuclear, biological, or chemical (NBC) weapons, provoked the development of special teams to handle such incidents in the future. For example, the NPA has established an investigative unit armed with the most advanced equipment to allow it to handle an NBC event. In the same vein, the NPA has begun to prepare for the possibility of cyberterrorism with the creation of a High-Tech Crime Division, and in 2001, a new unit called the Cyberforce will be established. The Cyberforce’s responsibility will be the management of unauthorized computer access and cyberterrorist incidents. It will also coordinate prefectural and local responses to more contained threats in the future. In the event of genuine unconventional attacks, however, it is difficult to see how the NPA can handle them without coordination with and the participation of the Self-Defense Forces. But constitutional limits as well as the organizational dynamics between the two make it unclear whether or how this might be achieved. The NPA’s capabilities in this regard have improved, but it is hard to know whether they have improved enough.

The Japan Coast Guard has also upgraded its abilities by combining preexisting teams (including a security unit from a plutonium transport ship and a counterterrorism unit from Kansai Airport) into its Special Security Team. The SST, created in 1996, is small: forty members, armed primarily with German-made MP5s and flash-stun grenades. Because of the Aum incident and the Peruvian hostage crisis, the SST now conducts a variety of counterterrorism drills, martial arts training, helicopter landing drills, and the like. It has also received training from the U.S. Navy.14

Under the Anti-subversive Activities Law and the Law to Control Organizations That Engage in Acts of Indiscriminate Mass Murder, the PSIA has some power to maintain surveillance over certain organizations that might commit acts of terrorism. Its authority under the Anti-subversive Activities Law was never used, but under the new law targeted at Aum it has conducted investigations by entering thirty-three Aum premises. Even here, however, the PSIA’s law enforcement capability is limited at best. It must first apply to another body, the Public Security Examination Commission, for permission to keep the organization under surveillance, and it can enter the premises of the organization only if the commission has allowed it to. The PSIA lacks almost any genuine investigative authority that
matches the abilities of its personnel, and it must even get permission from the owner or tenant before it can conduct a search.15

The Special Defense Forces, which operate in lieu of the constitutionally banned armed forces, are permitted to defend Japan to protect the nation from direct or indirect invasion and may engage in action to preserve public order when the need arises.16 They have never been mobilized in a terrorist attack, however, nor have they ever been used to maintain public order. At the time of the Aum attack, the Ground Self-Defense Forces’ Chemical Rescue Team was dispatched at the request of the government officials in Osaka and Tokyo, who were no doubt alarmed at the inability of the national government to dispatch SDF units even after the cataclysmic Kobe earthquake in January of that year. Their duties were confined, however, to the detection and analysis of the dispersed chemical substance, and the use of counteragents for removal and cleanup. This disaster operation—the closest the SDF has come to involvement in a terrorist incident—involves two hundred personnel and ten cleanup vehicles.17

Before the Aum attack, it had actually been Japanese defense doctrine that counterterrorism measures were strictly the responsibility of the police forces and that the SDF did not intend to establish special teams for this purpose in the future. After the sarin incident, however, an increasing number of observers began to argue that the police alone were not enough to protect the nation from terrorist assaults. With this push for the establishment of a counterterrorism mission for the SDF, the new “National Defense Guidelines,” approved by the government in 1995, state unequivocally that one of the key functions of the SDF is to respond to terrorism. Particularly with the 1996–97 hostage crisis at the ambassador’s residence in Peru, the SDF has been able to move toward a broader counterterrorism role.

The fiscal year 2000 budget of the Defense Agency demonstrated this shift in priorities. It provided additional funding to enhance defense capabilities by improving protective equipment, drills, and research to respond to suspicious vessels that might be involved in the transport of personnel or materials for terrorist assaults; making antiguerrilla preparations; preparing for terrorism with weapons of mass destruction; and so forth. The GSDF’s Research Headquarters includes, for example, a new special weapons research commiss-
sioner, who works on protection against biological and chemical weapons. The Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) now have a Ship Investigation Team that might be used in counterterrorism missions. And a new institute is responsible for training the SDF in the handling of guerrilla tactics, street warfare, and the protection of sensitive facilities such as nuclear power plants from potential terrorist adversaries. Additionally, the GSDF will add a Cyberterrorism Team sometime between 2001 and 2005, and it will be responsible for coordinating its activities with the MSDF and the Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) in the event of a terrorist attack on the information or communications infrastructure. Approved at the end of 2000, the plan demonstrates a new commitment to improving the SDF’s capabilities against terrorism, particularly terrorist attacks with weapons of mass destruction.

These seem, of course, like fairly typical missions for the armed forces. But it bears repeating that Japan’s SDF units are not ordinary armed forces and that the conception of terrorism has traditionally been quite different in Japan than in the other advanced industrialized nations. With a tightly circumscribed role for the SDF, even Japanese defense leaders have been reluctant to commit them to the protection of the nation against terrorist assaults. These changes, while muted in comparison with those evidenced in other nations, reflect important shifts in the way the government conceptualizes terrorism as a threat and a problem requiring a systematic response. Although it is too early to predict how the SDF would handle a bona fide terrorist event, and there is reason to doubt its ability to coordinate effectively with the NPA, its steps in the past few years suggest that its commanders have begun to think more seriously about the threat that terrorism presents and the ways in which the SDF can contribute to national security.

**DIPLOMATIC STRATEGIES**

Much has been made in the scholarly and journalistic literature on Japan of its small size, its resource dependence, and its consequential efforts to maintain strong international ties. This characterization of the nation is at best misleading. Indeed, with more than 125,000 million citizens, Japan is one of the world’s ten most
populous nations, and its gross national product is second only to that of the United States; in terms of economic power, it dwarfs all the other nations of East and Southeast Asia combined. Even so, there can be no doubt that a profound sense of vulnerability informs much of Japan’s diplomatic orientation, which aims largely at building strong regional ties while protecting its crucial security alliance with the United States. Many Japanese and non-Japanese observers alike point to the government’s interest in promoting multilateral agreements and institutions that can mitigate some of the concerns it has with the global environment. And perhaps to a larger degree than do many other nations the Japanese government clearly believes international cooperation to be one of its key tools in an overall counterterrorism strategy. International terrorism, practically by definition, requires international cooperation for lasting solutions. In the case of Japan—which is partly dependent on its allies for intelligence and security support—this is perhaps even more true.

Summits have played a particularly important role in setting Japan’s vision of the global agenda and helping it to articulate in globally legible terms its understanding of security cooperation. At the G-5 Bonn Summit of 1978, for example, Prime Minister Fukuda—who had been deeply affected by Japan’s inability to prevent or counter the Dacca hijacking—proposed a “Communiqué on Airline Hijackings,” which was adopted by the summit participants. In successive G-5, G-7, and G-8 Summits, terrorism has been a major topic of discussion, and Japan is a signatory to its various communiqués and declarations on the subject. Following the resolutions adopted at the Halifax Summit, which was held after the 1995 sarin gas attack and the bombing of the U.S. Federal Building in Oklahoma, the nation’s interior, justice, and foreign ministers participated in the Ministerial Conference on Terrorism in Ottawa. The chairman of the Public Security Examination Commission and the foreign minister represented Japan, reporting on the Aum Shinrikyo incident and proposing a meeting of experts on biological and chemical terrorism. This proposal was included in the “Ottawa Ministerial Declaration on Terrorism,” which led to a conference of experts held in Paris in 1996. At the Denver Summit in June 1997, in the wake of the Peruvian crisis, Prime Minister Hashimoto expressed his determination to fight terrorism jointly with the international community.
and vowed that Japan would never capitulate to terrorism. Among his proposals were improvements in capabilities vis-à-vis hostage situations, strengthened information exchange, and another experts meeting on terrorism and hostage-taking incidents. Japan is still making efforts to follow up on his proposals.

At the various working group meetings on counterterrorism, one of the main topics is always the effort to expand the use and recognition of international conventions against terrorism. At the July 2000 Okinawa Summit, the Japanese foreign minister called upon all nations to become signatories of the twelve counterterrorism conventions and to enforce them strictly. Japan has already ratified ten of the twelve, including those on hijacking, the taking of hostages, the protection of nuclear materials, and the like. It is working on the enabling legislation necessary to allow ratification of two more: the International Convention for the Suppression of Terrorist Bombings and the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism.

The financing convention provides an illustrative glimpse at Japan’s attempt to coordinate its efforts more effectively with the global community. To be sure, the problems with Aum should have alerted Japanese policymakers to their problems in investigating the financial transactions of terrorist groups. Aum had, after all, been able to support its vast network because it ran several profitable computer stores and other enterprises. Even so, the Japanese investigative agencies were ill prepared to track the growing financial resources of this radical cult. When the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), an international organization that is largely responsible for the investigation of money-laundering cases, conducted a survey in Japan in 1998, it informed Japanese leaders of the extent to which they were unaware of illicit financial transactions being carried out in the country. The FATF’s Japanese representative pointedly remarked that Japan’s criminal laws and regulations against organized crime were insufficient not only in their effectiveness but in their reflection of the seriousness of the problem of money laundering. In 1999, largely because of this criticism and the government’s eagerness to meet international standards and demonstrate its commitment to global cooperation, Japan passed new legislation against money laundering and illicit financial transactions. Some experts have suggested that this financial infrastructure against money
laundering may also be useful in implementing the requirements of the convention against the financing of terrorism. As the Japanese government investigates how it can best pass enabling legislation that will allow for the ratification of the convention, there can be little doubt that the government takes international cooperation against terrorism seriously. It is not an auxiliary element in the government’s counterterrorism stance but one of its fundamental components. In related issue areas, the Japanese government has also passed legislation on the production of chemicals and unauthorized computer access, again in an effort to bring these up to international standards.

Although much of Japan’s international cooperation on terrorism focuses on its collaboration with the other advanced industrial nations, it also maintains increasingly robust ties with its Asian neighbors. In January 1997, during the Peruvian crisis, Prime Minister Hashimoto visited the member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), taking the opportunity to push for a network for the exchange of information and views on terrorism between Japan and the ASEAN nations as well as a regional experts’ forum on terrorism. As a result, in June 1997 the Japan-ASEAN Information Network on Terrorism was created and in October Tokyo hosted the Japan-ASEAN Conference on Counterterrorism, which was attended by relevant personnel from Japan and all nine ASEAN countries. The conference concluded with an agreement for improved cooperation in intelligence, police protection, and communications during terrorist events. In 1999, Tokyo hosted a follow-up Asian–Middle East Conference on Counterterrorism, which was attended by representatives of a larger range of nations.

The Japanese government also uses some of its substantial Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) budget to support counterterrorism efforts among developing nations. Since 1995, the NPA has been holding seminars for personnel from developing countries on practical measures against terrorism. These seminars introduce counterterrorist equipment and tactics and operate as a kind of “technology transfer,” especially with regard to the classification of analysis of intelligence, the detection of forged passports, and the like. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), one of the government’s main foreign aid agencies, has also held annually since 1997 its Seminar for the Investigation of International Terror-
ist Incidents as a way of providing expertise on techniques that can be used to handle terrorist crises. Significantly, these programs work for both Japan and the visiting nations. That is, the Japanese government believes that its security is enhanced by the reduction of terrorist violence elsewhere, and these seminars are designed to provide the tools necessary to allow the governments of developing countries to prepare for and deal with terrorism.

Japan’s overall ODA programs are perhaps a double-edged sword in its efforts to deal with international terrorism. Japan each year vies with the United States as the world’s top donor of international aid, and its programs are designed in large part to enable developing nations to establish the kind of industrial infrastructure necessary to foster sustainable growth. In the absence of other tools for international engagement (e.g., a military that might more easily take part in collective security arrangements), Japan has turned toward ODA as one of the key aspects of its diplomatic orientation. As a nation committed to pacifist principles, Japan uses its aid in part to provide a basis for economic growth that can mitigate some of the potential causes of conflict. Although counterterrorism is hardly at the core of Japan’s ODA charter—which focuses primarily on the humanitarian reasons for development assistance—these aid programs could presumably affect Japan’s ability to deal with terrorism in two conflicting ways.

First, by providing development assistance to poor regions, Japan has tried to alleviate some of the worst suffering in developing nations, including some of those most affected by terrorism. The late Prime Minister Obuchi, for example, proposed enhanced ODA contributions to the Philippines, which has in recent years suffered from terrorist attacks by leftist revolutionaries as well as Muslim separatists. Whether economic development fostered by such assistance can be part of a long-term strategy to undermine the causes of conflict is still unclear, but if an improvement in people’s lives is visible there might be a reduction in public support in poor areas for groups posing a violent challenge to the government. Second, however, Japan’s ODA programs almost inevitably establish ties between it and the government of the developing region. That is to say, Japanese ODA—which is often accompanied by Japanese private investment and Japan-related joint ventures—becomes a symbol of Japan’s relationship with a government under attack.
example, Japan’s ties with Peru have grown in the past decade, a fact not lost on the MRTA rebels who stormed the ambassador’s compound. As noted previously, the leader of the rebels told the hostages that Japanese firms were in part responsible for the misery of Peruvian workers and peasants.

As one of the world’s leading industrial democracies, Japan is not going to turn away from its ODA programs. And in the absence of other military tools Japan’s economic strength could conceivably be one of its most important assets in its efforts to contribute to international counterterrorism priorities. In the long run, the economic growth generated by Japan’s ODA programs might alleviate some of the suffering that no doubt can be mobilized as support for violent rebel groups that use terrorist tactics. Even so, in the short run, Japan’s development assistance ties make it a symbolic target and inevitably put Japanese workers in harm’s way.

CONCLUSION

Because of the vexing nature of terrorism, governments are perhaps better equipped to deal with it when they have options rather than when they are institutionally forced onto one path. An Israeli refusal to deal with organizations that have used terrorist violence in the past, for example, would have scuttled the Middle East peace process from the start. Israel’s flexibility—a combination of tough-minded security measures and a realistic assessment of how to generate political solutions—has at least allowed it to move with the Palestinian Authority toward a resolution of one of the world’s most terrorism-ridden conflicts. In contrast, Japan’s counterterrorism policymakers operate within a tightly constrained environment, one that by and large rejects expansion of police or military power and relies instead on narrowly construed responses to specific terrorist incidents and on broad diplomatic cooperation to mitigate Japan’s vulnerabilities.

This discussion of the evolution of Japan’s counterterrorism policies demonstrates how incidents such as the Aum Shinrikyo attack and the crisis in Lima have led to reforms. Without an understanding of the constitutional, legal, and political limits on decision makers, however, observers will likely find the nature of Japan’s re-
sponses incomprehensible. After all, among the advanced industrial nations Japan is alone in having actually suffered from a bona fide terrorist attack using weapons of mass destruction, one that fortunately killed only a few but could have been far worse. Why has the Japanese government’s response been so muted, not only against the religious cult but also against the possibility of future acts of terrorist violence?

Simply put, Japanese decision makers have had to learn how to negotiate in a narrow environment, trying to balance the complex security issues engendered by domestic and international terrorism and a social mistrust of the police and the military. There have been limited, qualified improvements in Japan’s counterterrorist capabilities in the past few years, and clearly there has been a subtle shift in the public mood toward a belief that social and political threats do exist and it is the state’s responsibility to protect citizens. The shift has not gone far enough to overcome political opposition toward more expansive roles for the police and the SDF, but it suggests that Japanese policymakers can feel more confident than before about their role in trying to prepare for the possibility of terrorist events in the future. After all, the terrible events of 1995 and 1996, including the Aum and MRTA incidents as well as the catastrophic earthquake in Kobe, have increased the expectations of Japanese citizens that the government must have enhanced capabilities for dealing with crises. Within the constitutional and political restraints that prevent a more aggressive policy orientation, Japanese counterterrorism policymakers have been working quietly to make such improvements.

POSTSCRIPT

WITHIN DAYS OF THE terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Japan’s new prime minister, Junichiro Koizumi, spoke in unusually harsh terms, calling them “unforgivable.” Unwilling to sit on the sidelines, he rapidly proposed a seven-point plan to ensure that Japan would be engaged in the U.S. war on terrorism. Although proposals like this have often foundered in the Diet, Koizumi’s popularity and his reputation as a free-thinking maverick encouraged many supporters of action to believe that Japan would
play a far more active role than it traditionally has in international conflicts. His success—the legislation passed the Diet after only a few weeks of debate—might be seen as evidence of a radical rethinking of Japan’s counterterrorism policies. But in many ways, counterterrorism was largely beside the point. Although some officials now seem interested in pursuing certain issues on the counterterrorism agenda, this bill was focused on military support for the United States in a specific conflict, not on a change in priorities over the nation’s approach to terrorism.

The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty does not compel the Japanese government to come to America’s defense in the event of an attack on American soil. But with vivid memories of the criticism the nation faced for its failure to participate more quickly in the international coalition in the Gulf War, Prime Minister Koizumi recognized that Japan simply could not stand idly by while the United States emphasized cooperation against terrorism. And so he took the controversial step of proposing that Japanese troops be sent overseas to take part in the coalition. Although they would not be used in combat—primarily offering logistical support, providing intelligence assistance through the deployment to the Indian Ocean of Aegis-equipped cruisers, and perhaps manning field hospitals in Pakistan—members of the Self-Defense Forces would be authorized to fire their weapons to defend themselves and those under their care. This was undoubtedly an ambitious proposal, and perhaps only Koizumi had the popularity and the devil-may-care attitude to make it work. But its focus on military assistance near the Afghani theater reflected a belief that this was a military strike on the United States and was not emblematic of a growing terrorist threat that Japan might itself face.

To be sure, officials in Japan have moved to align the nation’s practices more firmly with those of other G-8 nations in the war on terrorism. The Diet, for example, has committed itself to ratifying the International Convention on the Suppression of Terrorist Financing sometime in 2002, far more quickly than it might have without the catalyst of the September 11 attacks. And Japan’s diplomats with expertise in South Asia, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia have no doubt about working with local governments to promote cooperation with U.S. initiatives. Japanese police also arrested eight Uzbeks in Japan, all of whom were suspected of having ties to Al Qaeda.
Even so, the Koizumi proposal and the immediate shifts after the September 11 attacks do not yet imply that Japan will undergo a transformation in its counterterrorism policies. The nation's muted international posture and tight immigration controls together suggest to policymakers that the country is neither the target nor the safe haven of members of the Al Qaeda network. Although twenty-four Japanese were killed in the September 11 attacks—twice as many as in Aum Shinrikyo’s sarin gas attack in Tokyo—no one believes that groups affiliated with Osama bin Laden are primarily interested in attacking Japan. The Aum attacks provoked narrow, specific, legislative and administrative changes in keeping with the government’s emphasis on civil liberties and strict limits on police and military power. Although the new legislation stretches those boundaries, it does not offer carte blanche to policymakers to expand the state’s counterterrorism role.

Japan might prove in the long run to make a greater contribution to the U.S. war on terrorism if it systematically upgrades its intelligence-gathering and sharing activities. This will be particularly true if American activities spread—as many believe they will—to Southeast Asia. Islamist movements in the Philippines and Indonesia are known to have been affiliated with Al Qaeda, and the network might spread into Malaysia as well. Japanese knowledge of the region is both deep and expansive, and it might be of considerable assistance. The emphasis on military support is worrisome, however, because it is less likely that the Diet will support a direct Japanese military role in any actions in Southeast Asia. Moreover, if Japan adopts a role that is highly visible it might have to contend with the anger of Islamist movements in the region. The Diet seems to understand that the Self-Defense Forces will face danger abroad, but it seems less aware that Japanese civilians might themselves become targets throughout the region should terrorist groups believe that they can undermine the war on terrorism by attacking Japan. Though bold, Japan’s new counterterrorism legislation might then prove to be woefully inadequate to face the challenges of this new, highly uncertain endeavor.