

**Unconditional Surrender, Restraint in Foreign Policy, Relationships and Breaking up?
What Happens Next – 9.12.2021
Kenneth Pyle QA**

Larry Bernstein:

I want to start our conversation just before the war. What were the Japanese thinking when they attacked Pearl Harbor? Was this instigated by Roosevelt's policies, specifically, the embargo on oil and other critical commodities? What provoked the Japanese attack?

Ken Pyle:

Well, we had been in negotiation with the Japanese for about half-a-year before Pearl Harbor, and, what we were trying to achieve was a Japanese withdrawal from the continent. And in the last phase of the negotiations, Secretary of State Hull sent a message, we won't end the embargo on all these critical materials, including oil, unless you withdraw from China.

Tojo who had become prime minister turned to Admiral Yamamoto, who had this scheme of a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. One interesting development that's become clear recently is that Harry Dexter White, who was undersecretary of Treasury and a Soviet sympathizer and spy, actually, had written an early draft of what became the Hull note. And there was a basic miscalculation by both the Japanese and the Americans, and that led to the war.

Larry Bernstein:

How do you explain the Japanese behavior of fighting to the last man in its battles with the Americans and the decision to use suicidal kamikaze pilots to destroy American warships?

Ken Pyle:

From way back in the Meiji period in the late 19th century, the Japanese military had been taught that that surrender was a lack of loyalty to the emperor. And then during the war, Japan was faced with fighting against a country that was 10 times its power. And they always believed that what their last card was Japanese spirit, as opposed to the Yankee's technology. Japanese spirit would overcome the invader.

Larry Bernstein:

After the bombings of Tokyo and Hiroshima, was the Japanese public enraged, and did they think that the Americans had gone too far with their incendiary and atomic bombings of civilians? Did the Japanese view these bombings as an illegitimate form of warfare? Or, did the Japanese consider the fact that they drew first blood at Pearl Harbor as an appropriate justification for the American response?

Ken Pyle:

The Japanese were outraged, but a lot of the details of the atomic bomb were kept from the Japanese population by the occupation.

It did not really demonize the Americans for the use of the atomic bomb, but they became convinced that they had been unique victims of a new weapon. But the American occupation and the new relationship with Americans after surrender helped to diffuse some of the hatred that people felt for the use of the bomb.

Larry Bernstein:

I did a book club with Reverend Wilson Miscamble of Notre Dame; he wrote a book defending the American decision to drop the bomb at Hiroshima. Miscamble reviewed Truman's decision-making process. No one in Truman's circle thought that we shouldn't drop the bomb, and there was a strong belief that a million American soldiers would likely die to invade the Japanese Islands. Do you agree with Reverend Miscamble's historical interpretation?

Ken Pyle:

I know the book well, and that's the common view of Americans that defend the atomic bomb decision, that it saved a million American lives. Historians that have studied this carefully can find no confirmation of how that number makes any sense. The truth is we don't know how many casualties, because we don't know how long the war would have gone on. In my opinion, the unconditional surrender policy of Roosevelt created the conditions in which when we were faced with a massive buildup for the invasion, and the Japanese sent 3 million men in the army down to Kyushu to handle the invasion. Truman, as a result of unconditional surrender, was faced with a terrible dilemma. And just at that point, the Manhattan Project came to a conclusion.

We had an atomic bomb, and so we used it. But in my judgment, we could have undertaken diplomacy to negotiate a peaceful end to the war. How that would have worked out we can't be sure, because it's a counterfactual. But in my judgment, it was the unconditional surrender policy which made that decision inevitable.

Larry Bernstein:

Core to your thesis was the foolishness of the unconditional surrender proclamation by FDR. I want to ask questions first on the US side, and then on the Japanese. In America we have a Congress, there's a state department, and public intellectuals who could have said the unconditional surrender demand was a bad idea. Why didn't these people come to the fore? Roosevelt died in 1944. Why doesn't Truman, and other members of the US State Department or other foreign policy experts challenge the unconditional surrender proclamation?

Why didn't Japan publicly announce a willingness to negotiate? This would have reopened the issue for Allied public debate?

How do you explain both the American and Japanese policies relating to this bungled unconditional demand for surrender?

Ken Pyle:

The State Department was exceedingly weak during the Second World War. Roosevelt neglected them, often didn't even bring them along to major conferences. And then Truman came in, weak and inexperienced, and with the weight of the world on his shoulders, and pledged to follow Roosevelt's legacy. And in his first speech to Congress, he announced right away, "Our policy will continue to be unconditional surrender," and at that, the entire chamber, joint meeting of Congress, they all rose to their feet. So public opinion by the time of Truman was overwhelmingly in favor of unconditional surrender. A Gallup poll in the early summer of 1945 found 9 to 1 in favor of unconditional surrender, even if it meant an invasion.

There were realists within Truman's advisors who said, "We're going to be crazy to invade Japan. We should try to negotiate." But the new Secretary of State James Byrnes, persuaded Truman that changing unconditional surrender, he would be politically crucified if he did that. And Byrnes had great influence over the president.

On the Japanese side, why didn't the Japanese just come out and say, "Let's negotiate?" Well, that was their strategy from early in the war, was if we can win one big battle, make it so bloody and costly to the Americans, we can bring them to negotiate. And they had the precedent in their most previous war, which was the Russo-Japanese war, of winning a great sea battle in the Japan Sea against the Russian fleet, and that had led the Russians then to negotiate.

They were taken back when Roosevelt's sweeping war goals were made to them, and fearful that their whole way of life was going to be changed by any kind of surrender policy. And in the last year of the war with the emperor's approval, they set out to have one great decisive battle. And they believed that that would force the Americans to negotiate. And in the pre-atomic era, that strategy might well have worked, because Truman was faced with this terrible dilemma of the casualties that an invasion would cost, and whether the American people would be willing to continue a protracted war.

Larry Bernstein:

In your opening remarks, you highlighted that force feeding a constitution to a people is not the way to create institutions or democracy. Yet, the Japanese seem to have adopted and willingly accepted these institutions. Why do you believe that the American methods for creating democracy in Japan was flawed?

Ken Pyle:

Democracy is something that has to be achieved. Democracy has to be in the lifeblood of a people, on its history. And we have polls now that show that while MacArthur was having the Americans draft a constitution in the space of six days, there were polls taken that show that Japanese people wanted to have a constitutional convention. They wanted to revise the Meiji Constitution of 1889. And we took that opportunity for the Japanese to reform themselves away from them.

Why did Japan succeed? Well, Japan became a democracy, in my judgment, not because MacArthur imposed it, but over the next decades, Japanese people, through civic activism, held the conservative elite, which we put back in power, to accountability in all kinds of ways. There

were massive demonstrations in the 1950s against the Alliance and American bases. In the 1970s, when I first went to Japan, there were massive public demonstrations and civic activism against pollution that the high growth was causing, and the health problems. In the 1990s, there was civic activism that held the Japanese government for its failure to deal with the Kobe earthquake, and then most dramatically, the triple disaster of the earthquake, and the tsunami, and the explosion of the nuclear reactor has led to another massive civic activist pushback against the conservative elite.

Over the period of decades, Japan has forced the conservative elite, the ruling liberal democratic party, to accountability. And they have become very sensitive to public opinion. That's one reason why the Prime Minister has just announced his resignation, because of pushback against his handling of the pandemic.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's talk about Article Nine of the Japanese Constitution. Why have the Japanese people embraced Article Nine?

Ken Pyle:

Article Nine says that the Japanese people renounce war as a sovereign right, and that they will not have land, sea, and air forces. And that was MacArthur's instruction to the Americans who drafted the constitution, but it can also be traced back to Franklin Roosevelt's policy of disarming Japan.

The Japanese people love Article Nine. Particularly in the 1950s, it gave them a reason not to have to participate in the Cold War. Vice President Nixon said, "We made a big mistake with Article Nine. Now we want you to rearm and be our ally in the Cold War." The Japanese very cleverly and cynically used Article Nine to say, "I'm sorry. We have this wonderful article in our constitution. And by the way, you Americans wrote it for us. And we can't rearm. We have this constitution, which doesn't allow us to do that."

With the rise of China, Japan has begun belatedly to take greater responsibility for its own security. But the unconditional surrender policy, we so weakened Japan that the remnants of that policy are with us today. Under Prime Minister Abe, they began participating in collective defense.

And just most recently, in the last few months, quite an important development, the Japanese have said that it's really tied the future of Taiwan to Japan's own security. So that neglect of their own self-defense is beginning to change, but Article Nine remains on the books, and a large proportion of the Japanese population favors the continuation of that policy.

Larry Bernstein:

As you just mentioned, China has been seeking greater ambitions in the South China Sea. This has encouraged Japan to create a military coalition known as the quad, which include India, Australia, Japan, and the United States. The primary objective of the Quad is to limit Chinese military power and to defend Taiwan. What do you make of Japan's role in the quad?

Ken Pyle:

The quad was an idea of Prime Minister Abe during his first term. It was no accident that Biden invited Prime Minister Suga as his first foreign guest, because the alliance with Japan is now critical to our defense of China, and also for pushing back against the Chinese encroachment in the South China Sea, and the pressure they're putting on Taiwan now, and their almost daily flights over and around the islands.

Larry Bernstein:

US-Japanese relations appear to be very strong and continue to get stronger. Is there anything to be concerned about?

Ken Pyle:

Well, we have to maintain the credibility of the alliance. For example, the Japanese have worried about in a nuclear war, would we trade Los Angeles for a Japanese City? And when Trump talked about, "Why are we defending Japan?" That made the Japanese very nervous. And the Japanese have the option any time to go nuclear if they lose faith in the American alliance and its willingness to defend Japan. Of course, as long as we have 50,000 troops on bases in Japan, that serves as a tripwire to assure our commitment to Japan.

If we pulled back, the Japanese would almost certainly go nuclear and would probably cut some kind of a deal with China.

Larry Bernstein:

Let's move to North Korea as our next topic. When I was living in Japan in 1998, North Korea fired an unarmed missile over the Sea of Japan, and it self-destructed not far from Japanese territory. This really upset the Japanese public and it led to front page news stories seemingly for years. Another hot topic in Japan was the discovery that North Korea had used small submarines to kidnap lovers on Japanese beaches in the 1950s and 1960s. The purported purpose was to learn from the kidnapping victims about Japanese culture to assist them if and when there was a war between North Korea and Japan. The negotiation with the kidnapped victims returning to Japan was complicated when the North Koreans would not allow the Japanese victims to return to Japan with their children for fear that they would not return to Korea afterwards. This negotiation created a firestorm.

Are Japanese-North Korean relations particularly hostile now and do you expect these relations to continue to be hostile indefinitely?

Ken Pyle:

You raise the two important points that the Japanese have, the belief that there are still Japanese citizens who were kidnapped and brought back to North Korea, that they're still there, and that issue has to be solved to Japan's satisfaction before they can really open any kind of relations with the north and of course the nuclear threat and the missiles. And the commitment to the alliance with the US is of critical importance.

Larry Bernstein:

You mentioned the role of having American troops at bases in Japan and in Okinawa. But there are cost and consequences of having troops on Japanese soil. How do you think about whether or not we should maintain those bases from both the Japanese and the American perspective?

Ken Pyle:

The bases in Okinawa in particular are absolutely critical to the future of the balance of power in East Asia. And there can be no question about giving up those bases. And the very sad thing is that the people of Okinawa bear this tremendous burden of having the bases, 75% of the American military personnel on their island, largely because other parts of Japan have said not in my backyard.

Larry Bernstein:

On a previous episode of What Happens Next, Angela Stent a Georgetown Professor in Government, spoke about Russia's relations with its neighbors. And one of our discussions related to the Kuril Islands, which are Japanese islands that were annexed by Russia at the end of World War II. Over time, the Russians have discussed with the Japanese the potential to return the Kuril Islands to Japan, but they never seem to get around to it. And Putin doesn't appear to have any inclination to do so. How do you explain the Russian reticence to end this dispute with Japan?

Ken Pyle:

Japan and Russia have never signed a peace treaty ending World War II. The Japanese will never forget that Stalin came into the war at the very last minute, two days after Hiroshima. The Japanese believed the Southern Kurils are their own islands, but Putin is not going to ever give up those islands in my judgment.

Larry Bernstein:

You're considered one of the great historians of US-Japanese relations. Why is there so little academic interest in Japan here in America?

Ken Pyle:

The focus is overwhelmingly now on our relations with China.

China has a more open universal kind of outlook on the world, which appeals to Americans. Whereas Japan is a very tightly knit country. There are a lot of younger scholars studying Japan today, but the vogue is more Japanese study of gender relations and society and so on. I'm somewhat worried about the younger generation not going into the field of international history and diplomatic and military history.

Larry Bernstein:

I end each session with a note of optimism, what are you optimistic about as it relates to US-Japanese relations?

Ken Pyle:

I'm cautiously optimistic that after our misadventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, that we may finally have learned the lesson that history and culture count. Japan, the occupation mistakenly came to be a model for interventions in other countries, but I'm cautiously optimistic now that we've learned our lesson. And I like to quote an address that John Quincy Adams gave an Independence Day address in 1821. And he said that, "America has abstained from interference and the concerns of others, even when conflict has been for principles to which she clings." And then the famous phrase of his, "She goes not abroad in search of monsters to destroy." In other words, the US would not use military force to intervene abroad.

In the 19th century, we believed that we should be a model. We were going to be as the Puritan ideal, the city on a hill. I'm cautiously optimistic that we will make our nation a model for the world and encourage other nations to follow us, but not intervene militarily as we have done so often in the past century.

I think we need to focus on nation building here at home.

Larry Bernstein:

Ken, thank you very much.

Larry Bernstein:

I would like to bring Barry Posen into the conversation. Barry, what were your thoughts on some of the arguments that Ken gave?

Barry Posen:

Well, it's hard, especially given the arguments that I make, to disagree with his invocation of the need of the United States to understand better the history and cultures of others and to be much more modest about its ability to impose a liberal democracy on others who have not found their way to it themselves. And it's particularly difficult to be the bearer of democracy at the point of a bayonet without arousing those nationalistic impulses that will cause the people we come to visit to reject it. So I'm sympathetic to all that and I'm also sympathetic, as I've heard it many times, to the observation that American Presidents like to invoke the example of the Japanese occupation or the German occupation as an indicator that if we work hard enough and stay long enough, we can somehow create the country we want.

They get away with this in part because Americans don't know much history and the success in these two countries was conditioned on many, many different variables. I wonder maybe if Ken might like to talk a little bit more about the variables that effected the U.S. occupation that may have assisted success, variables that are very, very hard to recreate. I wonder if he has any view on that.

Kenneth Pyle:

Perhaps most important was that pre-war Japan, especially pre-1930s Japan, had a great deal of experience with constitutional government. It didn't have popular sovereignty in the Meiji Constitution of 1889, but it did have a two party system. And in the 1920s, the leader of the majority party in the lower house of the parliament became Prime Minister. So the roots of a Japanese form of democracy were quite strong in the pre-war period and Japan had that to draw on if they had been given an opportunity to reform themselves. And the fact that the military by the end of the war had been totally discredited, if you think of the firebombing and all of the civilian suffering, the military had been totally discredited and would have been inevitably pushed aside in a Japanese form of reform.

And I think we could have compelled Japan to reform quite easily because by the last year of the war the Japanese Navy was totally defeated, and we could have sanctioned Japan without reforming it ourselves. We could have sanctioned Japan because they were in desperate need of trade and aid and investment and technology. And Japan's great weakness, of course, is that it has no resources of its own. So with a negotiated peace, we could have made sure that Japan carried out reforms by itself.

Larry Bernstein:

Ken and I discussed whether or not we should remove our troops from Okinawa and substantially reduce the U.S. military presence in Japan. Ken thought that if we did that, Japan might go nuclear or cut a deal with China. First, do you think Japan would go nuclear? And if so, is that a big problem? And second, do you think that, that would result in Japan making a side deal with China? Or do you think it will result in a more effective containment of Chinese military ambitions as we work together as two partners instead of one subordinate to the other?

Barry Posen:

It's a great question. I don't think many people doubt the material capacity of Japan to become a nuclear weapon state in short order and I don't think many political analysts doubt that there is a sizeable strain of the Japanese foreign policy elite opinion that would support such a policy. So I think that were the United States to disconnect itself militarily from Japan entirely, I think it's quite likely that Japan would become a nuclear weapon state. That said, if the United States were to disconnect itself from Japan militarily entirely, capitulation to China is another possibility. And we don't know what the outlines of such a capitulation would be. People often use the model of Finland, which was a rather small country on Russia's border that had fought the Russians nearly to a standstill in two wars before succumbing to superior numbers, the Finns made a deal with Russia after the war, and that was not to get in the way of Russia's foreign and security policy so long as they were left to have their own liberal democracy internally.

We cannot know what kinds of arrangements Japan could make with China, or what kinds of arrangements China would accept. But it's true, when you live next door to a great power, if you're not prepared to defend yourself and you don't have a strong ally, you're likely to

appease. So we can't really know in advance which of these Japanese strategies is the most likely. I consider nuclearization to be most likely, but I can't tell you that that's what's going to happen.

Larry Bernstein:

Yet in your book Barry you recommended that we remove our troops from Japan and try to encourage them to defend themselves as an equal partner in the Quad to limit Chinese aggression in the South China Sea.

Barry Posen:

I think that the present security relationship with Japan is just awful. I think the Japanese under invest in defense, and what they do invest, they invest poorly. And I think this puts an enormous onus on us to provide not only conventional fighting power, but to be willing to reach for the nuclear weapon early in a conflict or at least to do things that would raise the nuclear risk. So I don't like the way the alliance currently works. The way I interpret this is that the U.S. agrees to defend Japan and Japan agrees to help. That's not an alliance that I believe is sustainable, especially given the growing Chinese power.

We need an alliance where Japan and the United States each for their own national security reasons contribute meaningful amounts of military power to the problem of securing the Pacific, and there are a number of ways to get there. One is for the Americans to be very forthright and activist in bringing about a change and in part to make that change credible. I think the Americans should put some limits on what they do. I don't think the Americans should be afraid to withdraw some troops from some parts of Japan. Personally, I'm surprised at Ken's attitude towards Okinawa, not because Okinawa is not an important and useful military base, but because every American military person on Okinawa is not essential to Okinawa's utility. And this is especially true of the Marines, especially true of the Marine Air Base and the Futenma replacement facility in Okinawa. These are mistakes. I mean, this is a way of poisoning U.S.-Japan relationship, it poisons the alliance, and it achieves nothing militarily. The Marines just don't have a particularly important role in the defense of the first island chain. That role is an air and naval role.

So this is a freebie and I think it might both make the Okinawans a little happier and make the Japanese understand that American forces could come and American forces could go and that we expect to see more cooperation. That's what I would do inside the present grand strategy of the United States of America. Even if we want to maintain this commitment, I think we need to change the way it works. Now, beyond that, I would like to move to a world where other countries are responsible for their own defense, but this is a much bigger conversation about how we arrange what I would think would be the inevitable nuclearization of Japan under those circumstances. And how do you manage that without also causing the Chinese to make big bold moves? So, in the first instance, I believe that we have to reform the present situation and then we can think about something bigger, if that makes sense.