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## Set to Lead, Japan's Next Premier Reconsiders Postwar Era

By NORIMITSU ONISHI  
Published: September 21, 2006

TOKYO, Sept. 20 — After securing the Liberal Democratic Party's presidency on Wednesday, Shinzo Abe will become [Japan's](#) first prime minister born after World War II, with a clear eye toward re-examining the postwar era.



Issei Kato/Reuters

Shinzo Abe has called for revising the Constitution, which bars Japan from having a full military.

He also wants to revise the other legal document of the postwar American occupation, the Fundamental Law of Education, and emphasize moral values, patriotism and tradition in schools.

“By entrusting our national security to another country and putting a priority on economic development, we were indeed able to make great material gains,” Mr. Abe wrote of the postwar era in his campaign book, “Toward a Beautiful Country.” “But what we lost spiritually — that was also great.”

Mr. Abe, who will turn 52 on Thursday, received two-thirds of the votes in the election for the presidency of the Liberal Democratic Party. Because of the party's grip on the lower house of Parliament, which chooses the prime minister, Mr. Abe is now assured of succeeding Prime Minister [Junichiro Koizumi](#) in a parliamentary session on Tuesday.

In a race that was his to lose, Mr. Abe (pronounced AH-bay) avoided specific comments about how he would pursue economic changes or how he would repair Japan's strained relations with [China](#) and [South Korea](#).

Instead, he spoke of revising the [United States](#)-imposed Constitution, which forbids Japan to have a full-fledged

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The emergence of a prime minister with no personal experience of World War II is considered a turning point in Japan, where the absence of a consensus on the war still troubles relations with the rest of Asia.



Considered politically inexperienced, Mr. Abe, who will be the youngest prime minister in postwar Japan, rose to political stardom by talking tough on [North Korea](#), China and national security. In Japan and in the rest of Asia, Mr. Abe is regarded as even more hawkish and conservative than Mr. Koizumi.

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To his supporters, Mr. Abe is a politician unburdened by Japan's past, capable of forging a newly independent and strong path for the nation. To critics, he is a potentially dangerous ideologue ready to jettison the postwar values that have brought stability, peace and wealth to Japan.

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Hakubun Shimomura, a Liberal Democratic lawmaker and an ally of Mr. Abe's, said the next prime minister would "look back objectively at the postwar period, removed from its trauma and able to make choices as part of the postwar generation."

"I think the symbolic start of the independent nation of Japan will be Mr. Abe's revision of the Constitution," Mr. Shimomura said.

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But Shusei Tanaka, a professor at Fukuyama University and a former Liberal Democratic lawmaker, worried that Mr. Abe's greatest influence was from his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, a wartime cabinet member imprisoned as a Class A war crimes suspect but never tried, who became prime minister in 1957. Recently, Mr. Abe has avoided commenting on Japan's wartime past.

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Only five years ago, few would have predicted that Mr. Abe would become prime minister. He was known mainly as the grandson of Mr. Kishi and the son of Shintaro Abe, a former foreign minister, whom the son long served as secretary.

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Mr. Abe took over his father's parliamentary seat in 1993, after Shintaro Abe's death, and became quite popular among voters, earning a reputation as a strong leader by voicing national anger at North Korea's admission in 2002 that it had kidnapped several Japanese citizens in the 1970's and 1980's. Since then, he has kept his hard line against North Korea, and against China. After North Korea launched missiles in July, he suggested that Japan debate whether it should acquire the military capacity for a pre-emptive strike.

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One of Mr. Abe's most pressing problems will be to restore normal relations with China, which has refused to hold high-level talks because of Mr. Koizumi's annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, the Shinto memorial where 14 Class A war criminals are enshrined. The shrine, also a memorial to Japan's 2.5 million war dead, is considered a symbol of Japanese militarism in the rest of Asia.

The visits have worried American politicians that Japan is provoking China, and hurting American interests in the region. Mr. Abe, despite past support of the visits, has said he

would pursue a policy of ambiguity, neither confirming nor denying whether he has visited the shrine.

On wartime history, Mr. Abe has allied himself with Japan's right-wing politicians, news media and scholars. Unlike Mr. Koizumi, he has doubted the validity of the postwar Tokyo trials in which Japan's wartime leaders were condemned.

In the past he has indicated that he rejects the mainstream, postwar view that Japan waged a war of aggression and invasion in Asia. But he has not publicly embraced the hard-line position that Japan waged war in Asia to liberate it from Western imperialism. Unlike Mr. Koizumi and other prime ministers, Mr. Abe, though pressed many times, has avoided endorsing a landmark apology issued in 1995 by the Japanese government to Asian countries.

Japanese hard-liners regard him as a true believer, while they looked askance at Mr. Koizumi for trying to negotiate with North Korea and for proposing to change the Imperial Household Law so that a woman could ascend the throne. While Mr. Koizumi made decisions on his own, dividing people between enemy and ally, Mr. Abe emphasizes harmony.

"People tend to like Mr. Abe's personality," Mr. Shimomura said. Lacking Mr. Koizumi's larger-than-life personality, Mr. Abe has instead cultivated a soft image that has taken the sharp edges off his strong views. Mr. Abe, a teetotaler who is married but has no children, appeared on a talk show to announce that his favorite food was ice cream.

"In his appearance and his way of speaking, he's soft," Mr. Shimomura said. "But in the inside, he's rock solid. He sticks to his principles and won't compromise."

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