Why does the U.S.-Japan security relationship still exist, even after the Soviet threat, which originally initiated this arrangement, has disappeared? To be able to analyse Japan's motives to stay in the alliance, the different parties to the security debate will be defined. The study shows that the arguments presented by the Japanese Government tend to be more realist in their ideology while the opinions of the Japanese public can be classified as mainly idealist or pacifist. To reveal the friction between the political elite and the general public, the study explains what security policies the Japanese Government has implemented after the Cold War, and how the public has reacted to these policies. The study also analyses how the Government has tried to legitimize some unpopular defense policies and whether this process has been sufficient.

The hypothesis is that some of the original reasons to enter the alliance after the Second World War still exist and motivate Japan to stay in the alliance. The results show that the Japanese Government has decided for Japan to stay in the alliance because the security environment surrounding Japan is still seen as a threat to national security. By maintaining the alliance, Japan can balance mainly against the regional power of China. In addition to balancing against power alone, Japan also balances against threats posed by both China and North Korea. Balancing against treats rather than power alone, is one of the key hypotheses of Stephen M. Walt whose theories have guided the structure of this study. The results also show that the Government has not paid enough attention to the public opinion, which has caused problems in legitimizing its defense policies. After the Government has implemented an unpopular policy, the public has usually reacted negatively to it after which the Government has tried to justify its decisions. In the post-Cold War era, the Government needs to clarify its intentions to the public and promote transparency in its defense policies. To avoid potential legitimacy crises, an extensive public discussion about Japan's international role is also needed.