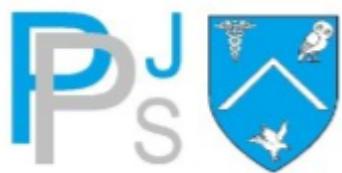


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Japan's Role in Security of The Asia-Pacific Region

Abstract

This paper examines Japan's present and future international security role in the light of changes affecting the Asia-Pacific Region. Japan always had a major impact on this region despite of its post-World War II uncomfortable geopolitical position. In this paper the author concludes that Japan is now more favorably disposed to play a "comprehensive international role" in the field of regional security. Tokyo seems to be eager to go on with security co-operation with Washington D.C., however at the same time gradually increasing self-responsibility for its defense and the security of its surrounding environment. Although Japan with no doubt has its strategic interests in Asia-Pacific, nowadays it is likely to play more than only a supportive role in this region. From the political point of view, the author tries to prove, that Japan is well prepared to play a role of regional stabilizer, but to do this Japan requires to choose carefully its independent path without undermining strategic relations with the United States.

Keywords: *Japan, United States, defense, security, international relations.*

Introduction

Japan's international position in geopolitical world had been always attracting attention since its great victories over Qing's China (1894-1895) and Tsar's Russia (1904-1905). After its "national seclusion" period in Tokugawa Era (1603-1868) the Japanese made such fast progress in every field, that nobody has expected during first decades of re-opening its borders to the outside world, especially for the occidental powers. Before and after World War I Japan had already confirmed its position as a regional power with more ambitious plans... After surrounding to the Allies in 1945 Japan has become an occupied state with newly introduced constitution, in which it is forbidden to maintain the army and thus, practically, not to play any significant role in even regional security system. It was obvious, that Japan will not participate in shaping military security even on its own territory. But soon when the Cold War broke down, it became natural that country with such industrial and economic potential should play more comprehensive role in the regional security system.

However, the details of Japan's post-war security role in the said region still remains the subject of intense debate among the international community and of course in Japan itself. Although Japan is now politically and economically independent state with its top scientific and technological potential, the burden of lost Pacific War (1937-1945) is still, for some states, overshadowing its non-aggressive image. After the fall of the Berlin Wall (1990), which symbolized the end of the Cold War, an increasing number of Japanese top politicians seems to adopt very quickly to new conditions. On the other hand, Japanese society expresses great uncertainty to new geopolitical situation.

In 1992, it was great responsibility for all Japanese cabinets facing both, internal and external, critical reactions on dispatching Japanese Self Defense

Forces (JSDF) abroad for the first time after World War Two. As Muthiah Algappa mentioned: "Post-World War II Japan's international orientation has been governed by three main factors: impressive economic growth (...); the U.S. connection; and a pacifist tendency with an apolitical orientation arising from the negative reaction in Japan to its experiences in the Pacific war."

Despite on above, it seems that Japanese government plays with the diversity of many opinions using the lack of consensus as an excuse to maintain its military profile for self-defense. The limitations of using troops included in Article 9 of post-war Constitution of Japan still determines the politicians to deal with tight security collaboration with the United States as the only way to survive in not friendly entourage. Paradoxically, it gives Japan green light for focusing on other measures (mainly economic) to maintain the stability in Asia-Pacific Region.

Breaking up with pacifism?

Until the end of 20th century Japan's security policy can be described as rather passive. Still relying on U.S. security alliance Japan could concentrate on soft-power measures, such as development assistance, direct and indirect foreign investments, cultural promotion. Taking into consideration significant changes in the Asia-Pacific Region, which took place after Cold War, Japan has undertaken steps to redefine its security policy. In new reality, aspiring to take over the role of regional leader, Japanese authorities are exposed to new type of threats – growing economic and military power of China, nuclear threat of North Korea and nowadays even "active" foreign policy of Russia.

December 2013 marked an important turning point in Japan's evolving security and defense policies. While the debate about Japan's so-called security 'normalisation' has been going on now for more than a decade, by releasing three national security-related documents the conservative

government led by Shinzo Abe since 2012 has dissipated any doubts that may still linger regarding the ‘why, what and how’ of Japan’s national security. The Abe administration adopted the first ever National Security Strategy (NSS) of Japan – together with the country’s new national security doctrine, namely the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), as well as the Mid-Term Defense Program for 2014-2019. The last two documents replace the 2010 NDPG and the Mid-Term Defense Program adopted by the previous, centre-left government of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Centred on a policy of ‘proactive contribution to peace’, the NSS sets out the main guidelines for Japan’s national security for the next decade, including for the areas of sea, outer space and energy. It also seeks to promote, both domestically and internationally, a better understanding of the country’s strategic objectives and responses.

Japan’s national security policy is driven, first of all, by a strong perception of a shifting balance of power at the global level since the start of the twenty-first century. In this regard, the documents make reference to the emerging countries, especially to China’s increasing international presence, as well as to the changing relative influence of the US. Specific threats to Japan’s security at the global level include international terrorism as well as the threats stemming from the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery, such as ballistic missiles (BM). The Abe administration further underscores the problems related to maintaining ‘open and stable seas’, which include piracy, maritime disasters and, generally, the safety of sea lanes of communication (SLOCs). What stands out here, in particular, is the reference to the growing risk of incidents at sea, not least as a result of competition between states over natural resources and unresolved sovereignty issues. Specifically, the South China Sea disputes are provided as an example in the NSS.

At regional level, in the Asia-Pacific, the shifting balance of power is said to give rise to regional tensions. Northeast Asia is singled out as an Asian subregion with a large concentration of military power and where countries have diverse security views (as well as different political systems). There is also an explicit concern about escalation of the so-called 'grey zone' disputes over territorial sovereignty and interests – which, in Japan's view, further complicates the Asia-Pacific strategic environment.

Shinzo Abe as a participant of 13th Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapour, describing changes in security environment in 21st Century, stated that the Asia Pacific Region has experienced huge development changes merely in one generation. Unfortunately, significant part of this growth is spent for military purposes and arms' dealing. However, the ASEAN members are increasing their defense budgets and modernizing their armed forces as a challenge for rising regional power – Peoples' Republic of China. Also the US allies in the Far East – Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, do not remain calm and are adjusting their budgets to new challenges in the field of national security.

Specific regional security challenges to Japan's national security discussed in the NSS and the NDPG are not new, and include North Korea's Ballistic Missile (BM) and nuclear developments as well as China's military modernisation and its intensified activities in the seas and airspace around Japan. However, it is the increasing concern about maintaining the rule of law at sea that appears to be of primary importance for the Abe administration. The perception that Beijing is attempting to unilaterally change the *status quo* 'by coercion', disregarding international law and infringing upon the freedom of navigation, refers to Japan's dispute with China over the Senkaku (Diayou) Islands in the East China Sea. The Abe government sees China's overall behaviour as an 'issue of concern for the international community, including

Japan'⁴⁵. The overall conclusion, therefore, is that the security environment surrounding Japan 'is becoming increasingly tense'.

The core principles of Japan's national security, as introduced in the post-war years, are said to remain unchanged. These include maintaining an exclusively defense-oriented policy, not becoming a military power that poses a threat to other countries, and adhering to the three non-nuclear principles of not possessing, not producing and not introducing nuclear weapons in the country. The main message that the Abe administration seeks to send is one of continuity: Japan remains 'a peace-loving nation'⁴⁶.

Based on this new national security principle and in line with its long-standing policy of international cooperation, Japan is expected to become a 'proactive contributor to peace'. The country's contribution to international security has been made primarily in the framework of the UN, including in humanitarian relief missions and peacekeeping operations. Japan has a self-imposed ban on exercising its right to collective self-defense based on the interpretation of Article 9 (also known as the 'peace clause') of its 1947 post-war Constitution.

As Abe has prioritised constitutional revision in order to allow Japan to enter into collective self-defense arrangements, the shift in the NSS towards proactive pacifism seeks to open up the way for Abe to move forward on this policy initiative. This shift has alarmed some of Japan's neighbours, notably China and South Korea. As both countries suffered under Japan's imperial rule in Asia in the first half of the twentieth century, they now warily watch Abe's every step aimed at expanding Japan's security role. The justification for Tokyo's move towards security activism, as discussed in the NSS, includes the

⁴⁵ E. Atassanova-Cornelis, *Japan's New Approach to National Security*, in: *Brief Issue of EU Institute of Security Studies*, January 2014

⁴⁶ Precisely, it is the content – namely the shift in the NSS from the 'one-country pacifism' to 'proactive pacifism' – that suggests new security aspirations. In: *Mid-term National Defense Program for 2014-2019*

‘severe’ security environment that Japan faces and the Abe administration’s belief that the international community expects the country to become an active contributor to international peace. Furthermore, the successful pursuit of Tokyo’s national interests – such as maintaining sovereignty and achieving prosperity – is seen to be directly linked to the country’s efforts in the area of international cooperation. In line with this thinking, Abe’s national security objectives stress – in addition to deterring threats from reaching Japan (national level) and improving the regional security situation in the Asia-Pacific (regional level) – Tokyo’s role in global security and in building a stable international community (global level).⁴⁷

Japan’s capabilities and roles

Although the NSS mentions the strengthening of Japan’s diplomatic creativity and its ‘soft’ (or non-military) power as well as its role in international organisations, the weight of this strategic approach appears to be placed on enhancing the country’s military capabilities, namely its ‘hard’ power. The document introduces the ‘highly effective and joint defense force’ concept, which emphasises collaborative operations among the three branches of the Self-defense Forces (SDF), i.e. Ground, Maritime and Air SDF. This new ‘dynamic joint defense force’ will be equipped with advanced technology and able to deter diverse threats, as well as respond in a swift and integrated manner to various contingencies. These can include, for example, a potential occupation by enemy forces of a remote island. Such a scenario has arguably been considered by the Abe government: in April 2013 it adopted a five-year blueprint for protecting the nation’s maritime interests, partly as a response to Chinese claims in the East China Sea. In this regard, the NSS mentions that

⁴⁷ Japan’s strategic approaches to national security may be divided into three major groups: strengthening Japan’s own capabilities and roles; enhancing the US-Japan alliance; and cooperating for global peace and stability. The strategic thinking of the Abe administration reveals a comprehensive picture of diplomatic and defense policies as well as the utilisation of diverse resources designed to address challenges at the three levels mentioned above – the national, the regional and the global.

Japan will protect and develop remote islands near national borders as well as examine 'the situation of land ownership' in such areas.

The maritime dimension of Japan's national interests is underscored and well reflected in the nature of the capabilities to be enhanced and the specific contingencies to be tackled. The former include, for example, capabilities for maritime surveillance and law enforcement as well as the SDF development of 'full amphibious' capability that would be necessary – in the Abe administration's view – for the potential recapturing of an occupied island. Primary contingencies include ensuring the safety of sea and airspace surrounding Japan and responding to offshore island invasion, along with responses to BM attacks and threats in cyberspace. The NSS and the NDPG express Japan's determination to 'fully protect its territories' and 'not to tolerate any change in the status quo by coercion', thereby sending a quite unequivocal signal to China. The defense of the Nansei islands in Southwestern Japan, in particular, will be strengthened. To this end, 52 amphibious vehicles and 17 Osprey transport aircraft will be introduced, which will seek to provide the SDF with landing capabilities comparable to those of the US Marine Corps. Furthermore, the NSS calls on Tokyo to play a leading role in maintaining and developing 'open and stable seas', especially by seeking to ensure the safety of SLOCs.

Other capabilities that are to be strengthened include, among others, information-gathering and intelligence analysis as well as satellite manufacturing and dual-use technologies. The NSS further underscores Japan's participation in joint development and production of defense-related equipment, as well as its exports of weapons and military technology. By lifting restrictions on weapons exports and engaging in joint manufacturing of arms, it is hoped that Tokyo will enhance the international competitiveness of its defense industry.

The strengthening of Japan's defense capabilities goes hand in hand with changes in military spending. The current fiscal year, which started in April 2013, has marked an increase of 0.8 % from 2012 and the first increase in defense spending after 10 consecutive years of decline. Military spending is projected to rise by more than 2.5% (to A4.81 trillion) in FY 2014. In 2010, the DPJ-led administration earmarked A23.5 trillion (US\$227 billion) for the 2011-2016 five-year defense program. For its part, the Abe administration's Mid-term Defense Program for 2014-2019 projects a five-year defense spending of A24.7 trillion (US\$240 billion). This will constitute a 5% increase to the military budget over five years.

The US-Japan Alliance

In line with previous policies, the Abe administration sees the alliance with the US – based on common strategic interests and universal values – as 'the cornerstone of Japan's security', also playing an indispensable role in fostering peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific. The NSS calls for enhancing the effectiveness of the bilateral security arrangements, for instance by revising the Guidelines for Japan-US defense Cooperation and strengthening bilateral ties in the areas of Ballistic Missile defense and maritime affairs. However, the 'hidden' message that the NSS seems to send is one of strategic uncertainty. This concerns the sustainability of the US commitments to Asian-Pacific security against the background of America's tight fiscal and economic situation and, especially, China's rise. Japan, therefore, appears to emphasise the strengthening of its own defense and deterrence capabilities as the best way of responding to a 'severe' regional environment while maintaining its alliance with the US.

Security Cooperation with ASEAN

Special attention in the NSS is also given to Tokyo's role in promoting multilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific, including in the framework of ASEAN+3, as well as trilateral dialogues, such as the Japan-China-Korea grouping. Concerning China, Abe's thinking is dominated by the long-standing Japanese objectives of encouraging Beijing to 'adhere to international norms of behaviour' and enhance its 'transparency' in military affairs. While constructing a 'mutually beneficial relationship' with China is the long-term goal, urging the PRC 'to exercise self-restraint' appears to be an urgent priority for Abe, indeed, reflecting Japan's concern about Chinese behavior in territorial disputes in the Asia-Pacific.

Other initiatives that Japan is expected to pursue largely represent continuity of previous policies. These range from contributing to UN peacekeeping operations and the international disarmament efforts, to promoting the rule of law and the free trade system, as well as the strategic use of foreign aid. Abe's policy approaches at the global level thus appear to emphasise Japan's 'soft' power, which stands in contrast with the focus on 'hard' power envisaged for Japan to deal with regional challenges in Asia.

In fact, the path that Japan has followed over the last 70 years is nothing short of extraordinary. After the war, Japan reinvented itself as a peaceful nation by going through a remarkable democratization and by promulgating a new constitution that included the famous Article 9 "peace clause." Japan built an egalitarian society, achieved rapid economic recovery to become the second largest economy in the world in less than 25 years, utilized its wealth to establish itself as a leader in technological innovation, and became one of the world's leading providers of official development assistance—all the while never firing a single bullet. Japan's peaceful identity and its contributions to global public goods have been recognized around the world, as evinced by its positive image in global opinion polls.

Abe's NSS is significant not because of the shifts it appears to introduce, but because it provides a clarification regarding Japan's path towards 'proactive pacifism' – a tangible trend in Japan's security policy since the start of the century. It now seems quite clear that, for Japan, there is no turning back...

Looking forward, Japan must make clear to the world that it is continuing to face up to its wartime conduct; that it recognizes the pivotal role of US support, which enabled Japan to reinvent itself; and that, based on its proud record over the past 70 years, it will continue to work for the peace and prosperity of the region in the future.

The Issue of Article 9

The domestic debate on Article 9 revision and the need for more international contributions, too, has been a major characteristic of the security debate in Japan in the past decade. What seems to be new is the (implicit) emphasis placed on Japan's own efforts, rather than on its alliance with the US, for responding to the changing security environment.

To best position itself for future regional cooperation, the Japanese government must pay more attention to how its foreign policy is perceived among its neighbors. Most critically, it must clarify where it is moving with the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the constitution, which it is undertaking in order to allow the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to engage in collective self-defense. While the contemporary security environment makes it important to move forward with a common-sense reinterpretation of Article 9 that will allow limited forms of collective self-defense, more rigorous explanation is required

to demonstrate that the reinterpretation set out in the cabinet's July 2014 decision will maintain the constitution's original spirit.

The Abe cabinet's reinterpretation names three new conditions for the use of force beyond cases where the Japanese homeland is under attack: "When an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan . . . threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn the [Japanese] people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness"; when there are "no other means to repel the attack"; and when the use of force is limited "to the minimum extent necessary."

These conditions appear restrictive, but since they do not come with any geographical limits, there is significant potential to push the envelope toward a more expansive interpretation. For instance, the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) could theoretically be interpreted as posing a threat to the Japanese people's constitutional right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Some may argue that this would open the door for the SDF to participate in coalition air strikes against ISIL in Syria and Iraq, a scenario that goes well beyond the spirit of the constitution.

Thus, conservatives argue that Japan cannot isolate itself from the global phenomenon of terrorism and must be prepared to use the SDF to safeguard Japanese interests. While there are merits to both arguments, Japan's national security policy must be determined in a calm and rational manner. The danger now is that Japan's security policy and postwar identity may be shifted by a wave of emotional nationalism following these tragic deaths. In shaping new policy, a careful balance must be maintained between clarifying the legitimate roles of the SDF and maintaining Japan's identity as a pacifist nation.

Building Long-Term Cooperation with China

China is a rising star on the global stage, having achieved unprecedentedly rapid economic growth, hosting key international events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2014 APEC Summit. From Japan's perspective, there is a risk that Chinese leaders might, for the sake of short-term domestic political gains, choose to escalate anti-Japan rhetoric, further politicize history, move unilaterally in the East and South China Seas, and pursue their version of a "new model of great power relations" with the US in a way that marginalizes Japan.

The meeting between Prime Minister Abe and Chinese President Xi Jinping at the APEC Summit was an important first step in repairing Japan-China relations, but further follow-through is needed. To this end, both countries need long-term, win-win strategies to deepen regional cooperation. China's continued portrayals of Japan as a present-day adversary undermine the long-term peace and prosperity of both China and the region by damaging not only Japan-China trade and investment relations but also, and more critically, the requisite regional stability needed for high-level regional cooperation aimed at managing the shifting balance of power and deepening regional economic integration.

Indeed, the need for investment in infrastructure in emerging and developing economies across the region is huge. But the manner in which China announced the establishment of the bank without prior consultations with other countries leaves uncertainty as to whether it will uphold international labor, environmental, and good governance standards, as well as concerns about equitable representation for all member nations. Japan, South Korea, the United States, the EU.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ H. Tanaka, Bolstering East Asian Cooperation 70 Years On, in: East Asia Insights, Feb. 2015

Repairing Japan–South Korea Relations

Japan-ROK relations have been frosty over the last few years, and Prime Minister Abe and President Park Geun-hye have yet to meet bilaterally despite both being in office for two years. The primary issue that is blocking not only a leaders' meeting but also bilateral cooperation on other fronts is the 'comfort women issue'. It is right for Japan to express its sincere apologies and remorse for the treatment of the comfort women, such as through the 1993 Kono Statement and the efforts of the Asian Women's Fund. But Seoul's preconditions, which essentially assume that Japan should do more unilaterally to resolve the issue despite the need for strong leadership from both sides, have been disappointing. In order to realize a mutually acceptable resolution, Japan and South Korea must enhance bilateral communication channels at all levels of government and find a way to work together.

As the two most economically advanced East Asian democracies, Japan and South Korea share overlapping strategic interests. They both have a stake in coordinating joint contingency planning vis-à-vis North Korea, promoting a regional order based on liberal free market principles and open regionalism, and negotiating free trade pacts such as the China-Japan-ROK Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership with the ASEAN+6 countries. There is no time to waste in resolving the comfort women issue, but at the same time, discussions on critical shared interests cannot be postponed as a diplomatic bargaining chip. It is time for Japan and South Korea to reestablish a mindset of being regional partners with shared democratic values and an atmosphere that encourages collaborative work.

Solidifying US Engagement in Asia

While the US-Japan alliance remains strong 70 years after the war, a number of thorny issues must be tackled to ensure it remains a bedrock for regional stability. Two issues in particular that have the potential to damage alliance confidence if not properly managed are the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations and the Okinawa military base issue. With regard to the first issue, early agreement on the TPP is imperative not only for the further liberalization of markets but also because the TPP has the potential to be utilized as a vehicle to deepen cross-Pacific economic integration and establish rules needed for 21st-century economic relations.

However, the bigger issue at hand is the broader strategic context of how the US forward deployment can meet US objectives and the needs of the US-Japan alliance. The question of whether the concentration of bases in Okinawa might be gradually reduced needs to be periodically reviewed within the context of the overall American forward deployment throughout the region, advances in military technologies, the evolving roles and functions of the SDF, and the expanding military cooperation between the United States and other regional partners such as Australia, India, the Philippines, and Vietnam.

The United States has repeatedly insisted that it is committed to remaining deeply engaged in Asia, but doubts still persist around the region among those who have seen Washington's involvement ebb and flow over the years. Given the growing importance of the region, what is needed is a shift in the United States toward a mindset in which it feels comfortable viewing itself as a "resident political power" in East Asia. One way in which the United States could move toward that goal is by spearheading the establishment of a four-party China-Japan-ROK-US confidence-building mechanism. The US alliances with Japan and South Korea and the growing strategic weight of the US-China relationship place the United States in the best position to take the

lead in creating such a mechanism. It is an urgent task, given the need to manage the shifting balance of power in the region, not to mention the serious risk of accidental conflict if US-Japan and US-ROK joint military exercises are misinterpreted by China's increasingly active navy. A good first step would be to establish standardized protocols and permanent emergency hotlines to deal with any potential crises in the most efficient manner.

A Systematic Approach towards Security Policy

The Abe administration initiated a systematic approach towards national security policy, creating a mechanism to plan and execute it and developing a comprehensive strategy for it. The administration established the National Security Council (NSC) and its staff, National Security Secretariat, located at the Prime Minister's Office in December 2013. The core of the NSC is the four ministers meeting consisting of the prime minister, the foreign and defense ministers, and the chief cabinet secretary, who meet regularly. The four ministers meeting is expected to serve as a control tower for foreign and defense policy related to national security, while larger meetings conduct discussions in a wider context.

The Abe administration announced the first NSS in Japanese history on December 17, 2013. The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG 2013) for fiscal year 2014 and beyond and the Mid-term Defense Program (MTDP) for fiscal years 2014-2018 were released on the same day based on the NSS, covering a broader context encompassing the defense strategy. A defense strategy and policies to implement it fit into the wider NSS context. In the case of the United States, a national security strategy is issued at the presidential level, which leads to a national defense strategy at the level of the secretary of defense, following which the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff develops a national military strategy. This, in turn, sets the strategic context for

subordinate strategies such as those of service chiefs (army, navy, air force, marines) and unified commanders (Pacific Command, etc.). This change in the process of developing defense strategy and policy will ensure that they are consonant with all other aspects of Japan's security strategy such as those on diplomacy, commerce, and trade, while fitting precisely into a broader picture of NSS. The establishment of the NSC and a permanent staff for it reinforces the planning and execution of strategy in a comprehensive manner.

When Japan moves in the direction dictated by the new NSS as a "proactive contributor to peace," deliberations on constitutional restraints become more important. As the Cold War East-West confrontation disappeared, a cooperative approach towards international security became much more feasible. International peace activities, as UN PKO, have become more frequent—more common than traditional peacekeeping following the termination of armed conflict that includes "peace-building" operations.

Since 1992 when Japan sent its first peacekeepers to Cambodia, it has actively participated in international peace operations. The JSDF contingents in Cambodia in 1992 worked together with Korean peacekeepers in Timor le Este in 2002-2004 for reconstruction of the two countries. During the PKO in Cambodia in 1992-1993, in which Chinese and Japanese peacekeepers worked together, the Chinese contingents suffered from a mortar attack resulting in two fatalities and some dozen wounded. In the South Sudan there have been fatalities, including Indian peacekeepers, while Japanese have been safe. While UN PKOs are not intended for combat, they are not conducted under perfectly safe conditions. There may be cases where the Japanese contingent needs the assistance of the armed forces of other countries as well as where it is needed to assist units from other countries. In the worst case scenario, the Japanese contingent would be asked to protect other peacekeepers and not be able to do so due to constitutional restraints. If this meant intentional failure to save fellow peacekeepers from Asian countries such as Korea and China, it could

result in another history issue lasting for a number of decades ahead. Restraining from exercising the right of collective defense is obviously not sufficient to show Japan's determination to be a peace-loving nation.

Which Way Now? - Conclusion

Japan's choices are: to strengthen the alliance with the United States in order to assure its commitment to the region; and to build constructive relations with China through engagement while hedging to avoid a situation where Japan has to consider China as a hostile entity. For the alliance, it is important to revise the "Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation." The first guidelines, adopted in 1978, described operational cooperation between US forces and the SDF and were revised in 1997 to adapt the alliance to the post-Cold War environment. The ongoing efforts to revise the guidelines should be extended to include the bilateral response to "gray-zone" situations as well as bilateral cooperation for other peacetime activities such as counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations, and to deal with issues related to new domains such as the open seas, outer space, and cyberspace.⁴⁹

Japan's own defense buildup is also important in the context of the Japan-US alliance because it shows the determination to take responsibility as an ally. In parallel to this effort, Japan must be keen about taking measures to reconstruct the legal basis for security that will strengthen the alliance, such as those for the protection of US naval vessels on the open seas and the interception of ballistic missiles that might be on their way to the United States. The two governments are currently working on the new "Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation," which will provide the two with a golden opportunity to coordinate their respective security policies and to share threat perceptions and security priorities.

⁴⁹ N. Yamaguchi, *Evolution of Japan's National Security Policy under the Abe Administration*, in: The Asian Forum, Jan.-Feb. 2015

Aware of the importance of building and maintaining good relations with Japan's neighbors, the Abe administration has been active diplomatically and successful in improving ties with many countries, notably the members of ASEAN. It remains an urgent task to rebuild constructive relations with Korea and China. For this reason, Japan will construct future-oriented and multilayered relations and strengthen the foundation for security cooperation – a key framework in realizing peace and stability in Asia-Pacific region.

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