

BACKGROUND

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Japanese Defense Reform Supports Allied Security Objectives

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Abstract

Japan's new defense reform legislation enables the country to play a more comprehensive global security role commensurate with its capabilities, resources, national interests, and international responsibilities. The changes, although extremely minimalist compared with what even smaller nations can do, are highly controversial with some Japanese voters who prefer the comfortable status quo of relying on other nations to defend Japanese interests overseas. China and South Korea mischaracterized these security changes as dangerous and indicative of an innate Japanese desire to resume a 1930s-style militaristic imperialism. The United States should strongly support Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's initiatives and counter misportrayals of Japan's new security posture.

In September 2015, Japan passed defense reform legislation that enables it to play a more comprehensive role in responding to global security challenges. Japan's reforms replace archaic restrictions on its forces that precluded Tokyo from assuming a role commensurate with its capabilities, resources, national interests, and international responsibilities. The legislation also allows implementation of the new U.S. and Japan alliance guidelines agreed to during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's April 2015 trip to the United States.

These changes, long overdue and promised by successive Japanese administrations, augment allied deterrence and defense capabilities against threats to Japan as well as to peace and stability in Asia. The reforms also allow Japan to make more meaningful contributions to multinational peacekeeping operations worldwide.

The changes, although extremely minimalist compared with what even smaller nations can do when supporting United Nations peace-

KEY POINTS

- Japan's new defense reform legislation enables the country to play a more comprehensive global security role commensurate with its capabilities, resources, national interests, and international responsibilities.
- Escalating security threats have added greater impetus to Japan removing some of its self-imposed, outdated constraints on the use of military force.
- Despite domestic protests and strong regional reaction, Japan's defense reform legislation is actually modest, incremental, and consistent with Japan's slowly evolving defense posture.
- China and South Korea have mischaracterized these security changes as dangerous and indicative of an innate Japanese desire to resume a 1930s-style militaristic imperialism, but for the past 70 years, Japan has followed a responsible, restrained, and purely defensive security posture.
- The United States should strongly support Prime Minister Abe's initiatives—including Japan exercising collective self-defense—and counter mischaracterizations of Japan's new security posture.

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keeping operations, are highly controversial within Japanese society and with some of Japan's neighbors. There was strong domestic opposition to altering Japan's comfortable status quo of relying on other nations to defend Japanese interests overseas.

China and South Korea characteristically depicted these changes as dangerous and indicative of an innate Japanese desire to resume a 1930s-style militaristic imperialism. In reality, growing security threats from North Korea and China have primarily driven these defense reforms. Japan will remain closely integrated with U.S. forces in any Asian security operation and will continue to play only a supporting logistical role in overseas operations.

The United States should strongly support Prime Minister Abe's initiatives and counter mischaracterizations of Japan's new security posture. Washington should also maintain robust forward-deployed U.S. forces in the Pacific—something the U.S.–Japan alliance is critical to facilitating—and reverse devastating cuts to the defense budget during the past five years.

Japan's Constrained Security Posture

The United States has long urged its allies to assume more responsibility for their own defense and to confront common security threats by increasing their defense expenditures and accepting new missions. Few allies have done so.

Japan was further constrained by unique circumstances. At the conclusion of World War II, Japan's military power was limited to prevent a resurgence of militarism. These limitations were a combination of constitutional and legal constraints, self-imposed restrictions on defense spending and security roles, and the postwar pacifist views of the populace.

Over time, Japan's security posture and what its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are permitted to do have

evolved, albeit at a glacial pace. Tokyo has reinterpreted its constitution several times to gradually loosen the restrictions on the SDF in response to changes in its security environment.

Collective Self-Defense

Perhaps the greatest constraint on Japan assuming a larger security role was its determination to not exercise its right to collective self-defense, which enables a nation to regard the attack on another nation as an attack on its own territory, even if it itself is not directly attacked. The U.N. Charter stipulates that nothing "shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations."¹

Tokyo's long-standing position² has been that it "inherently possesses the right of collective self-defense under international law, but the exercise of the right of self-defense as allowed under Article 9 of the Constitution is limited to what is minimum and necessary to defend the country, and exercise of the right of collective self-defense exceeds that range."³

In 2007, during his first term as prime minister, Abe appointed a commission of outside experts to determine whether Japan should adopt a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense. The advisory panel concluded that Japan's national security policies should evolve to "respond both to the changing threat environment as well as [Japan's] enhanced position in the international community." The commission delineated four scenarios in which Japan should adopt a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense:

1. Defending U.S. naval ships from attack in international waters while those ships are protecting Japan;
2. Intercepting ballistic missiles targeting the United States and U.S. bases in the Pacific theater;

1. Charter of the United Nations, art. 51, <http://www.un.org/en/charter-united-nations/index.html> (accessed December 3, 2015).

2. Article 9 of Japan's postwar constitution stipulates: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international dispute. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." The Constitution of Japan, art. 9, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html (accessed December 3, 2015).

3. The Japanese government position expressed on October 14, 1972, quoted in Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, "Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security," June 24, 2008, p. 6, http://craigxmartin.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/Yanai_Report.pdf (accessed December 3, 2015).

3. Allowing Ground Self-Defense Forces to use their weapons to respond to attacks on allied forces during peacekeeping operations; and
4. Providing logistical support to foreign forces during peacekeeping operations.⁴

The panel's findings were not implemented. When Abe returned as prime minister in 2012, he reappointed the panel and directed it to adopt an even more expansive review of possible collective self-defensive scenarios.⁵ The panel presented its findings in May 2014. After negotiations within the ruling coalition, the Abe cabinet approved a less restrictive interpretation of exercising collective self-defense. After extensive debate, the Diet passed the security legislation in September 2015.

Drivers of Japanese Defense Reform

Several factors have driven the changes in Japanese self-defense.

Deteriorating Security Environment. Escalating security threats have added greater impetus to Japan removing some of its self-imposed constraints on the use of military force. The Abe Administration highlighted the “fundamental transformation of the security environment surrounding Japan [including] the shift in the global power balance, rapid progress of technological innovation, development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction/ballistic missiles, international terrorism.”⁶

North Korea's growing arsenal of nuclear weapons and missiles is a direct threat to Japan. Successful launches of North Korean long-range missiles have underscored Japan's vulnerability and spurred acquisition of missile defense systems.

China's double-digit annual defense budget increases, expansion of its military forces, and increased political and military assertiveness in the East and South China Seas snapped Japan out of its usual complacency. Japan's 2013 National Defense Program Guidelines explained, “China has intruded into Japanese territorial waters, frequently violated Japan's airspace, and has engaged in dangerous activities that could cause unexpected situations.”⁷

Escalating security threats have added greater impetus to Japan removing some of its self-imposed constraints on the use of military force.

Increasingly, Tokyo has also seen the need to defend its national interests overseas. The National Security Strategy articulated that “risks that can impede the utilization of and free access to global commons (such as sea and cyberspace) have been spreading and becoming more serious.”⁸ For example, since Japan is so dependent on the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf, the mining of the Strait of Hormuz could be deemed a threat to the nation.

Ineffective Defense Policy. Japan faced criticism for its “checkbook diplomacy” during the 1991 Persian Gulf War. The international community expects Japan to play a more proactive role for peace and stability in the world.

Japan's minimalist security policy was outdated in today's security environment. Concepts such as “rear area” were no longer valid in light of North Korea's growing nuclear and missile capabilities and

4. Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, “Report,” p. 14.

5. The Japanese government has identified numerous scenarios in which its military cannot act: foreign ship on remote Japanese island, Japan commercial ships under attack, U.S. ships on ballistic missile alert, foreign submarines in Japanese territorial waters, logistical support for U.N. peacekeepers, militia attack on nongovernmental organization or peacekeepers, using force to accomplish mission, rescue of Japanese hostages, helping U.S. ships carrying Japanese nationals, U.S. ships under attack near Japan, forcible inspection of ships, U.S.-aimed ballistic missile interception, U.S. counterattack near Japan, international minesweeping operations, and international naval protection of commercial ships. Tokio Sekiguchi, “16 Scenarios Where Japan's Military Can't Act,” *The Wall Street Journal*, May 28, 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2014/05/28/16-scenarios-where-japans-military-cant-act/> (accessed December 3, 2015).

6. Government of Japan, “Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security,” May 2015, http://www.au.emb-japan.go.jp/pdf/japan's_legislation_for_peace_and_security.pdf (accessed December 4, 2015).

7. Japanese Ministry of Defense, “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond,” December 17, 2013, p. 3, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e2.pdf (accessed December 3, 2015).

8. Government of Japan, “National Security Strategy of Japan,” December 17, 2013, p. 20, http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryu/131217anzenhoshou/pamphlet_en.pdf (accessed December 3, 2015).

Japan's Evolving Security Posture

1947. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, the “Peace Clause,” renounces “use of force as means of settling international disputes.”

1950. General Douglas MacArthur orders formation of a 75,000-officer Japanese National Police Reserve manned by former army officers and outfitted with U.S. Army equipment, including tanks. It is subsequently renamed the Safety Agency.*

1951. U.S.–Japan Security Treaty is signed.

1954. The Safety Agency is renamed the Defense Agency, which is made up of Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces (SDF).

1960. United States and Japan sign the Revised Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.

1978. First U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines enacted.

1981. Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki becomes the first Japanese leader to describe Japan’s relationship with the United States as an “alliance,” sparking protests and eventually leading to the resignation of the foreign minister.†

1992. Japan enacts the U.N. Peacekeeping Activities Cooperation Law and begins deploying SDF on U.N. missions.

1997. U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines are revised to allow Tokyo to provide logistical support to U.S. forces in areas surrounding Japan even if Japan is not attacked.

2004. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi appoints an advisory panel, which recommended reviewing overly restrictive rules of engagement for SDF deployed for peacekeeping operations and to promote debate on collective self-defense.

2005. Japan’s National Defense Program Guidelines refocus Japanese security posture away from static Cold War defense of Hokkaido to protecting Japan’s southwest islands from Chinese incursions and engaging actively in international peacekeeping operations.

2007. Japanese Defense Agency is upgraded to Ministry of Defense.

2014. Cabinet decides that Japan will exercise collective self-defense by adopting a less restrictive interpretation of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution.

2015. U.S.–Japan Defense Guidelines are revised, and the Diet approves Japanese defense reform legislation.

* James E. Auer, “Japan’s Defense Policy: Closer to Proactive Reality,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, August 12, 2014, <http://csis.org/publication/japan-chair-platform-japans-defense-policy-closer-proactive-reality> (accessed December 3, 2015).

† Tomohito Shinoda, *Leading Japan: The Role of the Prime Minister* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000), p. 114.

newly developing issues such as cyberwarfare and the militarization of space.

Prior to the 2015 defense reforms, Tokyo had limited itself to providing logistical support only to U.S. forces in rear areas during emergencies on the Kore-

an Peninsula. Tokyo could not even refuel planes preparing for combat or transporting U.S. ammunition. Deploying the Japanese SDF for international peacekeeping operations was cumbersome due to protracted legislative debate. When a security situ-

ation became more risky, Japan withdrew its forces, leaving other coalition forces to pull their weight.

In April 2015, Prime Minister Abe stated that Japan should “take yet more responsibility for the peace and stability of the world [based on] a proactive contribution to peace based on the principle of international cooperation.”

Refusal to Act Could Undermine Alliance. If Japan willfully stood by idly when its forces could have protected U.S. territory or forces from deadly attack, it could precipitate the breakup of the U.S.–Japan alliance, which is critical for Japan’s security. Prime Minister Abe commented in a May 2014 press conference, “If U.S. forces, which stand on guard for us, come under attack, (under current legislation) we won’t be able to do anything.... Is this really the way it should be?”⁹

The commission appointed in 2007 to review collective self-defense emphasized the need to allow Japanese missile defense of the United States since “there is no doubt that if the United States, an ally of Japan, suffers substantial damage from a ballistic missile attack, this will seriously affect Japan’s own defense and will seriously jeopardize the Japan–US alliance, which is the foundation of Japan’s security.”¹⁰

What Does the New Security Legislation Do?

The legislation provides greater flexibility, responsiveness, and interoperability for training, exercises, and planning on a broader spectrum of security issues by easing restrictions on SDF operations, including the ability to exercise collective self-defense. This will empower Japan to protect adjacent areas and more proactively contribute to maintain regional stability.

The new defense legislation:

- **Eliminates geographic constraints** by substituting a situational threshold (situations that “gravely affect the peace and stability of Japan”) rather than limiting support to “Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan.”
- **Authorizes support to non-U.S. troops.** It permits Japan to provide greater logistical support to friendly countries to collectively address situations threatening international peace and security although not where combat activities are being conducted.¹¹
- **Expands the range of allowable logistical support**, such as refueling fighter planes and transporting ammunition for U.S. and other foreign military forces in multinational operations.
- **Enables allied interaction in gray-zone scenarios** between armed conflict and peacetime law enforcement actions, in which swift and robust responses are required to secure the peace and security of Japan even when an armed attack against Japan is not involved.¹² A notable example would be Chinese nonmilitary incursion into Japanese territorial waters and airspace.
- **Enables more timely deployment of SDF for multilateral operations.** Previously, the Diet was required to enact a new temporary law for every dispatch of SDF forces overseas to support international peacekeeping operations and to certify that combat was not expected currently or in the future near Japanese forces. The new security legislation provides a permanent, standing law, although each deployment will still require advance Diet approval.
- **Creates less restrictive rules of engagement.** SDF troops were precluded from using their weapons when rescuing Japanese citizens who had been taken hostage overseas. The new rules of engagement are better aligned with the current U.N. standard, which is used by other nations.¹³
- **Allows SDF to protect friendly nations’ military assets.** The SDF can now defend military

9. “Government Eyes Passing Security Bills by End of July to Beef Up Japan–U.S. Ties,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, May 15, 2015.

10. Advisory Panel, “Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security,” p. 14.

11. Government of Japan, “Japan’s Legislation for Peace and Security,” November 2015, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000080671.pdf> (accessed December 8, 2015).

12. Japanese Ministry of Defense, “The Interim Report on the Revision of the Guidelines for Japan–U.S. Defense Cooperation,” October 2014, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/20141008.html (accessed December 8, 2015).

13. “Law Allows for Armed SDF Rescues,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 19, 2014.

assets, including warships of the U.S. and “a foreign country in a close relationship with Japan” if three new conditions are met: the attack threatens the Japanese people’s constitutional right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness; no other means are available to repel the attack; and the use of force is limited to the minimum extent possible.

U.S.–Japan Defense Alliance Guidelines Revised

The Guidelines for U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation were first enacted in 1978 and revised in 1997. The initial guidelines focused on defending Japan during the Cold War, particularly defense against Soviet invasion of the northern island of Hokkaido. Any regional contingency was relegated to subsequent joint study and consultation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait signaling a greater importance of multinational operations, and the growth of the North Korean threat necessitated revising the guidelines. In 1994, Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa appointed an advisory panel to assess Japan’s security posture, particularly after international criticism of Japan’s “checkbook diplomacy” in the Persian Gulf War.

The panel’s report recommended that Tokyo play a more active role in international security and defined Japanese participation in U.N. peacekeeping activities as a “major duty of the SDF.” U.S. and Japanese officials also “recognized that failure to respond to a Korean-like contingency in the Asia-Pacific region could put the alliance at risk. This highlighted the need to revise the 1978 guidelines to account for the changing post–Cold War strategic environment in East Asia.”¹⁴

The ensuing 1997 guidelines recognized that military situations in areas surrounding Japan could significantly affect the country’s security and could result in an armed attack on Japan. Thus, the revised guidelines expanded the alliance beyond just defense of Japan, tasking the SDF with providing rear-area support to U.S. forces in “situations in areas surrounding Japan,” most notably during a Korean crisis.

However, Japan’s security participation in international waters and airspace still excluded “areas where combat operations are being conducted.”¹⁵

After Abe returned as prime minister, Washington and Tokyo decided it was necessary to update the guidelines to ameliorate security shortcomings and to recognize Japan’s greater military capabilities and contributions to international operations. The 1997 alliance guidelines had become hopelessly outdated for dealing with today’s evolving and deteriorating security challenges.

Prime Minister Abe’s push for Japan to exercise collective self-defense and the revisions to the U.S.–Japan alliance guidelines are inexorably linked since the latter depends on the former. The new alliance guidelines institute sweeping changes to the existing 1997 structure, enabling greater synergistic and integrated alliance security operations worldwide, enabling Japan to act as a more equal partner and pull more of its own weight.

What Do the New Alliance Guidelines Say?

The new 2015 guidelines will “transform the alliance, reinforce deterrence, and ensure that we can address security challenges, new and old, for the long term. The new guidelines will update our respective roles and missions [and] enable Japan to expand its contributions to regional and global security.”¹⁶

The new guidelines delineate the responsibilities of the SDF and U.S. military in peacetime, gray-zone situations that have not yet developed into hostilities, and attacks on Japan. The guidelines emphasize bilateral responses that are seamless, robust, flexible, effective, interoperable, and they underscore the alliance’s global nature by expanding the geographic scope and breadth of Japan’s security contributions.

The new alliance framework calls on Japan to provide logistical support farther from Japan and to other military forces besides those of the United States. Japan will also be allowed to protect U.S. forces and assets, such as ships, from attack by mutual enemies. For example, Japan can now intercept North Korean

14. James J. Pryzstup, “The U.S.–Japan Alliance: Review of the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation,” National Defense University, Institute for National Security Studies, March 2015, <http://inss.ndu.edu/Portals/68/Documents/stratperspective/inss/Strategic-Perspectives-18.pdf> (accessed December 3, 2015).

15. Ibid.

16. The White House, “U.S.–Japan Joint Vision Statement,” April 28, 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/us-japan-joint-vision-statement> (accessed November 12, 2015).

ballistic missiles bound for U.S. targets and defend allied ships from North Korean submarines. The concept of Japanese self-defense will now take on a more global scope, possibly including defending sea lines of communication in the Strait of Hormuz.

The new guidelines, in conjunction with Japan exercising collective self-defense, provide a welcome and long overdue augmentation of allied security capabilities against growing security threats in Asia and worldwide. Japan's archaic and overly restrictive interpretation of its constitution has prevented Tokyo from being a viable contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations. The revised guidelines will create a more equal, although still strongly limited, alliance of mutual defense, rather than only the U.S. defending Japan.

To a greater degree than in the previous U.S.–Japan defense guidelines, both forces will now be able to engage in more integrated operations, such as in missile defense, antisubmarine warfare, maritime security, maintaining safe and secure sea lines of communication, counterpiracy, minesweeping without a cease-fire being in effect, counterterrorism, counterproliferation, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. Japan can also more actively cooperate through multilateral security networks with Australia and India.

Evolutionary, Not Revolutionary Changes

Despite domestic protests and strong regional reaction, Japan's defense legislation and new alliance guidelines are actually modest, incremental, and consistent with Japan's slowly evolving defense posture. Abe's defense policies exhibit greater conformity with than change from the policies of his predecessors, including the left-of-center Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

Japan's defense legislation and new alliance guidelines are actually modest, incremental, and consistent with its slowly evolving defense posture.

Successive National Defense Program Guidelines, including those issued in 2010 by the DPJ, had already made the significant strategic policy shift from a Cold War focus to the Chinese threat to Japan's southwest islands. The document vowed to contribute more

strongly to global security requirements, including those not directly related to Japan's own defense.

While pursuing security policies largely consistent with his predecessors, Prime Minister Abe has brought a new vitality to actually implementing long-promised reforms. His advocacy for Japan exercising collective self-defense provided the catalyst for updating the alliance guidelines.

Since assuming office, Abe has:

- Reversed the 11-year trend of consecutive decreases in Japanese defense spending;
- Created a National Security Council to overcome the country's weak decision making and to improve crisis management;
- Developed a National Security Strategy to provide whole-of-government security policy direction;
- Adopted a new policy on exercising collective self-defense; and
- Implemented the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, the Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, the Basic Act on Cybersecurity, and the Basic Plan on Space Policy.

The 2015 security changes, although monumental when viewed in the static, overly constrained Japanese context, are still pitifully small when compared with principles that all other nations already follow and that are necessary to respond to growing military threats. Japan will still not be a full partner in international operations. The changes are predominantly reactive in that they will not be implemented except in response to negative or threatening behavior by other nations. If North Korea, China, or other potential belligerents behave themselves, Tokyo will not need to exercise its new authorities.

Objections to Altering the Status Quo

Abe's proposed defense reforms led to large protests in Japan. The security reforms will indeed be a change for Japan, just as the creation of the Self-Defense Forces, the signing of a defense treaty with the U.S., and allowing Japanese forces to participate in U.N. peacekeeping operations were in decades past but eventually accepted.

Many of the objections raised today were leveled against previous changes to Japan's security posture. A 1997 analysis by the United States Information Agency, based on 35 reports from 16 countries, showed concerns that those alliance guidelines "paved the way" for a possible remilitarization of Japan. Editors in all regions claimed that the guidelines "have opened the door for Japan to intervene militarily abroad" and could lead Japan "to seek hegemony in Asia." Of course, all of the 1997 angst and predictions were wrong since Japan did not alter its passive security posture. As today, the objections in 1997 were particularly strong in China and South Korea.¹⁷

Opponents to Prime Minister Abe's reforms worry that the legislative text does not delineate every possible contingency and therefore could provide a Japanese administration with too much leeway for starting on the slippery slope to remilitarism. Some critics expressed fear of being dragged into a "U.S. war." But Tokyo still retains the right to decide whether to intervene in security situations. For example, the Abe Administration decided not to join the fight against the Islamic State even after two Japanese citizens were captured and executed.

Opposition lawmakers also worried that SDF forces would face increased risk as a result of the new legislation. Prime Minister Abe responded in May 2015, "The SDF will provide logistical support in places where safety is ensured. Let me make it clear that there will be no risks involved [and] no one is thinking of deployment near combat zones."¹⁸ Japan will also continue to withdraw its forces when the going gets tough. Abe commented that the bills "clearly stipulate that when combat occurs, the SDF will immediately suspend (activities) temporarily or evacuate."¹⁹

To date, Japan has had a pretty good deal on its security. Relying on the U.S. to pledge the blood of its sons and daughters to defend Japan in return for providing bases has been a low-risk policy. By eschewing collective self-defense, Japan did not need to defend those who were defending their country.

Tokyo has also relied on other countries to protect Japan's national interests overseas and respond to difficult U.N. requests. When Japanese

Ground Self-Defense forces were deployed, they did so with overly restrictive rules of engagement so as to be of limited utility. In Iraq, Japanese forces were protected by Dutch ground troops, In Sudan, they were protected by Sri Lankan troops. As such, the Japanese contribution may have been a diplomatic success, but it was an operational drain on coalition resources.

Opponents of Japanese defense reform question why Japan should give up its comfortable role for a potentially more contentious or dangerous role. Japanese fretting that greater involvement overseas could be risky for its forces neglects the risk that other nations' troops have borne on Tokyo's behalf. Japan has not put its forces in harm's way and pulled out at the first sign of danger while other nations' forces remained to endure the risks and complete the mission.

Defense Reforms Not a Threat to Japan's Neighbors

Nor are the reforms, as some have alleged, a slippery slope toward a resurgence of 1930s militarism. Such a view ignores the remaining constitutional and legislative constraints; all existing military strategic guidance documents; Japan's democratic system including opposition parties, public opinion, and media; a limited defense budget; 70 years of nonbelligerent and minimalist security policy; and the U.S. security treaty with South Korea and presence of U.S. forces in Japan and South Korea.

When announcing the new policy on collective self-defense, Abe declared, "It still remains the case that the SDF will never participate in such warfare as the Gulf War or the Iraq War.... Japan will never become a country that would wage war again." That is consistent with all other Japanese documents underscoring that Japan will not engage in offensive operations.

The new U.S.–Japan alliance guidelines are based on principles of "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity [a direct message to South Korea], commitment to the peaceful resolution of disputes without coercion, and support for democracy, human

17. Kathleen J. Brahney, "U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines: Fears of a 'Provoked' China, a Remilitarized Japan," United States Information Agency, October 6, 1997, http://fas.org/news/japan/97100601_rmr.html (accessed December 4, 2015).

18. "Opposition Camp Intensifies Attacks on Security Bills in Party Leaders' Debate," *Mainichi Shimbun*, May 21, 2015.

19. Akihiro Yamada, "Abe: SDF Will Be Deployed to Safe Areas, Minesweeping an Exceptional Case," *The Asahi Shimbun*, May 21, 2015, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201505210066 (accessed December 4, 2015).

rights, and the rule of law.”²⁰ Tokyo has declared that any Japanese security operation will be conducted in accordance with “international law, including the Charter of the United Nations and its provisions regarding the peaceful settlement of disputes... constitutions, laws, and regulations...[and Japan’s] exclusively national defense-oriented policy and its three non-nuclear principles.”²¹

None of the contemplated scenarios of collective self-defense are offensive military operations. Japan still precludes itself from any type of combat operations. The SDF will not have the ability to strike foreign bases or conduct expeditionary operations, nor does it possess the strategic airlift capabilities to project power overseas.

Japan Critical for Responding to Korean Crisis. Japan exercising collective self-defense is not only *not* a threat to South Korea, but it is critical to the allied defense of South Korea. Japan provides a critical base of support for U.S. forces that would defend South Korea during a conflict with Pyongyang. Seven U.S. bases in Japan are designated as United Nations Command (Rear) and would provide critical strike and logistics capabilities during a Korean crisis. U.S. military forces in Japan and additional reinforcements would also require access to additional Japanese bases.

Japanese combat support capabilities are required for the defense of South Korea, but impossible without Tokyo exercising collective self-defense. Japanese forces could defend the air and sea lines of communication from the United States to South Korea, conduct minesweeping operations, and defend U.S. forces and bases from air, missile, and submarine attacks. All of these operations require Japan to exercise collective self-defense.

Quite simply, the U.S. and South Korea cannot deter, attack, and defend the Korean Peninsula from the North Korean threat without Japan, a point seemingly lost on the South Korean government and populace. South Korea should be more concerned about Japan *not* being involved in a Korean crisis because of strained relations.

No “Japanese Boots on the Ground.” A prominent South Korean fear has been deployment of Japanese ground troops to the Korean Peninsula despite the absence of any Japanese statement, document, or proposal indicating any such intent or desire. Instead, Japan will continue to avoid any risk to its troops.

Japan exercising collective self-defense is not only *not* a threat to South Korea, but it is critical to the allied defense of South Korea.

Seoul repeatedly demanded that Tokyo would need South Korean permission prior to any Korean security operations. Tokyo has provided such assurances. In 2014 and again in October 2015, Japanese Defense Minister Gen Nakatani vowed that Japan’s armed forces will not deploy to Korea without Seoul’s permission. In May 2015, Prime Minister Abe declared, “It will never happen that the SDF will land on the territories or territorial waters of foreign countries and use force there.”²²

South Korean officials have acknowledged the Japanese assurances, yet continue to publicly demand transparency and express concerns. In July 2014, South Korean Chairman Cho Yoon-hee stated that Japan had agreed to Seoul’s request that any Japanese exercise of collective self-defense in the Korean operational zone could not be carried out without South Korean permission.²³

In April 2015, the South Korean Foreign Ministry commented:

We take note of the fact that the U.S. and Japan have made it clear that they would fully respect the sovereignty of a third country when it comes to Japan’s exercise of the right to collective self-defense. Our government’s demands concerning the security of the Korean Peninsula and our

20. The White House, “U.S.-Japan Joint Vision Statement,” April 28, 2015.

21. Japanese Ministry of Defense, “The Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation, April 27, 2015, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/shishin_20150427e.html (accessed December 4, 2015).

22. Sachiko Miwa, “Diet Debate on Security Bills Starts with Confusion over Limits on Collective Self-Defense,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, May 26, 2015, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/behind_news/politics/AJ201505260061 (accessed December 4, 2015).

23. Park Byong-su, “S. Korea, US and Japanese Joint Chiefs of Staff Hold a Poorly Timed Meeting in Hawaii,” *The Hankyoreh*, July 3, 2014, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/645329.html (accessed December 4, 2015).

security interests have been reflected in these guidelines.²⁴

In June 2015, the South Korean Ministry of National Defense announced that Japanese Minister of Defense Nakatani affirmed that Tokyo will not bring its armed forces to the Korean Peninsula without prior consent from the Korean government.²⁵ In September 2015, South Korean Minister of Defense Han Min-koo stated that “Japan’s armed forces cannot impact events in the country unless South Korea’s president grants authorization” even if the U.S. requests it. Han’s comments echoed those of the South Korean Foreign Ministry.²⁶

Inaccurate—or deliberately misrepresented—perceptions of a Japanese “threat” divert attention from the real challenges to regional peace and stability: those coming from China and North Korea. Japan has not fired a shot in anger in 70 years, while North Korea, since 1945, has invaded, repeatedly attempted to assassinate the South Korean president, conducted terrorist acts, issued threats to incinerate Seoul, and killed 50 South Koreans in 2010.

South Korea seems more fearful of a hypothetical resurrection of a 1930s Japan than present-day threats from North Korea and China.

Counterintuitively, South Korea seems more fearful of a hypothetical resurrection of a 1930s Japan than present-day threats from North Korea and China. Polls show 60 percent of South Korean

respondents regard Japan as a military threat while only 34 percent perceive China as threat.²⁷

China, not Japan, has acted in a militaristic, hegemonic manner to extend territorial claims in Asia. However, Seoul has not objected to Beijing’s 270 percent expansion²⁸ of its defense budget; claims on Korean sovereignty, both historic (Koguryo kingdom) and current (Jeodo Island); hegemonic actions in the East and South China Seas; and pressure against South Korea deploying missile defense systems to better protect its populace. Beijing also supports the North Korean regime, which threatens nuclear attacks on South Korea.

What Should Be Done

The U.S. and Japan should:

- **Operationalize the new security legislation and alliance guidelines** for Japan to assume greater international security responsibilities. Following through on new commitments will be critical. It is unclear to what degree Abe can deliver on broader Japanese security roles and whether subsequent administrations will maintain those commitments.
- **Raise Japanese defense spending** over the self-imposed restriction of 1 percent of gross domestic product to enable Japan to fulfill a broader security role.
- **Enhance public diplomacy efforts** to articulate that the North Korean and Chinese threats necessitate Tokyo augmenting its defense capabilities and that Japanese defense reform poses no threat to regional stability, augmenting rather than undermining it.

24. Song Sang-ho, “U.S.-Japan Defense Upgrade Won’t Hurt S. Korea’s Security Interests,” *The Korea Herald*, April 28, 2015.

25. Lee Sung-eun and Jeong Yong-soo, “Ministers Talk Defense, but Tensions Get in Way,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, June 1, 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3004800> (accessed December 4, 2015).

26. Lee Sung-eun, “Seoul Tries to Tame Worries over Japan’s Defense Laws,” *JoongAng Ilbo*, September 22, 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3009486> (accessed December 4, 2015).

27. Jiji Press and Kyodo News, “62% of South Koreans Regard Japan as a Military Threat: Think Tank Poll,” *The Japan Times*, October 30, 2013, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/10/30/national/politics-diplomacy/62-of-south-koreans-regard-japan-as-a-military-threat-think-tank-poll/> (accessed December 4, 2015), and Kyodo News, “Nearly 60% of South Koreans View Japan as Military Threat: Joint Survey,” *The Japan Times*, May 29, 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/05/29/national/nearly-60-of-south-koreans-view-japan-as-military-threat-joint-survey/#.VifglCtwvd6> (accessed December 4, 2015).

28. Japan’s defense budget declined by 5 percent over the past decade; China’s increased by 270 percent. In 2000, Japan’s defense budget (measured in U.S. dollars) was 63 percent larger than China’s, but by 2012, it was one-third the size of China’s defense budget. Philippe De Koning and Phillip Y. Lipsky, “The Land of the Sinking Sun,” *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/07/30/the-land-of-the-sinking-sun/> (accessed December 4, 2015).

- **Retain robust forward-deployed U.S. military forces in the Western Pacific.** The U.S. needs to back American resolve with sufficient forces to deter or respond to regional military threats. These forces should be closely integrated with their South Korean and Japanese counterparts to counter South Korean fears of resurgent Japanese militarism.
- **Create a trilateral security initiative** (2+2+2 meeting) of the U.S., South Korean, and Japanese foreign and defense ministers to develop joint strategies for addressing common threats and objectives. The allies should develop comprehensive trilateral plans for responding to North Korean provocations and a strategy for Korean unification.
- **Tokyo should assume greater responsibility for protecting sea lines of communication and augment its contribution to peacekeeping operations.** Tokyo should increase SDF contingents on U.N. missions, expand the missions that they can perform, and loosen unnecessarily restrictive rules of engagement.
- **Urge South Korea and Japan to sign a general security of military information agreement** and explore the potential for bilateral or trilateral joint operations for peacekeeping, counterterrorism, counterproliferation, counternarcotics, anti-submarine warfare, minesweeping, cyberspace protection, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response.

Conclusion

The U.S. has critical national interests in Asia and needs to remain fully and energetically engaged in the region, but Washington cannot protect these interests alone. It must rely on its indispensable allies—Japan and South Korea—to achieve mutually beneficial goals. Japan’s new security policy will enable it to become a more effective security partner to the United States, to augment allied deterrence and defense against the North Korean threat to South Korea, and to be a more responsible contributor to maintaining regional and international peace and stability.

There are growing security threats in Asia, but Japan exercising collective self-defense and assuming a larger security role is not one of them. Tokyo is a trusted ally that shares America’s democratic values. For the past 70 years, Japan has followed a responsible, restrained, and purely defensive security posture. Indeed, the danger has been that Japan has done too *little* rather than too much to support international efforts to maintain peace and stability.

It is in Washington’s and its allies’ interest to encourage Japan to adopt additional security responsibilities and engage in global humanitarian and peacekeeping operations, but Tokyo should continue reconciliation efforts on historical issues to allay regional concerns and enable Japan to exercise a leadership role in Asia.

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