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Toward Normalization of Japan's Security and Defense Policy

Benjamin Schreer

On December 10, 2004, the Japanese government adopted the new National Defense Program Outline (NDPO). Setting out the defense doctrine and the military capabilities required to fulfill it, the NDPO was received by international media as evidence for a substantial reorientation in Japan's security and defense policy. To what extent is this claim justified? What are possible regional and global implications?

Ever since World War II, Japan's security and defense policy has been largely defined by its special role as a country which by constitutional law renounced war as a sovereign right. The bilateral security alliance with the United States of 1951 provided Japan with the opportunity to adopt an exclusively "defense-oriented defense posture." In return for guaranteeing strategic bases for U.S. power projection in East Asia, Japan's Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) could be oriented toward defending against a possible large-scale territorial attack by Soviet forces.

Consequently, throughout the Cold War the JSDF lacked effective power projection and expeditionary warfare capabilities as well as sufficient interoperability with U.S. forces. Due to U.S. pressure in the 1980s for greater burden-sharing, Japan expanded its qualitative and quantitative defense capabilities. However, despite these adjust-

ments, the JSDF defense posture remained largely centered on territorial defense.

The end of the Cold War forced Japan to rethink its security and defense policy. Two main challenges to its security emerged during the 1990s. North Korea's program of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles became the most prominent threat, specifically after Pyongyang test-fired a ballistic missile over Japanese territory in August 1998. Secondly, the rise of China grew as a source of major concern to Tokyo. Historical memories, unresolved territorial disputes, potential conflict in the Taiwan Strait, and insecurity about the future of the regional order, fueled Japanese perception about the neighbor as a security problem.

Additionally, the United States pushed for a more active Japanese role within the alliance in order to meet the changing strategic framework. At the global level, Japan (like Germany) after the Gulf War of 1990/

91 could no longer abstain from taking on a greater responsibility in international security affairs.

Adjustments in the 1990s

Consequently, major steps to reorient Japan's security and defense policy were already undertaken in the 1990s. In 1995, the NDPO was revised for the first time and laid the groundwork for a more active Japanese security and defense policy. It called for a stronger U.S.-Japan defense cooperation. Most importantly, the role of the JSDF was expanded to (vaguely defined) "areas surrounding Japan."

The NDPO of 1995 also paved the way for the 1997 revision of the Japan-U.S. Guidelines for Defense Cooperation. The role of the JSDF in providing logistic support to U.S. military operations in regional contingencies was strengthened. This in turn set the stage for JSDF "out-of-area" dispatches to Afghanistan and Iraq to support the campaign against international terrorism in Afghanistan and post-War reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

The new NDPO of 2004, therefore, must be evaluated in the context of long-term developments in Japanese security and defense policy, which started in the 1990s and which expanded the regional and global scope of JSDF missions. Contrary to media coverage, the NDPO of 2004 does not reflect a radical shift but rather reconfirms the trend toward a "normalization" of Japan's security and defense policy.

New and old threats

The new document acknowledges the changing strategic parameters and identifies the new and old threats to Japan's security. According to the paper, the threat scenario of a major land invasion does no longer match reality. Instead, North Korea and international terrorism are perceived as a growing threat. Explicitly, the NDPO identifies Pyongyang's continuing development, deployment, and proliferation of

weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles as "destabilizing factors for regional security."

More implicitly, the document refers to China as a growing source of concern. It does not label China as a threat. However, it notes that Beijing is "pushing ahead with enhancing its nuclear and missile capabilities in modernizing its navy and air force while expanding marine activities." Consequently, Tokyo will "continue to watch these moves in the future." Obviously, Japan is becoming increasingly suspicious of China's growing influence and the possible implications for the regional balance of power. Thus, China is in fact the catalyst for Japan's long-term adjustments of its security and defense policy.

Enhancing power projection capabilities

The NDPO 2004 for the first time supports the development of significant power projection capabilities for the JSDF which are required to meet its broader mission spectrum. According to the paper, the JSDF is to participate in international operations in order to "contribute to the stability of the international community." Additionally, the need for closer bilateral defense cooperation with the United States is stressed. Notably, the NDPO in this respect refers to the American approach to form "coalitions of the willing" in the struggle against international terrorism.

This framework codifies the extended role of the JSDF in regional and global security affairs. On the level of the capabilities required to fulfill these missions, it aims at significantly restructuring the forces toward a more expeditionary military. The so called "standard defense force structure," primarily designed for the territorial defense of Japan, is to be transformed into a flexible, multi-functional force that can be deployed more rapidly. Both the Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP) FY 2001-05 as well as the MTDP FY 2005-09 are to serve this purpose.

All single services of the JSDF will be affected by this transformation. The Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) will be reduced from a total of 166,000 to 155,000 troops. It will be redesigned toward a lighter and more rapidly deployable force. Consequently, the NDPO 2004 cuts the number of heavy Type-90 tanks from 900 to 600, and also reduces heavy artillery systems. Additionally, according to media reports, the GSDF plans to create a counterterrorism force of about 7,000 troops.

The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), already the second-to-none Asian navy, will lose three of its Cold-War era destroyers (from 60 to 57). But in return, its power projection capabilities will be significantly increased. It will get three *Osumi*-class Landing Ship Tank (LST) ships. Each LST ship has a flat deck for helicopter operations and an internal deck at the stern for air-cushion landing craft capable of landing tanks. Moreover, the MSDF plans to construct four more DDH (Destroyer Helicopter) ships, each capable of carrying four helicopters. Officially, these ships could be used for peace support operations as well as evacuation missions. However, the bow-to-stern flat tops and below-deck hangars of the DDH ships have raised suspicion that they could be used as small aircraft carriers, possibly carrying the maritime version of the advanced F-35 Joint Strike Fighter (JSF). Furthermore, the MSDF's off-the-shelf purchase of U.S. *Aegis* Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) systems will further add to its power projection capabilities, being fully interoperable with its American ally.

The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) will also be modernized toward expeditionary capabilities. The NDPO reduces the number of older fighter aircraft by 70 to a total of 230. At the same time, its power projection capabilities are strengthened through various procurement programs.

Among those is the indigenous development of the P-X replacement for its P-3C Orion early warning aircraft, which could

gather intelligence from as far away as the South China Sea. The ASDF will also replace its C-1 transport aircraft with the C-X program. The C-X is supposed to transport the GSDF's rapid reaction forces to regional contingencies and beyond. However, the most obvious step toward power projection is the procurement of four Boeing 767 tanker aircraft. For the first time, the ASDF will now have in-flight refueling capabilities for potentially global operations. The MTDP FY 2005-09 is expected to double this number. Additionally, the ASDF might replace its Cold War era F-4 fighter bomber with a version of the F-35 JSF, and also acquire Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) for precision strikes.

The NDPO of 2004 also for the first time outlines the Japan-US initiative for joint development and deployment of regional BMD. It will consist of ground- and sea-based systems. In this regard, the paper recommends a reconsideration of the 37-year old "three principles" of Japan's export policy, which until now made technological cooperation BMD virtually impossible. The Japanese government promptly followed this proposal by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United States on December 17, 2004, allowing for deeper technological cooperation on BMD.

Toward normalization

So does the NDPO of 2004 reflect a major reorientation in Japan's security and defense policy? Will Tokyo make more use of its military instruments as a diplomatic tool?

The new NDPO and the modernization of the JSDF continue the long-term trend toward a "normalization" of Japan's security and defense policy. This will pose additional challenge to the eroding post-War constitutional limitations on the use of military power. It will also open up a range of options for using its military independently and within a bi- or multilateral setting.

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However, it is reasonable to assume that Japan's move toward expeditionary capabilities is primarily an instrument to strengthen the U.S.–Japan security alliance. In principle, autonomous Japanese military operations are a possibility. But the capabilities that Japan is acquiring are most suited to project fully interoperable power in support of U.S. expeditionary operations. Greater flexibility in joint regional and global operations signals Japan's willingness to adjust the US-Japan alliance to a new era.

Additionally, how a more potent Japanese military could actually be used depends to a large extent upon domestic factors. A distinct pacifism remains deeply embedded in Japanese society, limiting the prospect for a radical shift in Japan's security and defense policy. Within the Japanese elite the political consensus about "normalization" stands on shaky ground. Prime Minister's Koizumi's room for political maneuver even within his own Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) is limited. Thus, for the foreseeable future the JSDF will be strictly limited to non-combatant missions such as in Cambodia, East Timor and Iraq. Absent a dramatic event, the domestic environment will continue to preclude a "militarization" of Japanese foreign policy.

Regional and global implications

What are the regional and global implications following the NDPO and a more active Japanese defense posture? On a regional level, a strengthened U.S.–Japan security alliance, with Japan as a subordinate partner, guarantees U.S. military hegemony in the region. As a result, visions of a bipolar (U.S.–China) or tripolar (U.S.–Japan–China) regional security order are unrealistic for the foreseeable future. China, despite its remarkable economic growth and military modernization, will hardly be able to challenge the U.S.–Japan security alliance in military terms. Neither Japan nor the

United States will be keen on seeing a third "pole" emerging.

Similarly, multipolar or effective multilateral security institutions (largely favored by Europeans) such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) will also not substitute for the stabilizing role of the U.S. dominated security alignment with Japan. Many smaller states in the region will accept this type of regional order since it provides them with intrastate security and since it hedges against an unbound Japanese defense build-up. The question is whether this also applies to China. Despite its bellicose rhetoric toward Tokyo, Beijing so far acknowledges the stabilizing function of the US-Japan security alliance. Among other things, China has a great interest in the alliance providing for maritime security and consequently energy security. It simply does not have the resources to take on such a mission by itself. Two critical strategic questions, however, hold the potential for future conflict. The first is whether Japan would support the United States militarily in a war over Taiwan. Secondly, if Taiwan would be included in the US-Japan BMD architecture, China would clearly perceive this to be a major provocation.

On a global level, the "out-of-area" dispatches of the JSDF to Afghanistan and Iraq show that the US-Japan security relationship is no longer restricted to the Asia-Pacific region. In the context of US-led "coalitions of the willing," Japan is becoming a more important security actor internationally. From an US perspective, the bilateral security alliance with Japan remains central to its ability to project military power worldwide.