
Japan's Security Policy towards East Asia

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Abstract

After the Second World War, Japan was occupied by the United States, regaining its sovereignty in 1952 with the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Japan-US Security Treaty. During the Cold War, Japan maintained a low military profile, refraining from developing strong military forces and from deploying them overseas. Its security relations with East Asian countries were not very tense. However, Japan's security policy has undergone significant transformation after the Cold War. This change was prompted by the weakening of the left in Japanese domestic politics, North Korea's missile and nuclear development programmes, and the rise of China's power. Instead of making active efforts at improving its relations with its neighbouring states, Japan has taken a realist policy of strengthening its own military capability, enhancing its alliance, and building new security ties with states that have similar security concerns.

Key Words

Japan, the United States, China, North Korea, South Korea, Australia, India.

Introduction

Japan was the first Asian country in modern history to become an imperial power. However, its devastating defeat in the Second World War and subsequent occupation by the United States (US) transformed the country. In 1946, during that occupation, Japan adopted a constitution that prohibited the country from possessing military forces, relinquished the right of belligerency, and adopted a policy of refraining from developing, or deploying, a strong military. In 1954, Japan established the Self-Defence Forces (SDF), regarding them as exclusively defensive, rather than military, forces. Japan has kept a low military profile ever since, even though it rose to become the second biggest economy in the world. During the Cold War, Japan never engaged directly in military conflicts with other countries, but its military policy underwent a significant transformation immediately afterwards, as the Soviet Union collapsed, North Korea developed militarily, and China's rise to economic and military power became evident.

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This paper examines Japan's security policy, with particular focus on relations with East Asian countries and the US. More specifically, it presents an overview of the transformation of Japan's security policy in response to the change in the security environment in East Asia, particularly North Korea's military development and the rise in China's power. For this purpose, the paper pays particular attention to change in the content of its basic policy document, the *National Defense Program Guidelines* (NDPG), compiled in 1976 and subsequently revised three times, in 1995, 2004, and 2010.

The 1976 NDPG

In October 1976, Japan adopted the first *National Defense Program Guidelines* (1976 NDPG) to take effect from the beginning of fiscal year (FY) 1977. It remained in effect until 1995. It expressed a view on the international situation that “[w]ithin the general neighborhood of Japan, an equilibrium exists, involving the three major powers of the United States, the Soviet Union and China” although “[t]ension still persists on the Korean Peninsula” and “military buildups continue in several countries nearby Japan.”¹ The NDPG considered it unlikely that a major military conflict, one that would seriously threaten Japan's security, would arise.

The military posture and capability advocated by the 1976 NDPG was “the maintenance of a full surveillance posture in peacetime and the ability to cope effectively with situations up to the point of limited and small-scale aggression.”² With regard to its alliance with the US, it acknowledged the importance of “maintaining the credibility of the Japan-US security arrangement and insuring the smooth functioning of that system”³ but did not stress the need for strengthening the alliance.

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The 1976 NDPG made a very short reference to the tension on the Korean peninsula as cited above, but made no specific references to North Korea (also known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) or China. Apparently, Japan was not very concerned about either, as North Korea had a limited power projection capability, and China not only had limited military power, but also enjoyed generally friendly relations with Japan.⁴

Developments after the Adoption of the 1976 NDPG

During the Cold War, Japan's security policy was rather simple. The hostility between the US and the Soviet Union prompted Japan, which had its own tension with the Soviet Union, to maintain an alliance with the US. Soviet attacks on Japan were sufficiently unlikely, however, to allow it to continue a passive, limited military stance after the adoption of the 1976 NDPG. In November 1978, Tokyo and Washington compiled the Guidelines for Japan-US Defence Cooperation to clarify the roles each should play during military contingencies, thus ensuring the smooth functioning of their joint military operations. These guidelines endured without revision for the rest of the Cold War.

Japan reviewed its security policy when the Soviet Union collapsed after the end of the Cold War because the alliance with the US, premised on the presence of the Soviet Union as a common enemy, had been undermined. However, the Gulf War (August 1990- April 1991), as well as North Korea's nuclear and missile developments, prompted Japan to reconsolidate the alliance and change its passive, limited defence posture. During the Gulf War, Washington demanded that Japan contribute to the allied action

against Iraq on the grounds that it was a major beneficiary of a secure supply of oil from the Gulf region. Unable to make a military contribution, Japan made a financial contribution instead, providing as much as US\$13 billion, most of which went to the US. After a formal truce was reached in April 1991, Tokyo dispatched minesweepers to the Persian Gulf. It was the first overseas military operation of the SDF.⁵ Then, in June 1992, Tokyo enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law (the PKO Law), allowing the SDF to take part in United Nations peacekeeping operations (UN PKOs), but limited its participation to non-combatant operations. The SDF first participated in a UN PKO in Cambodia, starting in September 1992.⁶

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North Korea started operating its first experimental, graphite-moderated nuclear reactor in around 1986, and by late 1988 American satellite surveillance had detected construction of a spent-fuel reprocessing facility. This generated international suspicion of North Korea's

plutonium extraction. However, in March 1989, a joint delegation from Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the Japan Socialist Party (JSP), the largest opposition party, visited Pyongyang and agreed to make efforts at normalising diplomatic relations between Japan and North Korea. This meeting was followed by official normalisation talks that started in January 1991. These were suspended in November 1992, largely because of the mounting US-DPRK tension over the nuclear issue, and partly because of lack of support from South Korea (also known as the Republic of Korea, or ROK). Against this backdrop, Japan and the United States held a summit in January 1992 in Tokyo, issuing the Tokyo Declaration on the US-Japan Global Partnership, reaffirming their commitment to their alliance, and expressing their recognition that their alliance remained important to the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

Japan's security concerns about North Korea increased in May 1993 when the DPRK test-launched its first medium-range ballistic missile, the Nodong, and showed that Japan had come within the reach of North Korean missiles. While North Korea's missile capability became a new concern, the nuclear issue was

resolved, if not conclusively, through a US-DPRK agreement, the Agreed Framework (AF), in October 1994. That did not lead to Japan-DPRK diplomatic normalisation, however, partly because of the lack of progress toward US-DPRK diplomatic normalisation, and partly because of the lack of support from South Korea's Kim Young-sam administration whose relations with Pyongyang were very bad. Unlike North Korea, post-Cold War China did not become a major security concern for Japan, although Tokyo was alarmed by

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Beijing's enactment of the Law of Territorial Waters in February 1992, in which their disputed islands, known as Senkaku in Japanese, were clearly stated to be Chinese territory.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union accelerated North Korea's nuclear and missile development programmes. Both events also had a significant impact on Japan's domestic politics, weakening the left led by the JSP and strengthening the right led by the LDP that had advocated easing constitutional constraints on Japan's military activities. As of 1990, it had 136 seats out of 512 seats in the more powerful lower house. Yet, its presence dropped to 70 out of 511 in 1993.

The 1995 NDPG

The rise of the right prompted Japan to compile a new NDPG in November 1995 (the 1995 NDPG), to take effect from the beginning of fiscal year (FY) 1996. The NDPG stressed the international expectations for Japan's contribution to building a more stable security environment through participation in international peace cooperation activities, and expressed its willingness to “[c]ontribute to efforts for international peace through participation in international peace cooperation activities.”⁷ This reflected new international military activities, such as the US-led war against Iraq (the Gulf War) and UN peacekeeping operations.⁸

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The new NDPG still made no specific reference to North Korea, but strongly suggested Japan's particular concern about the DPRK's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as can be seen from the statement that “new kinds of dangers, such as the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction, including nuclear arms and of missiles, are on the increase,”⁹ and from the following passage: “There remain uncertainty and unpredictability, such as continued tensions on the Korean Peninsula, and a stable security environment has not been fully established. Under these circumstances, the possibility of a situation in this region, which could seriously affect the security of Japan, cannot be excluded.”¹⁰

The 1995 NDPG made no reference or allusion to China. As far as Japan-US alliance is concerned, the NDPG stressed its importance, regarding it as “indispensable” to Japan's security and key to “achieving peace and stability in the region surrounding Japan and establishing a more stable security environment.”¹¹ Apparently, the 1995 NDPG looked upon North Korea as the primary destabilising factor in the security of Northeast Asia that increased the importance of the Japan-US alliance.

Developments after the Adoption of the 1995 NDPG

After the adoption of the new NDPG in 1995, the presence of the left in Japanese politics declined further. In January 1996, the JSP changed its name to the Social Democratic Party (SDP), but about the half of its members left, due mainly to their concern about

being re-elected in the next lower house election to be held under a new electoral system, adopted in 1994, combining the plurality and proportional representation systems, with 300 seats elected by the former and 200 seats by the latter. The new system was more advantageous to big parties. The first election to the lower house under the new system was held in October 1996 and gave victory to the LDP, increasing its seats by 28 to 239, while the SDP's were reduced by 15 to a mere 30. The weakening of the left made it easier for those on the right to realise their long-held desire to ease the restrictions posed on Japan's military activities by the constitution, and they lost no time in doing so.

After the Taiwan Strait crisis of March 1996, on 15 April 1996, Tokyo and Washington signed an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) under which Tokyo would contribute to the smooth and effective operation of US forces. Two days later, Prime Minister Hashimoto held a summit meeting with President Clinton in Tokyo and issued a Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security, in which the two countries stressed the importance of the alliance to the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and their intention to strengthen the alliance. Tokyo and Washington then revised the 1978 Guidelines for Japan-US Defence Cooperation in September 1997, with the aim of improving their cooperation in order to deal with any

situations in the areas surrounding Japan that could seriously affect Japan's national security.

The new guidelines raised China's concern about the possibility of Japan's assistance in a US intervention in China's military actions against Taiwan. Japan's relations with China deteriorated further because of Tokyo's rejection of Beijing's request that Tokyo provide a formal, written apology for its past military aggression toward China to President Jiang Zemin during his visit to Japan in 1999, as it had done for South Korea's President Kim Dae-jung in 1998. In this context, in May 1999 Tokyo enacted a series of laws to strengthen the Japan-US alliance, namely the Law on the Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan, the revised SDF Law, the revised ACSA, and the Ship Inspection Operations Law.

The legal changes were also spurred on by two developments involving North Korea. One was its launch of a rocket, allegedly for putting a satellite into orbit, on 31 August 1998. The rocket, called Taepodong-1 by Washington and others, flew over Japan and fell into the seas off the coast of Alaska, proving that North Korean missiles could now reach any part of Japan. The other development was Japan's detection of suspicious vessels, apparently North Korean, in Japanese territorial waters on 23 March 1999, an event that led to unprecedented mobilisation of SDF warships and airplanes to chase them.

The Hashimoto administration and conservative media regarded the rocket launch and the ship incursion as serious threats to Japan's national security, and thereby heightened anti-North Korean public sentiment, already strong as a result of the February 1997 media report of suspicion that a Japanese junior high school girl, Yokota Megumi, had been abducted by the DPRK.

In effect, the conservatives used the North Korean "threat" as an excuse to strengthen the Japan-US alliance and weaken the constitutional constraints on Japan's military activities. In response to the launch of a Taepodong-1, in December 1998 Tokyo decided to conduct joint research with Washington on ballistic missile defence (BMD). In the same month, the Japanese government also decided to introduce "Information Gathering Satellites" (IGS), *de facto* spy satellites, discarding the long-standing policy of the non-military use of space based on a resolution in the Diet, the parliament, in 1969 on the peaceful development of space.

Japan's hard-line stance towards North Korea was temporarily eased by South Korea's "Sunshine Policy", a conciliatory policy of President Kim Dae-jung who came to power in February 1998. Kim Dae-jung was eager to improve inter-Korean relations and urged Washington and Tokyo to improve their relations with Pyongyang. This led to the first DPRK-ROK summit in June 2000, the

visit of Secretary General Kim Jong-il's aide, Cho Myong-rok, to Washington in October 2000, and the reciprocal visit to Pyongyang of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright later in the month. The first Japan-DPRK summit, between Prime Minister Koizumi (April 2001-September 2006) and Kim Jong-il, took place in September 2002 and resulted an agreement to make every possible effort for early diplomatic normalisation.

However, it became difficult for them to realise it because of the Bush administration's revelation of Pyongyang's uranium enrichment programme in October 2002 and the subsequent collapse of the Agreed Framework of 1994. The resurgence of the nuclear issue reduced Japan's domestic support for diplomatic normalisation with North Korea and strengthened the voice for hard-line policy toward it. Tokyo largely followed the Bush administration's hard-line policy, although South Korea's Kim Dae-jung administration and the Roh Moo-hyun administration, which succeeded it in 2003, continued a conciliatory policy toward Pyongyang. Koizumi held a second summit with Kim Jong-il in May 2004, but his primary objective was to bring to Japan the children of those Japanese citizens who had been abducted by North Korea and had returned to Japan in October 2002, not to make any breakthrough on the nuclear or missile issues.

In contrast, Koizumi showed eagerness to strengthen military ties with Washington. He supported the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) proposed by Bush in May 2003, while Seoul distanced itself from it. Japan actively participated in the first and succeeding meetings and exercises of the PSI, hosting two exercises in October 2004 and October 2007. Japan was also eager to follow Bush's policy of constructing a BMD system despite doubts that it could be effective, while South Korea showed little interest. In December 2003, Tokyo decided to construct a BMD system by purchasing SM-3 surface-to-air missiles and PAC-3 ground-to-air missiles from Washington.

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Besides its cooperation with Washington on the PSI and BMD, Tokyo enhanced the Japan-US alliance by enacting the Law on Measures against Military Attacks in June 2003 and the Law for Smooth Operations of US Forces in June 2004. Tokyo also strengthened security ties with Washington by enacting the Special Law on the Iraq War in July 2003, and then

dispatching the SDF to Iraq to assist with the US occupation of Iraq. Koizumi argued that it would be necessary to meet Washington's request for assistance so that Washington would be ready to support Tokyo should the need arise (He apparently had contingencies on the Korean peninsula in mind).¹²

Tokyo's decision to strengthen its security ties with Washington seems to have had a negative impact on its relations with Moscow and Beijing. In December 2001, President Bush antagonised Moscow by withdrawing from the ABM treaty with Russia and starting to deploy BMD systems. Moscow was presumably unhappy with Tokyo's joint development of more effective BMD systems with Washington. In the case of China, the unilateral stance of the Bush administration and its policy of strengthening security ties with its allies and other countries prompted Beijing and Moscow to strengthen their relations with each other. Japan's relations with China and South Korea both deteriorated, too, because of Koizumi's visit during his 2001-2006 tenure to the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates dead Japanese military personnel and class-A war criminals, despite repeated criticism from Beijing and Seoul.¹³ In August 2003, the Six-Party Talks (SPT) to discuss the North Korean nuclear issue started. In essence, Tokyo followed Washington's lead and exerted little influence at the talks.

While Japan's relations with North Korea saw little improvement, its relations with China deteriorated even further. This was triggered partly by China's development of a gas field close to the bilateral demarcation line of their exclusive economic zone (EEZ), a line that Japan regarded as valid but China did not. China announced a plan to develop the gas field in August 2003, and Japan expressed strong concern, arguing that the gas field spread over the line onto its side. The bilateral relations deteriorated again in November 2004, when a Chinese submarine passed through Japanese territorial waters without surfacing. The incursion prompted Tokyo to order the Maritime SDF (MSDF) to go on alert, for only the second time in history after its mobilisation in 1999 (the first had been for the incursion, mentioned above, by the suspicious vessels widely deemed North Korean).

The 2004 NDPG

In December 2004, in the context of Tokyo's strained relations with Pyongyang and Beijing, Tokyo adopted a new NDPG, the 2004 NDPG, which took effect in FY2005. The new guidelines clearly stated that their adoption was prompted by Japan's December 2003 decision to introduce BMD systems. In December 2004, Tokyo also decided to ease its long-standing policy of not exporting weapons so that it could export

BMD-related weaponry to the US. The new NDPG regarded the introduction of BMD systems as a measure to "adequately respond to the threat of nuclear weapons"¹⁴ and supplementary to the extended US nuclear deterrence.

The 2004 NDPG made a clear reference to North Korea for the first time and identified it as a major destabilising factor to regional and international security: "North Korea is engaged in the development, deployment and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, and it maintains a large number of special operations forces. Such military activities by North Korea constitute a major destabilizing factor to regional and international security, and are a serious challenge to international non-proliferation efforts."¹⁵ The 2004 NDPG was compiled after the collapse of the Agreed Framework of 1994, following Washington's October 2002 announcement of Pyongyang's possession of a uranium enrichment programme and its November 2002 decision to terminate its provision of heavy fuel oil to North Korea as agreed in the Agreed Framework.

The 2004 NDPG is also notable in that it made a (very brief) reference to the tension between China and Taiwan for the first time: "The situation on the Korean Peninsula is unpredictable and

cross-Taiwan Strait relations remain uncertain.”¹⁶ Also for the first time, the new NDPG named China as a security concern: “China, which has a major impact on regional security, continues to modernise its nuclear forces and missile capabilities as well as its naval and air forces. China is also expanding its area of operation at sea.”¹⁷ The new NDPG stressed the importance of the security of sea lanes as “indispensable to the country’s prosperity and growth,”¹⁸ implying its concern about China’s extended maritime operation.

The 2004 NDPG proposed to develop military capability as an effective response to new threats and diverse situations, particularly “ballistic missile attacks” (apparently with North Korea in mind), “guerrillas and special operations forces attacks” (also apparently with North Korea in mind), “the invasion of Japan’s offshore islands” (apparently with the territorial dispute with China in mind), “the intrusion of armed special-purpose ships operating in waters surrounding Japan” (apparently with North Korea in mind) and “submerged foreign submarines in Japan’s territorial waters” (apparently with China in mind).¹⁹

The 2004 NDPG regarded the US military presence as “critically important to peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, where unpredictability and uncertainty continue.”²⁰ It expressed

Japan’s need “to improve the international environment so as to reduce the chances that any threat will reach Japan in the first place” in cooperation particularly with the US, and stated its intention to strengthen the alliance with the US and harmonise “perceptions of the new security environment and appropriate strategic objectives.”²¹

In short, the 2004 NDPG regarded North Korea and China as Japan’s primary security concerns, proposing to strengthen security ties with the US and to enhance its own military capability.

Developments after the Adoption of the 2004 NDPG

After the adoption of the 2004 NDPG, Japan’s relations with North Korea and China deteriorated further, while ties were strengthened with the US, South Korea, Australia, and India. Japanese-DPRK relations became more hostile because of the DPRK’s July 2006 missile tests and its first nuclear test in October 2006, both triggered by Washington’s imposition of financial sanctions on North Korea on 16 September 2005, just before the first joint statement of 19 September at the SPT (the 9.19 joint statement). Tokyo responded particularly strongly to the missile and nuclear tests, imposing unilateral sanctions. Against

this backdrop, in December 2006 Tokyo decided to elevate its Defence Agency to a Defence Ministry and legalise international peace cooperation activities as one of the primary duties of the SDF.

After the nuclear test, the Bush administration softened its stance toward the DPRK. That led to two agreements at the SPT on 13 February 2007 (the 2.13 agreement) and on 3 October 2007 (the 10.3 agreement), establishing concrete steps to realise the denuclearisation of the DPRK. Following the agreements, Pyongyang froze its nuclear facilities and proceeded with their dismantlement. Washington eased its economic sanctions and provided heavy fuel oil along with Seoul, Beijing, and Moscow, though Tokyo refused to take part on the grounds of insufficient progress on the abduction issue. Maintaining a hard-line policy, Tokyo established, in March 2007, a new mobile unit for rapid deployment in the Ground SDF and deployed its first unit of PAC-3 missiles as part of its BMD systems. Japan also hosted a PSI drill in October 2007, when Seoul held a second summit with Pyongyang in which the two Koreas agreed to improve their relations. The denuclearisation process came to a deadlock when Pyongyang rejected Washington's demand to accept inspections to verify the content of the documents on nuclear activities, submitted by Pyongyang in May 2008, on the grounds that verification should

come at the final stage of normalisation of Pyongyang's relations with Washington.²² The rejection hardened Washington's stance toward Pyongyang again and reduced policy difference between Washington and Tokyo.

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Japan's relations with China worsened as well. In April 2005, anti-Japan demonstrations took place in parts of China over their strained bilateral relations on historical and territorial issues. In turn, the demonstrations aggravated Japan's anti-China sentiments and concerns about China. In addition, in an apparent response to the deepening Japan-US alliance and Washington's efforts at forging stronger security ties with other allies and friendly countries, China held its first joint military exercise with Russia in August 2005. The Abe administration that started in September 2006 tried to mend Japanese-PRC relations, in stark contrast with his tough stance toward North Korea. In fact, Abe and his successors refrained from visiting the Yasukuni Shrine. Tokyo's appeasing stance toward Beijing could be

attributed to the business circle's strong preference not to antagonise China. Abe visited Beijing and held a summit with President Hu Jintao in October 2006, the first of its kind since October 2001, agreeing to build "strategic, mutually beneficial relations."

However, the bilateral relations did not improve very much. Apparently in response to Washington's development of BMD systems with Tokyo, Beijing conducted a test in January 2007 to destroy a satellite with a ballistic missile. In October 2007, Tokyo decided to deploy 20 F-15 fighter jets to Okinawa in order to strengthen its defence of the southern part of its territory close to China. In June 2008, Tokyo and Beijing agreed to jointly develop the disputed gas field near their EEZ demarcation line, but little progress was made after that. Meanwhile, Tokyo became sensitive to China's growing maritime activities, such as the first passage of Chinese warships through the Tsugaru Strait in October 2008, and the incursion into Japanese waters of two Chinese maritime surveillance ships in December 2008.

The historic 2009 power shift from the LDP to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) appeared to improve Japan-PRC relations because the DPJ, led by Hatoyama, advocated the creation of an East Asian community and was eager to improve relations. Those hopes were

dashed, however, by an incident on 7 September 2010 that severely hurt relations. Japan's Maritime Security Agency (MSA) patrol ships found Chinese fishing vessels in Japanese territorial waters near the disputed Senkaku Islands. They ordered them to leave the waters, but one ship refused and collided with two MSA ships. The MSA arrested its crew. Beijing was angered by the action and demanded their immediate release, but instead of doing so, Tokyo prosecuted the captain. Beijing's retaliatory actions included a *de facto* embargo of its rare earth metals to Japan that crippled production of high-tech equipment because more than 90 % of those resources had come from China. In the end, Tokyo accepted Beijing's demand for the captain's release, but the incident made the Japanese very bitter toward China.

As its relations with Pyongyang and Beijing deteriorated, Tokyo's relations with Washington deepened further under the leadership of LDP Prime Ministers Koizumi (April 2001-September 2006), Abe (September 2006-September 2007), Fukuda (September 2007-September 2008), and Aso (September 2008-September 2009). Tokyo and Washington held meetings of the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) consisting of foreign and defence ministers (2+2 meetings)

in February and October 2005, May 2006, and May 2007. At the February 2005 meeting, they confirmed their common strategic objectives, which included ensuring the security of Japan, strengthening peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, supporting the peaceful unification of the Korean peninsula, seeking the peaceful resolution of issues related to North Korea, encouraging the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue, and encouraging China to improve transparency in its military affairs. At the following meetings, they discussed measures to achieve their common strategic objectives. At the 2007 meeting, they reviewed the common objectives and adopted new ones that included strengthening security and defence cooperation with Australia, and enhancing partnership with India.

Tokyo's relations with Washington became somewhat unstable after the victory of the DPJ in the July 2007 upper house elections and the resultant loss of the LDP-led ruling coalition's majority. The DPJ's political altitude tended to the right with more rightist members than leftist ones. Even so, it was critical of Japan's support for the US war against Iraq, the continuation of the SDF's refuelling activities in the Indian Ocean for the US-led military operations in Afghanistan, the effectiveness of the BMD systems, and the massive host

nation support costs for US forces in Japan despite its huge public debt of more than 900 trillion yen. The DPJ called for a close but more equal and independent alliance with the US. The party won a landslide victory in the August 2009 lower house elections and formed a coalition government with the SDP and the People's New Party (PNP) in the next month.

In January 2010, the DPJ-led coalition government headed by Prime Minister Hatoyama (September 2009-June 2010) ended the refuelling activity that had started in December 2001, despite Washington's request for its continuation. It also tried to lessen the concentration of US forces in Okinawa by reducing the presence of US Marines there. Yet the implementation was so difficult that Hatoyama eventually gave up. Whether it was an excuse or not is unclear, but Hatoyama referred to the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* in March 2010- South Korea's conservative Lee Myung-bak administration had attributed it to a North Korean torpedo attack in its report of May 2010- and justified his policy reversal on the grounds that the North Korean threat necessitated the presence of US Marines in Okinawa at the current level.

The DPJ virtually gave up on the idea of building a more independent alliance with the US and came to adopt

a security policy very similar to that of the LDP. For instance, in December 2005 Tokyo decided to upgrade its joint BMD research with Washington to actual development. Also, with the help of Washington, Tokyo conducted tests of shooting down missiles with its SM-3 missiles from Japanese Aegis destroyers, first in December 2007 and then in November 2008, October 2009, and October 2010. Meanwhile, Washington conducted a test to destroy a dysfunctional satellite, using a US SM-3 missile, in February 2008.

In response to its aggravated relations with North Korea and China, Japan also developed closer security ties, bilaterally with

Australia, India, and South Korea, and multilaterally with Washington. Tokyo and Canberra held a summit in Tokyo on 13 March 2007, issuing a Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in which they agreed to strengthen their security cooperation. Australia became the second country (after the US) with which Japan had issued a bilateral security declaration. They held two more summit meetings in September 2007 and December 2009, agreeing to compile an action plan to

substantiate the joint declaration at the 2007 meeting and to revise the plan at the 2009 meeting. They also started a defence and foreign ministers' meeting (2+2 meeting) in June 2007, held again in December 2008 and May 2010. At the 2010 meeting, they signed an ACSA, making Australia the second country to sign such a treaty with Japan. Tokyo and Canberra also held defence ministers' meetings in May 2009, May 2010, and October 2010. To substantiate their talks and agreements, they have conducted military exercises.

The SDF took part in a multilateral maritime exercise, Kakadu IX, hosted by Australia in July and August 2008, and conducted three bilateral exercises in September 2009,

May 2010, and August 2010. Japan and Australia also held security talks and conducted exercises with the US, starting director-level trilateral security talks called the Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF) in April 2007. Their first trilateral defence ministers' meeting was held in June 2007, and two more SDCF meetings followed in April 2008 and November 2009. Trilateral exercises were held in October 2007, September 2009, and June 2010.

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Tokyo also expanded its security relations with New Delhi. They held summit meetings in December 2006, August 2007, October 2008, and December 2009, agreeing to strengthen their security cooperation. At the 2006 meeting, they agreed to establish a strategic global partnership. At the 2008 meeting, they signed a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, making India the third country with which Japan signed such a declaration. At the 2009 meetings, they compiled an action plan to strengthen their security cooperation. The two countries also held defence ministers' meetings in August 2007, November 2009, and April 2010. Tokyo and New Delhi did not hold bilateral military exercises but held multilateral ones. In April 2007 they held their first trilateral maritime exercise with Washington. Tokyo took part in Malabar 07-2 in September 2007 and Malabar 09 in April 2009. Malabar is traditionally a bilateral exercise between the US and Indian navies, but Malabar 07-2 included Japan, Australia, and Singapore, and Malabar 09 included Japan.

Tokyo's bilateral security cooperation with Seoul has been limited, due largely to unsettled historical issues associated with Japan's invasion and colonisation of Korea. The only bilateral military drills were joint search and rescue exercises (SAREX), started in 1998 and held again in 2002, 2003, 2005, 2007,

and 2009. Tokyo and Seoul also held a SAREX with Washington in August 2008. Although their bilateral exercises went no further than SAREX, there were some notable developments. At their April 2009 meeting, their defence ministers agreed to expand their military exchanges, including talks between top ranking officers and interactions between the two military forces, such as the dispatch of observers to each other's military exercises.

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Washington was eager to facilitate greater security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul, for instance, by holding a first trilateral defence ministerial meeting with them in May 2009, and a second in June 2010. In July 2010, for the first time, Japan sent observers to a US-ROK exercise (Invincible Spirit), and South Korean observers took part for the first time in a Japan-US exercise (Keen Sword) in December 2010. In between, two Japanese warships, with some US warships, took part in the

first PSI drill hosted by South Korea in October 2010. These developments were prompted by the conservative Lee Myong-bak administration that adopted a North Korea policy more in line with Washington's and Tokyo's since its inception in February 2008.

The 2010 NDPG

In December 2010, Tokyo adopted the 2010 NDPG, which took effect in FY 2011. The new NDPG takes particular note of unstable security situations in the Asia-Pacific region, citing disputes over territories and issues over the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. It also makes special reference to the apparent shift in the region's balance of power and designates prevention of "threats from emerging by further stabilizing the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region"²³ as a security policy objective, apparently with China in mind. To achieve this and other security objectives, it stresses Japan's intention to facilitate cooperation not only with the US but also with countries in the Asia-Pacific. The new NDPG identifies North Korea's military activities as serious security concerns, just like the preceding NDPG. Yet, it differs from its predecessor in that it regards North Korea's military activities as not only grave but also immediate destabilizing factor to regional security.²⁴

More significant difference between the 2004 and 2010 NDPG is a much greater attention to China by the latter. References to China have tripled, exceeding, for the first time, references to North Korea, indicating a shift in Japan's primary security concern: "China, a growing major power, is beginning to play an important role for regional and global security. On the other hand, China is steadily increasing its defense expenditure. China is widely and rapidly modernizing its military force, mainly its nuclear and missile force as well as navy and air force, and is strengthening its capability for extended-range power projection. In addition, China has been expanding and intensifying its maritime activities in the surrounding waters. These trends, together with insufficient transparency over China's military forces and its security policy, are of concern for the regional and global community."²⁵ The 2010 NDPG for the first time refers to China's military stance as a security concern. Apparently out of its concern about China's maritime activities, the new NDPG stresses that "securing maritime security and international order is essential for [Japan's] prosperity."²⁶

Having expressed concerns with North Korea and China, the 2010 NDPG regards the strengthening of US engagement in the Asia-Pacific region, and US efforts to enhance security ties with its allies and partners, as "important

contributions to the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region”.²⁷ It then says that Japan intends to “actively tackle both regional and global security challenges in cooperation with its ally, partners and other countries concerned,” particularly South Korea, Australia, member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and India and to “actively engage in encouraging China to take responsible actions in the international community,” with those countries.²⁸ The new NDPG argues that “the military presence of the US armed forces in Japan allows countries in the Asia-Pacific region to have a strong sense of security by functioning as deterrence against and response to contingencies in this region.”²⁹ It regards the extended deterrence provided by the US as “indispensable” as long as nuclear weapons exist, and expresses Japan’s intention to cooperate closely with the US to maintain and improve the credibility of the extended deterrence, as well as to “take active measures for the smooth and effective stationing of US forces in Japan, including Host Nation Support” and to study other measures to enhance its bilateral cooperation with the US to “strengthen the U.S. forces’ deterrent and response capability to regional contingencies” apparently having North Korea and China in mind.³⁰

Besides stressing the importance of Japan’s alliance with the US, the new NDPG announces Japan’s new security policy of building a “dynamic defense force” as well as “raising levels of equipment use and increasing operations tempo.”³¹ It argues that “[c]lear demonstration of national will and strong defense capabilities...., not just maintaining a certain level of defense force, is a critical element for ensuring credible deterrence and will contribute to stability in the region surrounding Japan.”³² As an initial step toward a dynamic defence force, the new NDPG expresses Japan’s plans to “permanently station the minimum necessary units on off-shore islands where the SDF is not currently stationed” and to augment submarine units, apparently to show China Japan’s will to defend its territorial integrity. The 2010 NDPG also states Japan’s intention to enhance the capability of its BMD system by developing a multi-layered defence posture, in order to “respond effectively to ballistic missiles capable of evading interceptors.”³³ This policy may indicate a shift in Japan’s concern from less sophisticated North Korean missiles to more sophisticated Chinese ones.

The 2010 NDPG also expresses Japan’s determination to participate more actively in, and to enhance its capabilities for, international peace cooperation

activities and shows an eagerness to ease existing restrictions on the use of firearms when participating in UN peacekeeping operations. Besides, for the first time, the NDPG expresses the need to consider participating in international joint development and production of defence equipment, thereby indicating Tokyo's willingness to ease the long-held policy of strict restrictions on weapons exports.

In sum, the 2010 NDPG expresses Tokyo's greater security concerns about Pyongyang and Beijing and advocates deepening the Japan-US alliance and strengthening security ties with Seoul, Canberra, and New Delhi, while developing a dynamic defence force.

Developments after the Adoption of the 2010 NDPG

In January 2011 the DPJ-led coalition government headed by Prime Minister Kan (June 2010-September 2011) decided to maintain the current level of the host nation support for US forces in Japan (188 billion yen in 2010) for the next five years, although the DPJ used to advocate its reduction, and signed a new pact with Washington. Tokyo and Washington held 2+2 meetings in June 2011 and April 2012. At the former meeting, they renewed their common strategic objectives. Newly

stated objectives included strengthening trilateral security and defence cooperation with South Korea. At the latter meeting, they expressed their intention to enhance bilateral security cooperation and to strengthen engagement with countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

References to China have tripled, exceeding, for the first time, references to North Korea, indicating a shift in Japan's primary security concern.

Japanese and South Korean defence ministers met in Seoul in January 2011. It was the first visit to South Korea by a Japanese defence chief since 2005. The two ministers agreed to start discussions on concluding an ACSA and a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA). It was reported that the Japanese side showed greater enthusiasm for stronger security ties and conclusion of the two pacts.³⁴ The two ministers met again in June 2011, which was followed by another meeting in a trilateral setting with their US counterpart in June 2012. Tokyo and Seoul also held a SAREX in November 2011 and another one with Washington in August 2012, while conducting their first extensive trilateral maritime exercise with Washington in June 2012, in which the USS George Washington

aircraft carrier took part. Yet, it became difficult to Tokyo to improve its security relations with Seoul because the bilateral relations were soured due particularly to their territorial dispute over Takeshima/Dokdo islands that was rekindled by President Lee's visit there in August 2012.

Tokyo also continued efforts to strengthen security relations with Canberra and New Delhi. In June 2011 Japan and Australia held defence ministers' meetings in June 2011 and May 2012 and a 2+2 meeting in September 2012. In May 2012 the two countries concluded a GSOMIA, while in September 2012 they agreed on their common security vision and objectives. The SDF sent observers to an Australian army military exercise in November 2011, while in January-February 2012 Australia, for the first time, sent observers to a Japan-US bilateral command post exercise, Yamasakura-61. Then, in February 2012, Tokyo, Canberra, and Washington held joint military exercises in July 2011, February 2012, and June 2012. With regard to India, Tokyo and New Delhi held a defence ministers' meeting in November 2011 and a summit meeting in December 2011 and confirmed their commitment to strengthening their security relations. Then, in June 2012, they held their first joint maritime military exercise.

With regard to Japan's relations with China and North Korea, they

deteriorated further. Its relations with China were strained severely by the purchase by the Noda administration (September 2011- December 2012) of three of the five Senkaku islands from their private owner on 11 September 2012 and the subsequent violent demonstrations in many parts of China that accompanied attacks on Japanese companies and products particularly cars. The demonstrations were even bigger and more damaging than those in 2005. The escalation of anti-Japan sentiments resulted in sharp decline in sales of Japanese products in China. Besides the demonstrations, it became more frequent for Chinese government vessels and aircraft to enter into Japanese territorial waters and airspace around and over the Senkaku islands. Tokyo's relations with Pyongyang worsened because of Pyongyang's satellite launch on 12 December 2012 that Tokyo regarded a *de facto* long-range ballistic missile test and because of Pyongyang's third nuclear test on February 2013.

In response to the increased tension with Beijing and Pyongyang, the Abe administration, which was formed after the LDP's landslide victory in the lower house election on 16 December 2012, has given the priority to strengthening Japan's alliance with the US. Also, it has expressed its intention to ease constitutional restrictions on Japan's military activities and revise the NDPG.

Conclusion

Tokyo has described Japan as peace loving and pacifist. However, the transformation of its security policy, described above, makes one doubt this self-description. Japan does not seem to be an idealist state that actively tries to foster peace through peaceful means. Rather, it is more like a realist state, focusing on the change in military capabilities of neighbouring countries and pursuing countermeasures of strengthening military capability, enhancing alliances, and building new security ties with states that have similar security concerns.

Military countermeasures may be necessary and effective in dealing with some cases. However, it is questionable whether such measures are effective vis-à-vis North Korea and China. Japan's lopsided focus on military countermeasures carries a serious risk of undermining its security by triggering a spiralling military competition with the two countries. It would be too optimistic for Japan to assume that it can out-compete China, considering its serious weaknesses such as population decline

and the resultant further economic decline. To reduce the security threat posed by North Korea and China, Japan needs to improve relations with them. Yet, its diplomatic effort to do so has been limited. In a way, Japan's nationalistic, hard-line policy has helped undemocratic, hostile forces in the two countries to retain power, and has undermined those who support the policy of improving relations with Japan.

It is questionable that the Japanese government has tried to maximise the security and well-being of the Japanese people as a whole. Improving Japan's relations with China and North Korea could bring more benefit to the security and well-being, not only of the Japanese as a whole, but also of the Chinese, the North Koreans, and other peoples in East Asia and beyond. However, it requires a strong political leadership to abandon a nationalistic, hard-line policy and adopt a compromising policy in the face of strong criticism from hard-liners. Unfortunately, leadership of that calibre is particularly lacking in Japan. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that Japan's current security policy toward East Asia will change significantly in the foreseeable future.

Endnotes

- 1 National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) (Official translation presented in Defense of Japan 1989), "Section 2: International Situation". NDPO and NDPG refer to the same document; the government currently uses NDPG.
- 2 NDPO, "Section 3: Basic Defense Concept, (2) Countering Aggression".
- 3 NDPO, "Section 3: Basic Defense Concept, (1) Prevention of Armed Invasion".
- 4 Japan and China normalised relations in 1972 and then signed a peace treaty in 1978.
- 5 Excluding overseas military exercises.
- 6 Since then, the SDF has participated in several UN peacekeeping operations, in Mozambique (1993), Golan Heights (1996), East Timor (1999, 2002), Nepal (2007), Sudan (2008), Haiti (2010), and South Sudan (2012). For a detailed review of Japan's involvement in UN PKOs, see, Gunjishi gakkai (Military History Association) (ed.), *PKO no shiteki kensho* (*Historical Investigation of PKO*), Tokyo, Kinseisha, 2007.
- 7 National Defense Program Outline in and after FY 1996 (NDPO FY1996) (Official translation presented in Defense of Japan 2000), "III: Security of Japan and Roles of Defense Capabilities, (Role of defense capability), (3) Contribution to Creation of a More Stable Security Environment".
- 8 In Japan's definition, both US-led activities and UN peacekeeping operations fall into the category of international peace cooperation activities.
- 9 NDPO FY1996, "II. International Situation, 1".
- 10 Ibid., "II. International Situation, 3".
- 11 Ibid., "III. Security of Japan and Roles of Defense Capabilities (Japan-US Security Arrangements)".
- 12 *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 20 March 2003, evening edition, p. 1.
- 13 President Roh Moo-hyun (February 2003–February 2008) came to Japan only twice, in June 2003 and December 2004.
- 14 National Defense Program Guidelines, FY 2005- (NDPG FY2005) (Official translation presented in Defense of Japan 2008), "V. Future Defense Forces, 1. Role of the Defense Forces, (1) Effective Response to the New Threats and Diverse Situations, a. Response to Ballistic Missile Attacks".
- 15 Ibid., "II. Security Environment Surrounding Japan, 2".
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid., "II. Security Environment Surrounding Japan, 4".
- 19 Ibid., "V. Future Defense Forces, 1. Role of Defense Forces, (1) Effective Response to the New Threats and Diverse Situations, d".

- 20 Ibid., “III. Basic Principles of Japan’s Security Policy, 3. Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements”.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 “Foreign Ministry’s Spokesman on DPRK’s Decision to Suspend Activities to Disable Nuclear Facilities”, *KCNA*, 27 August 2008.
- 23 “II. Basic Principles of Japan’s Security”, *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and beyond (NDPG FY2011)* (Provisional translation, presented at the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at www.mofa.go.jp/policy/security/pdfs/h23_ndpg_en.pdf [last visited 22 February 2013]).
- 24 NDPG FY2011, “III. Security Environment Surrounding Japan, 2”.
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 Ibid., “III. Security Environment Surrounding Japan, 3”.
- 27 Ibid., “III. Security Environment Surrounding Japan, 2”.
- 28 Ibid., “V. Basic Policies to Ensure Japan’s Security, 3. Multi-layered Security Cooperation with the International Community, (1) Cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, I”.
- 29 Ibid., “IV. Basic Policies to Ensure Japan’s Security, 2. Cooperation with its Ally”.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Ibid., “IV. Basic Policies to Ensure Japan’s Security, 1. Japan’s Own Efforts (3) Japan’s defense force -Dynamic Defense Force”.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Ibid., “V. Future Defense Forces, 1. Roles of Defense Forces, (1) Effective deterrence and response, e. Response to ballistic missile attacks”.
- 34 Furukawa Hajime, “Japan, ROK to Push Defense Cooperation”, *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 12 January 2011.