



The Future of Japan-China Relations

China's Security Threats and Japan's Responses

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Introduction

The security environment surrounding Japan has been deteriorating significantly over the last decade. North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons and a variety of ballistic missiles, which pose “grave and imminent threats” to Japan’s security.² Meanwhile, China’s persistent attempts to expand its maritime claims and interests through coercion with its growing economic, diplomatic, and military might present more profound challenges to the existing rules-based international order, on which Japan relies greatly for its security and prosperity. China’s increasingly aggressive behavior, which seeks to jeopardize Japan’s sovereignty and jurisdiction over the Senkaku Islands, and its steady enhancement of Anti-access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities aimed at U.S. forces in East Asia, are of particular concern for Japan’s security.

Vessels of the China Coast Guard (CCG) are continuously present within the contiguous zone and frequently intrude into the Japanese territorial sea of the Senkaku Islands. This pressure, along with increasing maneuvers of warships and aircraft of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) nearby, represents the unilateral escalation of China’s coercive methods to pursue its claims. Moreover, China recently passed the Coast Guard Law, which allows the CCG to use weapons for conducting missions, and CCG ships have now started to obstruct Japanese fishing boats navigating in the territorial water of the Senkaku Islands. This development poses a new phase of threats to Japan’s security. The PLA has been making great efforts to enhance its capabilities to “conduct long-range attacks against adversary force who might deploy or operate within the western Pacific Ocean” in the air, maritime, space, electromagnetic, and information domains.³ China’s recent test-firing of anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) in the South China Sea, reported to be successful in attacking a moving target,⁴ indicates Beijing’s strong resolve and capability to weaken the U.S. military presence in its periphery. These advancements in China’s military capabilities, including in new domains such as space and cyber, have accelerated the great power competition between China and the United States and will likely

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² Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2020* (Tokyo: MOD, August 2020), 91.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress, Military and Security Developments Involving the People’s Republic of China 2020* (Washington D.C.: DOD, August, 2020), 71, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Sep/01/2002488689/-1/-1/1/2020-DOD-CHINA-MILITARY-POWER-REPORT-FINAL.PDF>.

⁴ Josh Rogin, “China’s Military Expansion will Test the Biden Administration,” *Washington Post*, December 4, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/chinas-military-expansion-will-test-the-biden-administration/2020/12/03/9f05e92a-35a7-11eb-8d38-6ae1adb3839_story.html.



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impact Japan's security policies to confront both the immediate threat posed by maritime coercion and long-term security challenges that will test the U.S.-Japan Alliance.

These new developments in China's behavior have intensified the threat to Japan's security and may soon render Japan's current defense policies obsolete, thus compelling the government to recalibrate them. This paper will examine the nature of the major security challenges that China poses to Japan and the U.S.-Japan Alliance and contemplate policy recommendations for increasing deterrence against Chinese aggression that challenges the legitimate interests of Japan and the United States.

Historical Background

Since the mid-1990s, North Korea has been the primary source of security concerns for the Japanese people as it develops weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and provokes neighboring countries. In response to the growing threats posed by Pyongyang, Japan embraced new defense capabilities. In August 1998, North Korea launched a medium range ballistic missile, named Taepodong, which flew over Japan into the Pacific Ocean. In December 1998, the Japanese government decided to join the U.S. program for developing ballistic missile defense technologies.⁵ The shock of the Taepodong launch drove the Japanese government's decision to acquire independently operated information gathering satellites (IGS) to monitor developments threatening Japan in November of the same year.⁶ Opinion polls about Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF) and defense issues conducted by the Cabinet Office every three years show that most of the respondents are concerned about the situation on the Korean Peninsula, except for the poll in January 2015, when China was considered a greater threat.⁷

Certainly, North Korea's provocations and continued development of ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs remain a significant threat to Japan. However, the public and the government of Japan have come to recognize the emerging security threat caused by China, as it has vigorously pursued military modernization and coercive behavior to extend its maritime sovereignty claims in the East and South China Seas since the 2010s. The Cabinet Office survey conducted in January 2015 indicated that China's military modernization and its maritime activities attracted the highest concern for Japan's national peace and security among the Japanese people, followed by the situation on the Korean Peninsula.⁸ The Japanese government

⁵ National Institute for Defense Studies, ed., *East Asian Strategic Review 2000* (Tokyo: NIDS, 2000), 90, http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2000/east-asian_e2000_2.pdf.

⁶ Joan Johnson-Freese, "Japan Joins the Exclusive Space Spy Club," YaleGlobal Online, March 31, 2003, <https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/japan-joins-exclusive-space-spy-club>.

⁷ See "自衛隊・防衛問題に関する世論調査 [Public Opinion Survey on the Self Defense Forces and Security Issues]," Japan Cabinet Office, from 2018, 2015, 2012, 2009, 2006, etc., <https://survey.gov-online.go.jp/index-all.html>.

⁸ "自衛隊・防衛問題に関する世論調査（平成 27 年 1 月調査） [Public Opinion Survey on the Self Defense Forces and Security Issues (January 2015)]," Japan Cabinet Office, March 9, 2015, <https://survey.gov->



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addressed the China threat two years earlier in the first-ever National Security Strategy (NSS) released in December 2013. The NSS noted China's rapid advancement in military capabilities without sufficient transparency and China's attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and the South China Sea: "Such an external stance and military activities by China, coupled with a lack of transparency in its military affairs and security policy, have become an issue of concern to the international community including Japan."⁹

The increase in Japan's apprehension about China in terms of security is derived from China's coercive maritime advancements initiated ostensibly to enhance its power projection capabilities in what it considers a theater campaign encompassing the First Island Chain, which extends from Japan down through the Philippines, and ultimately the Second Island Chain including Guam and the Pacific Islands. Firstly, China has strengthened its actions to support its claims over the Senkaku Islands located in the East China Sea, which Japan incorporated into its territory in January 1895.¹⁰ The People's Republic of China (PRC) started to claim the islands as its territory in December 1971, creating a serious problem in bilateral relations. In December 2008, two Chinese government vessels belonging to the China Marine Surveillance (CMS) intruded into the Japanese territorial sea of the Senkaku Islands,¹¹ the first step of a Chinese government effort to more overtly challenge Japanese sovereignty over the islands. In September 2010, China sent more than 10 government vessels to the sea surrounding the Senkaku Islands with the aim of pressuring the Japanese government to release a captain of a Chinese fishing boat that intentionally collided with ships of the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) within the territorial waters of the Senkaku Islands.¹² In September 2012, China started to maintain a presence of government ships in the Japanese contiguous zone and repeatedly made them intrude into the Japanese territorial sea of the Senkaku Islands, resulting in a continuous stand-off between the vessels of the CCG and JCG. In November 2013, the Chinese government declared the establishment of the East China Sea Air Identification Zone (ADIZ) to encompass the Senkaku Islands in contravention of the principles of international law, thus escalating the situation in the East China Sea.¹³

Secondly, China has intensified assertive actions against rival claimant nations to expand Chinese control and interests in the South China Sea. Chinese government vessels of the CMS and the Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC) started regular patrols in the South China Sea in 2008 and frequently obstructed and intimidated foreign fishing boats operating within the

online.go.jp/h26/h26-bouei/index.html.

⁹ "National Security Strategy (Provisional Translation)," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 17, 2013, 13, <https://www.cas.go.jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

¹⁰ "The Senkaku Islands," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2014, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/senkaku/pdfs/senkaku_pamphlet.pdf.

¹¹ "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 3, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html.

¹² Jake Douglas et al., "Counter Coercion Series: Senkaku Islands Trawler Collision," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 18, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-trawler-collision/>.

¹³ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2014* (Tokyo: MOD, August 2014), 42.



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so-called “nine-dash line.” In May 2011, a vessel of the CMS obstructed exploration activities by a survey ship contracted with the Vietnam National Oil and Natural Gas Group in the South China Sea. The Chinese vessels cut the exploration cable towed by the survey ship, which caused strong diplomatic protests by the Vietnamese government against the Chinese government.¹⁴ In April 2012, vessels of the CMS and FLEC started to confront vessels of the Philippine Coast Guard (PCG) over the Scarborough Shoal, which was administrated by the Philippine government.¹⁵ After the two month stand-off, Chinese vessels expelled the PCG’s ships and established exclusive control over the shoal, proving China’s growing maritime power and strong resolve to extend control in the South China Sea by coercive measures. In May 2014, the China National Offshore Oil Corporation (CNOOC) dispatched the *Haiyang Shiyou 981* (HYSY981) oil rig to the area south of the Paracel Islands that Vietnam claimed as a part of its Economic Exclusive Zone (EEZ), which prompted the Vietnamese government to send Coast Guard vessels and fishing boats to hamper the operation of the oil rig. China mobilized more than 60 vessels and many aircrafts to counter the Vietnamese interception, leading to crashes between the two sides.¹⁶

And thirdly, China has begun to take steps to undermine the operations of U.S. forces within and beyond the First Island Chain. In March 2009, the U.S. Navy oceanographic ship, *Impeccable*, was conducting routine operations in international waters 70 miles south of Hainan Island and was surrounded by Chinese ships, including a Chinese navy intelligence collection ship, a vessel of the CMS, a vessel of the FLEC, and two trawlers. The Chinese vessels harassed the navigation of the *Impeccable* and the trawlers tried to snag the acoustic array sonars towed by the U.S. ship.¹⁷ China obstructed the operations of a U.S. warship again in December 2013 in the South China Sea. A PLA Navy ship harassed the U.S. Navy guided missile cruiser, *Cowpens*, which was observing the Chinese aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, compelling the U.S. cruiser to maneuver to avoid a collision.¹⁸ In August 2014, a Chinese jet fighter conducted a dangerous intercept of a U.S. Navy P-8 patrol aircraft over the Pacific Ocean about 135 miles east of

¹⁴ “Press Conference on Chinese Maritime Surveillance Vessel’s Cutting Exploration Cable of PetroViet Nam Seismic Vessel,” Vietnam Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 28, 2011, http://www.mofa.gov.vn/en/tt_baochi/pbnfn/ns110530220030#KLWTZ1m3GqJ8.

¹⁵ Jake Douglas et al., “Counter Coercion Series: Scarborough Shoal Standoff,” Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, May 22, 2017, <https://amti.csis.org/counter-co-scarborough-standoff/>.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ “Chinese Vessels Shadow, Harass Unarmed U.S. Survey Ship,” defense-aerospace.com, March 9, 2009, <https://www.defense-aerospace.com/articles-view/release/3/103341/chinese-vessels-harass-unarmed-us-survey-ship.html>.

¹⁸ “Chinese Warship Nearly Collided with USS Cowpens,” *Stars and Stripes*, December 13, 2013, <https://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/chinese-warship-nearly-collided-with-uss-cowpens-1.257478> and “American and Chinese Navy Ships Nearly Collided in South China Sea,” *New York Times*, December 14, 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/15/world/asia/chinese-and-american-ships-nearly-collide-in-south-china-sea.html>.



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Hainan Island. The Chinese jet made several passes close to the P-8, which caused the U.S. Department of Defense to register strong concerns with the Chinese government.¹⁹

Faced with China's assertive maritime advancement and attempts to change the status quo through coercion, Japan made an adjustment in its security strategy and initiated some new defense and foreign policies. Japan shifted the primary region for its defense posture from the North to the Southwest in response to Chinese coercion around the Senkaku Islands. The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) of 2014 declared that the SDF would prioritize defense posture buildup in the Southwestern region including information, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, logistical support capabilities, and new units stationed in remote islands.²⁰ In May 2014, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a keynote speech at the Shangri-la Dialogue, stressing the importance of upholding the rule of law at sea and maintaining free and open seas from the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. Abe pledged to support Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN) countries that were making an effort to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight by providing regional coast guards with equipment and training opportunities.²¹ With the aim of further enhancing the U.S.-Japan Alliance, in May 2015 the Japanese Diet passed new security legislation that enabled Japan to partially exercise collective self-defense rights, thus expanding opportunities for the SDF to assist U.S. forces under attack.²² In April 2015, Japan and the United States renewed the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, expanding the scope of alliance cooperation by pursuing trilateral cooperation and extending bilateral cooperation into new domains such as space and cyberspace.²³

Japan has established a strategic framework for managing the China threat and is committed to investing in new defense capabilities accordingly. But Japan also faces resource constraints that will require strategic investments and close coordination with the United States as the U.S.-Japan Alliance evolves to address this long-term security challenge. In the near term, the immediate threat posed by Chinese coercion in the East China Sea will continue to animate Japan's defense policy debate.

¹⁹ "DoD Registers Concern to China for Dangerous Intercept," *DoD News*, August 22, 2014, <https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/603111/dod-registers-concern-to-china-for-dangerous-intercept/#:~:text=The%20Defense%20Department%20has%20expressed,John%20Kirby%20told%20reporters%20today>.

²⁰ "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and beyond (Provisional Translation)," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 17, 2013, https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2014/pdf/20131217_e2.pdf.

²¹ "The 13th IISS Asian Security Summit -The Shangri-La Dialogue-Keynote Address by Shinzo ABE, Prime Minister, Japan," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 30, 2014, https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page4e_000086.html.

²² Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Active Denial, Redesigning Japan's Responses to China's Military Challenges," *International Security*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Spring 2018), 135.

²³ National Institute for Defense Studies, ed., *East Asian Strategic Review 2016* (Tokyo: NIDS, 2016), 311-313, http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/east-asian/pdf/2016/east-asian_e2016_09.pdf.



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Growing Pressure on the Senkaku Islands and the U.S. Military Presence

China's Challenges to Japan's Sovereignty

China's intensifying assertiveness around the Senkaku Islands poses a serious threat to the sovereignty and security of Japan. China has recently increased the number of the CCG vessels navigating around the islands. Six hundred fifteen CCG vessels entered the Japanese contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands in 2018.²⁴ The number increased to 1,161 in 2020, nearly doubling in just two years.²⁵ The CCG has also strengthened its presence in the seas close to the Senkakus by extending the total number of days their vessels enter the contiguous zone of Japan from 159 days in 2018 to 333 days in 2020.²⁶ The CCG vessels intruding into the Japanese territorial sea near the Senkaku Islands in 2020 also displayed more assertiveness. In May of that year, CCG vessels approached and pursued a Japanese fishing boat in Japan's territorial waters, causing the JCG ships to take maneuvers to protect the boat from the Chinese vessels. In July, the CCG vessels again chased a Japanese fishing boat in Japan's territorial waters, causing the Japanese government to lodge a diplomatic protest against the Chinese government. In response, Zhao Lijian, spokesperson of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated, "China Coast Guard found a Japanese fishing boat illegally trespassing into the territorial waters off Diaoyu Dao [Senkaku Islands in Chinese]. China Coast Guard followed and monitored this ship in accordance with law and demanded it immediately leave China's waters."²⁷ China insisted that the CCG vessels enforce Chinese law in the territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands, which clearly infringes on Japanese sovereignty and jurisdiction. The CCG vessels have thereafter repeatedly followed Japanese fishing boats, not only challenging Japan's sovereignty rights but also threatening Japanese citizens.

The latest concern about the CCG, in addition to the harassment of Japanese fishing boats, stems from the enactment of the Coast Guard Law on February 1, 2021. This new law authorizes the CCG vessels to use force against foreign ships in "China's jurisdictional waters," which are not clearly defined.²⁸ The law also allows the CCG to demolish structures constructed

²⁴ "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 3, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html and "The Numbers of Chinese Government and Other Vessels that Entered Japan's Contiguous Zone or Intruded into Territorial Sea Surrounding the Senkaku Islands," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 3, 2021, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000465486.pdf>.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "4 Chinese Ships Observed Off Japan's Senkaku islands for 1st Time This Year," Japan News, January 3, 2021, <https://the-japan-news.com/news/article/0007038471>.

²⁷ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian's Regular Press Conference on July 6, 2020," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, July 6, 2020, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1795337.shtml.

²⁸ Shigeki Sakamoto, "China's New Coast Guard Law and Implications for Maritime Security in the East and South China Seas," Lawfare, February 16, 2021, <https://www.lawfareblog.com/chinas-new-coast-guard-law-and-implications-maritime-security-east-and-south-china-seas>.



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by foreign organizations and individuals in China's jurisdictional waters and islands. Under this law, the CCG is tasked to conduct defense operations by order of the Central Military Commission (CMC).²⁹ Since China claims sovereignty and jurisdiction over the Senkaku Islands and its surrounding waters, it is possible that the CCG may attempt to remove a light house on the island maintained by the Japanese government. Similarly, the possibility exists that CCG vessels may use weapons against JCG ships while pursuing their operations in the Senkaku area. Tomoyuki Yoshida, press secretary of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated, "Japan has been seriously concerned about the entry into force of China's Coast Guard Law," and urged China not to infringe upon the just interests of related countries including Japan in contravention of international law.³⁰

Japan's concern regarding the CCG is intensified by the fact that its fleet and capabilities have been significantly enhanced. The CCG has constructed offshore patrol vessels at a quick pace for the last decade. The number of CCG vessels with more than 1,000-ton displacement increased from 40 in 2012 to 145 in 2019.³¹ The JCG operates the same class ships but has less than half the number of the CCG.³² The CCG vessels are increasingly equipped with more powerful arms, including 76 mm guns.³³ Furthermore, the nature of the CCG significantly changed in 2018. The CCG was originally founded under the control of the State Council's Ministry of Public Security as a civilian law enforcement organization but was transferred to the People's Armed Police (PAP) under unified command and control of the CMC. This transfer means that the nature of the CCG has shifted from a civilian state organization to a military force. After the organizational change, former naval officers assumed major posts of the CCG and retired warships of the PLA Navy (PLAN) were delivered to the CCG, indicating the enhancement of cooperation and coordination between the PLAN and the CCG.³⁴ In July 2020, the PLAN and the CCG reportedly conducted a joint exercise in the Paracel Islands designed to strengthen CCG capabilities to seize an island and suppress civilian unrest with logistical support from the PLAN.³⁵

²⁹ “中华人民共和国海警法[Coast Guard Law of the People's Republic of China],” *People's Daily*, February 2, 2021, http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2021-02/02/nw.D110000renmrb_20210202_1-16.htm.

³⁰ “Press Conference by Foreign Press Secretary YOSHIDA Tomoyuki,” Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 10, 2021, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/kaiken/kaiken23e_000013.html.

³¹ “海上保安レポート 2019[Japan Coast Guard Annual Report 2019],” Japan Coast Guard, https://www.kaiho.mlit.go.jp/info/books/report2019/html/tokushu/toku19_01.html.

³² Benjamin Brimelow, “China's Ships Are Getting Bigger and More Aggressive, and Japan Is Scrambling to Keep Up,” *Insider*, February 25, 2021, <https://www.businessinsider.com/chinas-coast-guard-ships-worrying-japan-scrambling-to-keep-up-2021-2>.

³³ See, Andrew S. Erickson et al., “Surging Second Sea Force: China's Maritime Law Enforcement Forces, Capabilities, and Future in the Gray Zone and Beyond,” *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (Spring 2019), 1-24.

³⁴ *Defense of Japan 2020*, 66.

³⁵ “China Launches Naval Exercise in South China Sea,” *Radio Free Asia*, July 1, 2020, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/exercise-southchinasea-07012020194330.html>



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China's Military Power Threatens U.S.-Japan Alliance Deterrence

The PLA has enhanced power projection capabilities and increased military pressure on Japan as well. A Jiangkai I-class frigate of the PLAN entered the contiguous zone near the Senkaku Islands in June 2016, marking the first time a Chinese combatant vessel navigated in the Japanese contiguous zone.³⁶ In January 2018, a Shang-class submarine and a Jiangkai II-class frigate passed into the contiguous zone around the Senkaku Islands.³⁷ The Chinese submarine made a submerged passage in the contiguous zone close to the Japanese territorial sea of the islands, causing a higher sense of alarm in Japan. The PLAN warships have become increasingly active in the areas around Japan and beyond. The Chinese flotillas, including the *Liaoning* carrier strike group, frequently conduct training and exercises in the East and South China Seas and sometimes advance into the western Pacific Ocean, passing through the Miyako and Bashi straits. In early 2020, a PLAN flotilla consisting of four warships entered the Pacific Ocean from the East China Sea and reached the sea 300 km west of Hawaii. When the flotilla turned its direction and sailed to the South China Sea, a destroyer applied a laser to a U.S. Navy P-8A patrol aircraft in international airspace 380 miles west of Guam Island.³⁸

PLA aircraft have also increased the number of flights and expanded areas of operation around Japan. China is increasing the number of flights of its military aircraft in the southwestern part of the Japanese ADIZ, posing a significant burden on the Air Self Defense Force (ASDF) in conducting intercept missions. The number of intercepts against Chinese aircraft by the ASDF increased from 38 in FY 2009 to 675 in FY 2019.³⁹ About 70 percent of the total scrambles in FY 2019 were caused by Chinese aircraft.⁴⁰ The PLA aircraft expanded their areas of operations from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean and the Sea of Japan. Recently, China has flown many types of military aircraft over the Pacific Ocean including the H-6 bomber, Y-8 early warning aircraft, Y-9 intelligence gathering aircraft, Y-8 electronic warfare aircraft, and Tu-154 intelligence gathering aircraft. This indicates the enhancement of Chinese ISR capabilities and strike capabilities for attacking land-based targets in the First Island Chain and surface ships operating in the western Pacific Ocean. In addition, the PLA operates more than 1,000 fourth and fifth generation fighters combined, about three times more than the ASDF in 2020.⁴¹ The overwhelming number of these highly capable fighters, together with the increasing number of early warning aircraft and air refueling tankers, enhances the PLA's capabilities to control the airspace over the East China Sea and the South China Sea.

³⁶ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2016* (Tokyo: MOD, August 2016), 53.

³⁷ Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2018* (Tokyo: MOD, August 2018), 104.

³⁸ "People's Liberation Army Navy Lased a U.S. Navy P-8A in Unsafe, Unprofessional Manner," U.S. Navy Press Release, February 28, 2020, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/Press-Releases/display-pressreleases/Article/2236785/peoples-liberation-army-navy-lased-a-us-navy-p-8a-in-unsafe-unprofessional-mann/>.

³⁹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, 74.

⁴⁰ "Statistics on Scrambles through the Third Quarter of FY 2019," Joint Staff Press Release, January 29, 2020, https://www.mod.go.jp/js/Press/press2020/press_pdf/p20200129_02.pdf.

⁴¹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, 67-68, 493.



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The significant enhancement of Chinese naval and air equipment in quality and quantity helps the PLA enhance its A2/AD capabilities against the SDF and U.S. forces operating in areas around Japan. Given the increasing number of sophisticated aircraft and combatant ships of the Chinese military, it has become harder for the United States and Japan to maintain air and maritime superiority in the East China Sea. The rapid modernization of the Chinese missile force plays an important role in strengthening the PLA's A2/AD capabilities. The PLA Rocket Force (PLARF) operates medium-range ballistic missiles (MRBM) and land-attack cruise missiles (LACM) which can attack military bases and facilities of the SDF and U.S. forces such as airports, naval ports, and radar stations in Japan. If the Chinese MRBMs and LACMs successfully degrade or neutralize Japanese and American operational capabilities around the First Island Chain, the PLA might easily advance warships and aircraft into the western Pacific Ocean to threaten the U.S. carrier strike groups.

In addition, anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBM) are particularly concerning when regarding China's A2/AD capabilities. China test-launched the ASBMs towards the South China Sea in July 2019 and August 2020. In the latter case, China launched a DF-26B from the northwestern province of Qinghai and a DF-21D from Zhejiang province in the east. Both missiles landed in an area between Hainan province and the Paracel Islands.⁴² Adm. Philip Davidson, commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, later confirmed that the PLA had successfully tested an ASBM against a moving ship.⁴³ This development indicates significant improvement of Chinese ASBM capabilities and suggests that large surface ships of the U.S. Navy and the Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF), such as the USS Ronald Regan and the Izumo-class destroyer, operating beyond the First Island Chain might be threatened if China's ISR capabilities are enhanced significantly. In the military parade held in 2019 at Tiananmen square, the PLARF displayed the DF-17, a medium-range missile system equipped with a hypersonic glide vehicle (HGV).⁴⁴ Although the real capacity of the DF-17 is unclear, the Chinese effort to develop HGVs might weaken the effectiveness of the current missile defense systems of the SDF and U.S. forces. The significant enhancement of China's A2/AD capabilities threatens not only the security of Japan but also the peace and stability of the broader region including Taiwan, the South China Sea, and the Line of Actual Control between China and India.⁴⁵ The increase of military tension or even the occurrence of military conflicts in the Taiwan Strait would inevitably affect the security of Japan. Taiwan is located adjacent to the Nansei Islands and the strategically important sea lines of communication connecting Japan to

⁴² "Chinese Military Fires 'Aircraft-carrier Killer' Missile into the South China Sea in 'Warning to the United States'," *South China Morning Post*, August 26, 2020, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/3098972/chinese-military-launches-two-missiles-south-china-sea-warning>.

⁴³ Rogin, "China's Military Expansion will Test the Biden Administration."

⁴⁴ Missile Defense Project, "DF-17," *Missile Threat*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, February 19, 2020, last modified June 23, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/df-17/>.

⁴⁵ "Statement of Admiral Philip S. Davidson, U.S. Navy Commander, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture," March 9, 2021, 31-37, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Davidson_03-09-21.pdf.



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Southeast Asia, Indian Ocean, Middle East, Africa, and Europe. If the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decides to liberate Taiwan by all means necessary, including denying the intervention of U.S. forces, the PLA may attack American military assets in the Japanese territories.

Japan's Responses and Limitations

In response to China's expanding ambition and capabilities to change the status quo through coercion, the Japanese government has gradually enhanced the capabilities of the JCG and the SDF. In December 2016, the Abe administration announced the Policy on Strengthening the Maritime Security System.⁴⁶ Since then, the Japanese government has continued to increase the budget for the JCG. The JCG has acquired new types of offshore patrol ships, helicopters, and surveillance aircraft in recent years. It plans to operate surveillance by unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV) to enhance ISR capabilities.⁴⁷ Satoshi Nakajima, former commandant of the JCG, maintains that the new patrol ships will have cutting-edge technologies and structures and will significantly enhance JCG capabilities of command and control, surveillance, response to large ships, and coordination and cooperation with related government agencies.⁴⁸

The SDF has also increased its capability to cope with the growing assertiveness of the PLA around the southwestern areas of Japan. As a part of the efforts in enhancing ISR capabilities on the activities of the PLA in the East China Sea, the Ground Self Defense Force (GSDF) established a new coast observation unit in Yonaguni Island, close to both the Senkaku Islands and Taiwan, in 2016.⁴⁹ The ASDF has started to introduce E2-D early warning aircraft with improved radar systems and cooperative engagement capabilities (CEC) with other assets of the SDF and U.S. forces. The ASDF also plans to establish a new unit for operating Global Hawk UAVs to enhance ISR capabilities in wider areas and with longer duration.⁵⁰ To cope with China's growing military presence in the East China Sea, the GSDF established new bases in Amami Oshima Island, Miyako Island, and Ishigaki Island to fill in the vacuum of the SDF presence in the Nansei Islands.⁵¹ The GSDF also established an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade in 2018, which is expected to have enhanced capabilities to deter and counter threats through conducting persistent steady-state maneuver.⁵² The ASDF doubled the number of F-15 fighters stationed at Naha air base in Okinawa to 40 to meet the increasing intercept missions against Chinese aircraft.

⁴⁶ "Ministerial Council on the Strengthening of the Maritime Security System," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 21, 2016, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/actions/201612/21article4.html.

⁴⁷ "Japan Coast Guard Test-flying SeaGuardian Drone," *Asahi Shimbun*, November 10, 2020, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13917723>.

⁴⁸ 中島敏[Satoshi Nakajima], "急がれる海上保安体制の強化=警備[Urgent Needs to Strengthen Maritime Security System]," *世界の艦船*[Ships of the World], October 2020, 133.

⁴⁹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, 252.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

⁵² Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2019* (Tokyo: MOD, August 2019), 230.



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In addition, the SDF has improved its capability to counter Chinese A2/AD capabilities. The MSDF increased the number of submarines from 16 to 22 to enhance deterrence against the warships of the PLAN.⁵³ The GSDF now deploys surface-to-ship missile (SSM) units in the Nansei Islands to strengthen capabilities to counter the PLAN surface ships approaching the first island chain. The Japanese government upgraded the Type-12 SSM to extend its range and is diversifying launching platforms to strengthen stand-off capability.⁵⁴ The 2018 Medium Term Defense Program (MTDP) declared that the SDF will procure stand-off missiles including Joint Strike Missiles (JSM), Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missiles (JASSM), and Long Range Anti-Ship Missiles (LRASM) and proceed with R&D on hyper velocity gliding projectiles (HVGP), new SSM, and hypersonic weapons to intercept attacks against Japan while ensuring the safety of SDF personnel.⁵⁵

Although the Japanese government has made significant efforts to enhance the capabilities of the JCG and the SDF as mentioned above, it remains difficult for Tokyo to deter Beijing's ambition and actions to dominate the Senkaku Islands and the East China Sea. China seeks to establish control over the Senkaku Islands using "gray-zone" coercion methods without triggering military conflicts with the SDF and U.S. forces.⁵⁶ The CCG has already overwhelmed the JCG in its number of vessels and their level of armament. Despite Japan's effort in increasing ships for the JCG, the gap in capabilities between the CCG and the JCG will inevitably expand as the resources China can allocate for the CCG is much more than what Japan can allocate for the JCG. Consequently, the opportunities for the CCG to expel JCG ships and establish an exclusive presence in the waters around the Senkaku Islands will continue to increase, as they did with the Scarborough Shoal in the South China Sea in 2012. To prevail in this "gray-zone" strategy to deprive Japan of the Senkaku Islands by avoiding armed conflict between the CCG and JCG, China will try to make Japan hesitant about exercising force through the SDF when responding to any escalations in the situation.

The deterrence of the PLA against the SDF has also significantly increased. The PLA operates many more warships and aircraft than the SDF, making it difficult for Japan to sustain defensive operations in the East China Sea for an extended period. To make matters worse,

⁵³ "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2019 and beyond," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 18, 2018, 31, https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218_e.pdf.

⁵⁴ "Procurement of a New Missile Defense System, etc. and Strengthening Stand-off Defense Capability," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 18, 2020, https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11623291/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/Defense_Program_e_2020.pdf.

⁵⁵ "Medium Term Defense Program (FY 2019 - FY 2023)," Japan Cabinet Secretariat, December 18, 2018, 12, https://warp.da.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/11591426/www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/chuki_seib_i31-35_e.pdf.

⁵⁶ James Holmes and Toshi Yoshihara, "Five Shades of Chinese Gray-Zone Strategy," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, May 2, 2017, <https://csbaonline.org/about/news/five-shades-of-chinese-gray-zone-strategy>.



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China's growing long-range precision strike capabilities, including ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and HGVs, can severely damage, or even neutralize, the functions of the SDF's critical infrastructure such as naval ports and air bases at the onset of a military conflict, thus resulting in a serious deterioration of Japanese defense capabilities. The threshold for the PLA to exercise its long-range precision strike capabilities against Japan is relatively low because the SDF fully lacks the equivalent capabilities needed to degrade Chinese bases and infrastructures supporting such aggression. This asymmetry in long-range strike capabilities gives China greater confidence in deterring Japan from mobilizing the SDF to counter Chinese attempts to dominate the Senkaku Islands.

Need for Counter-Strike Capabilities

Under the current division of labor in the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance, specifically regarding the “spear” role for the United States and the “shield” role for Japan,⁵⁷ U.S. forces are expected to conduct counter-strike operations against a country that attacks Japan. China, therefore, intends to prevent U.S. forces from exercising their formidable strike capabilities against the PLA when supporting Japan in a contingency over the Senkaku Islands. The rapid increase of Chinese A2/AD capabilities will surely pose a higher cost on U.S. offensive operations against China and may make China's leadership more confident in China's ability to deter U.S. forces. This could possibly result in a miscalculation about U.S. resolve and capabilities to execute its “spear” role in accordance with the U.S.-Japan Alliance. To make matters worse, Japan's effort in enhancing its “shield” against missile threats faces difficulties. In June 2020, the Japanese government scrapped the plan to deploy the land-based Aegis Ashore missile defense system due to concerns over potential damage to local populations caused by the boosters falling outside the launch bases. Japan's national security apparatus has been discussing alternatives to Aegis Ashore, and has proposed three alternative options of sea-based systems for radars and launchers: building new destroyers for such systems, placing the systems on commercial merchant ships, or building offshore structures similar to oil rigs.⁵⁸ Finally the government decided to build two Aegis-equipped destroyers, costing 25 percent more than the original plan of land-based systems.⁵⁹ Other than the financial cost, the additional two warships will increase the workload for the MSDF, which is struggling with a manpower shortage.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ James L. Schoff and David Song, “Should America Share the ‘Spear’ With Japan?” *The Diplomat*, May 5, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/05/should-america-share-the-spear-with-japan/>.

⁵⁸ “Japan's Missile Defense Options,” *NHK World*, October 2, 2020, <https://www3.nhk.or.jp/nhkworld/en/news/backstories/1321/>.

⁵⁹ “Japan's Plan for 2 Superdestroyers to Cost More than Aegis Ashore,” *Nikkei Asia*, November 25, 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Japan-s-plan-for-2-superdestroyers-to-cost-more-than-Aegis-Ashore>.

⁶⁰ “Focus: Japan's Additional Aegis Ships could Encourage Further Arms Buildup,” *Kyodo*, December 18, 2020, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2020/12/3f97429e8c93-focus-japans-additional-aegis-ships-could-encourage-further-arms-buildup.html>.



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Meanwhile, the cancelation of the Aegis Ashore systems encouraged a discussion about what kind of military capabilities Japan should have.⁶¹

Under these circumstances, one of the most effective means for Japan to improve its strategic environment is to play its own part of the “spear” role in the U.S.-Japan Alliance through acquiring long-range precision strike capabilities. If the SDF possess credible counter-strike capabilities to target Chinese military assets and infrastructure used to attack Japan, the PLA should consider a higher possibility for the SDF to engage in escalated situations over the Senkaku Islands, thus resulting in an enhancement of Japan’s deterrence of China’s aggression in the East China Sea. Rather than deterrence by punishment, deterrence by denial is appropriate for Japan to pursue through introducing conventional counter-strike capabilities, which can pose non-negligible military and political cost on the PLA and the CCP leadership. Japan’s deterrence by denial would prevent the PLA from achieving a decisive victory in a short-period war without damages and casualties. Damages on military bases, naval ports, airfields, and other military facilities in the mainland coastal areas would likely cause social and economic instability, which the CCP wants to avoid at any cost.

The strengthening of Japanese counter-strike capabilities will reduce China’s expectation that it can make the alliance fail to function by preventing U.S. forces from supporting the defense operations of the SDF. There is no possibility for the United States to use force to defend Japan unless the SDF conducts defense operations against China over the Senkaku Islands. When Japan stands up to Chinese aggression by exercising the full capabilities of the SDF, there is a high possibility that U.S. forces will join the operation to defeat China. Moreover, the counter-A2/AD capabilities of the alliance will be enhanced when Japan increases its long-range strike capabilities. The Biden administration regards China as “the biggest geopolitical test of the 21st century” and seeks to engage China “from a position of strength,” which requires working with allies and partners.⁶² In this context, an SDF with credible counter-strike capabilities will contribute to enhancing the deterrence of the U.S.-Japan Alliance and will enable the alliance to better meet China’s challenges to the common interest of both major democracies. Consequently, enhancement of Japan’s counter-strike capabilities will reduce the opportunity for China to control the Senkaku Islands through “gray-zone” coercion.

⁶¹ Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Is Japan’s Interest in Strike Capabilities a Good Idea?” War on the Rocks, July 17, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/is-japans-interest-in-strike-capabilities-a-good-idea/>.

⁶² Antony J. Blinken, “A Foreign Policy for the American People,” U.S. Department of States, March 3, 2021, <https://www.state.gov/a-foreign-policy-for-the-american-people/>.



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Policy Recommendations

Japan and the United States are recommended to consider the following policies to manage the challenges China poses to the security of Japan and the stability of East Asia.

First, Japan should increase investment in enhancing the capabilities of the constabulary force to enforce Japanese law in the Senkaku Islands and the surrounding territorial waters. The JCG should acquire larger patrol ships with enhanced protection on hulls and bridges in preparation for ramming and armed attacks by CCG vessels. The JCG needs to strengthen sea and air lift capabilities to dispatch personnel and police officers to the Senkaku Islands in case of an illegal landing on the islands by foreign people. The National Police Agency and the Okinawa Prefectural Police should establish a special police unit in Ishigaki Island with a mission to prevent Chinese people and personnel from landing on the Senkaku Islands and, if this fails, to capture them in accordance with Japanese law. The JCG and the special police unit need to regularly conduct joint exercises to effectively pursue this mission. The Japanese government should declare that the CCG is a military force and, therefore, armed attacks by the CCG against the JCG can be regarded as an armed attack against Japan, possibly leading to an issue of a Defense Operation order to the SDF. The room for China to exploit the “gray zone” for dominating the Senkaku Islands will be diminished by this declaration.

Second, the SDF should acquire long-range precision strike capabilities to enhance Japanese deterrence of China’s aggressions and to increase the credibility and effectiveness of the U.S.-Japan Alliance in upholding a free and open Indo-Pacific. The SDF plans to acquire stand-off missiles and pursue the development of hypersonic weapons, both of which should be accelerated. At the same time Japan needs to consider introducing existing weapons for long-range strike including anti-ship and land-attack cruise missiles. A mixture of cruise and ballistic missiles has been identified as the best option to attack fixed targets because ballistic missiles can make up for the weakness of cruise missiles, such as low velocity and limited payload.⁶³ Since there are opinions among Japanese society that oppose the acquirement of strike capabilities from the standpoint of Japan’s “exclusive defense-oriented policy,” the Japanese government and politicians should share objective information about the situation surrounding the Senkaku Islands and encourage candid discussions about the necessity of acquiring long-range strike capabilities among Japanese constituencies. The Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party issued a proposal for the Japanese government to consider acquiring capabilities to attack enemy missile bases as a part of missile defense capabilities in May 2010.⁶⁴ As missile threats to Japan continue to expand, the possession of long-range precision strike

⁶³ Masashi Murano, “The Modality of Japan’s Long-Range Strike Options,” Texas National Security Review, October 1, 2020, <https://tnsr.org/roundtable/policy-roundtable-the-future-of-japanese-security-and-defense/>.

⁶⁴ 自由民主党政務調査会[Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party], “提言・新防衛計画の大綱について[Proposal on the New Defense Program Guideline],” May 14, 2010, https://www.jimin.jp/policy/policy_topics/pdf/seisaku-017.pdf.



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capabilities should be discussed in terms of not only the defense of the Senkaku Islands, but also in the broader context of Japanese security, including enhancing missile defense capabilities.

Third, Japan and the United States need to substantiate their common objective of deterring Chinese assertiveness in the maritime domain to change the status quo. In this context, the reaffirmation by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin to the Minister of Defense Nobuo Kishi that the Senkaku Islands are covered by Article V of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is encouraging.⁶⁵ The SDF and U.S. forces need to form combined operational plans to conduct a variety of missions from surveillance and display of force in peace time to counter-attack and recapture of occupied islands in war time. The two militaries then also need to conduct combined exercises according to the above plans. Japan and the United States need to share real time information about Chinese activities in the East China Sea. This information would provide the U.S. government and Congress with background on how Japan makes its decisions in an escalated situation over the Senkaku Islands and would contribute to closer coordination between the two countries when reacting to Chinese destabilizing and aggressive behavior. Joint use of bases and facilities between the SDF and U.S. forces is another effective measure to facilitate combined operations and raise the cost for China to attack the Japanese territories, which may then cause collateral damage to U.S. forces. As the PLA envisages the concept of all-domain operations and strives for enhancing capabilities in new domains,⁶⁶ the two allies should accelerate defense cooperation across all domains, including space and cyberspace, as articulated in the Joint Statement of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) issued in March 2021.⁶⁷

And fourth, Japan and the United States should promote multilateral cooperation to maintain and enhance the existing regional order in the Indo-Pacific. Since China challenges not only Japanese sovereignty but also the interests of other nations as well as the stability and prosperity provided by the current regional order, many regional countries have an interest in cooperating with Japan and the United States to balance and counter China's ambitions. Through promoting existing multilateral frameworks such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (U.S.-Japan-Australia-India) and exploring opportunities to coordinate with some ASEAN members such as Vietnam and the Philippines, Japan and the United States can more effectively deter China's assertiveness in the region.

⁶⁵ "Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's Call With Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi," U.S. Department of Defense, January 23, 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2480919/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-austins-call-with-japanese-defense-minist/>.

⁶⁶ Derek Solen, "Chinese View of All-Domain Operations," China Aerospace Studies Institute, July 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/CASI/Display/Article/2310442/chinese-views-of-all-domain-operations/>.

⁶⁷ "Joint Statement of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2)," Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 16, 2021, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/files/100161035.pdf>.



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Conclusion

Japan now faces the most severe security environment since the end of World War II. China intends to invade Japanese territory and alter the regional security order by degrading the U.S.-Japan Alliance and reducing the U.S. military presence in the Indo-Pacific region. In addition, China far exceeds Japan in terms of economic and military power. This harsh reality inevitably compels Japan to reconsider its defense policies and prioritize new capabilities in the face of resource constraints. Japan should enhance long-range precision strike capabilities to increase Japan's own ability to deter China and strengthen the U.S.-Japan Alliance, a reminder that alliance interoperability is also critical to deterring China. Although it remains to be seen if Japan can lift some of its deep-rooted and self-imposed restrictions as a military power,⁶⁸ Japan needs to take a new step towards adapting to this drastically changed security environment in coordination with the United States and other like-minded partners.

⁶⁸ Bjorn Elias Mikalsen Ggrønning, "Japan's Shifting Military Priorities: Counterbalancing China's Rise," *Asian Security*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 15.