

## Japan's Defense Policy: Closer to Proactive Reality

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Although General Douglas MacArthur claimed that Prime Minister Kijuro Shidehara suggested a no war article in Japan's new constitution, MacArthur himself provided guidance to his government section that the new document contain a prohibition of military forces for any purpose "including self-defense." The American framers deleted the self-defense prohibition as redundant, and Hitoshi Ashida modified the words to those of the present Article 9, which he said, made the meaning clearer, only to admit later that his version was designed specifically to permit future Japanese armament. Nonetheless when the constitution went into effect on May 3, 1947, the occupied Tokyo government explained that Article 9 prohibited any type of Japanese military forces.

MacArthur dramatically reversed himself in June 1950 when he ordered the formation of a 75,000-man Japanese National "Police" Reserve manned by former army officers and soldiers of the rank of colonel and below and armed with regular U.S. Army equipment including tanks. At that time, the supreme commander began to say that the Japanese constitution outlawed only offensive rather than defensive military capability.

It is frequently argued that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which came into effect on April 28, 1952, was a U.S. guarantee of Japanese security in exchange for a Japanese provision of military bases for the Americans; but that description omits the fact that Japan was also required to take measures for its own defense, which it initially achieved by changing the name of the Police Reserve to the Safety Agency. In 1954, the Safety Agency became the Defense Agency, made up of Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces (SDF).

There was no national security committee in the Diet for more than two decades following the end of the occupation; the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) maintained absolute majorities in both houses of the Diet. Opposition parties led by the Socialists and Communists argued that the Self-Defense Forces were illegal and called for the abolition of the Security Treaty. In 1957, the government promulgated Japan's National Security Policy, calling for Japan to rely on a collective security organization, the United Nations, as the basis for its safety. Recognizing that the United Nations was not at that time fully effective, the policy stated that temporarily Japan would depend on U.S.-Japan security arrangements. Given that the proximate Asian provinces of the Soviet Union were a part of a growing global military superpower bent on world domination meant that Japan's security was dependent on the willingness of the United States to provide Japan with nuclear and conventional protection.

In 1959, Japan's Supreme Court ruled that self-defense was legal and that the amount of self-defense power was a political rather than a legal decision. Even though the veracity of that ruling should have been recognized in 1972 when the Kakuei Tanaka cabinet made a decision based solely on domestic political rationale devoid of any strategic calculus that, although Japan has the right of collective self-defense,<sup>1</sup> it cannot exercise that right because of Article 9.

That decision might have made sense if General MacArthur's 1946 order to his staff remained in effect and if Article 9 had not been reworded by Ashida, but it made no sense in view of the 1950 MacArthur declaration that only offense is prohibited, which the Japanese government accepted to end the occupation in 1952 and which Tokyo has followed ever since. Only the limited capability of the SDF in 1972 obscured the strategic illogic of the cabinet decision stating that Japan could not exercise collective self-defense while relying on collective self-defense for its own security, either from the United States or from the United Nations. This 1972 policy decision was made legally by the cabinet but with only a domestic political (ending a Diet boycott) rationale, which potentially endangered Japanese security (Japan in effect telling even the United States that no assistance outside Japanese territory can be provided by Tokyo).

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Japan's 1957 policy was still in effect giving primacy to the ultimate collective security organization, the United Nations.

During the final decades of the Cold War, the Soviet Union, a primarily European power conventionally, expanded its nuclear and conventional forces in its Far Eastern provinces including its Pacific naval forces. At its height, the USSR possessed 100 submarines in its Pacific Fleet alone, 40 percent of which were nuclear powered, some with intercontinental ballistic missiles. The U.S. Seventh Fleet had only about 25 antisubmarine P3 patrol aircraft to deal with this threat, but thanks to Japan's Maritime SDF increasing its number of P3 patrol planes to 100, totally interoperable with the U.S. aircraft, every single Soviet submarine trying to exit Vladivostok for the Pacific was detected by a Japanese or U.S. aircraft.

Fortunately the Soviets did not believe that Japan would not exercise collective self-defense if only U.S. ships were attacked, and the 125 combined Japanese and U.S. planes overwhelmed and negated the Soviet numbers. Because the Cold War never became hot, a result to which Japan's antisubmarine patrol air fleet strongly contributed, whether Moscow's paranoia was justified or not (this author believes it was), the USSR collapsed owing in great measure to combined Japanese-American naval efforts. Given the geography involved, Japan's MSDF could posture that its aircraft were merely training in the Sea of Japan and northwest Pacific rather than admitting what the U.S., Japanese, and Soviet navies knew, that Japan's MSDF Fleet was engaging in collective self-defense operations together with the Seventh Fleet. Together the MSDF and U.S. Seventh Fleet played a huge role in winning the Cold War in the Pacific; particularly the Japanese contribution is seldom recognized.

Before Japan and the United States could enjoy the disappearance of the Soviet naval threat very long, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1990. President George H.W. Bush organized a 37-nation coalition to expel Iraq, an effort that dovish Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu resisted owing to the 1972 position on collective self-defense. Japan instead raised taxes and contributed over \$13 billion; however, despite the Gulf War's unexpected short duration and the relative lack of combat losses, and Tokyo's huge financial contribution, Japan's unwillingness to put SDF or even Coast Guard assets in harm's way was criticized by the United States, by friendly Gulf States, and by many Japanese commentators as well.

Stung by criticism from many quarters Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi tried to react more positively and rapidly following attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Under Defense Guidelines agreed to in 1997, Japan dispatched MSDF tankers and destroyers to the Indian Ocean, GSDF engineers to Iraq, and ASDF logistic aircraft to the Middle East. Although these forces were not authorized to conduct combat operations,<sup>2</sup> this was the furthest Japanese military had operated outside the nation since 1945.

More recently, China has labeled much of the South China Sea, the freedom of which is critical for Japanese economic livelihood, and the Japanese-owned Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea as Chinese "core interests." In 2010, a Chinese fishing boat rammed a Japanese Coast Guard vessel, and at present Chinese ships and aircraft are conducting dangerous operations close to Japanese ships and aircraft in the vicinity of the Senkakus. For the first time since 1945, rather than the United States worrying that Japan might not fight together with it, Japan has become worried that the United States might not fight together with Japan if the Senkakus, which many Americans have never heard of, are threatened.

Fending off vicious attacks by some Japanese media and some opposition parties--not to mention criticisms from China and South Korea--that he was acting dangerously reminiscent of Japan in the 1930s, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe replaced the 1957 National Defense Policy on April 1, 2014, with a realistic Japanese National Security Policy based on combined efforts of a strengthened SDF and enhanced cooperation with the United States and other countries. Additionally, on July 1, Abe replaced the 1972 cabinet decision, not extra legally as his critics claim, but in the same manner as was the case in 1972, by a legal, political cabinet decision, this time, however, based on strategic reality rather than on domestic political calculus.

Minimally, this change is more than symbolically important since, despite Abe's decision to maintain some restrictions on Japan's exercise of collective self-defense, the cabinet decision of July 1 allows the United States and Japan to plan more realistic bilateral defense guidelines within this year for the first time since the strategically naïve decision of 1972. Beijing and Seoul quickly criticized Tokyo's move even though, particularly in the case of the latter, the reaction is hard to rationalize given that any Japanese offer of collective self-defense in case of a North Korean attack on the South would only come about if Seoul requested assistance or accepted a Japanese offer. If the United States were reengaged in the Middle East and were resultantly not able to provide support to its Korean ally, Seoul might welcome Japanese assistance, at least in the form of air and naval support.

In sum, Japanese defense policy changed substantially from 1946, when General MacArthur directed that postwar Japan have no military power for any purpose, to 1950 when the same MacArthur stated that still-occupied Japan's constitution outlawed only offensive capability,<sup>3</sup> to the position Japan accepted in 1952 to end the occupation. Since that time, however,

<sup>2</sup> The GSDF engineer soldiers had to be protected by other allied soldiers while in Iraq.

<sup>3</sup> When serving as special assistant for Japan in the Office of the Secretary of Defense from 1979 to 1988, the author sometimes noted to Japanese

Japan's basic policy has been modified largely by self-imposed restrictions decided principally on political grounds. The Abe administration's adoption of a proactive, strategically sound National Security Strategy and a logically complementary collective self-defense policy have removed restrictions in a manner that, rather than indicating a dangerous return to militarism of the 1930s, suggests a sound investment in a realistic Japanese strategy of alliance with the United States in Japan's national security interest.

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audiences that the nuclear umbrella and other offensive protection the United States promised to supply Japan in time of emergency would of course come from the Department of "Defense."