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# New Chapter in the Japan-US Alliance\*

—Developments and Challenges in Japan's Role—

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投稿論文

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## Abstract

For over sixty-five years, the Japan-United States (US) alliance has developed into one of the lynchpins of security in the Asia-Pacific. Yet since the formative years of the alliance, there have been myriad ups-and-downs in developing the partnership due not only to new regional security issues, but also to issues in the Japan-US bilateral alliance, slow developments in Tokyo's security posture, and readiness of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF). While it is easy to point to the problems and make prescriptions, achieving them are easier said than done. Focusing on the defense capability aspects, this paper aims to assess how the Japan-US alliance has developed, as well as outlining the key prospects and issues in developing the security partnership from the Japanese perspective.

**Keywords:** Security, Japan, United States, Alliance, East Asia

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## 1. Introduction

For over sixty-five years, the Japan-United States (US) alliance has developed significantly, epitomized by the strong commitment to improve their abilities to fulfil the partnership's goals and provide one another with assurance. Politically and strategically, the Japan-US alliance remains strong and there are no signs that it will weaken in the foreseeable future. Still, the fluid dynamics of the East Asia security balance, compounded by external and internal calls for Japan to take on greater security roles have raised critical questions about the alliance's future and how it should be further developed or reconfigured. In particular, despite the developments in the capabilities of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF), there are questions regarding the actual significance in the alliance context.

Throughout history, alliances have played a pivotal role in international security. Arnold Wolfers defined alliances as the “promises of mutual military assistance between two or more sovereign states.”<sup>1</sup> While the description is straightforward, there are many dimensions to the nature and perception of alliances. From the realist perspective, alliances are beneficial and essential in enhancing national defense and the state's position in the regional and international balance of power through the partnership's joint capabilities and extended deterrence. At the same time, alliances are filled with issues, particularly in how they are operated and sustained.<sup>2</sup> Even if states vow to maintain alliances, changes in the security environment, domestic developments, and of course, relations among the allied governments can alter the nature of partnerships.<sup>3</sup>

The Japan-US alliance presents an interesting case. To date, there are plentiful studies on the nature of the Japan-US alliance and its development.<sup>4</sup> There is also a rich collection of studies that have looked at the alliance's significance in the context of relations with the powers in the region.<sup>5</sup> Yet while there is a general consensus on the significance of the alliance and the strong bond between Japan and the US, many also note the challenges and shortfalls even as Tokyo reconfigured its security posture in recent decades.<sup>6</sup> In particular, many have pointed to the asymmetric nature of the alliance. For instance, Hornung and Mochizuki accurately describes Japan as the US's “exceptional ally,” arguing that “while Japan's SDF is now in a better position to assist US forces across a range of operational scenarios, the US should not expect too much of Japan” given Tokyo's myriad constraints in utilizing the use of force.<sup>7</sup> Many have also looked at how the alliance should be

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<sup>1</sup> Arnold Wolfers, “Alliances,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. David L. Sills (NY: Macmillan, 1968). p.268.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure or Collapse,” *Survival* 39, no. 1 (1997).

<sup>3</sup> Kurt M. Campbell, “The End of Alliances? Not So Fast,” *Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (2004).

<sup>4</sup> For example, see: Toshitaka Takeuchi, *Nichibei Domeiron: Rekishi-Kino-Shuhen Shokoku No Shiten [Studies on the Japan-US Alliance: Perspectives from History, Functions, and Neighboring States]* (Tokyo: Minerva Shobo, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> For example, see: Takashi Inoguchi, G. John Ikenberry, and Yoichiro Sato, *The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance: Regional Multilateralism*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Additionally, some have also looked at the soft-power aspects of the Japan-US alliance and its impact on regional perceptions toward the partnership. See: David Arase and Tsuneo Akaha, *The US -Japan Alliance: Balancing Soft and Hard Power in East Asia* (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel M. Kliman, *Japan's Security Strategy in the Post-9/11 World: Embracing a New Realpolitik*, Washington Papers (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Hornung and Mochizuki (2016). pp.99, 109-110.

strengthened.<sup>8</sup> Among the prescriptive works, the “Armitage-Nye Report” has been one of the most powerful, outlining not only the justifications, but also the means by which the alliance should be strengthened to achieve the security interests of both Japan and the US.<sup>9</sup> In Japan, a number of security studies scholars and specialists speaking largely from the realist perspective such as Ken Jimbo, Mataka Kamiya, Tetsuo Kotani, Masashi Murano, Satoshi Morimoto, Toshihiro Nakayama, Masashi Nishihara, Hisahiko Okazaki, Sugio Takahashi, and Noboru Yamaguchi have argued in various publications and events on how Japan can play a greater role in the alliance to work more closely and effectively with the US. In particular, Hisahiko Okazaki deserves special mention given his role in conceptualizing what one could call “Japanese realism” in the post-WWII era and arguing for the importance of the alliance with the US for Japan’s security and strategic interests. Thus, supportive perceptions toward the US alliance have developed in conformity with the shaping of Japan’s realist security perceptions in the post-WWII era and more so in the post-Cold War era.

The rich collection of literature reflects the strong understanding of the nature and importance of the long-standing Japan-US security partnership. At the same time, despite the convincing and powerful arguments presented, they are often outpaced by the fluid regional and domestic developments – particularly in the last two decades. Furthermore, beyond the analyses that look at the strategic and political aspects of the Japan-US alliance, there is still a shortage of studies that look at the micro-level capabilities of the partnership. While there are a number of quality studies conducted in security-related institutions (both at the government and non-government levels), the readiness aspects of the alliance warrant further assessment – particularly given the significant developments that have taken place in the JSDF’s capabilities over the past decade.

To fill the above gaps in existing analyses, this paper purports to examine the developments in the partnership by focusing on the capabilities of the JSDF, looking at how they have impacted Japan’s role in the alliance. The paper begins with an overview of the Japan-US alliance, looking at the key developments in the post-WWII era. The third section will discuss how the recent developments in Japan’s defense policies and capabilities impact the alliance. The fourth section will then outline the key areas that are essential for the alliance’s further development. The paper will conclude with the fifth section, arguing that while the Japan-US alliance has made some essential developments, there are many challenges in further developing the partnership.

## 2. Developments in the Japan-US Alliance

Embracing the developments in the Japan-US alliance requires historical context. While there have been key developments in Japan’s defense posture and alliance role in recent years, they are part of consistent, long-term plans that have been considered and planned for decades. Since the signing of the Security Treaty Between the

<sup>8</sup> Michael Green and Zack Cooper, *Strategic Japan: New Approaches to Foreign Policy and the U.S.-Japan Alliance* (DC: Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, “The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia,” (Washington, DC2012).

US and Japan in 1951, the Japan-US alliance has been the lynchpin of Japan's national security. The most important achievement of the long-standing partnership is evidenced by the fact that Japan has been free from major armed attacks since 1945 until present. Equally important, the Japan-US alliance also facilitated the rich political, economic, and cultural exchanges to further strengthen the bond between the two states. Even from the realist viewpoint, the alliance has served well in meeting the interests of the two states. For the US, their commitment in Japan not only stems from their victory in WWII, but also the Cold War interests in the Indo-Pacific. As for Japan, the alliance with the US provided a security umbrella allowing Tokyo to focus on economic development while maintaining a low profile in security affairs under the auspices of the Yoshida doctrine. Thus, both from the alliance and individual state perspectives, the partnership was established and developed as a key asset to fulfil the respective security interests of Japan and the US.

Still, the advent of the Cold War, and more specifically the Korean War accelerated the push for Japan to develop its role in national and international security. To further upgrade the alliance, Tokyo and Washington signed the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement in 1954 calling on Japan to play a greater security role. While the agreement was explicitly on the premise that Japan steers clear of "armament which could be an offensive threat or serve other than to promote peace and security," it did facilitate the rearmament of Japan. On 1 July 1954, the Japanese government founded the Defense Agency, now currently the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and established the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) comprising of three branches: Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF), and the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF). Yet although Japan's rearmament based on the government's standpoint that the right of self-defense was constitutional, the JSDF was not recognized nor institutionalized as a full military force. In keeping with the Article 9 of the constitution, various self-imposed political, legal, and bureaucratic restrictions were put in place, railroading Japan's security strategies and capabilities, as well as its role in the alliance with the US.

Despite the intensity of the Cold War, the developments in the Japan-US military security partnership were incremental. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security signed in 1960 called on Japan to make greater security contributions. Still, the treaty remained to be asymmetric in nature, where the US was obligated to defend Japan if attacked, but Japan was neither duty-bound nor capable of defending the US. Moreover, the treaty was met with strong public backlash in Japan. Opponents to the treaty mainly consisting of the political left argued that Tokyo's greater security role would undermine its "peaceful" and "neutral" role in international affairs as well as the revival of remilitarization. While to a lesser scale, even the hard-right expressed their displeasures with the treaty, viewing it as an arrangement that compromises Japan's sovereignty for the sake of fulfilling the security interests of the US. Even though the treaty was essential from the national security standpoint, the scale of the political chaos reflected the strong sensitivities concerning Japan's national defense and alliance roles.

While controversial, the 1960 treaty kick-started some developments in Japan's alliance role, notably with the issuance of the first National Defense Program Outline – Japan's defense planning doctrine – in 1976. Then in 1978, Japan and the US signed the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, promoting improvements in the alliance by strengthening Tokyo's role, and configuring the partnership's focus to “situations in the Far East outside of Japan which will have an important influence on the security of Japan.”<sup>10</sup> Still, the JSDF developed in strict conformity with Article 9 of the Japanese constitution and on the premise that it is shielded by the United States Forces Japan (USFJ). Moreover, the developments in military-to-military cooperation such as bilateral exercises and training were incremental. While the JMSDF was the first branch to hold exercises with the US Navy (USN) in the mid-1950s, the JASDF conducted its first fighter combat training exercise with the US in 1978, and the first command post and field training exercises between the JGSDF and its US counterpart did not start until 1981.<sup>11</sup> The gradual developments in bilateral exercises reflect the reality that the actualization of alliance capabilities were incremental.

The demise of the USSR and end of the Cold War arguably presented more challenges than opportunities for the Japan-US alliance, to what Yamaguchi correctly described as an era of “identity crisis.”<sup>12</sup> In East Asia, there were increasing uncertainties concerning China and North Korea. Moreover, transnational terrorism and conflicts in less-developed states called for new alignments in the defense postures of the major powers. Another turning point came at the time of the Gulf War of 1990-1991 when the US along with other partner states heavily criticized Japan's “checkbook diplomacy” and lacking contributions to international security. In response, Japan enacted the International Peace Cooperation Law in 1992, enabling it to take part in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations (UNPKO). Moreover, the Japan-US alliance in the 1990s also faced issues due to domestic problems that affected bilateral relations. In the US, there were growing concerns about its leading global position being challenged by Japan – particularly from the economic standpoint.<sup>13</sup> As for Japan, anti-US sentiments erupted over the gang rape of a teenager in Okinawa by US military personnel sparked heated emotions over basing issues. Hence while the alliance remained intact, the bilateral relations were far from rosy.

Despite the issues in bilateral relations, pressing regional security agendas emanating from the fluid post-Cold War security environment in the Indo-Pacific gave momentum for further developments in the partnership. Sustaining and even strengthening the alliance was confirmed to be a bipartisan policy in Japan when the leftist Murayama administration made a pivotal shift in its stance on national security. As well put by Hornung, the Murayama government “recognized the constitutionality of the [J]SDF, and declared support for

<sup>10</sup> Japan Defense Agency, “The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation,” (Tokyo: Japan: Japan Defense Agency, 27 November 1978).

<sup>11</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, “Defense of Japan 2012,” ed. Japan Ministry of Defense (Tokyo 2012). p.235.

<sup>12</sup> Noboru Yamaguchi, “Redefining the Japan-US Alliance,” *nippon.com* (May 11, 2012), <http://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00204/>, accessed on 15 May 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph S. Nye, “Coping with Japan,” *Foreign Policy* 89 (Winter 1992-1993).

the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty as the basis of Japan’s security framework in the mid-1990s, these ideological debates subsided and gave rise to more measured deliberations on the means by which Japan could, or should, contribute to international security.”<sup>14</sup> Against this backdrop, Japan and the US focused on strategic and operational alignments to strengthen the alliance. In 1996, Japan and the US issued a Joint Declaration on Security and in 1997 updated the Guidelines for Defense Cooperation that expanded the alliance’s strategic shift from territorial defense to “situations in areas surrounding Japan.”<sup>15</sup> According to Yamaguchi, the new Guidelines for Defense Cooperation “involved not only adapting the alliance to the post–Cold War environment but also formulating a complete national security strategy for the new era.”<sup>16</sup> The new Guidelines for Defense Cooperation epitomized Japan and the US’s commitment to strengthen the alliance in the post-Cold War era, yet the international security environment faced new challenges particularly with the September 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, prompting greater awareness and readiness against terrorism and rogue states. Based on the bitter experiences from the Gulf War and renewed commitment to the US alliance, Japan proactively took part in the international “war on terror” and war in Iraq by deploying the JSDF on the strict condition that they only take part in non-combat roles. Still, critics opposed the move, labelling Japan’s involvement in non-UN operations as unconstitutional and that it could expose the nation to terrorism.

In East Asia, the regional security developments created new circumstances, consequently leading to new uncertainties for Japan on two fronts. One of the challenges came from North Korea with their pursuit of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as well as Pyongyang’s admission to the abduction of Japanese nationals. The other concern was China’s military modernization combined with Beijing’s increasing assertiveness in the region. Both cases served as catalysts to sharpen Japan’s defense posture, leading to the issuance of the new National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) in 2004.<sup>17</sup> While it was the North Korean threat that instigated greater security awareness and justification for change, it was the uncertainties concerning China that accelerated the strengthening of the JSDF. Over the years, Japan’s concerns toward China became more pronounced as tensions increased in the East China Sea. The uncertainties called for the fine-tuning of Japan’s defense capabilities under the auspices of “Dynamic Defense Force” by placing greater emphasis on air, naval, and amphibious capabilities as stated in the NDPG 2010.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, Operation Tomodachi in response to the March 2011 triple disaster in the Tohoku region clearly evidenced not only the strength of the partnership but its potential for further development.

Japan’s new security concerns opened up fresh debates in the alliance. On the one hand, Japan wanted greater assurance from the US. Yet on the other hand, the US expected Japan to play a bigger role to enhance the

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<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Abe on His Heels,” *Foreign Affairs* September 18, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> “The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation,” (Tokyo: Japan: Japan Defense Agency, 23 September 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Yamaguchi (2012).

<sup>17</sup> Japan Defense Agency, “National Defense Program Guidelines, FY 2005-,” (10 December 2004).

<sup>18</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, “National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond,” (17 December 2010).

alliance. At the intergovernmental, as well as Track 1.5 and II levels, both Japan and the US debated over the credibility and expectations of the alliance but were in general agreement that the partnership needs to be revamped.<sup>19</sup> Although both Japan and the US viewed that the sharpening of the JSDF's capabilities would be essential in strengthening the alliance, the question was *how*.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the "Second Armitage-Nye Report" published in August 2012 outlined the key concerns in the US, calling for a more proactive security role by Japan, as well as more robust measures to strengthen the strategic and operational cooperation in the partnership.<sup>21</sup> While many in Japan felt that they have been put in a delicate spot given the domestic political issues, the debates nevertheless set the tone to strengthen the alliance as a partnership.

The return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to governance in December 2012 led to further upgrades in Japan's defense planning with the establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) and issuance of the National Security Strategy (NSS). The Abe government also revised the NDPG, calling for "Dynamic Joint Defense Force" that emphasized air and maritime supremacy as well as joint readiness as the key imperatives for the JSDF.<sup>22</sup> Further developments took place in 2015 with the revised Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation that stated Japan's greater role in the alliance and diversification in the partnership's application to the cyberspace and outerspace domains.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, the new Guideline also established the Alliance Coordination Mechanism to facilitate greater policy and operational coordination. The new Guideline came out after the Abe administration made a cabinet decision in July 2014 to reinterpret the Article 9 of the Constitution to exercise the right to collective self-defense, and was counting down for the passing of the Legislation for Peace and Security in the Diet. Still, as Tatsumi argues, the fact that the Guideline did not specify how Japan and the US will cooperate in international security (beyond Japan's borders), reflects the reality that Tokyo can only exercise its right of self-defense under limited circumstances.<sup>24</sup> Even when the Legislation for Peace and Security passed in September 2015, stringent restrictions on how Japan can exercise collective self-defense remained in place. Hence although the policy developments do facilitate improvements in Japan's security capabilities and alliance roles, there are myriad difficulties in making more robust.

Facing the fluid challenges in the Indo-Pacific security environment in the post-Cold War era, both Japan and the US have made efforts to realign and sharpen their partnership. According to the Defense of Japan 2016, the US-Japan alliance focuses on ISR, missile defense, maritime security, joint training and exercises, large-scale

<sup>19</sup> See for instance the variety of dialogues held by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), Pacific Forum CSIS, Japan Institute of International Affairs, Project 2049, Council on Foreign Relations, National Bureau of Asian Research, RAND Corporation, Stimson Center, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Okazaki Institute, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Brad Glosserman, "Disturbing Disconnects in the US-Japan Alliance," *PacNet* (18 April 2013), [https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy\\_files/files/publication/Pac1326.pdf](https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/Pac1326.pdf), accessed 19 April 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Richard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Anchoring Stability in Asia," (Washington, DC 2012).

<sup>22</sup> "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond," (17 December 2013).

<sup>23</sup> Ministry of Defense Japan, "The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation," (Tokyo: Japan: Japan Defense Agency, 27 April 2015).

<sup>24</sup> Yuki Tatsumi, "4 Takeaways from the New US-Japan Defense Guidelines," *The Diplomat* (29 April 2015), <http://thediplomat.com/2015/04/4-takeaways-from-the-new-us-japan-defense-guidelines/>, accessed on 30 April 2015.



disasters, and joint/shared use.<sup>25</sup> Still, there are questions regarding how Japan can play a bigger role and take on greater burdens in the security alliance, given the myriad restrictions that remain in place. Even with what seems to be Japan's incremental steps toward "normalization," the JSDF's new roles will not be immediately operational, as it takes time to translate strategies into actual capabilities and readiness.

### 3. Efforts toward Enhancing the JSDF's Capabilities

In recent years, key developments are taking place in JSDF's capabilities under the auspices of the current NDPG that focuses on air-sea supremacy, defense of remote islands, ballistic missile defense, security in outer space and cyber space, and large-scale disasters.<sup>26</sup> The acquisition of new hardware and changes in policies have sharpened the effectiveness and efficiency of Japan's defense readiness both in the national defense and alliance contexts.

In force structure, the high-tech nature of the JSDF rests in Japan's access to US defense technologies and the developments in its indigenous defense industry. Much of Japan's hardware acquisitions have been long-term in nature, as opposed to abrupt surges in investments. During much of the Cold War years, the JSDF was essentially a rear support force on the premise that the US plays the central defense role. However, the developments in recent years clearly indicate the JSDF's transition into a defense force capable of playing a more autonomous role in national defense while also making stronger contributions to the alliance.

Developments are clearly seen in air and maritime capabilities in response to the increasing number of incursions in recent years. Japan has acquired next-generation tactical fighter aircraft such as the F-35A, aerial refueling aircraft, surface-warfare vessels, as well as a range of assets for anti-submarine warfare (ASW) such as the *Izumo*-class helicopter destroyers.<sup>27</sup> In addition, the JSDF plans to acquire array of anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles, as well as the Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile (JASSM-ER) and Long Range Anti-Ship Missile (LRASM) for the F-15J and the JSM (Joint Strike Missile) for the F-35A. Taken together, these platforms and weapons systems enhance not only the JSDF's, but also the alliance's defense capabilities in the air and maritime domains.

Improvements are also seen in the JSDF's joint capabilities – particularly in the context of amphibious operations to defend Japan's offshore islands. Today, the JMSDF operates a variety of transport docks with landing craft air cushions (LCAC) and helicopter destroyers capable of accommodating the CH-47J transport helicopters and V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft that are essential for the JSDF's amphibious operations. In the air, the

<sup>25</sup> Ministry of Defense Japan, "Defense of Japan 2017," (Tokyo, Japan 2017), p.272.

<sup>26</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond," (17 December 2013), p.13.

<sup>27</sup> Kotani correctly argues that helicopter destroyers have been a long-cherished dream for the JMSDF for ASW. See: Tetsuo Kotani, "Herikuubo 'Izumo' Dounyuu No Imi: Nihonno Anzenhosyousenryaku Niokeru Jyuyousei [the Significance of the Helicopter Carrier 'Izumo': Significance for Japan's Security Strategy]," *Wedge Infinity* (20 August 2013), <http://wedge.ismedia.jp/articles/-/3084>, accessed on 25 August 2013.

JASDF's logistical capabilities have been enhanced with the new C-2 that is superior in size, speed, and range than the C-1. The JGSDF has also acquired vehicles such as the Maneuver Combat Vehicle (MCV), Light Armored Vehicle (LAV), and the Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV7) that are designed to work with the JASDF and JMSDF assets.

Critical developments are seen in Japan's ballistic missile defense (BMD) capabilities, largely in response to the continuous test launches of ballistic missiles by North Korea over the last two decades. Currently, the JMSDF's Aegis-equipped destroyers and the PATRIOT batteries have served as the main assets to defend Japan against ballistic missiles. However, with the significant progress in North Korea's ballistic missile capabilities under the Kim Jong-un regime, Japan is taking steps to further sharpen its BMD capabilities. Specifically, Japan is working with the US in the joint development of the SM-3 Block IIA/B and is also upgrading its PATRIOT batteries with the PAC-3MSE, both with significantly longer ranges. Additionally, Tokyo's recent decision to install the Aegis Ashore system will further augment the JSDF's current BMD capabilities.

In intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), the JASDF's E-767 airborne warning and control system (AWACS) and the E2-C and E-2D airborne early warning (AEW) play central roles in the air domain while the P-1, P-3C, and SH-60K focus on surveilling the seas. The JSDF also has an array of radar systems installed in key areas along the Japanese archipelago eyeing movements in the air and naval domains. Looking ahead, Japan will soon operate the RQ-4 Global Hawk to further enhance the JSDF's ISR capabilities. More importantly, Japan has made significant progress in developing its command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (C4ISR) systems to enhance coordination and interoperability not only within the JSDF but also with the US.

The hardware acquisitions and upgrades are clearly enhancing the JSDF's capabilities in air and maritime defense, joint operations, missile defense, ISR, and other operations such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR). Issues, however, still exist. While the capability improvements have improved the alliance's readiness and diversified its operations, there are still issues in interoperability, such as different C4ISR equipment that undermine the use of a common operating picture. Thus although it is clear that the JSDF's capabilities have been significantly strengthened in recent years, there are questions over whether the capabilities are still sufficient to effectively deal with the myriad security concerns Japan faces.

There are also important questions in the alliance context. In particular, the developments in political, bureaucratic, and operational aspects in Japan have not been in step with the hardware improvements, consequently undermining the JSDF's ability to fully utilize its assets. Even if the Japanese government is strongly committed to strengthening the JSDF's role in the alliance, there are at least three issues that stand in the way of further enhancing the Japan-US partnership.

First, political sensitivities over Japan's defense policies and capabilities remain strong. The debates range from those that are ideological in nature regarding the constitution, national defense, and alliance relations, to more technical debates on how Japan can be better defended (including the possible need for offensive capabilities) or enhance its alliance role. The heated political debates over the Legislation for Peace and Security passed in 2015 demonstrated how policies that were arguably modest in nature still require much political capital given the strong domestic backlash.<sup>28</sup> Even regarding the alliance with the US, objections ranging from those that fear greater exposure to threats, increased involvement in wars, US basing issues, as well as accidents and incidents that take place in areas where US bases are located (particularly in Okinawa) reveal the absence of an absolute consensus in Japan over the alliance. Indeed, one can claim that while the radical opposition to the alliance or Japan's defense policies are vocal, they do not make up the majority. Yet still, the circumstances nevertheless do call on the Japanese government to promote better understanding and building a democratic consensus on national defense issues, as well as solving and reconciling problems to prevent extreme political divisions.

Second, the JSDF remains constrained by the nation's self-imposed political, legal, and bureaucratic restrictions that set strict positive-list codes of conduct and rules of engagement. Indeed, changes are evident with the Armed Attack Situation Response Act enacted in 2003 and the Measures Based on the Armed Attack Situation Response Act of 2004, allowing the JSDF to respond more effectively to contingencies. Moreover, as the Legislation for Peace and Security came into effect in 2016, the JSDF is now able to be mobilized more effectively – particularly against “gray zone” situations and in international security operations. Yet the developments are essentially soft moderations to existing laws concerning the use of arms, and the JSDF's capabilities for actual combat operations remain constrained and untested.

Third, there are financial questions. By the nature of its defense budget, Japan is constrained from dramatically transforming the JSDF. Indeed, Japan's defense budget is by no means small. Japan's defense budget for the 2018 fiscal year (FY) is set to increase for the sixth straight year recording 5.19 trillion Yen (46.1 billion USD). Given the future investments and alignments required, the defense budget could very well continue to increase, eventually revising the self-imposed “1% of the GDP” ceiling that has remained consistent in the post-WWI era. However, what matters here is not so much the amount devoted, but rather the breakdown of the budget. Japan faces numerous budgetary constraints given the high costs for operations and maintenance as well as host nation support.<sup>29</sup> Thus although there will be a series of key hardware acquisitions and upgrades

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<sup>28</sup> Hornung correctly notes that even though the political fault lines concerning the JSDF and the Japan-US alliance had been solved in the mid-1990s under the Murayama administration, they returned in 2015 due to the debates concerning the Legislation for Peace and Security. See: Jeffrey W. Hornung, “Abe on His Heels,” *Foreign Affairs*, (18 September, 2015), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/japan/abe-his-heels>, accessed on 19 September 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, “Defense Programs and Budget of Japan - Overview of FY2017 Budget,” (Tokyo, Japan2017). p.48.

to existing capabilities in the years to come, they will take place under careful planning to ensure that they are both affordable and suitable for the JSDF's strategies and operations.

The internal obstacles not only inhibit the developments in Japan's ability to defense itself better, but also its role in the alliance with the US. For those who vouch for a stronger Japan-US alliance, evaluations on the developments in Japan's defense capabilities and policies, and its role in the partnership would depend on whether we see the glass being half full or half empty. On the one hand, one may argue that Japan has made significant developments particularly in the post-Cold War era despite the myriad constraints. On the other hand, one may argue that the developments were long overdue, and that a lot more must be done. Despite the differing perspectives, the underlying argument is the notion that Japan's defense capabilities and policies are pivotal in strengthening the alliance.

#### **4. Tasks in Further Developing the Japan-US Alliance**

The developments in the Japan-US alliance to date clearly indicate that the partnership is much more capable than ever before. Discussions on further developing the alliance have enriched significantly in recent years. In February 2016, the Commission on the Future of the Alliance hosted by Sasakawa USA correctly argued that both Japan and the US must work to deepen, broaden, and sustain the alliance.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, initially there were uncertainties surrounding the Donald Trump administration, ranging from the US's exit from the Trans-Pacific Partnership to his demands for greater financial contributions by Japan and the ROK to the alliance. Yet at least until the time of writing, Abe and Trump have expressed their strong commitments to strengthen the alliance, and their intentions were demonstrated by the strong coordination against North Korea's continued provocations. Moreover, the US Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster have given clear signals that the Japan-US and ROK-US alliances will remain strong. The frequent communication between the Abe and Trump administration to enhance coordination has paid off, with the US's new National Security Strategy released in December 2017 clearly stating that "we welcome and support the strong leadership role of our critical ally, Japan."<sup>31</sup> While there are still discussions and controversies over the US's new National Security Strategy, the above statement clearly showed that Washington indeed recognizes the importance of, and developments in Tokyo's alliance role.

However, the question is how to further enhance the coordination and credibility of the alliance at the operational and tactical levels. Above all, Japan and the US will need to further define the alliance's defense strategy to provide a framework for the application and operation of the capabilities. Thus far, the alliance's

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<sup>30</sup> Commission on the Future of the Alliance, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance to 2030: Power and Principle," (Washington, DC: Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA, 29 February 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Donald J. Trump, "The National Security Strategy of the United States of America," ed. The White House (Washington, DC2017). p.46.

operations in ASW and BMD are very clear, and there are developments in a joint air and maritime supremacy. Experts such as Takahashi have even argued for the operationalization of an “allied air-sea battle” concept to deal with the growing anti-access and area-denial threat posed by China.<sup>32</sup> Yet it is one thing to propose strategies, but another to actually formulate and operationalize them. To ensure seamless cooperation, both Japan and the US will need to identify and deal with the divergence in expectations and gaps in readiness – particularly with the different capabilities possessed. Further challenges may also be encountered as the alliance has expanded its coverage, extending to cyberspace and outerspace. Hence as the alliance develops, the demand to continuously revise and update their joint strategy and operations will also grow in congruence.

Formulation of an alliance strategy would be pivotal in setting clearer defense planning priorities – particularly for Japan. While this may require Japan to further strengthen the JSDF, one must understand that not all capabilities would be beneficial to the alliance. For instance, Kotani warns that Japan acquiring indigenous nuclear armaments could be interpreted by China and North Korea as a decline in the credibility of the US’s extended deterrence and the alliance itself.<sup>33</sup> Yet on the other hand, acquisitions that enhance cooperation in the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation in the ground, sea, air, cyber and outerspace domains will benefit the alliance’s capabilities and credibility. Thus hardware such as aircraft carriers, cruise missiles, missile defense systems, as well as other tactical assets would expand and deepen the Japan-US alliance’s capabilities and operations.

The key question, therefore, is about how to define the assets that strengthen or weaken the alliance’s capabilities and credibility. Drawing this line, however, is more challenging than one may assume. A simplistic argument can be made that it could be about strategic and tactical, or offensive and defensive capabilities, whereby Japan should focus on tactical systems that conform to the alliance’s strategy and enhances interoperability. Yet this approach would be somewhat too narrow, as it could rule out some offensive capabilities that could in fact strengthen both Japan and the alliance’s capabilities (e.g. cruise missiles, joint operations platforms, etc.). Of course, logic tells us that new weapons acquisitions will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Thus, future acquisitions and upgrades will not only need to be based on Japan’s capability and mission requirements, but also take into consideration of the alliance’s operations, interoperability, and credibility.

At the operational level, there are at least three areas where Japan and the US could strengthen their partnership. First, there is much room for improvement in interoperability. Indeed, interoperability has been achieved to a certain level given that most of the JSDF’s platforms that are either imported from, or inspired by

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<sup>32</sup> Sugio Takahashi, “Counter A2/AD in Japan - U.S Defense Cooperation: Toward ‘Allied Air-Sea Battle’,” *Futuregram* 12-003 (Apr 18, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Tetsuya Miyazaki, and Tetsuo Kotani. Kitachousen no misairuga nihonwo tsuka [North Korea’s missile passes over Japan]. Podcast audio. *Za boisu - Sokomadeiuka!* (29 August 2017).

the US. However, there are still differences in the C4ISR systems in some units that prevent Japan and the US from working with a common operational picture across the board. Moreover, interoperability is not simply a technological issue, but also concerns operational procedures and protocols to carry out tasks more effectively and efficiently. As Japan and the US works to further develop their capabilities, and more importantly, as the alliance moves forward to deepen and expand its partnership, the need to further enhance interoperability would grow in congruence. The relocation of key JSDF commands such as the relocation of the JASDF Command Headquarters to Yokota Air Base in 2012 and JGSDF Central Readiness Force (CRF) to Camp Zama in 2013 were significant steps in this regard. Going forward, the both Japan and the US should increase the number of liaison staff to smoothen operational communication and coordination.

Second, there are still shortfalls in the frequency and quality of both command and field exercises. The variety of bilateral and multilateral exercises involving Japan and the US increased rapidly since the 1980s.<sup>34</sup> Looking into the future, Japan and the US will need to further improve their coordination through developing common practices and tactics. The quality of joint exercises between Japan and the US (and sometimes additional states) such as Dawn Blitz, Iron Fist, Keen Sword and Yama Sakura have all improved with the use of modern hardware, leading to enhancements in the alliance's capabilities. Developments are evident, particularly in the areas of amphibious capabilities, ballistic missile defense, as well as air and naval warfare. In particular, a new area of development has been the collaboration between the JGSDF and the United States Marine Corps (USMC) that has contextualized and strengthened Japan's readiness to defend its archipelago with amphibious capabilities.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, some grassroots initiatives in the JSDF and USFJ are encouraging. For instance, the 7th Air Wing of the JASDF and the Strike Fighter Squadron 195 of the US Navy began an initiative to facilitate cultural exchange and tactical integration known as "*benkyokai*" in 2016 under the leadership of the then commander Guy Snodgrass.<sup>36</sup> Bilateral exercises on a tactical level should be held on a more regular basis to promote readiness for various domains and scenarios. However, enhancing the alliance's capabilities may be more about issues in the JSDF rather than the alliance itself. While the JSDF is well trained, they have empirically worked within the scope of existing assets and procedures that still need development. For example, capabilities for joint operations in the JSDF still remain nascent, therefore requiring greater efforts to minimize the readiness deficits among the three branches of the JSDF.<sup>37</sup> Thus improvements in the JSDF's joint capabilities will naturally lead to enhancements in the alliance's readiness.

Third, the alliance must also develop in a more multilateral setting and work further with regional

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<sup>34</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, "Defense of Japan 2012."

<sup>35</sup> Justin Michael Goldman, "An Amphibious Capability in Japan's Self-Defense Force: Operationalizing Dynamic Defense," *Naval War College Review* 66, no. 4 (2013).

<sup>36</sup> Amy Lowe, "VFA-195 Trains with Japan Air Self-Defense Force", CPF News (20 April 2016), <http://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/110027>, accessed on 15 May 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Grant Newsham, Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, and Swee Lean Collin Koh, "Japan Should Steal a Strategy from China's Playbook," *The National Interest* (11 May 2016), <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/japan-should-steal-strategy-chinas-playbook-16159>, accessed on 15 May 2016.

stakeholders given the diverse and fluid dynamics of the post-Cold War regional security environment. As Soeya rightfully argues, Japan needs to play a more innovative and constructive role in East Asia beyond the paradigm it has worked in thus far.<sup>38</sup> Tanaka also makes a valid argument, claiming that the alliance must “take a multifaceted approach towards promoting regional stability and mutual prosperity; strengthening the US-Japan alliance for its own sake cannot be the end goal.”<sup>39</sup> Thus to play a constructive role in regional security, the Japan-US alliance must also network with states that are already allied or at least aligned to the US. In recent years, proposals at the governmental, as well as Track 1.5 and Track-II levels for the formation of multilateral partnerships have gained greater momentum. Progress is seen in the emergence of US-Japan-Australia, US-Japan-India, and US-Japan-Philippines cooperation, particularly in light of the uncertainties surrounding the South China Sea.<sup>40</sup>

Among the various actual and potential partners, trilateral cooperation with the ROK is the most vital. While a Japan-ROK-US partnership is essential and logical in the regional security context, forging cooperative ties between Seoul and Tokyo has proved to be an uphill struggle due to the political differences over historical and sovereignty issues, as well as the colliding national identities.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, trilateral cooperation is made difficult by ROK’s dilemmas in balancing its national security and economic interests that inevitably impact its relations with the US and China. For Seoul, the circumstances are challenging particularly with Beijing clearly objecting to the Japan-ROK-US cooperation evolving into an alliance. Nevertheless, despite the challenges, incremental developments are taking place in the trilateral Japan-ROK-US security partnership.<sup>42</sup> Given the continued provocations from North Korea, Japan, the ROK, and the US have vowed to cooperate. At the same time, the concern is whether the momentum (even if they are partial) for trilateral security cooperation can be sustained particularly in light of the domestic political intrigues that often affect the relations between Japan and the ROK. Together with the ROK-US alliance, the Japan-US alliance remains to be, and will continue to be the lynchpin of security in the Indo-Pacific, but much remains to be done in ensuring that the trilateral partnership is both operational and sustainable.

Looking ahead, the actual developments in the alliance depend not only on the bilateral relations between Japan and the US (and the relations with other regional stakeholders), but also how Tokyo will develop its defense policies and capabilities in the years to come. While many discussions circle around the topic of constitutional reform, the more important questions rest in the future Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation, as well as the NSS and NDPG that outlines the fundamental strategy and policy of Japan. Under the current trajectory, Japan and the US will continue to work in further enhancing the alliance’s capabilities and

<sup>38</sup> See: Yoshihide Soeya, *Nihonno Midoru Pawa Gaikou [Japan’s Middle Power Diplomacy]* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2005).

<sup>39</sup> Hitoshi Tanaka, “The US-Japan Alliance and East Asia: Five Guiding Principles,” *The Asan Forum* (June 30, 2015).

<sup>40</sup> Ian Storey, “Japan’s Maritime Security Interests in Southeast Asia and the South China Sea Dispute,” *Political Science* 65, no. 2 (Dec 2013).

<sup>41</sup> See: Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder, *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States*, Contemporary Asia in the World (Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>42</sup> Ryo Hinata-Yamaguchi, “Completing the US-Japan-Korea Alliance Triangle: Prospects and Issues in Japan-Korea Security Cooperation,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2016).



credibility, though how the developments will take place remain open.

## 5. Conclusion

Under the recent developments, the Japan-US alliance is strengthening and Japan's role in the partnership has also been enhanced. At the same time, the developments also reflect changes in the nature of Japan's dependence on the US. While incremental, it is clear that Japan is growing out of a junior client status to become a partner of the US. Of course, much remains to be seen, as Japan's new policies and capabilities are still largely untested – particularly in actual military contingencies. Either way, the developments have highlighted the fact that Japan's defense policies and capabilities works best in the framework of the alliance with the US.

The current Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation promote a “seamless, robust, flexible, and effective” partnership between Japan and the US. Yet the alliance is still in the early stages and many more developments are expected. In particular, the nature of the partnership both at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels will depend heavily on how Japan's defense policies and strategies will develop in the years to come. As Japan continues to sharpen and strengthen its defense capabilities, one can expect further revisions and upgrades to the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation. Nevertheless, many questions remain on how the developments will take place, warranting further analyses and debates.

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