

The US-Japan Alliance: Japan's Security Provider?

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The Security Environment in East Asia

The East China Sea dispute presents a major challenge for the US-Japan alliance. This dispute is over the Senkaku (Diayou in Chinese) Islands, a group of five islands in the East China Sea that are uninhabited and currently controlled by Japan, but contested by the People's Republic of China and Taiwan.¹ The ownership of the islands would provide the claimants unrestricted access to the Western Pacific ocean. In 2013, US President Obama stated the US stance on the dispute, saying,

“Our commitment to Japan's security is absolute and article five [of the security treaty] covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku islands... We don't take a position on final sovereignty on the Senkakus but historically they've been administered by Japan and should not be subject to change unilaterally.”²

The East China Sea shelf range has 175 trillion to 210 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves according to Chinese surveys, whereas foreign estimates say these are close to 100 billion barrels. The Xihu trough and the Chun Xiao reserves are predicted to contain 17.5 trillion cubic feet and 1.8 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves respectively.³ Moreover, estimates indicate that the Senkaku/ Diayou seabed has significant oil resources, with Japanese surveys reporting more than 94.5 billion barrels of oil.⁴ Japan and China's dispute extends to resource management, especially regarding oil exploration and resource extraction in their waters by the other side. This is primarily due to the overlapping claims of maritime entitlements by the two countries. An optimal method

for avoiding resource disputes would be to ensure proper communication and practice joint resource management until a permanent resolution is achieved.⁵ Until then, the East China Sea region will continue to witness security volatility driven by sovereignty and resource causations.

The dispute is significant even without the economic aspect. It presents a considerable challenge to Japanese security- not only in terms of territorial sovereignty but also with regard to the national identity of the Japanese. Japan's military modernization is a way of deterring China's rise in the region, and nationalism and history play a key role in shaping the regional dynamics. The two factors have led to major riots and heated arguments in the parliament over the proposed revision of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution.⁶ Japanese Prime Minister Abe appears to be a pro-nationalist leader, and his attempts to revise Article 9 as well actions such as his visit to the Yasukuni shrine raise unpleasant memories of pre-World War II militarist Japan, creating concerns not only among the domestic community but across the larger Asia-Pacific.⁷

How equipped is Japan?

Prior to discussions on the revision of Article 9, the Japanese government has already taken some steps towards an increased level of military autonomy. Japan's State Secrets Law, also known as the Special Secrecy Law, came into effect in 2013. It allows certain information to be classified by the government, and this was interpreted by the Japanese media and people to be a tool of democratic compromise and a violation of the people's right to information. Since then the law has faced backlash and led to reduction in government approval ratings by almost 10 per cent.⁸ However, the law is essential in the highly hierarchical and bureaucratic system of the Japanese government that involves dissemination across multiple levels of agencies at several levels, thus requiring some mechanism to prevent unintended breach of information. The law reduces the probability of information exposure due to political osmosis and also speeds up policy implementation.

Within this law is an underlying element of Japan taking responsibility for insulating state information, which is a fundamental component of military

independence and self-determination. Certain other developments under the Abe administration are prognostic of Japan's move toward 'normalcy' and military independence, leading to apprehension regarding the nullification of Japan's constitutional resolution to renounce war and not maintain an offensive armed force (revised to not maintaining an offensive armed force- leading to the establishment of the Self-Defence Forces). This includes the creation of the National Security Council, an organization "spanning government departments and shouldering the responsibility for an integrated foreign and security policy, under the guidance of the Prime Minister."⁹

Japan has also articulated a National Security Strategy as a security guide, a reviewed defence guidelines titled 'National Defence Program Guidelines for FY2014 and Beyond', the Three Principles on Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology, and the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security. These may not be remarkable developments when compared to the rest of the world, but for a country lacking a security architecture for several decades, it is an important step towards becoming a 'normal' country. Furthermore, in 2015, the United States and Japan reviewed and modified the US-Japan Defence Guidelines.¹⁰ The National Security Strategy encourages 'active pacifism' that refutes disarmament as the only way to practice pacifism and avoid militarism.¹¹ The strategy outlines three objectives: addressing the necessity for ensuring deterrence, promoting secure regional politics in the Asia-Pacific region, and contributing to global security and peacekeeping. The document also talks about the need to strengthen the US-Japan alliance. US foreign policy in Asia is highly contingent to the US-Japan alliance forged at the end of the Second World War.¹² The partnership has so far been highly beneficial to both parties.¹³

Is the US Security Umbrella Sufficient?

The 21st century presents several challenges to the US-Japan alliance. US policies seem to indicate a greater amenability to accommodate the growing changes in the region. The rise of China, militarily and economically, has compelled the two allies to create robust and more deliberate alliance mechanism and operations. This is even more critical with increasing tensions in the East China Sea. Other constraints include Japan's slow and vulnerable economic revival and the process of American economic recovery, and in both cases, domestic demands have the potential to slow down foreign policy

aspirations. Japan's volatile political system, evident by unstable coalition politics and the short ruling terms, are not favourable for making a coherent and long-term foreign policy. Similarly, the current US administration faces the challenge of balancing domestic politics and the larger aims of the rebalance to Asia-Pacific strategy. Moreover, the alliance does not comprehensively cover issues such as humanitarian support that are important in the current world order, thus providing a new dimension to the exercise of the alliance.¹⁴

After the draining effects of two long wars, the US military is trying to consolidate and determine the usage of its military capabilities in an austere fiscal environment. US military resources are already overstretched due to reducing military budgets relative to the technological development of arms and deployment costs. There is also the possibility of distractions from emergent threats like the current US involvement against ISIS. These could undermine the promises of the revised US-Japan security alliance, leading to a security predicament and under preparation for Japan, especially when faced with a looming China capable of pursuing unilateral actions due to its escalating military advancement and economic might.

The US-Japan Alliance as a Security Provider

Even though a 'normal' Japan may exist at some time in the future, it would be too risky to depend solely on this possibility and divert from the proven advantages of the US-Japan alliance. It is important to utilize the strength and capability of the alliance to not only achieve Japan's security interests (the East China Sea dispute being a major one), but also speed up the process of Japan's path to 'normalcy'. It is essential for the US-Japan alliance to become more institutionalized, comprehensive, and permitting of a less passively pacifist form of military development in Japan.¹⁵

The claims that US support of an increasingly independent Japanese military could lead to Japan reverting back to its militaristic past are misplaced. Several countries have participated in war in the past, but Japan has been paying the price for being on the losing side for longer than any one of its allies. The Japanese cultural concept of 'saving face' led to Japan accepting Article 9 despite being a sovereign nation. The world order today demands accountability and is increasingly anarchic. Waltz's

infamous and maximalist nuclear deterrence argument¹⁶ can be modified as per conventionality for applicability in this scenario: a Japan with military capability like every other nation in the Asia-Pacific and beyond will actually contribute to peace, security and stability. It would deter China's assertiveness in the region, aid the US rebalance, and consequently ensure security of other surrounding countries that might not be as militarily strong as China or Japan. It would also help Japan face the increasingly important issue of a nuclear and unstable North Korea. Providing military support to South Korea in case of conflict between the two Koreas would enable betterment of the current difficult relations. Extending this argument further, it is preferable to have multiple nations with military power to create a sensitive yet highly stable form of deterrence where another's weapons will prevent each from using their own.¹⁷

Military power is also essential in ensuring safety of passage and trade routes in the extremely busy western Pacific Ocean through resolution of the Senkaku/Diayou Islands dispute, sea patrols, and anti-piracy measures. Maritime security is especially important to ensure the success of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) wherein the participating countries account for 26 per cent of the world's trade, 793 million consumers, and 40 per cent of the world's total GDP.¹⁸ The partnership aims to strengthen the US-Japan alliance and trade relations, help regenerate the Japanese economy, benefit the United States' Asia rebalance strategy, create a structure that would bring together several Asia-Pacific countries in one of the biggest trade partnerships in the world, contribute toward economic development in the region, and deter the monopoly of China owing to its huge economic strength. A militarily stronger Japan would lead to a more balanced political and economic structure in Asia. As an analyst states, "unlike China, Japan is a country that seeks alliances and naturally wishes to be part of a system, not a solitary player."¹⁹

In the current times we can definitely see a stronger US-Japan alliance, especially in the military context. According to the 2014 'Defence of Japan' released annually by the Japanese Ministry of Defence, the US deployment status in Japan has evolved to include advanced assets such as the F-22, MV-22 Ospreys, P-8, and the Global Hawk.²⁰ Two Aegis BMDs are expected to be permanently deployed by 2017. The document

states that a nation cannot develop stable defence measures on its own, and therefore acknowledges the significance of alliances in maintaining security interests in the increasingly volatile East Asia to not only defend Japan, but also secure the Asia-Pacific region. Close coordination within the US-Japan alliance would form the “foundation for various forms of international collaboration....which leads to the heightened operational effectiveness of the Japan-US Security Arrangement”.²¹ The document also recognizes that the American influence may be changing relatively however, according to the Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) released by the United States in 2014, the Asia Rebalance Strategy and the security alliance with Japan continue to be essential components of the US Department of Defence’s security strategy.²² The general nature of Article 9 has been accommodated to state in the document that Japanese Self-Defence Forces can participate along with US forces to respond to issues regarding the “peace and security of the Far East Region to which Japan belongs”.²³ This can also be seen in the National Security Strategy that reiterates the necessity of developing the Self-Defence Forces and maintaining a comprehensive architecture to ensure readiness and flexibility in security issue responses. ²⁴ It also expresses the importance of ‘Open and Stable Seas’ to Japan, stating that Japan would provide assistance and “enhance maritime law enforcement and cooperation with partners on sea lanes who share strategic interests with Japan”. ²⁵

The recently released 2015 Guidelines for Japan-US Defence Cooperation emphasize the need for a more pro-active Japan, allowing the Japanese Self-Defence Forces to go beyond their traditionally expected duties in accordance with the constitution.²⁶ The ‘Alliance Coordination Mechanism’ aims to develop a stronger and more interactive policy and operational coordination during peacetime as well as conflict. These guidelines repeatedly mention the rising security concerns for Japan, and articulate the importance of bilateral planning and training to ensure proper planning and execution.²⁷ Especially in the maritime context, plans for development in the fields of intelligence, surveillance, air and naval equipment, reciprocal asset protection and logistic assistance, etc. can be seen. Some noteworthy points include the provision of higher responsibility of defence to the Japanese forces for immediate response to an attack on Japanese sovereignty after exhausting any alternative, chiefly diplomatic, methods of resolution. This emphasizes the Japanese commitment to pacifism that is

nevertheless informed and equipped in accordance with the security demands of the region. Another area where Japanese forces can exercise operations is in the Air Defence Zones, and these include use of ballistic and cruise missiles. This could be seen as a response to the problem of the overlapping Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ). The Guidelines also assert the significance of ensuring freedom of navigation and protecting Japanese waters and trade routes. This is even more important in the near future with Japan's import and export based economy being a major participant in the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

Conclusion

It is essential for Japan to continue expansion of provisions within the Constitution as Japanese Prime Minister Abe has demonstrated by revamping the security architecture of Japan, advance the US-Japan alliance to accommodate these provisions (positive predictions can be made from the revised 2015 guidelines), and engage in international military exercises. With an understanding of how critical it is for Japan to become more militarily secure and strengthen its alliance with the United States, a stronger Japan that may be able to alleviate tensions in the East China Sea dispute can be predicted. This may be a chance for Japan to attain its goal of becoming a 'normal' country, by playing a more significant role in world affairs and becoming an important player in matters of Asia-Pacific security. This may also ease the Japanese people as well as the rest of the world towards the idea of a Japan with military capability but the wisdom to not revert back to its World War II days. A stronger Japan and US-Japan alliance would lead to multiple beneficial consequences that go beyond advantages for not just the involved countries by ensuring a stable balance of power in the China Seas and preventing unilateral actions by any one country.

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Notes

¹ They were taken under national control by the Japanese according to terra nullius (nobody's land) in 1895. The Qing dynasty ceded the southern portion of the province of Fêngtien, the island of Formosa and the islands appertaining or belonging to the island of Formosa, and the Pescadores Group to the Japanese government according to the Treaty of Shimonoseki in April 1895. The Treaty was renounced post World War II, and since Japan did not consider the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands to be a part of the treaty but a sovereign right of the country through terra nullius, the dispute over possession of the islands continues to this day. The People's Republic of China (and Taiwan) claim ownership of the islands, and justify this according to discovery rights, historical occupation, and by-products of an unequal treaty, at <http://www.taiwandocuments.org/shimonoseki01.htm> and http://www.eurasiacenter.org/publications/Senkaku_Diaoyu_Island_Dispute.pdf

² Justin McCurry, Tania Branigan, 'Obama says US will defend Japan in island dispute with China', *The Guardian*, 24 April 2014, at <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/apr/24/obama-in-japan-backs-status-quo-in-island-dispute-with-china> (Accessed 10 July 2015)

³ Selig Harrison, 'Seabed Petroleum in Northeast Asia: Conflict or Cooperation?', *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, 2005 at http://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/Asia_petroleum.pdf (Accessed June 15, 2015)

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ As an analyst contends, "Governments in Tokyo and Beijing have the option of nuancing their actions, and even favour cooperative forms of interactions. In this respect, "natural resources can be shared" and past willingness to jointly investigate and explore gas fields would suggest that the existence of an agreement over the boundary dispute is not regarded as a precondition for economic cooperation." See Alessi Patalano, 'Seapower and Sino-Japanese Relations in the East China Sea', *Asian Affairs*, Vol. XLV, No. 2, 2014, pp. 34-54.

⁶ Article 9 in the Japanese Constitution states "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." It was a result of the Yoshida Doctrine developed in 1951 that encouraged single-minded economic progress unhindered by security concerns since American deployment could manage that. See The Constitution of Japan, promulgated on November 3, 1946; Came into effect on May 3, 1947 Link: http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html

⁷ For example, neighbour country South Korea to this day demands apology, acceptance, informational accuracy, and reparations concerning the comfort-women controversy.

⁸ Shinichi Kitaoka, 'A "Proactive Contribution to Peace" and the Right of Collective Self-Defence: The Development of Security Policy in the Abe Administration', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.21, No.2, 2014, pp. 1-18.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Quoting from the translated document, "surrounded by an increasingly severe security environment and confronted by complex and grave national security challenges, it has become indispensable for Japan to make more proactive efforts in line with the principle of international cooperation", (emphasis added). Ministry of Defence, Japan, National Security Strategy of Japan, at <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

¹² Signed in 1951 and revised in 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security grants the United States the right to military bases on the archipelago in exchange for a US. pledge to defend Japan in the event of an attack.

¹³ Exemplified by the strong American presence in the Korean War, deterrence of major proliferation of Russian and Chinese communism in Asia, the economic boom in Japan in the Cold War era, the ability of Japan to deter anti-security processes despite lacking official armed forces while existing in a volatile political region (rising China, nuclearizing North Korea), collaboration during the Gulf and Iraq wars, etc. Sheila Smith, 'Feeling the Heat: Asia's Shifting Geopolitics and the U.S.-Japan Alliance.', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 9 July 2013, at <http://www.cfr.org/japan/feeling-heat-asias-shifting-geopolitics-us-japan-alliance/p31194>, accessed 11 June 2015

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ It is necessary for the United States to "strengthen its relationships with the region across various dimensions and issue areas, not only through verbal commitments but through concrete action. It should try to build a system for regional cooperation and integration so as to become a real 'resident power' in the region. The United States should operationalize its stated commitment to the region." Choi Kang, 'A Changing East Asia and U.S. Foreign Policy', *Council for Foreign Relations*, May 2012, at <http://www.cfr.org/south-korea/changing-east-asia-us-foreign-policy/p28385>, accessed 22 May 2015.

¹⁶ A world with nuclear weapons is safer than one with selective nuclear capability- "mutually assured destruction creates a more secure environment" See Gideon Hanft, 'Rationality and Nuclear Weapons: Revisiting Kenneth Waltz.' *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service at Georgetown University, 24 October 2011 at <http://journal.georgetown.edu/rationality-and-nuclear-weapons-revisiting-kenneth-waltz/>, accessed 5 July 2015.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Lydia DePillis, 'Everything you need to know about the Trans Pacific Partnership', *The Washington Post*, 12 November 2013, at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/wonkblog/wp/2013/12/11/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-trans-pacific-partnership/> accessed 12 June 2015.

¹⁹ Arthur Waldron, 'Japan's Choices in a Changed Security Environment', *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2014, pp. 195-212.

²⁰ 'Defence of Japan 2014: Celebrating the 40th issue milestone', Ministry of Defence, Japan.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "60% of US Navy assets will be stationed in the Pacific by 2020 including enhancements to its critical naval presence in Japan, and the Air Force will move forces such as ISR (intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance) assets to the region." ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 'National Security Strategy of Japan', Ministry of Defence, Japan, at <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ The Guidelines for US-Japan Defence Cooperation, at <http://www.defense.gov/pubs/20150427 -- GUIDELINES FOR US-JAPAN DEFENSE COOPERATION.pdf>

²⁷ Ibid.