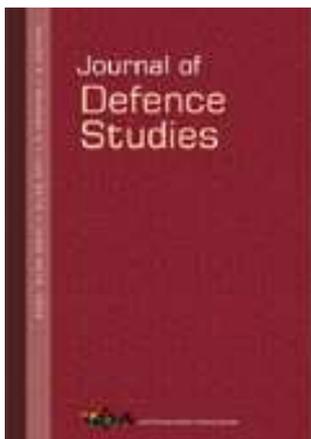


Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses

No.1, Development Enclave, Rao Tula Ram Marg
Delhi Cantonment, New Delhi-110010



Journal of Defence Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.idsa.in/journalofdefencestudies>

Japan's Self-Defense Forces: A Decade after Reorganisation

Kishore Kumar Khara

To cite this article: Kishore Kumar Khara (2018): Japan's Self-Defense Forces: A Decade after Reorganisation, Journal of Defence Studies, Vol. 12, No. 4, October-December 2018, pp. 57-83

URL <https://idsa.in/jds/jds-12-4-2018-japans-self-defense-forces-kkkhara>

Please Scroll down for Article

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.idsa.in/termsfuse>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

Views expressed are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the IDSA or of the Government of India.

Japan's Self-Defense Forces

A Decade After Reorganisation

*Kishore Kumar Khera**

Japan banks heavily on her security alliance with the United States (US) to ensure availability of requisite military capability in the region. China's economic and military capabilities have grown in the last two decades, closing the gap with the US. With diminishing differential, especially with respect to China, the US' deterrence power has gradually declined. Under these conditions, Japan has to develop Self-Defense Forces (SDF) capabilities to ensure that it, in combination with its alliance partner, the US, is able to meet national security challenges. In a major shift in security policy, on 9 January 2007 Japan's Parliament approved the upgradation of Defense Agency/SDF to a full-fledged ministry. However, the changes in the SDF, especially in its doctrine and roles, have been gradual. Till SDF graduates to have an offensive capability that can deter capably, the US will continue to be a key player in Japan's security milieu.

INTRODUCTION

Japan's SDF were created in 1954 despite strong domestic objections based on Article 9 of the post-World War II Japanese Constitution, which eschews the maintenance of military forces or their use to settle international disputes. On 9 January 2007, in a major shift in security policy, Japan's Parliament—the Diet—approved the upgradation of the Defense Agency/SDF into a full-fledged ministry. This has been followed by restructuring of the defence apparatus in the last decade. The following questions thus come to mind: What are the reorganisational

* Kishore Kumar Khera is a Research Fellow at the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, New Delhi. The views expressed here are his own.



and restructuring steps and how have these shaped the SDF? Is the SDF better prepared to handle security environment with two regional rivals, namely, North Korea and China, flexing their muscles?

On 29 August 2017, North Korea fired a ballistic missile that overflew Japan and, four days later, it tested a hydrogen bomb.¹ Reverberations of these events shook all the stakeholders in the region, specifically Japan. After multiple flip-flops, thaw in the Korean Peninsula, with North Korea's summit with South Korea in April 2018 and summit with the United States (US) on 12 June 2018 in Singapore, has deferred any immediate crisis. Yet, long-term regional stability remains a distant goal. Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula and the expansion of coordination between North Korea and South Korea, beyond the sports field, will bring in much-needed regional stability. A journey towards these goals has just begun, but uncertainty about its direction and pace remains. Reports in May 2018 of deployment of Chinese weapons systems on reclaimed islands in the South China Sea have further complicated the matters.² Against this background, it is important to analyse the development of SDF under the functional control of a Ministry of Defense (MoD) over the last one decade in a fast-changing security environment.

The article is structured into three sections. The first section discusses Japan's defence policy in 2006 just prior to the formation of the MoD. It includes the threat assessment, existing capabilities, their adequacy/inadequacy for meeting the challenges and policy constraints on the use of force. The next section analyses the changes in the security policies since 2006, from the points of view of the security environment, Japan–US security alliance and SDF integration in the regional and international security system. The final section covers the possible reasons for defence policy changes based on operational, national, regional and extra-regional factors.

JAPAN'S DEFENCE POLICY IN 2006

Security Environment³

The Japanese defence policy in 2006 was designed around states and non-state actors as the sources of threat. The threatening processes included the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles, besides regional conflicts stemming from religious and ethnic problems.⁴ Assessing a low probability of a full-scale invasion of Japan, the threat

from states—primarily North Korea and China—was perceived to be due to the pace of modernisation of their armed forces and nuclear arsenals. The development and trials of weapons systems by North Korea and a two-digit growth rate in China's defence budget were listed as the areas of major concern.⁵ The threat from non-state actors revolved around transnational terrorism. Within this framework, the objectives of the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) were to prevent any threats from reaching Japan and to improve the international security environment. Three verticals were defined to reach these goals: Japan's own efforts; cooperative efforts with the US; and cooperative efforts with the international community. A detailed road map was charted for the responses to new threats and diverse contingencies, from a large-scale natural disaster to a full-scale invasion of Japan.

Military Matrix

As mentioned earlier, the focus of the Japanese security environment analysis was on China and North Korea. A comparative quantitative assessment of key military capability parameters of these three nations is shown in Figures 1–5.

Figures 1–5 clearly indicate the quantitative military superiority of China over Japan in all domains, but qualitatively the difference was not so stark in 2006. However, systematic replacement of low-end technology military hardware with high-end equipment has allowed China to achieve a comprehensive military edge over Japan. This is balanced by the permanent deployment of the US forces in the region, including

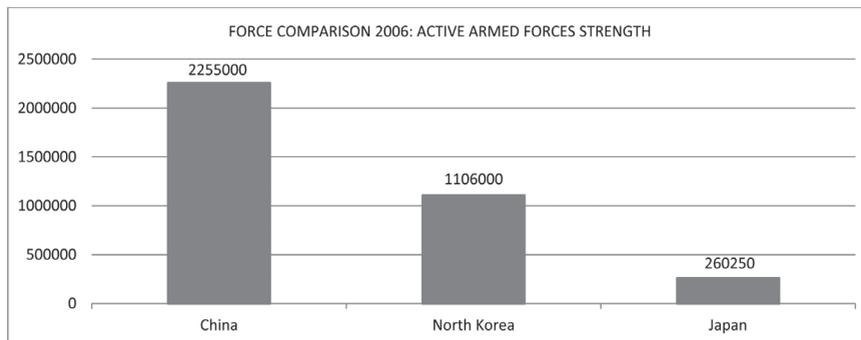


Figure 1 Force Comparison of Strength of Armed Forces of China, North Korea and Japan

Source: Based on data from International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS, 2006).⁶

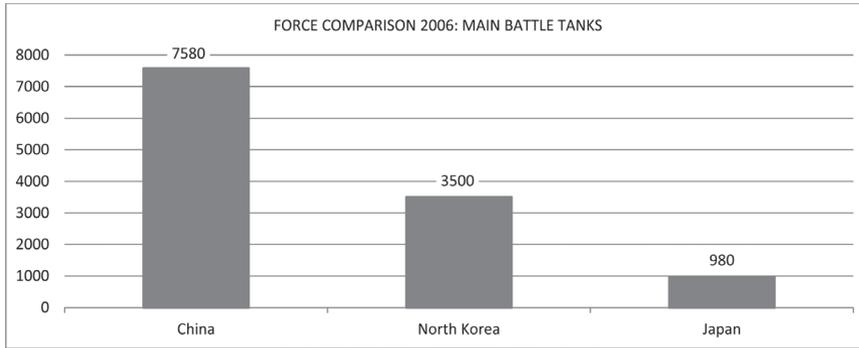


Figure 2 Force Comparison of Strength of Main Battle Tanks of China, North Korea and Japan

Source: Based on IISS data (2006).⁷

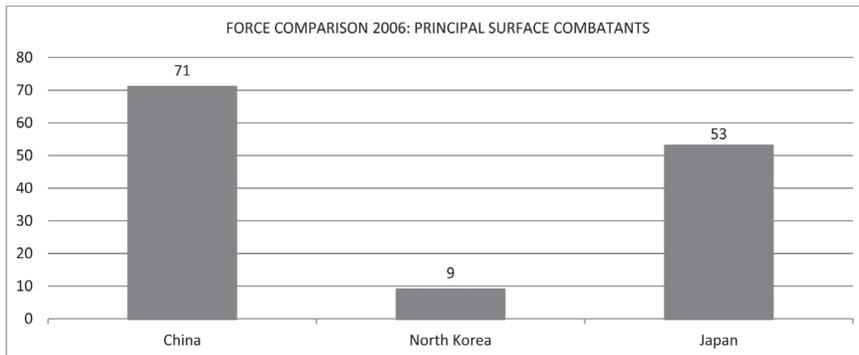


Figure 3 Force Comparison of Strength of Principal Surface Combatants of China, North Korea and Japan

Source: Based on IISS data (2006).⁸

within Japan. The Chinese military might is growing and closing the gap with respect to the deployed capability of Japan–US military alliance in the region.

An analysis of equipment profile of the North Korean military in 2006 indicates a South Korea-centric approach. North Korea’s military was not designed to attack Japan. It was devoid of major naval ships to transport military to the Japanese islands. Her submarine fleet was primarily suitable for protection of her coastline. Yet, North Korea could play a disruptive role by aggressively utilising its fleet of ageing submarines for a short duration and in a limited area. However, its air

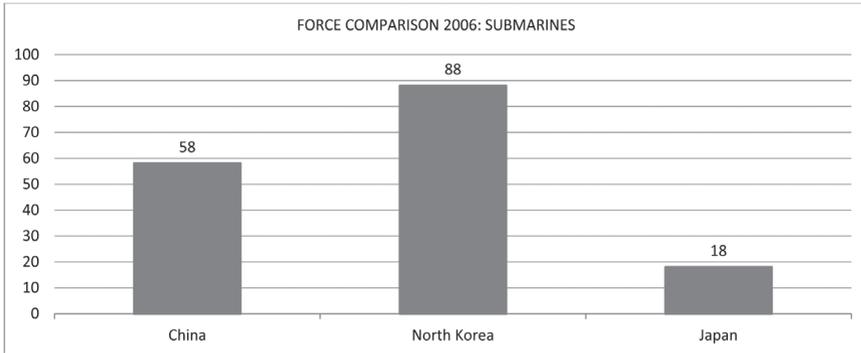


Figure 4 Force Comparison of Strength of Submarines of China, North Korea and Japan

Source: Based on data in IISS (2006).⁹

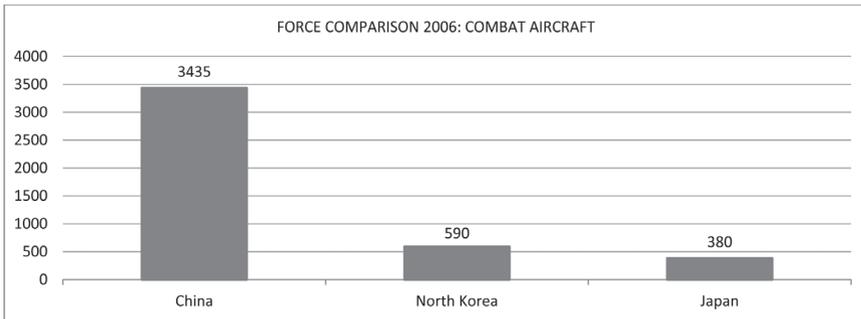


Figure 5 Force Comparison of Strength of Combat Aircraft of China, North Korea and Japan

Source: Based on IISS data (2006).¹⁰

power had severe limitations. Its airfield and aircraft combination were incapable of delivering requisite weapon load on a significant number of military targets in Japan with a high degree of assurance. The Japan–US security treaty and the permanent deployment of US forces in Japan made the task of attacking Japan with conventional military even more improbable. In the conventional domain, no major changes have taken place since.

Japan's assessment of a low probability of large-scale invasion of its territory is supported by this force comparison. However, North Korean development of surface-to-surface missiles and nuclear weapons in recent years has altered the threat matrix for Japan, as also for the US forces based in the region.

Policy Restrictions

The maintenance and employment of SDF has been governed by the principle in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. The SDF came into being as the self-defence force devoid of any offensive intent.

Article 9

1. 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.
2. 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.¹¹

Gestalt

Constitutional restrictions have prohibited Japan from developing and deploying military capability for independently defending national interests. Japan's security assessment, and therefore the security policy, is based on its inability to defend herself against militarily powerful states in the region. Military alliance with the US is a security necessity and will continue till the SDF are capable of defending Japan.

DEFENCE POLICY TRANSFORMATION: 2007–17¹²

The transformation of policies for the defence of Japan started with the establishment of an MoD with the approval of the Japanese Diet on January 9, 2007. Major highlights of its journey in the last decade are collated and included in the annual White Paper on the *Defense of Japan 2017* (Table 1). The establishment of the National Security Council (NSC) and development of the National Security Strategy (NSS) in 2013 finalised the new higher defence architecture. A consequent reassessment of the security environment led to legislative changes and redefining of Japan–US alliance, SDF role and capability expansion. The MoD was also restructured and the Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) was created.

Strategic Vision

The establishment of the NSC and the development of the NSS for the first time in 2013 paved the way for the transformation through necessary

Table I Major Changes in SDF 2007–17

<i>S. No.</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Highlights</i>
1.	2007	Reorganisation into the MoD
2.	2008	Review of the Medium Term Defense Program (MTDP)
3.	2009	Enforcement of the Anti-Piracy Measures Act
4.	2010	Development of the 2010 NDPG
5.	2013	Establishment of the National Security Council; development of the NSS; development of the 2013 NDPG
6.	2014	Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology
7.	2015	Development of the new Guidelines for Japan–US Defence Cooperation; enactment of the Legislation for Peace and Security; MoD restructuring; establishment of the ATLA
8.	2016	Enforcement of the Legislation for Peace and Security
9.	2017	The 10th anniversary of the reorganisation into the MoD

Source: MoD, Japan (2017).¹³

legislative changes. An analysis of Japan's NSS¹⁴ indicates Tokyo's aspirations to play a significant role in the global security environment. The main focus of the NSS is on ensuring international order based on universal values and rules. Greater cooperation with the partners is the way enunciated. To support this vision, there is a necessity to have a cooperative mechanism in the realm of security with multiple partners. That is a possibility only in case restrictions imposed by Article 9 of the Constitution are reassessed.

Policy Framework

The NDPG, for the financial year (FY) 2014 and beyond, gives out the basic defence policy framework.¹⁵ Further, to support the newly crafted NSS, a number of legislative changes have been made in 2015 for a greater role for the SDF by reinterpreting Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. The Legislation for Peace and Security has also been enacted by Japan in September 2015 and came into effect in March 2016. Its objective is to enhance deterrence and to contribute to the peace and stability of the region and of the international community. Associated changes in the SDF law established to transport Japanese nationals overseas now includes 'rescue measures including guarding'. Additional provisions for the protection of equipment of other armed forces allows for a greater contribution by the SDF. A similar expansion of the provision of supplies

and services to the US armed forces has been made. However, the greatest impact on the role of SDF is by redefining the 'Law Concerning Measures to Ensure Peace and Security'. In this redefinition, the responsibility of SDF has changed from 'areas surrounding Japan' to 'situations that will have an important influence on Japan's Peace and Security'. Even the definition of the armed forces has been expanded to include 'Armed forces of other foreign countries engaged in activities contributing to the achievement of the objectives of the UN Charter'. As an amendment to the International Peace Cooperation Act, 'Internationally coordinated operations for peace and security' (humanitarian relief support and safety-ensuring tasks not under the control of the United Nations [UN]) have been added as operations Japan can participate in. The 'safety-ensuring operations' and the 'Kaketsuke-Keigo' operations have been added as tasks in UN peacekeeping operations. Furthermore, the authority to use weapons has also been reviewed subject to Diet approval. Revision of the Legislation for Responses to Armed Attack Situations includes a newly enacted International Peace Support Act. This act enables Japan to conduct search and rescue and ship inspection operations for the armed forces of foreign countries engaged in operations that have competent UN resolutions as well as meet some other requirements. Appropriate revisions have also been made in the act for Establishment of the NSC to deliberate newly inducted provisions in other security-related laws.

The legislative revisions primarily have expanded the types and scope of operations for SDF, including supplies, services and support it can provide to international forces. Three major implications of the legislative changes are:

1. Switch from passive support to active cooperation with other armed forces.
2. The switch of the definition of threat from 'geographical' interpretation to 'effect based'.
3. Use of kinetic means in safety-ensuring operations.

This is a significant change for a subdued and passive SDF. These legislative changes now permit a change of role of SDF from a passive support provider to an active member of operations not only in the areas around Japan but also anywhere in the world which may impinge directly or indirectly on Japanese security. These changes also allow active SDF support to all other armed forces engaged in similar operations, hitherto prohibited by the Constitution. Although these changes do not allow

SDF to undertake offensive operations ab initio, it gives adequate leverage for use of kinetic weapons in defensive and rescue operations. Permission to actively support offensive operations by other armed forces will allow SDF to understand operational nuisances and gradually assist in redefining its operational philosophy for relevance in the contemporary environment.

Reorganisation

With the establishment of the MoD in 2007, another set of major reorganisations was implemented in October 2015. This was based on the 'Direction of the Ministry of Defense Reform' (August 2013). The key changes included the unification of work relating to actual operations into the Joint Staff and establishment of the ATLA. The ATLA, a new extra-ministerial organisation, consolidated departments in the MoD related to the procurement of equipment. Additional reforms of the internal bureaus strengthened the policymaking function and the defence capability build-up function. At the operational level, the biggest reorganisation step came in the form of Ground Central Command (GCC). In March 2018, the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) launched the GCC to provide unified command over regional armies and the new Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade. The GCC is housed at a military base in Asaka, just north of Tokyo.¹⁶

The impact of these changes will take some time to be visible in terms of jointmanship and equipment acquisition process. However, it is clear that synergy in policy, operations and capability development will assist Japan to develop a force capable of enabling her strategic vision of 2013 for an active role. These organisational changes are in sync with the role that SDF is required to play. These will permit efficient capability build-up and focused capability employment—the essential verticals of military power projection.

Roles and Tasks¹⁷

The defensive mandate has focused SDF on maritime, airspace and cyberspace defensive operations. The SDF primarily is engaged in warning and surveillance activities in the waters and airspace surrounding Japan. Its command, control, communication and computer (C4) systems are focused on intrusion prevention and for increasing the safety of information. The SDF is tasked to monitor the operational environment with intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) missions

and redeploy forces to deter enemy attacks. In case of an invasion, the SDF is expected to suppress the enemy force by an attack from aircraft and vessels, followed by operations to retake the islands through the amphibious landing of GSDF units. Additionally, the SDF is to assist the police and the Japanese Coast Guard in curbing illegal activities/infiltration of armed agents and sabotage, besides aiding the local governments during large-scale disasters. The SDF is also responsible to protect Japanese nationals overseas and transport them if the need arises.

No major changes have taken place in the roles and tasks of SDF in the 2007–17 period but owing to changes in rules, laws and acts, the scope of these activities has expanded. From being purely a passive observer, legislative changes and strategic vision have allowed active participation in operations. This, coupled with the increasing shift of conflict towards the grey zone and hybrid warfare, is likely to witness an intensification in SDF activities.

A purely defensive strategy can be dissuasive but its deterrence value is limited against a determined adversary. An aggressor, with no threat of retaliation, will, over a period of time, find a way to bypass the defences as no defensive system is impregnable. Therefore, the creation of an offensive capability is a deterrence necessity. Doctrinal changes in force employment from purely defensive operations to include an offensive option as part of the defensive strategy is likely to be the next major change in Japan's defence policy. That will add value to deterrence capability of SDF and make it more relevant in the current operational environment. This could be carried out within the existing legal framework as part of measures to ensure peace and security.

Military Capability

To implement the NSS, the necessary groundwork for outlining the objectives and legislative framework modification have been carried out. Reorganisation and expansion of tasks are focused towards enhancing capability. The active members of SDF have been around 245,000 in the last 50 years, with a marginal change that can be attributed to administrative reasons. Post reorganisation of the SDF, no significant change is noticed in the total strength, as can be seen in Figure 6. Changing nature of warfare and infusion of technology will drive the numbers down, but the strategic vision for a greater role will put an upward pressure. As a result, the total strength of SDF is unlikely to deviate from current levels in the next decade.



Figure 6 Strength of Armed Forces of Japan

Source: Based on IISS data.¹⁸

The biggest threat to Japan is a ballistic missile attack. Therefore, a multi-tier ballistic missile defence (BMD) is deployed with upper-tier interception by Aegis-equipped destroyers and lower tier by Patriot PAC-3, both interconnected through the Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment (JADGE). In December 2005, a Japan–US joint development of interceptor missiles to improve the capability of the BMD system commenced. Besides upgradation, acquisition of advanced ballistic missile interceptors (SM-3 Block IIA) and PAC-3 Missile Segment Enhancement (MSE) for BMD, additional Aegis-equipped destroyers and shore-based Aegis systems are planned to bolster this capability further. In the last two years, Japan's MoD has invested in (futuristic) ballistic missile interception systems and measures to improve defence capabilities against ballistic missiles. This will remain the focus area in the coming decade, and a central theme for capability development.

The overall personnel strength of GSDF has had no major changes, but the number of Main Battle Tanks (MBTs)—after peaking in the 1990s—is showing a downward trend (Figure 7). This reduction could be because of three reasons: first, in consonance with the assessment of the low probability of a full-scale military invasion of Japan by one of the adversaries. Second, lower survivability of large tank columns owing to enhanced strike capability of air power demonstrated in Operation Desert

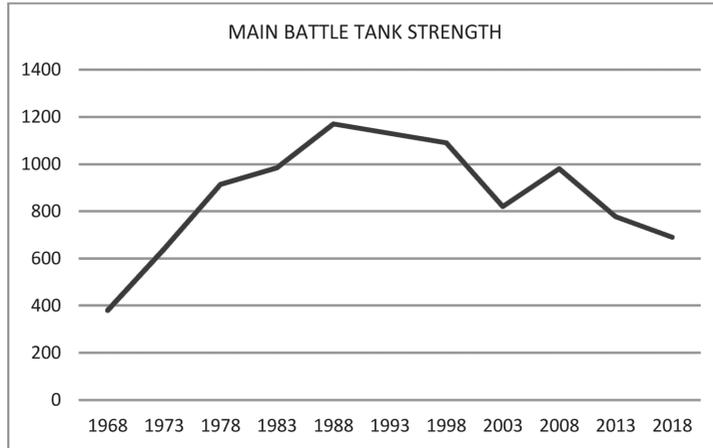


Figure 7 Strength of MBTs of Japan

Source: Based on IISS data.¹⁹

Storm. Greater reach and accuracy of air-delivered weapons coupled with enhancement in sensor technology to detect mechanised vehicles under almost all weather conditions has increased their vulnerability index. Enhanced lethality of specialised air-launched weapons, like Sensor Fused Weapons (SFW) that allows multiple targeting in a single attack, makes large-scale tank formations operationally unviable. Third, there is the issue of reduced open spaces for tank manoeuvre warfare because of urbanisation. This restricts movement of tanks to outflank an adversary and imposes tactical restrictions. On the other hand, with better battlespace transparency, an accurate assessment can be made of the location where the force application is required. Similarly, faster force mobilisation allows quick relocation. Combining these two factors (better ISR and mobilisation) have provided a cost-effective defensive solution obviating the need to maintain large armour formations.

The MBTs, often seen as offensive tools, are unlikely to be used by Japan to enforce implementation of its strategic vision. Therefore, the number of MBTs will continue to go down marginally in the next decade owing to their diminishing relevance in the current operational environment in Japan. However, capability focus is likely to be in other sectors to enhance transparency and mobility. Raising a Coast Observation Unit in Yonaguni in March 2016 and plans to upgrade Osumi-class transport LSTs (landing ship, tank) and induct V-22 Ospreys and SH-60K support this argument. In addition, the SDF has established an

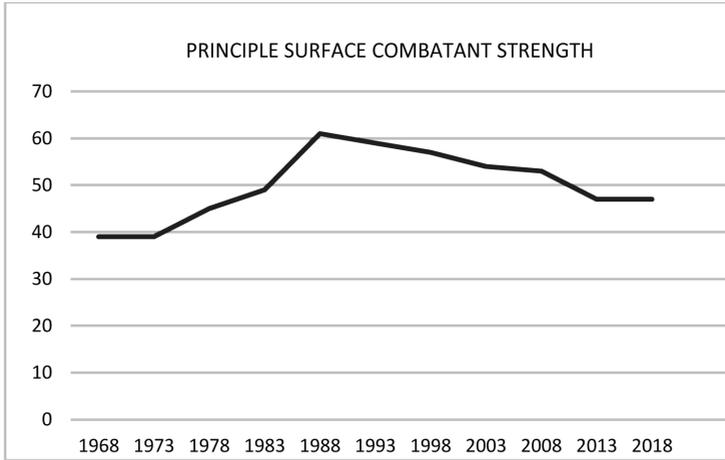


Figure 8 Strength of Principal Surface Combatants of Japan

Source: Based on IISS data.²²

Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade. These developments, besides reducing reaction time for security situations, will also support NSS for providing assistance in strengthening international cooperation.

The strength of major surface combatants of the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), that peaked in the 1990s, has been gradually tapering off to sub-50 number (Figure 8), but the submarine force is growing in strength and currently stands at 19 (Figure 9). In the last decade, there has been an expansion of role for the MSDF, to conduct counter-piracy activities, provide capacity-building assistance to coastal countries and carry out joint exercises. Aspirations of a greater role in consonance with the NSS will require greater capability in the maritime domain. For defensive purposes, the submarines strength will hover around the current number; but for support operations and building up international cooperation, MSDF surface combatants will need to expand qualitatively and quantitatively in the next decade. This will allow MSDF a greater role in international cooperation to ensure rule-based order in the global commons and support smaller nations in protecting their maritime interests. Additional MSDF capability will be a necessity to counter Chinese forays into Japanese coastal areas, especially near Senkaku.²⁰ An aircraft carrier, inherently an offensive platform, is unlikely to be in MSDF agenda for at least the next two decades, although possibilities of F-35B aircraft for Japanese Izumo-class ships are being debated.²¹

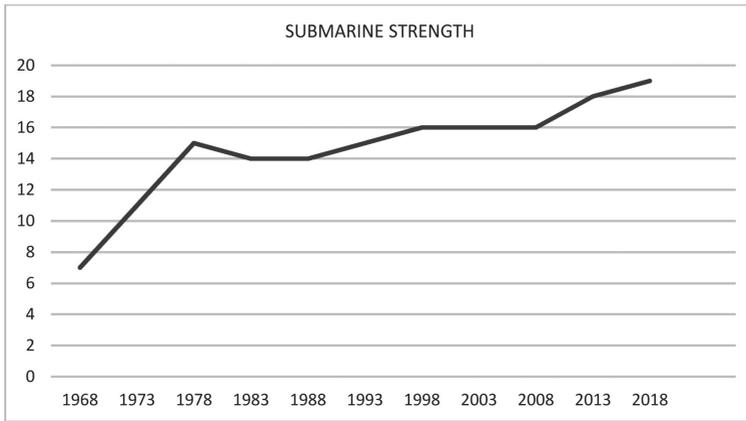


Figure 9 Strength of Submarines of Japan

Source: Based on IISS data.²³

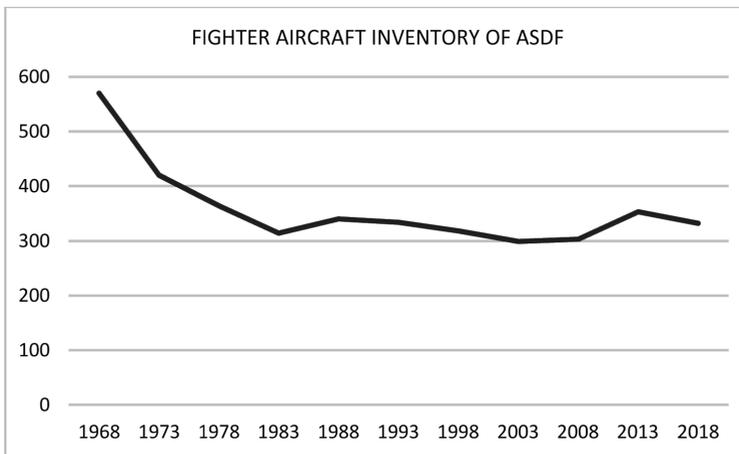


Figure 10 Strength of Fighter Aircraft of Japan

Source: Based on IISS data.²⁶

The combat capability of Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) is based on 189 F-15 and 88 F-2, with a support of phasing out 51 F-4. Its fleet of F35 is gradually growing to the contracted strength of 42 aircraft.²⁴ On completion of replacement of the F-4 with the F-35, the number of fighter aircraft with ASDF will be 319, slightly lower than the existing inventory of 332. The ASDF fighter aircraft inventory for the last 50 years is shown in Figure 10. Since 1983, the inventory has been steadily around 330 aircraft. In spite of heightened air activity by China,²⁵ it is unlikely

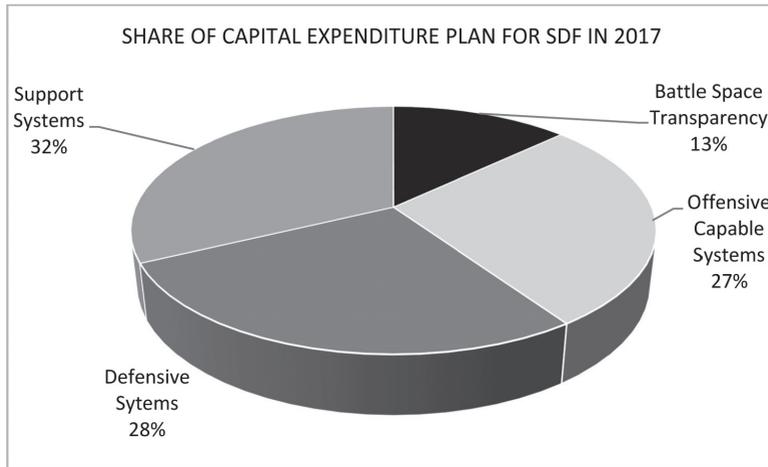


Figure 11 Share of Capital Expenditure Plan for SDF in 2017

Source: Based on data from MoD, 'Defence Programs and Budget of Japan', n. 27.

that ASDF will enhance its combat fleet in the coming decade. However, it probably will focus on enhancing capability through battlespace transparency and force redeployment capability. This strategy is evident from the establishment of the 9th Air Wing in Naha Air Base in January 2016, the Yonaguni Coast Observation Unit in March 2016, and the formation of the Southwestern Air Defense Force in July 2017. The SDF's plans to deploy units in Amami Oshima Island, Miyako Island and Ishigaki Island in the southwestern region strengthens this argument.

Budgetary Allocations²⁷

Japan's defence policy transformation has not yet resulted in recalibrating its military capability. Based on the NSS, the incremental role and task expansion have taken place by redefining the use of existing capability. That is the reason that there has been no major change in terms of budgetary support to the SDF in this period. It has hovered around 1 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), with allotment varying from \$4.1039 billion in 2007 to \$4.7342 billion in 2016, and peaking in 2011 to \$5.9843 billion at 1.02 per cent of the GDP.²⁸

The budgetary provisions in the FY 2017 for various capital acquisition projects indicate a majority of the share towards assets and upgradation of equipment related to the enhancement of combat support and defensive operations (Figure 11). Although 27 per cent of allocation is

for systems capable of offensive combat roles, yet doctrinally the SDF has planned to utilise them in defensive roles only. These include acquisition and upgradation of combat aircraft (F-35 and F-2) and submarines. Just these two assets account for 92 per cent of the share of this subcategory. Practically, the planned investment in the combat systems for offensive missions is marginal in the range of 2 per cent. Going forward, the focus of capability enhancement will be on instruments that can provide enhanced capability in BMD, maritime domain, battlespace transparency and mobility.

Japan–US Security Arrangements

Based on the Japan–US security treaty, the Japan–US security arrangements, together with Japan’s own efforts, constitute the cornerstone of Japan’s security.²⁹ Signed in 1951 alongside the Treaty of San Francisco that ended World War II, the original US–Japan Mutual Security Treaty was revised thrice till 1997 to incrementally increase the role of SDF and its operational limits. In 2015, the latest revision of the treaty, rechristened as Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation (Defense Guidelines), included cooperation in outer space and cyberspace, initiatives in the area of defence equipment and technology cooperation, intelligence cooperation, information security, educational and research exchanges and regular evaluation.³⁰ In November 2015, the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) was established to enable bilateral information sharing, and also the Bilateral Planning Mechanism (BPM) for the development and upgradation of bilateral plans was upgraded. The plan is to establish a seamless cooperation structure in all phases from peacetime to contingencies, including cooperation in grey zone situations, while enhancing joint training, exercises and ISR activities.

A gradual but definitive shift has taken place in the basic principles of the Japan–US security alliance. This has been forced by changing conflict dynamics. The role of the US forces has changed from assistance during an aggression against Japan to include broader hybrid threats. Setting up a mechanism for information sharing and enhanced cooperation in ISR domain is indicative of this change. This will allow a greater role for SDF in managing and mitigating threats.

The cost of maintaining the US forces in Japan is estimated at \$4.492 billion for 2018³¹ and is shared by Japan. According to an annual report published by the US Department of Defense in 2004, *Allied Contributions to the Common Defence*, Japan provided direct support of \$3.2 billion

(about ¥366 billion) and indirect support worth \$1.18 billion, offsetting as much as 74.5 per cent of the total cost. In 2015, Japan paid about ¥191 billion, 86.4 per cent of the total cost.³² This amount is approximately 37 per cent of the Japanese defence budget. Gradually, Japan's share of maintenance of the US forces in Japan has increased. The trend is likely to continue with the stated policy of the Trump administration on this account.³³ However, in the case of growth of SDF capabilities, it will lead to scaling down of the US forces in Japan and its consequent financial implications.

The operational part of the Japan–US security alliance has expanded to meet developing challenges in a comprehensive manner, but it is in the administrative and financial aspects—specifically related to Okinawa—that the progress is subdued.³⁴ Another aspect that is changing in the Japan–US alliance is about the US forces in Japan vis-à-vis local administrative issues. Japan provides host nation support (HNS) to the US forces stationed in Japan and in April 2016, the new special measures agreement (SMA) was implemented. After a vehicular accident by an inebriated US soldier in November 2017, the decision by the US to ban the consumption of alcohol by all US military personnel deployed in Japan indicates the changing equations.³⁵

International Interaction

Comparing international engagements of SDF in the period 1996–2006 with that in the following decade after the establishment of the MoD, the presence of a decisive direction can be assessed. As part of cooperative efforts by the international community, the SDF troops were engaged in a wide spectrum of international peace cooperation activities, including humanitarian and reconstruction assistance operations in Iraq. To improve the international security environment, the NSS outlined security dialogues, defence exchanges, bilateral and multilateral exercises with countries in the Asia-Pacific region and measures for arms control and disarmament and non-proliferation, including those for the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

The UN participation for SDF commenced in September 1992 with a set of eight ceasefire observers to Cambodia.³⁶ Since then, Japan has dispatched about 9,300 SDF and police personnel to UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Mozambique, Golan Heights, Timor-Leste, Haiti and the current mission in Southern Sudan. Japan, with a share of 10.88 per cent, is the second-largest financial contributor to the UN

peacekeeping budget.³⁷ Besides the UN, international engagements of SDF are a combination of joint exercises, capacity-building assistance, anti-piracy operations and defence equipment and technology cooperation at bilateral and multilateral levels.³⁸

Earlier, barring the US forces, SDF rarely engaged with other militaries in international exercises. This has been transformed with a four-time increase in annual engagement from averaging two per year in 2006–08. The SDF has participated in several multilateral and bilateral military exercises, like Cobra Gold, Empire Challenge, RIMPAC, Keen Sword, Red Flag, Orient Shield, JIMEX, TAMEX, SAREX, Malabar, Pacific Friendship, Aman, Khaan Quest, Cope North and Blue Chromite, with countries like Australia, India, Indonesia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines, Republic of Korea (ROK), Russia, Singapore and Thailand. The scope of exercises too has expanded and includes ground, maritime and air elements.³⁹ With an exception of an exercise with India and Russia, SDF has participated in military exercises with the US military as the host or a co-participant. It will take a while for SDF to chart out an independent course in international military exercises. But the steps are in the right direction.

An analysis of all international military engagements of SDF in the last decade indicates its willingness to be part of the international community with respect to operations under the aegis of the UN. A systematic approach for high-level engagement with multiple nations on bilateral basis and initiatives for cooperating on a multilateral basis is in consonance with the NSS. In a way, Japan is enhancing cooperation and engagement with other states both at policy and operational levels. Recent attempts in November 2017 on the resurrection of the Quadrilateral Forum, initiated first in 2007 with India, Australia and the US, are for broadening the hedging base. Overall, a shift in Japan's security strategy is well assessed by Stephen R. Nagy:⁴⁰

This security strategy shifts Japan's traditional practice of regional security from the Washington–Tokyo–Beijing calculus to one that inculcates many partners, in order to lessen Japan's sensitivity to any shifts in the triangular relationship. Rather than dual hedging, Japanese foreign policy can be understood as hedging in all directions, i.e., engaging in an omnidirectional hedging process, which accounts for the shifting dynamics of geopolitics in and outside the region.

WHYS AND WHEREFORES

A comprehensive military defeat, twin nuclear attacks, and the imposition of an externally dictated constitution after World War II redefined Japan as a state. In the last seven decades, Japan has been trying to reassess her position in the changing world order. National security and role in regional security are significant criteria in deciding this order. In this context, Japan is reviewing and changing her security policy. A nation's security policy transforms based on operational, national, regional and extra-regional factors, and, for Japan, these key parameters are discussed here.

Operationally, the mandate of SDF is defensive. The capability development of SDF and its deployment pattern have been only for defensive operations. The sources of threats and threatening processes enunciated in 2006 have essentially remained unchanged. However, the situation has been appreciated through a grey zone lens and described as neither purely peacetime nor contingencies, over territory, sovereignty and maritime economic interests. The risk of precipitation of a security situation consequent to a misunderstanding or miscalculation has increased in the region. Two major focus areas in the current matrix are North Korea's progress with nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and China's active maritime advancement. The relative combat strengths of these three players in critical areas of conventional warfighting have not changed substantially in the last decade. Besides nuclear capability, a key differential is close to 477 missile launchers with China and rapidly growing missile capability of North Korea. These pose the biggest threat to military, population and economic centres. On the territorial front, focus will be on the growing maritime capability of China as a threat to Senkaku.

The infusion of high-end communication, navigation and lethal technology in the battlespace, and its management, has changed the nature of warfare in the twenty-first century. Increased battlespace transparency, coupled with high accuracy of weapon delivery, has enhanced the assurance levels of success of swift offensive operations. This has tilted the balance in favour of the aggressor against a force restricting itself to defensive operations only. Therefore, the restrictive defensive role for SDF actually has impinged on its defensive ability owing to the absence of counter-offensive plan, intent and capability. This is assessed as the operational trigger for transforming SDF.

As a nation, there are, first and foremost, two competing views in Japan. The scars of American atomic bombs dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 are etched permanently, along with the humiliation of punishment after World War II. Therefore, Japan does not look at war as an option to resolve international disputes and wants the limited role of the SDF for self-protection only. The generation that witnessed and bore the brunt of humiliation after World War II has been, today, replaced by a generation that created a concept of economically strong Japan. In 2006, Shinzo Abe became the youngest and the first Prime Minister of Japan to be born after World War II. This generation is looking at the relevance and interpretation of Article 9 in the current context. Second, with the limited mandate, SDF gradually drifted from the core values and got embroiled in multiple scams, including a series of scandals concerning collusive bidding at the Defense Facilities Administration Agency and use of illegal drugs. This further diminished the already low societal status of the SDF. The necessity was, thus, to bring transparency and professionalism. Additionally, a perception of the US as protector of Japanese interests received a major setback during Senkaku Island incident in 2005.⁴¹ These three factors are considered the transformational triggers for the reorganisation of the SDF at the national level.

Regionally, besides territorial disputes, the main argument stems from the conduct of Japanese forces prior to and during World War II. Unresolved territorial disputes over the Northern Territories and Takeshima added to the complications in Japan's security milieu. The regional players, in general, opposed the concept of a militarily powerful Japan. The US, an extra-regional power, established herself as the net security provider in the region with the Japan–US security alliance, followed by the ROK–US security alliance in 1953 after the Korean War. The US enjoyed a very high degree of military capability supremacy in the region, leading to unchallenged domination and deterrence ability. However, this is changing. The economic, and therefore military, rise of China and the expansion of North Korean missile and nuclear capabilities have altered the status quo in the region and have forced a reassessment of the operational environment. A combination of Chinese capability expansion and assertion in the maritime domain and the unresolved Senkaku Island issue weigh heavily in the regional security matrices. There is a need to restore the regional military balance of power in the region for Japan to protect her interests through deterrence.

The US, the most significant extra-regional force, holds the key as the security partner of Japan. The security alliance between Japan and the US has undergone many modifications to accommodate the national, regional and global realities. Initialised as the Japan–US security treaty through the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, it has metamorphosed into the Defense Guidelines that includes cooperation in outer space and cyberspace. The scope of security cooperation with the US has expanded. Three assessed major security concerns of Japan on the global stage are: unchallenged Russia's changes to the status quo in Ukraine; increased risks to the stable use of cyberspace; and risk that a security problem in a single country or region could immediately explode into a challenge or destabilising factor for the entire international community. Japan's current assessment is that these challenges, owing to their complex, diverse and wide-ranging nature, can only be dealt with collectively. The current defence policies do continue to be hinged on the pivotal role of the US in Indo-Pacific region in general, and for Japan's security in particular. However, Japan recognises, from the events in Ukraine, the South China Sea and West Asia, the diminishing financial and technological edge of the US, leading to a shift in the global balance of power. To cultivate alternative options and widen the security cooperation, Japan is engaging states besides the US. The gradual incorporation of Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) members, Australia and India into Japan's security calculus, through bilateral and multilateral engagements and cooperation, is indicative of the perceived role of other extra-regional players. The rejuvenation of the Quad after a failed attempt in 2007 supports this argument.

This four-tiered operational, national, regional and extra-regional analytical structure is to comprehensively understand the changes in Japan security policy and SDF. In this, Shinzo Abe appears to be the X-factor, although it is difficult to assess at this juncture if the change is based on his individual charisma or is an outcome of SDF reorganisation. After the establishment of the MoD till 2012, the activities were related to refinement of the process and not reforms. This can be attributed to lack of decisive leadership after Shinzo Abe relinquished his post as the Prime Minister in September 2007 till his reappointment five years later. During this period, Japan had five different prime ministers. During Shinzo Abe's second term as the Prime Minister, rejuvenation of defence ties with a number of countries after a gap of four to five years and the next set of structural changes were carried out in 2013. Recommencement

of defence reforms with the announcement of NSS, legislative changes regarding role and scope of SDF operations, and recalibration of Defense Guidelines with the US are pointers towards Shinzo Abe's reformer role. Armed with a greater mandate in the 2017 snap polls, he is firmly in place and is expected to drive the SDF and Japan towards a larger international role and develop multilateral cooperative security arrangements.

CONCLUSION

The Japanese SDF, though small, is a potent force but not adequate to meet the security challenges that Japan faces today. Japan banks heavily on her security alliance with the US for ensuring availability of requisite military capability in the region to deter. In the last decade, the overwhelming financial and military superiority enjoyed by the US ensured a stable security environment for Japan. However, with diminishing differential, especially with respect to China, the deterrence power of the US has gradually declined. While it may take a while for China to match or surpass the military capability of the US, she will be in a position to stretch the US military might, specifically in East Asia, in the coming decade. Under these developing conditions, Japan has to develop the SDF to ensure that it, in combination with the alliance partner, the US, is able to thwart all attempts on her freedom. The role of the US forces in her security is gradually being redefined, with the share of responsibility for SDF increasing. Technologically and financially, SDF has had negligible constraints but it has not focused on requisite capability development. Changing a defensive mindset is the biggest factor in this matrix. With the support of Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and Flight Refueller Aircraft (FRA), SDF has a potent offensive potential and needs to be guided with intent, training and appropriate weapons. While appreciating a reduced probability of a full-scale military invasion, the threat matrix needs to be redefined in the changing security environment in her neighbourhood. Creating a multilevel defensive shield against a missile threat is in order, but defensive mechanisms can never deter. Rather than focusing on defending herself, probably the time is right to develop capabilities that would deter such an attack.

With the establishment of the MoD, defining of NSS and making legislative changes, Japan seems to be on course to achieve greater self-reliance for her security needs. A noticeable increase in regional cooperation and involvement of SDF in international events is a positive sign. This will allow SDF to grow professionally. Barring JIMEX with

India and SAREX with Russia, all international military exercises undertaken by the SDF in the last decade have had participation by US armed forces. It will take some time for SDF to chart out an independent course of action and international engagement policy. The changes in SDF, especially in its doctrine and roles, have been gradual. However, this process still needs to progress substantially before SDF can be a major partner of the alliance for the defence of Japan. Till SDF graduates to have an offensive capability that can deter, the US will continue to be a key player in Japan's security milieu.

NOTES

1. See 'North Korea Conducts Most Powerful Nuclear Test Yet', *Al Jazeera*, 3 September 2017, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/north-korea-confirms-sixth-nuclear-test-170903060221933.html>, accessed on 11 September 2018.
2. Amanda Masius, 'China Quietly Installed Defensive Missile Systems on Strategic Spratly Islands in Hotly Contested South China Sea', *CNBC News*, 2 May 2018, available at <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html> accessed on 11 September 2018.
3. Based on MoD, *Defense of Japan 2006*, Annual White Paper, available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/, accessed on 16 November 2017.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 2, chapter 1.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 1, Summary.
6. IISS, *Military Balance 2006*, London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 2006.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*
10. *Ibid.*
11. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, available at https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html, accessed on 11 September 2018.
12. Based on annual white papers by MoD, *Defense of Japan 2006–2017*, available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/, accessed on 16 November 2017.
13. MoD, *Defense of Japan 2017*, Annual White Paper, available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/ accessed on 11 September 2018.
14. Japan's NSS is available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.

html, last accessed on 11 September 2018. It lists three national interests: to maintain its own peace and security of Japan and ensure its survival; to achieve the prosperity of Japan and its people, thereby consolidating its peace and security; and to maintain and protect the international order based on universal values and rules. Three objectives are: to strengthen deterrence (thereby deterring threats from directly reaching Japan); to improve the security environment of the region (and prevent the emergence of, and reduce, direct threats to Japan by strengthening the Japan–US alliance); and enhancing trust and cooperative relations with its partners (to improve the global security environment and build a peaceful, stable and prosperous international community).

15. See Japan's 'National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond (Summary)', available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html, accessed on 10 July 2018. It gives Japan's basic defence policy:

Proactively Contributing to Peace' based on the principle of international cooperation, Japan will contribute more actively than ever to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity of the world while pursuing its own security and peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

- Under this basic principle, Japan will build a comprehensive defense architecture and strengthen its system for preventing and responding to various contingencies. In addition, Japan will strengthen the Japan–U.S. Alliance and actively promote security cooperation with other countries and also seek to establish an infrastructure necessary for its defense forces to fully exercise their capabilities.
 - Japan will efficiently build a highly effective and integrated defense capability based on an exclusively national defense-oriented policy under the Constitution, not becoming a military power that poses a threat to other countries, while observing the principle of civilian control of the military and the Three Non-Nuclear Principles
 - With regard to the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will take appropriate measures through its own efforts, such as maintaining and improving the credibility of extended deterrence provided by the United States, ballistic missile defense (BMD) and protection of the people. Japan will also play a vigorous and active role in nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation efforts.
16. 'Japan Opens Central Command HQ for Ground Troops', *The Straits Times*, 6 April 2018, available at <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/east->

- asia/japan-opens-central-command-hq-for-ground-troops, accessed on 10 July 2018.
17. Based on MoD, 'Medium Term Defense Program (FY2014–FY2018)', approved by Japan's National Security Council and the Cabinet on 17 December 2013, available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html, accessed on 10 July 2018.
 18. IISS, *Military Balance 1968–2017*, London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall.
 19. Ibid.
 20. As per the annual white paper by MoD, *Defense of Japan 2017*, n. 13, in 2016, there were 12 confirmed incidents of activities by Chinese Navy vessels, including passage through the Southwestern islands such as the sea areas between the main island of Okinawa and Miyako Island. In June 2016, a Chinese Navy combatant vessel entered Japan's contiguous zone to the north of the Senkaku Islands for the first time.
 21. Robert Farley, 'An F-35B for Japan's *Izumo*-class: Obstacles and Challenges', *The Diplomat*, 23 March 2018, available at <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/an-f-35b-for-japans-izumo-class-obstacles-and-challenges/>, accessed on 10 July 2018.
 22. IISS, *Military Balance 1968–2017*, n. 18.
 23. Ibid.
 24. IISS, *Military Balance 2018*, London: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 2018, p. 273.
 25. As per the annual white paper by MoD, *Defense of Japan 2017*, n. 13, in 2016, ASDF aircraft scrambled 1,168 times, which was 295 times more than the previous fiscal year and the highest figure since scrambles commenced in 1958. Among them, the number of scrambles against Chinese aircraft was 851, which was 280 times more than the previous fiscal year, another record. In May 2017, there was an incursion into Japan's territorial airspace by a small unmanned aircraft that was flown from a Chinese government vessel, which had intruded into Japan's territorial waters near the Senkaku Islands. This was the second incident of an incursion into territorial airspace by Chinese authorities since 2012.
 26. IISS, *Military Balance 1968–2017*, n. 18.
 27. Based on MoD, 'Defense Programs and Budget of Japan', 2017, available at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_budget/pdf/290328.pdf, accessed on 12 October 2017.
 28. IISS, *Military Balance 2006–2017*, n. 18.
 29. Itsunori Onodera, Japan Minister of Defense, in MoD, *Defense of Japan 2017*, n. 13.

30. To further promote cooperation in the space domain, the Space Cooperation Working Group (SCWG) was established in April 2015. The SCWG promotes reviews in broader fields: promotion of policy-related consultation regarding space; closer information sharing; cooperation for developing and securing experts; and implementation of table top exercises.
31. *United States Operation and Maintenance Overview Fiscal Year 2018: Budget Estimates*, June 2017, Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller)/Chief Financial Officer, p. 206, available at http://comptroller.defense.gov/Portals/45/Documents/defbudget/fy2018/fy2018_OM_Overview.pdf, accessed on 6 September 2017.
32. Ayako Mie, 'How Much Does Japan Pay to Host U.S. Forces?', *The Japan Times*, 31 January 2017, available at https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/01/31/national/much-japan-pay-host-u-s-forces-depends-ask/#.Wa_BUsbhXIU, accessed on 6 September 2017.
33. 'Donald Trump Warns NATO Allies to Spend More on Defence: A Look at US President's Relationship with Security Alliance', *Firstpost*, 4 July 2018, available at <https://www.firstpost.com/world/donald-trump-warns-nato-allies-to-spend-more-on-defence-a-look-at-us-presidents-relationship-with-security-alliance-4661991.html>, accessed on 10 July 2018.
34. To mitigate the impact on Okinawa, the US forces realignment plan, including the relocation of Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to the Camp Schwab Henokosaki area (Nago City), is to be implemented. In December 2015, both sides agreed on an early return of part of the land of MCAS Futenma as well as a part of the land of Makiminato Service Area. Other aspects cover the return of areas south of Kadena Air Base, the reduction of US troops stationed in Okinawa and its relocation to Guam and the training relocation of MV-22 Osprey aircraft. On 5 July 2016, the governments of Japan and the US released the 'Japan–United States Joint Statement on Reviewing Implementation Practices of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) Related to US Personnel with SOFA Status, Including the Civilian Component'.
35. Anna Fifield, 'US Military Imposes Alcohol Ban across Japan after Fatal Okinawa Crash', *Washington Post*, 19 November 2017, available at https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/us-military-imposes-alcohol-ban-across-japan-after-fatal-okinawa-crash/2017/11/19/a8ce40f8-cd98-11e7-8447-3d80b84bebad_story.html?utm_term=.c06e8596eff7, accessed on 11 September 2018.
36. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, 'Japanese Participation in UN Peacekeeping', December 1996, available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pko/pamph96/02_2.html, accessed on 6 September 2017.
37. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Japan, Report on 'Japan's

- Contribution to the United Nations Peace Keeping Operations', March 2014, available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/pko/pdfs/contribution.pdf>, accessed on 6 September 2017.
38. In 2015, at the multilateral level, participation in the Association of Southeast Asia Nations or ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)-Plus and hosting Japan–ASEAN Defence Vice-Ministerial Forum and bilaterally, the first Japan–Indonesia and Japan–Australia Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting (2+2 Meeting), and the Japan–Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan–China Defence Ministerial Meeting, held after a gap of nearly five years, indicate the Japanese intent. This was followed by the second Japan–United Kingdom (UK) Foreign and Defence Ministerial and the Japan–Canada Vice-Ministerial '2+2' Dialogue. In December 2015, during the Japan–India Summit Meeting, an agreement with India on the transfer of defence equipment and security measures for the protection of classified military information and technology was signed; and two months later, a similar agreement with the Philippines was inked.
 39. IISS, *Military Balance 2006–2017*, n. 18.
 40. Stephen R. Nagy, 'Japan's Proactive Pacifism: Investing in Multilateralization and Omnidirectional Hedging', *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2017, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09700161.2017.1295607>, accessed on 12 October 2017.
 41. During the 2005 Senkaku Island crisis, Japan expected the US to support its territorial claim. However, this did not happen. The US stand on the issue remained ambiguous until the visit of the US President Barak Obama and clarifications on the issue in 2014. For more, see Robert B. Aldridge, 'Introduction', in *The Origins of Reversion and the Senkaku Islands*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 1-6 and Nagy, 'Japan's Proactive Pacifism', n. 40.

