

# Japan's Security Concerns and Policy Responses

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## Abstract

*Japanese foreign policy and security perceptions have undergone a perceptible and steady change over the past decade, especially under the leadership of former Prime Minister Koizumi (2001-2006). Its support for the US war on terror was a significant step in its growing international politico-security profile. Japan's security perceptions in this period have been shaped by two distinct factors: hard security concerns that flow from the rising power and influence of China, and the uncertainties in the Korean Peninsula, especially in regard to the North Korean nuclear and missile programmes; and those that emerge from its quest for assured energy supplies from abroad and security of its large maritime interests as a trading nation. In the past five years it has sought an active international role to deal with its emerging security challenges, and a greater influence on global institutions that deal with security issues. Japan's quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, the changing role of its Self-Defense Forces abroad, the ongoing attempts to revise the Constitution, its active participation with the United States in the ballistic missile defence programme, and its search for new strategic partners in Southeast Asia and India –all indicate a fundamental shift in security policies and its emergence as a 'normal state'.*

In a significant article in *International Security* in 1993, Thomas U. Berger had argued that in the short to medium term he did not foresee Japan aiming to be a major military power in keeping with its postwar culture of antimilitarism and pacifism.<sup>1</sup> Yet over the past decade the centrality of its pacifist and antimilitarist culture in its security policy has gradually been eroded and a new discourse centering on the extent to which Japan will move towards realism and becoming a 'normal state' has taken its place. The debate that earlier focused on whether or not Japan would make such a shift has been largely settled. The election of Shinzo Abe as the new

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Prime Minister following the retirement of Koizumi is expected to give a further impetus to this process of change. Abe is a nationalist who favours a more assertive Japan that “shows leadership” and “its identity to the world.”<sup>2</sup> He has enumerated a revision of the pacifist Constitution to enable participation in collective self-defense activities and up-gradation of the Defense Agency to the status of a ministry as among his priority goals.

The so-called ‘normalisation’ is clearly perceptible in the incremental shifts in Japan’s security policy since the end of the Cold War. The most prominent of these shifts first appeared at the time of the redefinition of the US-Japan guidelines in 1997 and became even more discernible in the course of Japan’s assistance to the US in the war on terror following the 9/11 Al Qaida attacks. Japan offered assistance and took steps such as the quick passage of laws to empower the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to provide logistical support to the US in counter-terror operations and dispatch of its maritime SDF for intelligence gathering abroad. An anti-terrorism bill (October 2001) and a basic plan (November 2001) were passed by the Diet, enabling the SDF to provide non-combat and humanitarian assistance. The way was also cleared for the dispatch of Maritime SDF ships to the Indian Ocean specially to refuel US and allied ships. The enlargement in the role of the SDF has been noteworthy.

Other indicators include a definitive augmentation of Japanese participation in UN peacekeeping, the changing role of the Japanese SDF, the ongoing process of revisions in the Constitution (especially a rethinking on Article 9 that commits it to pacifism), Japanese participation in research on Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) with the United States and the inclusion of the Taiwan clause as an area of common concern with Washington in the Joint Statement following the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee 2+2 meeting in February 2005. These visible signs of change are marked indicators of the willingness of Tokyo to alter its security policy in response to the requirements of the changing times and the security environment. In other words Japan is clearly moving towards realism and normal statehood – a movement that is likely to get a powerful impetus as a result of the 10<sup>th</sup> October 2006 North Korean nuclear test.

Japan’s view of the global security environment emerges from recognition of the fact that the traditional sources of threat as perceived during the Cold War have significantly changed. There is also an acknowledgement that with the end of the Cold War the risk of a full-scale

invasion of Japan has substantially reduced— a point underscored by a report by the *'Task Force on Foreign Relations for the Prime Minister'* in 2002.<sup>3</sup> It believes that order in the post 9/11 international system hinges on the centrality and primacy of the US as the sole superpower. The present state of bilateral ties with the US has been referred to as the “golden age.”<sup>4</sup> The US-Japan alliance has been steadily bolstered since 1997, and was given a significant impetus by former Prime Minister Koizumi. Tokyo attaches greatest significance to its ties with Washington not just for its security, but also in its foreign and economic policy. A Report on Defense and Strategic Studies 1999-2000 published in 2001 had for example clearly affirmed that the US-Japan security arrangements “will still function as a foundation of a security mechanism for the Asia-Pacific region in 20 years from now after several reconfirmation process.”<sup>5</sup> The report reiterated the Japanese belief that no other military power in the region would be able to replace the US Asia Pacific region in this period.

In effect, whereas until the early 1990s Japan's management of its foreign and security policies were centered around “foreign economic policy” through development aid, investments and above all the generous provision of overseas development assistance with little external military cooperation, over the past decade Tokyo has graduated from a junior alliance partner of the United States to an increasingly prominent military ally. However, it is unlikely that this shift towards what Michael Green has called ‘reluctant realism’<sup>6</sup> would translate into a militarist Japan as in the pre-1945 period given the growth of democracy, the strong peace constituency, and the checks exerted by its participation in the alliance with the United States, and the rising power of China and Korea.

### **Drivers of Change**

The emergence of China as an increasingly powerful neighbour seems to be amongst the two most significant factors influencing Japanese security policy. North Korea's recently acquired nuclear weapon status following the nuclear test conducted on 9 October 2006 and its defiant political and military posture is the second but a more immediate factor that compounds Tokyo's problems and is now being perceived by many as an even bigger concern than Beijing's growing capabilities. Coupled with these are the critical issues of energy and maritime security and concerns about the spread of nuclear weapons and missile capabilities that could endanger its security. An influential section of the Japanese foreign policy elite

increasingly believes that the present security policies are inadequate to deal with the challenges. The self-imposed constraints in the US-drafted peace Constitution, the limited role of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDFs) and the inability to participate in collective security arrangement with allies are just a few issues that have come under the scanner at a time when Japan is poised and willing to take on a larger role in the international arena. The drive and impetus to bring about these changes therefore significantly flow from Tokyo's own vision of an enlarged regional and global role for itself on one level and Washington's expectations on the other. Japan's quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council is another manifestation of this desire.

### **Primary Concerns**

For the past decade, Japan has been gradually shedding its passive security policy and the key factors that are driving it to do so are clearly embedded in its changed security environment, perceived vulnerabilities and the emergence of a new generation of more assertive political elite. Its concerns in the region include a rising China, the volatile Taiwan Straits issue and the North Korean factor. The territorial disputes in the East China Sea with China and Korea are related concerns. These primary security concerns find a mention in the new National Defense Policy Outline 2004, the Araki Report and the Mid-Term Policy Outline. Though perceptions vary as to whether Beijing or Pyongyang is the primary security challenge, there is little disagreement over the fact that these two form the core of Tokyo's threat perceptions today. However, China continues to be seen as an economic opportunity despite political and diplomatic ties being troubled, while North Korea is viewed as being irresponsible and capricious.

### **China and Taiwan Straits**

China's rise and growing politico-military role in the strategic neighbourhood is perhaps the most telling factor in Japan's security and foreign policy.<sup>1</sup> As Green avers, Japan's policy is "increasingly being shaped by strategic considerations about the balance of power and influence in Northeast Asia, particularly vis-à-vis China...Japan's relations in East Asia...tend to reflect a self-conscious competition with China for strategic influence in the region... a new realism has emerged regarding the limits

	<i>Global/Regional Security Concerns</i>
<i>Araki Report October 2004</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>WMDs and ballistic missiles</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nuclear Powers in region – Russia and China</li> <li>• Ambitious power – North Korea</li> <li>• Instability on Korean peninsula</li> <li>• Taiwan Straits issue</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>NDPO FY 2005~</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>Non-state actors</i></li> <li>➤ <i>WMD proliferation and ballistic missiles</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Russia – reduced armed forces in Far East</li> <li>• China – Military might and modernizing forces, remain <i>attentive</i> to future actions</li> <li>• North Korea – WMDs, ballistic missiles, nuclearization</li> <li>• Full-scale invasion increasingly unlikely</li> <li>• Japanese vulnerabilities arise from- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Limited strategic depth</li> <li>○ Long coastlines and small islands</li> <li>○ High population density</li> <li>○ Concentration of population and industry in urban areas</li> <li>○ Important facilities in coastal areas</li> <li>○ Frequent natural disasters</li> <li>○ Security of SLOCs</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>US-Japan SSC Joint Statement</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>New and emerging threats - terrorism and WMD</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Modernization of military capabilities in region</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Security Concerns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ North Korea – concern on nuclear program, ballistic missile activities, illicit activities and humanitarian issues</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Common Strategic Objectives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ North Korea – support peaceful unification</li> <li>○ China- aim at cooperative relationship, encourage transparency in military affairs</li> <li>○ Taiwan Straits issue – Encourage peaceful resolution through dialogue</li> <li>○ Russia – Encourage constructive engagement, resolution of Northern Territories issue</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<i>Defense of Japan 2006 (Japan's White Paper on Defense)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <i>International Terrorist Organisation activities and non-state actors (stress on diversity, complexity and unpredictability of threats)</i></li> <li>➤ <i>Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Regional concerns from territorial issues and reunification of divided nations, pattern of disputes among areas and countries remains intact and views on security and threat perceptions vary greatly by country</li> <li>• Korean division – face-off between North and South Korean military forces</li> <li>• North Korean nuclear issue</li> <li>• Taiwan</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Source: The original texts of the Araki Report, the NDPO 2005, the Joint Statement US-Japan Security Consultative Committee, 19 February 2005 and the Defense of Japan 2006. The global level concerns are in italics.

of Japanese economic influence and the growing power aspirations of Beijing."<sup>2</sup> Bilateral ties between the two neighbors have taken a checkered path and become increasingly complex. While the crux of the issue between the two is the question of the balance of power, several underlying issues keep the relations troubled.<sup>3</sup> Mutual suspicions and apprehensions about each other's defense budgets and military capabilities;<sup>4</sup> Japan's expanding role in the US-Japan security alliance and the augmented role of the two militaries are all having their effect. China's emergence as a growing military and nuclear power and the lack of transparency in military matters underscores Tokyo's concerns. The new National Defence Programme Guidelines adopted by Japan for 2005 broke new grounds in mentioning the need to carefully watch China. Political issues also are shaping the context of bilateral ties such as the legacy of history that is reflected in the textbook and the Yasukuni Shrine issues. Koizumi's repeated visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine have been perceived as a symbol of Japanese neo-nationalism and lack of repentance for its wartime record in Korea and China. The visits had led to a suspension of high-level talks between Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul. Koizumi, however, stood by his conviction that the two countries were "wrong" in their response even as he stepped down as Prime Minister when he stated, "China and South Korea will know they are wrong when they think calmly as time passes."<sup>5</sup>

The simmering territorial issue over the *Senkaku/Diaoyutai* islands continues to dampen relations, aggravated by Chinese submarine incursions into Japanese EEZs. Both countries also find themselves competing and jostling over energy resources as the world's two largest importers and consumers of energy. Japan is concerned about active Chinese economic diplomacy and the resultant politico-diplomatic influence of its growing ties with South Korea and the Southeast Asian states, including the free-trade agreement with the ASEAN<sup>12</sup>

Japan also realizes that there have been phases when its strategic ally the US has come close to China, and there have been calls by some to the US to give greater prominence to China in its diplomacy and take a more equidistant posture between Japan and China. For example, the 'Japan-passing' by President Clinton in 1998 was a period of low in US-Japan relations and decidedly altered Tokyo's perception of Beijing and its proactive policy to strengthen ties with the US. Chinese Premier Jiang Zemin's symbolic stopover at the Pearl Harbor *enroute* to Washington in 1997 was

a clear reminder to the Japanese that neither Beijing nor Washington has forgotten the pre-1945 antagonism with Japan. It also highlighted China's attempt to manipulate that history of rivalry to secure diplomatic advantage in Washington. Clinton's criticism of Japan for not being able to do more at the time of the Asian Financial crisis in 1997 although it committed the largest amount of funds for the recovery of the regional economies made Tokyo perceive US-China relations with increasing caution and circumspection.

Related to the concerns about China is its uneasiness over the security of the Taiwan Straits. As one Japanese analyst has observed, "In Japan-China relations, there is a tendency to ignore the presence of Taiwan. The reason is that if one deals with Taiwan directly, one inevitably confronts the issue of 'two Chinas versus one China.' So the tendency is to let sleeping dogs lie."<sup>13</sup> The Chinese military exercises in the Taiwan Strait in 1996 were a significant cause of worry for Tokyo since it faces difficult options vis-à-vis Taiwan. On the one hand, it has to adhere to its commitments with the US (a hint of which comes through in the joint declaration) to join hands in any kind of action that draws in the United States. On the other, it has crucial ties with China, which are bound to come under pressure in case Beijing feels that Tokyo is supporting Taiwan's cause. Significantly, in case of a military action in the region, the US bases on the Japanese island of Okinawa (situated just about 600 kms off the Taiwan coast) would be of greatest importance. Should this happen Japan is sure to incur China's antipathy. On the contrary, if Japan decides to distance itself from the US, the alliance will surely be endangered. As one US scholar has stated, "if Americans and Chinese are killing each other" over Taiwan, and Japan "doesn't support us, the alliance is dead."<sup>14</sup>

The Taiwan issue came to the fore in the US-Japan joint statement after the 2+2 meeting in 2005.<sup>15</sup> The present Japanese standpoint vis-à-vis Taiwan is clearly a break with its more aloof stand of the past. While Japan has denied that the phrase 'area surrounding Japan' (incorporated in the 1997 US-Japan revised guidelines) entails the inclusion of Taiwan among its security responsibilities, yet the 2005 US-Japan joint statement was clearly a departure from the past in including Taiwan as a 'common security concern.' This would translate into Japanese support to any US action in the area. The clause drew censure from China as interference in its internal affairs. Many commentators have interpreted the inclusion of the Taiwan

clause as Tokyo's changing stance towards Beijing. In a statement on the Japanese position on Taiwan in 1996, a spokesperson had stated that "...our position is much more vulnerable than that of the United States, so that what *we can do and say is very limited* (emphasis added)."<sup>16</sup> The present Japanese stand clearly indicates a shift from its limited Japanese involvement in the past to a more active one in a potential conflict in the Taiwan Straits.

### *The Korean Peninsula*

Well-before the nuclear test of October, North Korea was perceived in Tokyo to be a constant source of "direct threat to peace and stability in the East Asian region including Japan (and) also a grave challenge to the international non-proliferation regime."<sup>17</sup> It is a major concern and a potential flashpoint for Japan. Former Prime Minister Koizumi's historic visit to North Korea in 2002 sought to open a new phase in relations but it instead led to a period of new tribulations and the two countries have refrained from establishing diplomatic relations. Japan's unease *vis-à-vis* Pyongyang had centered on its nuclear and missile development programme, its withdrawal from the non-proliferation treaty in 1993 and the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents as well as the frequent spy boat incursions in Japanese territorial waters.

Pyongyang's nuclear test is bound to have far reaching consequences on regional security and Japanese strategic thinking, its political and policy manifestations. In the larger regional context, not only has the test meant a floundering of the six-party talks, it has also demonstrated the inability and failure of both Washington and Beijing in dealing with Pyongyang in a manner that would restrain its nuclearisation. South Korea's 'sunshine policy' to ameliorate the situation on the peninsula has not been effective either. The nuclear test carried out at the time when Prime Minister Abe was visiting Beijing and Seoul drew sharp censure from Japan. Abe condemned the test as being "absolutely unacceptable," even as Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary termed it as a "serious threat."<sup>18</sup> The North Korean record of proliferating weapons and technology is accentuating concerns. While it may be premature and far-fetched to expect Japan to go nuclear as a response, the fallout for Japan would be noteworthy in terms of accelerating the shift towards becoming a normal state. Domestically, public opinion is bound to increasingly support the process of constitutional

revision and up-gradation of the SDF – a process initiated by Koizumi and envisaged by Abe too. The support for Prime Minister Abe, a known hardliner on Pyongyang, will in all likelihood see an upsurge. Also, the debate on considering preemption ignited a few months earlier by Pyongyang's missile tests in July 2006 might get further bolstered. The defense establishment will be forced to study options to counter the new situation effectively – whether through missile defense or some form of preemption.

This comes in the backdrop of the missile tests in July 2006 which had heightened Japan's anxiety many-fold. Despite strong international warnings, North Korea had launched as many as seven missiles, which plunged into the Sea of Japan bringing back memories of similar launches in 1998. The launch was taken seriously and had sparked off a debate within the defense establishment over the possibility of considering a preemptive strike option.<sup>19</sup> The Japanese Defense White Paper of 2006 stated its concerns over the fact that Pyongyang "transfers and proliferates ballistic missiles or its related technologies, including *Nodong* or its related technologies to Iran and Pakistan."<sup>20</sup> The document also criticised North Korean development of missiles "using funds procured by the transfer or proliferation of missiles."<sup>21</sup>

Japan joined the PSI (Proliferation Security Initiative) initiated by President Bush in 2003. The PSI is an effort to consider possible collective measures among participating countries, in accordance with national legal authorities and relevant international law and frameworks to prevent the proliferation of WMDs, missiles and related materials.<sup>22</sup> On the nuclear front, there is a continued stress on the US nuclear umbrella under the aegis of the security alliance. At the NPT Review Conference 2005, the then Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura put forth a five pronged approach to strengthen the functioning of the NPT to deal with the proliferation of WMD and their delivery means, which according to him is – "one of the most serious security issues."<sup>23</sup>

Japan also has its own share of problems with South Korea primarily on the issue of ownership of the Takeshima islets as well as the demarcation of their Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Sea of Japan.<sup>24</sup> The South Koreans have drawn out a larger area of EEZ along the median line between the Okinoshima Island and the disputed islets under their jurisdiction that clash with Japanese claims. The two sides have yet to settle the dispute

and this has led to serious diplomatic logjam at times. For instance tensions were high in April 2006 when Japan announced a plan to survey the disputed waters near the island. The issue was set aside through the diplomatic channel but not before Seoul had threatened to catch and even sink any Japanese vessels conducting research and survey operations. The other prickly issue that South Korea shares with China vis-à-vis Japan is in the interpretation of history. Seoul has objected to the Japanese version of its militaristic past and has vociferously condemned Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine just as has Beijing. The resultant complexity in ties between the two sides has also begun to get magnified because of steady weakening of the US-South Korean alliance. The bitterness in ties has perceptibly seeped down to the general public, a majority of who, according to a joint survey by *The Yomiuri Shimbun* and the South Korean daily *Hankook Ilbo*, believe that bilateral ties have been strained. According to the survey, as many as 59 percent Japanese and 87 percent South Koreans held that relations with Seoul had soured. Most South Koreans criticised Koizumi's visits to the shrine and were pessimistic about any early resolution of the Takeshima Island dispute.<sup>25</sup>

### **The Secondary Concerns**

In addition to the above principal conventional security concerns, Japan's perceptions have also been shaped by a set of non-traditional economy linked core security issues.

#### *The Quest for Energy*

While it is a commonly known fact that Japan is the fourth largest energy consumer and the second largest energy importer, it also has to be borne in mind that the Japanese quest for an uninterrupted and steady flow of energy supplies is critical to its strategic considerations as also finding alternate energy sources and supply points. Japan's concerns also emanate from a steep rise in demand for energy within the Asian region especially from China, which today is the world's second largest oil consumer after the US.<sup>26</sup>

The Japanese government came out with a document on Strategy and Approaches to Japan's Energy Diplomacy in April 2004, which delineated six issues of energy diplomacy. They are: <sup>27</sup>

- Maintaining and Enhancing Emergency Response Measures;
- Maintaining and Enhancing Friendly relations with Middle East countries, other energy producing countries and countries along international shipping lanes;
- Diversification of Sources of energy supply – and strengthening ties with such countries like Russian Federation for the Sakhalin project for instance;
- Diversification of energy sources – like creating an environment for further use of natural gas (eg. Sakhalin project) as compared to oil;
- Promoting energy saving, efficient use of energy, development and use of alternative energy and response to environmental issues;
- Creating an environment for the enhancement of global energy security through reforms based on market principles in the energy sectors of the CIS members, Central and East European countries.

In order to diversify its energy sources, Japan has been seeking equity stakes in the Caspian Sea region, where oil reserves are estimated at 500 million – 1 billion barrels. In fact, the Japan National Oil Company even offered to help finance oil development project in the region.<sup>28</sup> The second major alternative source of energy for Japan is Russia. The Russian option seems viable for Japan since a major part of Japan's refining capability is located on the west coast and can be easily supplied by Russia. Besides, Japan's northern shores are located just 47 kilometers from Sakhalin, which cuts down drastically on the transport time.<sup>29</sup> The proposed 4000-kilometer pipeline between Angarsk to Nakhodka is suitable for Japan but an area of jostling between it and China. An attempt to ensure a Russian tilt towards Japan over Beijing was made by Tokyo by offering to finance the project to the tune of US\$ 12 billion though not progress seems to have been made.<sup>30</sup> There is also an ongoing cooperation between the two countries in the co-development of offshore oil and gas fields near the Sakhalin Islands.<sup>31</sup>

Yet another area of competition between China and Japan is over energy supplies from Iran. Japan's dilemma and consequent delay in decision-making over developing the Azadegan project emanate from pressure from the US, which opposes dealing with Iran as long as it pursues its nuclear programme. The Azadegan oil field for which Japanese company Impex Corporation, along with two other firms had promised assistance in

development, is one of the world's largest of its kind and is said to hold as many as 26 billion barrels of crude oil reserves.<sup>32</sup> Tehran, in response has set a deadline for Tokyo to reach a final agreement on joint development of the project by 15 September 2006, failing which it would look at Russia or China as potential partners. A similar contest over energy resources with China and Russia is brewing in the Central Asian region. The attempt is to wean Japan off its dependence on the volatile Middle East for energy.

Recently, Japan and China squabbled over potential large oil and gas deposits located in the East China Sea between the Okinawa Island and the Chinese coast and close to Senkaku islands, which are contested between the two countries. China has initiated a natural gas development project in the area very close to Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ). In turn Japan too has granted its companies exploratory rights on its side – a move Beijing has opposed.<sup>33</sup> The dispute points to the growing Japanese distrust and fear of China's moves to acquire energy resources, including its perceived encroachment into Japan's EEZ. In spite of the vitiated atmosphere, the two sides are in the process of discussing ways to settle gas field claims.<sup>34</sup>

### *Maritime Security*

The quest for energy leads to the larger question of maritime security in terms of ensuring a safe transit passage of energy supplies from areas like the Middle East on which Japan's oil supply dependence is as high as 88 percent. Maritime security and security of sea lanes has been described as a 'matter of life and death.'<sup>35</sup> The Malacca, Makassar and Lombok and to a lesser extent the Sunda straits are vital lifelines to a steady flow of energy to Japan, especially from the Middle East. The significance of the Malacca Strait lies in the fact that not only does oil supplies that amount to three times that flow through the Suez Canal/Sumed pipeline and 15 times that of Panama Canal passes through it, but also that 2/3rds of tonnage passing through the strait consists of crude oil from the Persian Gulf bound for Japan, South Korea and China.<sup>36</sup> Maritime terror is a menace for many vessels passing through the area. Not surprisingly, Japan has been stressing on the need for a coordinated mechanism to deal with piracy in the region. Former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi in November 2000 proposed the establishment of a Regional Cooperation Agreement on Anti-piracy in Asia.<sup>37</sup> Under the agreement the signatory countries would share information on piracy through an information-sharing centre. The US

presence in the region is seen as vital for ensuring maritime security, as well as ensuring supply lines from the Middle East. In fact, the Japanese participation in the US-led war in Iraq was justified by the former Japan Defense Agency Director General Shigeru Ishiba on grounds that it would serve national interests by bringing stability to a region from which it imports oil and also strengthen the US-Japan alliance.<sup>38</sup>

### *Terrorism*

Though Japan has not itself directly been affected by terrorism except the attack by the *Aum Shinrikyo* cult in 1995, the current focus on terrorism can be largely attributed to the US concern and how Washington's global war against terrorism finds an echo in the Japanese view of the world. Both these factors have been highlighted in all the policy papers and documents such as the Defense of Japan 2006 which expresses concern over the "diversity and complexity of threats..., (particularly) activities of international terrorist organizations and other non-state actors..."<sup>39</sup> There is an acknowledgement of the need to look beyond conventional deterrence system since it will not work adequately in dealing with this menace. As mentioned earlier, Japan is actively involved with the US in its war on terror in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has also expressed concern over large-scale terrorist activities in countries like Indonesia in Southeast Asia.

In viewing Japan's primary and secondary security concerns, which in turn are drivers catalyzing the shift to normalcy, the centrality of concerns over China is clearly embossed. Not only is the political, economic and military rise China a prime motivating factor in itself, but even the secondary concerns have large elements of the China factor engrained in them. In the quest for energy resources for instance Japan has a clear competitor in China. Similarly, China's active networking with countries of Southeast Asia culminating into free trade areas is also being keenly watched by Japan for its politico-diplomatic implications.

## **Policy Instruments for Dealing with Security Challenges**

### *Dynamics of the US-Japan Security Alliance*

The US-Japan security alliance is the most significant pillar of Japan's security strategy ever since the end of World War II. The alliance, which initially served the purpose of ensuring the security of Japan at a time

when it pursued a minimalist security policy, has now become one of the reasons for Tokyo's moves towards normalisation. Goaded by the United States, Japan's security role within the partnership has considerably grown within the structure of the alliance. The most prominent recent developments include the proposed realignment of American bases in Japan and the joint development of missile defense. Another landmark initiative was the meeting of the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (SSC) in Washington on February 19, 2005 and the consequently released Joint Statement, which in many ways proved to be an update on both the priority areas of cooperation as well as the prominent common causes of concern to both allies in the present context. The 'Common Strategic Objectives' earmarked in the statement were the following:<sup>40</sup>

- Identification of international terrorism and proliferation of WMDs as common challenges;
- Modernisation of military capabilities in the region to be paid attention to (an obvious reference to China);
- Ensuring the security of Japan and regional peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region;
- Support to the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, as well as resolution of issues with regard to North Korean developments such as its nuclear programme, missile activities and abduction issues;
- Stress on cooperative relationship with China and encouraging it to improve transparency in military affairs;
- Peaceful resolution of the Taiwan Strait issue through dialogue;
- Resolution of the Northern Territories dispute between Japan and Russia;
- Development of regional cooperation; and
- Security of maritime traffic as well as ensuring of stability of global energy supply.

The blueprint for the proposed alterations in force posture was first announced by President George Bush in August 2004, based on the twin principles of 'greater flexibility and agility' to face new security threats and challenges "associated with rogue nations, global terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction."<sup>41</sup> Following another meeting of the SSC on May 1, 2006, which describes the alliance as the "indispensable foundation of

Japan's security and peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region and the linchpin of American security policy in the region,"<sup>42</sup> a 'US Japan Roadmap for Realignment' was announced and it broadly enumerates the following:<sup>43</sup>

- Futenma Replacement to coastal area around Camp Scwab in Nago, Okinawa Prefecture by the year 2014;
- Relocation of about 8, 000 US marines to Guam by 2014;
- Consolidation of the remaining facilities and areas in Okinawa to enable the return of land area south of Kadena Air base;
- Improvement of US Army Command and Control Capability;
- Relocation of Carrier Air Wing from Atsugi Air Facility to Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni;
- Close coordination on ballistic missile defense cooperation.

The US bases in Japan offer a very economical and effective platform from where the US can deal with any military contingency in the region. The proposed realignment of troops, which includes their reduction and relocation from Okinawa, will decrease the burden on the island and reduce irritants in the alliance. A reduction in the presence of American troops in South Korea would also mean an increase in the significance of Japanese bases in the Asia-Pacific region, especially with regard to developments on the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Straits. There is little doubt that the alliance is getting closer in the wake of the North Korean missile and nuclear programme and the rise of China. Washington's decision to offer as many as 80 more Patriot interceptor missiles to Tokyo as well as the deployment of the USS Shiloh, an Aegis-class cruiser equipped with missile-interception systems, at the Yokosuka naval base are clear fallouts of recent North Korean missile tests.

It can thus be said that the US-Japan security arrangements are mutually reinforcing. For Japan, the compulsion of maintaining the alliance as the foundation of its security policy has been a reality since the inception of the partnership. It realises that the inability to measure up to the expectations of the dominant ally in terms of a more active regional security role would expose it to the risk of abandonment. Tokyo is aware that ties with its alliance partner have seen low phases when talks of 'Japan-passing' were gaining ground. As a result, there has been a consistent and gradual increase in its involvement both in matters pertaining to its own security as well as in the US plans in the region. In the near future, Japan does not visualize a

security policy devoid of this arrangement. Tokyo also requires Washington's support to deal with the security challenges around it. For Washington, on the other hand, Tokyo's support for its policies is essential for its role in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan, it may be mentioned here, supported the US in its war on Iraq even when several other American allies abandoned it in the absence of a UN approval to do so.

#### *Japan's Quest for a UNSC Seat*

Japan's quest for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council is another new aspect of its foreign policy. A convincing case exists for Japan's membership of the Security Council on the basis of its large budgetary contribution to the UN (greater than the combined contribution of all the permanent members barring the US), its contribution of troops towards peacekeeping operations, and its active role in nuclear security issues. However, there is one major domestic factor which might make Japan's choices difficult in case it attains permanent membership. Japan's pacifist Constitution prohibits the country from exercising the right to collective self-defense. Such a restraint would be contrary to the role that a permanent member of the Council is expected to play, since at times it might entail the use of force. This variable has been highlighted by the former US Secretary of State Colin Powell, who stated in no uncertain terms that Japan would need to "re-examine" Article 9 of the Constitution if it wants a permanent seat on the Council in order to "play a full role on the world stage and become a full active participating member..."<sup>44</sup> There is no doubt that despite such statements, the US supports Japan's case. Former Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura had reportedly supported a revision to the Constitution before Japan becomes a permanent member "to ensure that no confusion will arise when Japan fulfils its duties as a permanent member (because of a possible conflict between constitutional principles and the position)"<sup>45</sup> These positions have to be perceived in the context of the ongoing discussion over the proposed revision of the Constitution and in particular the ability to neutralize and address the incongruity.

#### *Enhancing the Role of SDF*

The Japanese Self-Defense Forces are unique in their appellation, characteristics and role. Formed during the Cold War in 1954, the SDF were formed initially as the National Police Reserve comprising of about

75,000 personnel. It is interesting to note that the pacifist Constitution of 1947 clearly states that the state is not to maintain "land, sea and air forces as well as other war potential." According to the government position, however, being a sovereign nation, Japan is not denied the inherent right of self-defense. It is in order to possess this minimum level of armed strength necessary for self-defense that the SDFs are maintained as an armed organization.<sup>46</sup>

The traditional norms and functions spelt out for these forces are however undergoing a gradual transformation. The first steps were taken in the aftermath of the Gulf War of 1991. The landmark International Peace Cooperation Law of June 1992 marked the first step taken by these forces in UN activities. The US-Japan revised guidelines signed in 1997 also envisaged an expanded role for Japanese forces in the case of any contingency in the defense of not only its own territory, but also in 'areas surrounding it.'<sup>47</sup> The third major turning point came with the 9/11 attacks and the subsequent US war on terror in Afghanistan and Iraq, when the SDFs took a number of 'first' steps enabled by the passage and backing of domestic laws which set up the legal framework towards that end. The NDPG 2005 envisages a "multi-functional, flexible and effective defense forces that are highly ready, mobile, adaptable and multipurpose, and are equipped with state-of-the-art technologies and intelligence capabilities measuring up to the military-technological level of other major countries."<sup>48</sup> The aforementioned formulation is decidedly at variance from that spelt out originally in the Basic Defence Force Concept marking a shift from 'deterrent effect-oriented' to 'response capability-oriented' forces.<sup>49</sup> The forces aim to be effective in dealing with new threats and are to be prepared to deal with full scale invasion as well as guerilla and special operations forces attacks. The conservative government headed by former Prime Minister Koizumi had envisaged a more active role for the forces, including overseas deployment by putting in place a permanent law, as well as stipulation of the SDF as a military force for self-defense in the Constitution. The mood among the Japanese public also resonates a similar feeling. In a poll conducted by the *Asahi Shimbun*, as many as 62 percent of the people voted in favor of clearly stating the existence of the Self-Defence Forces.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, as much as 59 percent of the people (who had earlier condemned the governments' decision to send forces) now appreciate the decision to send forces to Iraq.<sup>51</sup> There is, therefore, both a governmental and popular will to alter and institutionalise the role of the SDF.

### *Constitutional Aspects Revisited*

The oft mentioned and reiterated Constitutional constraints that have defined Japan's strategic culture, which were till sometime back considered a 'constant' and sacrosanct feature of its security policy are today undergoing a change. The task of amendment would certainly not be an easy one and would entail an initiation by the Diet through a concurring vote of two-thirds or more of all the members of each House. This has to be followed up with its submission to the people for ratification requiring a majority affirmation of the votes cast at a special referendum.<sup>52</sup> Japan's postwar Constitution has certain unique features of which some (*vis-à-vis* security) have come under the scanner. These are:

- Article 9 of the Constitution<sup>53</sup> which upholds pacifism and forms the focal point of the debate on Constitutional revision. The government position on this article broadly stipulates that Japan is entitled to maintain a limited self-defense capability and minimum level of armed strength necessary for self-defense. With regard to the geographical scope of the exercise of Right of Self-Defense, the Constitution does not permit Japan to dispatch armed forces to foreign territorial land, sea and airspace for the purpose of using force since it would exceed the limit of minimum necessary level of self-defense.<sup>54</sup> It, however, clarifies that maintaining offensive weapons is not permitted. The issues being debated on this clause include its abolition or reinterpretation.
- Denial of the Right of Collective Self-Defense<sup>55</sup> – Despite the fact that under international law, Japan is entitled to the right of collective self-defense according to the present Japanese government position, this right is “constitutionally not permissible” and exceeds the permitted limit. This is because the exercise of the right of self-defense as permissible under Article 9 of the Constitution is authorized only when the act of self-defense is within the limit of the minimum necessary level for the defense of the nation.<sup>56</sup>

The stage was set for initiation of a discussion on a review of the Constitution with the establishment of research commissions in both chambers of the Diet five year back in January 2000. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party has also come up with a preliminary draft proposal on amending the Constitution. Both houses of the Japanese Diet as well as the LDP panel on the Constitution have broadly called in their

recommendations for need to characterize the SDF as a military force and retaining the first clause of article 9 that renounces war.

### *The Search for New Partners*

Japan is increasingly searching for new partners in the region. Its ongoing negotiations on Free-Trade Areas (FTAs) with countries of Southeast Asia, the recent nascent initiative towards establishing a strategic partnership with India and its move to augment ties with Russia in quest for energy are becoming a crucial part of its foreign policy.

Japan's linkages with Southeast Asia are vital for several reasons. While the maritime security aspect is obvious since a majority of sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) pass through the region, Tokyo is also acting at other levels to strengthen ties. At the bilateral level, it is establishing FTAs with countries like Singapore and Malaysia,<sup>57</sup> while parallel efforts are on to arrive at completing negotiations in a span of two years on a similar arrangement with the 10-member ASEAN grouping.<sup>58</sup> At the multilateral and institutionalised level it is also active in the ASEAN+3 grouping. The talks of developing an East Asian Community have been gaining ground to enhance cooperation among the participating countries. One of the reasons for such a proactive Japanese engagement of ASEAN is its growing diplomatic competition with China and to neutralise the possibility of China gaining prominence or dominating the region. Japan has also joined hands with the US and Australia to hold the first Trilateral Strategic Dialogue in March 2006. The dialogue held at the Foreign Ministers level was a step taken for intensification of strategic dialogue amongst member states, and also covered non-traditional security threats towards promoting peace and stability in Asia-Pacific.<sup>59</sup> Tokyo is sensitive to the absence of a viable and effective multilateral level institution in the Asia-Pacific region to ensure stability and has shown keen interest in the East Asia Summit for which it strongly backed the entry of India, Australia and New Zealand.

The visit by former Prime Minister Koizumi to India proved to be an opportunity for both countries to carve out strategies for the future. The highlight of the visit was the signing of the 'Japan-India Partnership in a New Asian Era: Strategic Orientation of a Japan-India Global Partnership' – an eight-fold initiative which included steps like enhancing the momentum of exchanges, launching of a High-level strategic dialogue, cooperation in UN Security Council restructuring and responding to global

challenges and opportunities. The visit of Defense Minister Pranab Mukherjee in May 2006 was significant in furthering bilateral strategic ties. In a Joint Statement (citation) the two sides stressed on developing the strategic aspect of their relationship, while identifying common threats like transnational terrorism, violent extremism, proliferation of WMDs and threats to maritime traffic. The statement also drew out a list of areas which the two sides would cooperate in including maintenance of peace and stability and promotion of confidence building in Asia, and in countering and curbing the spread of terrorism. At the bilateral level, the two countries aimed to cooperate by enhancing mutual understanding, holding regular high-level meetings between the two Defence Ministers, having a Comprehensive Security Dialogue and exchange of ship visits between the Japan Maritime Self Defense Forces and the Indian Navy amongst other things.<sup>60</sup> The heightened Japanese interest in India cannot be segregated from the perception of India's rise, its open policies, the strengthening of Indo-US ties, and its concerns about the need to balance a rising China in a rapidly changing Asian strategic environment.

Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh is scheduled to make his first visit to Japan in December 2006 following the East Asia Summit in the Philippines. In the meeting with his newly elected Japanese counterpart Abe, the two sides are expected to discuss an idea mooted by Abe of setting up a four nation forum including Japan, US, Australia and India which share values of freedom, democracy and human rights. In his recently published book entitled *Utsukushii-Kunihe: Towards a Beautiful Country*, Abe has gone as far as to remark that he would not be surprised if in the next ten years Japan-India relations will overtake Japan-US and Japan-China relations.<sup>61</sup> Both sides are also expected to discuss possible measures on defense exchanges, arms control and nonproliferation.<sup>62</sup> Indo-Japanese synergy is being seen as crucial to a secure Asia-Pacific. The 'Look East' policy pursued by India too is symptomatic of the significance New Delhi attaches to East Asia, of which Japan is a key player.

## **Conclusion**

The distinctive and marked metamorphosis that the Japanese security policy has undergone during the past few years, particularly post 9/11, deserves attention, since it involves a gradual but on the whole a radical shift from its traditionally pacifist ideology. Japan is not being compelled

to bring about this shift. There is indeed a domestic willingness and inclination to do so, as demonstrated by the internal dynamics of change seen in the constitutional amendments, the thinking of the ruling elite and political parties, as well as in public opinion.

The overarching dependence on the US-Japan bilateral security alliance notwithstanding, Japan's changing security policy is a response to its concerns primarily from North Korea and China. There was always a widespread consensus among the ruling elite as well as the public about the possibility of an 'irrational' act from Pyongyang – fears which got confirmed with North Korea's nuclear test. There is little doubt that the alliance with Washington is getting proximate and even more closely intertwined to effectively counter the North Korean problem. US President Bush has in a statement after the North Korean nuclear test has reaffirmed "to (our) allies in the region, including South Korea and Japan, that the US will meet the full range of (our) deterrent and security commitments."<sup>63</sup> The test has shaken the security construct of the region with the emergence of a second nuclear power apart from China. Any accelerated Japanese moves towards normalization are bound to be warily watched by Beijing. Japan, which was wavering over a decision on whether or not to participate in ballistic missile defense (BMD) with the US eventually decided to go ahead in the wake of Pyongyang's missile tests and a stark realization of an unpredictable neighbour. It has also decided to deviate and make exception from the three principles on arms export with regard to the US for the purpose of cooperation on missile defense. The recent talk on discussing the possibility of preemption and acquiring offensive capability following Pyongyang's missile tests in 2006 is an example of a radical departure from Japan's traditional strategic culture.

Coupled with this is the reality of China's exponential economic development, military modernization and its nuclear power. Japan's bid for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council was perceived by many as one of the most effective ways to deal with Beijing. China is a strong contender for regional dominance and competitor for energy resources. Japan appears to be prepared to make an effort to outdo China for acquiring energy from Russia, Central Asia and Iran – countries in which the Chinese are already active. Beijing has also enmeshed and woven itself into a strong economic relationship with promising countries of Southeast Asia, leading Japan to renew its diplomatic efforts to engage the region proactively.

Compounding this competition is the fact that ties between China and Japan at the diplomatic and political level had touched a low under Koizumi.

In short, Japan has been rethinking and altering its security policy. There are now new dimensions in its security alliance with the US. Imperatives of the alliance demand Japan to loosen its shackles and participate effectively and take measures in tandem with the requirements of its ally. The shift from being a 'free rider' to an equal ally translates into broadening of its strategic policy. The enhancement of the role of the Self-Defense Forces (SDFs) also flows from this new thinking. Finally, it is Japan's search for new partners and talk of having a 'strategic partnership' with countries like India which highlight its current outlook. The North Korean nuclear tests are bound to speed up the process of change in both thinking and policies in Tokyo.

### **Acknowledgement**

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- Paragraph 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." It is however, clarified that this provision does not deny Japan the inherent right of self-defense as a sovereign nation.
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