

# Japan's National Defense Strategies and Policies

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## Introduction

Since the Japanese people and the government deeply regret invading neighboring countries with military power and initiating Pacific War, Japan revised the constitution with the principle of democracy and pacifism in 1946, under the occupation by the Allied Force. Article 9 prescribes the renunciation of war, the prohibition of war potential, and the denial of the right of belligerency of the state. However, these provisions do not deny inherent right of self-defense as a sovereign state and the Self Defense Force (SDF) was established as minimum armed forces holding exclusively defense oriented policy. The government has strictly limited defense budget while keeping in mind the performance of weapons of the SDF so as not to pose a threat to neighboring countries. Cooperation with the United States under the Japan-US Security Treaty has greatly contributed to Japan's defense during cold war era. In 1996, Japan and the U.S. redefined to expand the role of security alliance as regional commons for peace and stability after the cold war. Since then, as security environment has been rapidly changing and becoming complexed, Japan and the U.S. has been changing each roles and responsibilities in the alliance.

In last December, Japanese government established seventh National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG)<sup>1</sup> based on National Security Strategy (NSS)<sup>2</sup> issued in 2013. These documents describes fundamental strategy and policy of national defense, and this paper analyzes them for better understandings of Japan's national defense strategy and policy.

## Principles for national defense policy

Japan is the only country in the world which experienced nuclear bombs attacks. The Three Non-Nuclear Principles<sup>3</sup>, which refers to those of not possessing nuclear weapons, not producing them, and not allowing them to be brought into Japanese territory, is a fundamental policy. In dealing with the threat of nuclear weapons, Japan will closely cooperate with the U.S. which provides extended deterrence, with nuclear deterrence at its core.

In the past, the Government had interpreted Article 9 to mean that armed force could be used to exercise the right of self-defense only when the following three conditions<sup>4</sup> were met:

- (1) When there is an imminent and illegitimate act of aggression against Japan

(2) When there are no appropriate means to deal with such aggression other than by resorting to the right of self-defense

(3) When the use of armed force is confined to be the minimum necessary level.

In July, 2014, the Cabinet decided the new conditions of the use of force to be permitted as measures for self-defense in order to liberate the right of collective self-defense partly<sup>5</sup>.

(1) When an armed attack against Japan has occurred, or when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness

(2) When there is no appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan's survival and protect its people

(3) Use of force to the minimum extent necessary.

To date, "use of force" is permitted only when an "armed attack" against Japan was conducted. However, the security environment surrounding Japan has been drastically changed and continuously evolving as such, shifts in the global power balance, the rapid progress of technological innovation, and appearance of threats. It is likely that an armed attack against a foreign country could actually threaten Japan's survival, depending on its purpose, scale and manner. In certain situations, "use of force" permitted under the Constitution is based on the right of collective self-defense.

The "right of belligerency"<sup>6</sup> does not mean the right to engage in battle. It is a general term for various rights under international law including the authority to inflict casualties and damage on the enemy's military force and to occupy enemy territory. Japan may use the minimum level of force necessary to defend itself but it is not the exercise of the right of belligerency even though the actions taken are similar. However, occupation of enemy territory is considered exceeding the minimum necessary level of self-defense.

Japan adopts the strict civilian control system that the SDF is operated by the representatives of Japanese nationals. The Prime Minister, on behalf of the whole Cabinet, holds the authority of supreme command and supervision of the SDF. The Minister of Defense, who is exclusively in charge of national defense, exercises general control and supervision over the SDF duties.

### **National Security Strategy**

In December 2013, the National Security Strategy (NSS) was approved by the Cabinet. It is Japan's first ever strategy on national security focusing on both diplomatic and defense policy. It describes fundamental values and principles such as freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, rule of law, complying with the United Nations

Charter, becoming peace loving nation, Three Non-Nuclear Principles, strengthening alliance with the U.S.

Then it describes the global security environment and strategic approach. The NSS emphasizes “Proactive Contribution to Peace” as key word of strategic approach<sup>7</sup>. It mentions six strategic approaches; (1) strengthening and expanding Japan’s capabilities and roles, (2) strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance, (3) strengthening diplomacy and security cooperation with partner nations, (4) proactive contribution to international efforts for peace and stability, (5) strengthening cooperation to resolve global issues, (6) strengthening the domestic foundation.

Strengthening Japan’s own capabilities of economy, technology, and resiliency in diplomatic and defense capability is the most important one. Further strengthening of Japan-US security and defense cooperation in wider range of areas will be another pillar. Diplomacy and security cooperation with partner countries and expanding the roles in the international community are also important. Japan has been contributing to the United Nation and its activities for a long time including Peace Keeping Operation, cooperation against terrorism, activities on disarmament and non-proliferation. Japan has been contributing to resolve various global issues, such as poverty, health, education, water supply, energy, and environment.

### **National Defense Program Guideline and Medium Term Defense Program**

The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) describes basic policies for Japan’s future defense, the role of its defense capabilities, and objectives for specific SDF equipment based on the NSS. The NSS and NDPG are mainly designed for the next decade and beyond. The Medium Term Defense Program (MTDP) specifies a maximum budget and amount of primary equipment to be procured over the subsequent five-year period in order to achieve the defense capability targets defined in the NDPG. The current NDPG and MTDP was introduced in December 2018.

The NTDP updates current rapidly changing security environment and future trend as; (1) interdependency among countries further expands and deepens, (2) China, as rising power, changes the balance of power increasing uncertainty over the existing order, (3) inter-state competitions across the political, economic and military realms, seek to shape global and regional order to their advantage as well as to increase their influence, (4) the so-called gray-zone situations becomes persistent over a long period of time, playing out as part of interstate competitions, (5) military technologies are showing remarkable advances and future warfare increasingly features capabilities combined across all domains: not only land, sea and air but space, cyberspace and electromagnetic spectrum.

The NTDP describes three pillars of effort to be made based on the NSS, which are: (1) strengthening Japan's own architecture for national defense, (2) strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance, (3) strengthening security cooperation. In order to deter and counter qualitatively and quantitatively superior military threats, it is vitally important to adapt to warfare that combines capabilities in all domains. "Multi-Domain Defense Force" which organically fuses capabilities in all domains to generate synergy and amplify the overall strength so that even when inferiority exists in individual domains. The development of "Multi-Domain Defense Force" will be done while honing the attributes of "Dynamic Joint Defense Force" under the former NTDP. It is also important for Japan to be able to seamlessly conduct activities at all stages from peacetime to armed contingencies in increasingly uncertain security environment, Further, Japan's defense capability needs to be capable of strengthening the ability of the Japan-U.S. alliance to deter and counter threats as well as promoting multi-faceted and multi-layered security cooperation.

Japan needs to further enhance the alliance with the U.S. through efforts under the "Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation"<sup>8</sup> issued in 2015 as security environment becomes more testing and uncertain at remarkably fast speeds. In particular, Japan will expand and deepen cooperation in space and cyber domains, comprehensive air and missile defense, bilateral training and exercises, bilateral ISR operations, and bilateral flexible deterrent options. Japan will conduct bilateral activities such as capacity building assistance, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) and counter-piracy. Japan will also enhance and expand cooperation in the areas of equipment, technology, facility, intelligence, and information security. Japan will provide stable support for U.S. forces in Japan through various measures including Host Nation Support (HNS).

In line with the vision of free and open Indo-Pacific<sup>9</sup>, Japan will strategically promote multifaceted and multilayered security cooperation. As part of such efforts, Japan will actively strengthen its defense capability to cooperate with partners in joint training and exercises, defense equipment and technology cooperation, capacity building assistance. From the viewpoint of securing the freedom and security of navigation and flight, Japan will promote cooperation to contribute to the improvement of capabilities for the maritime security of coastal states in the region. Japan will promote partnership and cooperation in the Space Situational Awareness (SSA)<sup>10</sup> and mission assurance of the entire space system, through consultations and information sharing with relevant countries and active participation in multilateral exercises. Japan will enhance cooperation with relevant countries in sharing views on threat awareness, exchanging views on response to cyber-attacks, and participating in multilateral exercises.

## Conclusion

The most vital challenge for national defense is how Japan deal with China's military buildup and its coercive actions to neighboring and regional countries. China seems to try to revise current world order and to achieve hegemony in the region. Japan, in spite of number two power in the region, is facing rapidly changing power shift and difficulty for catching up with China's growing power in economy, military, and technology. Japan's national defense strategy, the NSS and the NDPG, does not look good to adapt these major changes effectively and fast enough in order how Japan should minimize vulnerabilities and achieve advantages with whole government efforts.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we\\_000082.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000082.html)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we\\_000081.html](https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html)

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Statement by Prime Minister Eisaku Sato at the Budget Committee in the House of Representative", December 11, 1967, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/nnp/>

<sup>4</sup> Defense of Japan, Part II, Chapter 1, Section 2, pp.212

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.* pp.212

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.* pp.213

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.* pp.217

<sup>8</sup> [https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/ampo/shishin\\_20150427e.html](https://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/ampo/shishin_20150427e.html)

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific", <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Space Situational Awareness (SSA) is a function of surveillance and tracking satellites and other particles for protecting satellites and astronauts from space debris.