

Japan-U.S. Defence Alliance: The Chinese Response

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Abstract

After a period of decline, security ties between the U.S. and Japan have been revitalized by both the countries in response to the threats of terrorism and a nuclear North Korea. The invigorated alliance has also taken significant steps to deal with the rise of China as a military power, including the cooperation of security policies through revised guidelines 1997, which were intended to serve as a comprehensive transformation of the alliance, missile defence cooperation, and U.S. support of Tokyo's efforts to assert its interests in the Asia-Pacific region. China is a polity with a long history of wrong suffered at the hands of imperial powers, and thus it is naturally sensitive on issues related to its sovereignty. In terms of geopolitical realities, this paper will assess the manner in which China plans to integrate itself into the international system, or fails to do so, as it is one of the defining issues of international relations for the first quarter of the 21st century.

Keywords: *Japan-US alliance, China's military power, nuclear North Korea, the question of Taiwan, Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD)*

1. Introduction and Literature Review

The basic problem of China regarding Japan-U.S. alliance is that it has deep-rooted fear of Japan with emotional and historical dimensions. It automatically perceives Japan as a threat to its security, even though the U.S. presence in Japan was initially reassuring for Japan's neighbors, particularly China and Korea that U.S. troops in Japan would thwart Japan's remilitarization. On the contrary, if U.S. reassurance role is undercut then China begins to worry about Japan's remilitarization. So if the U.S. is to play reassurance role, it must have institutional underpinning to stay in the region, including strengthened alliance with Japan. Under the umbrella of U.S. leadership, Japan works its way towards the general acceptance by the Asian community. The U.S. protects Japan and at the same time protects the Asian countries against Japan, and also helping regional actor get along with each other.

The central strategic challenges in East Asia are to accommodate China into constrictive, cooperative regional and global role. In order to do that, there must be continued U.S. military involvement in East Asia. For both the US and Japan, their abilities to manage relations with China will define the nature of Asia's security environment for the first quarter of the 21st century.

Despite Asia's end-of-century prosperity, stability remains fragile and long-term security is problem. In the Post-Cold War era, the purpose of the alliance has transforming from

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its initial mission of defending Japan to a broader regional and global focus. President George Bush and Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa affirmed the alliance as a global partner, Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto emphasized that the mutual defence agreement constituted the regional and global issues. (Glasserman and Furukawa, March 2008).

The major reason of change in the region is the rapid emergence of China as an economic power. China has always been a predominant power in East Asia and likely to resume its historical position in the 21st century. China has promoted reforms and open door policy centering on the introduction of a socialist market economy, and as result it has emerged economically as a major regional power. China has a GDP considerably in excess of Japan's and it already exceeds Russia's by significant margin. (Brzezinski, 1997) That economic momentum should permit China to acquire military power on a scale that will be intimidating to all its neighbors to pay attention to the Chinese movements on military front. Estimated deployed nuclear forces of China are largely speculative and variable. According to U.S. experts, China deployed about 400 nuclear warheads. (INESAP, December 2004) While up-grading of the alliance serves as a number of Tokyo's strategic purposes, there is no mistaking the fact Japan has decided to join the U.S. in its grand strategy of checking China's great power ambitions.

Geography is an important factor. For Japan, China is a next-door problem and stability in China is vital. This is true for Japan's commercial and economic interests as well as its national security. For the US, China is foremost a strategic problem.

Since the Cold War developments in Northeast Asia have raised the value of Japan-U.S. alliance to both parties, uncertainties about Chinese future and North Korea's threat to regional stability have resulted in a common strategic context for long-term alliance even after the demise of the Soviet Union. Both the U.S. and Japan want the same thing in relation with China-integration into global economy and international organization, the establishment of consistent rule of law, peaceful resolution of Taiwan Strait problem, and reassurance that China will not use force to resolve territorial dispute. Cooperation in achieving these common objectives has been impeded, however, by increasing fluidity in great power relations in Northeast Asia since the end of the Cold War. Japan is taking more realistic view of regional security threats than in the past.

Indeed, distinctive dimension of today's debate in Japan is the fear of a regional nuclear arms race, and the Japanese are particularly worried about China's nuclear modernization program. It is also matter of concerns of the Japanese security planners about Beijing's long-term regional aspirations. The Japan Defence Agency (JDA) noted that China's military ambitions in the region were in question. Of particular concern to the JDA is China's nuclear modernization program. (Defense of Japan: Annual White Paper, 2003). The Japanese security planners and political leaders see a new threat occurred in the wake of the Cold War.

Despite the public commentary within Japan, (because the Japanese people do not want Japan to repeat its past colonial role), however, the Japanese government remains

committed to working with U.S. For Japan, U.S. is an umbrella under which it could safely cover from devastating defeat, regain its economic momentum, and on that basis progressively attain a position as one of the world's prime power. For Japan, U.S. continues to be the vital partner in Japan's emergence as an international leader.

Today, the alliance is even more central to the national interests of both partners during the Cold War. For Japan, Northeast Asia remains unstable and dangerous region, where Japan lacks real friends. For US, the alliance is the foundation of its regional and global strategies.

2. Japan-U.S. Alliance and China

The U.S. security ties with Japan have been a major concern of China's foreign and defence policies. China's position towards this alliance is determined by its foreign policies and security doctrines and principles; by its regional security mechanism in Asia-Pacific region, by bilateral relations with countries in Northeast Asia, and by disputed issues in Asia in which it is involved.

China believes the new world order in the post-Cold war era will be a system of partnership which will replace the alliance system. China is opposed to alliance and block politics for many reasons. First, China has seldom lent itself to become a party to any military or security alliance. Second, the so-called "Central Kingdom Mentality" is no longer the national psychology of the Chinese people. The "big country" or "big power" mentality makes the Chinese uneasy to an alliance. China drew the lesson from the failure of Sino-Soviet alliance to never again enter into an alliance with anyone. These are the main sources of China's independent policy.

Finally, Chinese memories of the alliance are not good. The Chinese do not buy American argument that U.S. alliance with Japan contributes peace and security in the region. Chinese believe that differences and disputes between states must be resolved peacefully, not by force or threat to use force, promote mutual understanding and trust through dialogue and seek peace and security through bilateral and multilateral cooperation.

The major challenge in the 21st century is management of the positive transitions to a stable and cooperative set of regional relationships while not inflaming tensions of the past. China, Japan, and the U.S. are critical to global on the other hand the three countries still have fundamental differences. Indeed, progress and problems tend to coexist in trilateral relations.

Chinese response to the enhanced Japan-U.S. alliance has been mixed. China was silent about Japan's Afghanistan and Iraq's operations but hypersensitive about Japan-U.S. statement of "Common Strategic Goals" adopted on 19th February 2005, capped the decade of deepening ties between the two countries. It strongly criticized the "Common Strategic Goals" that merely called for peaceful resolution of Taiwan issue. Furthermore, the close Bush-Koizumi relationship and the upgrading of the of the alliance incrementally improved relationships with Taiwan despite Beijing's protests.

The enhancement of Japan-U.S. alliance runs contrary to an understanding with Washington and Tokyo at the time of the 1972 Sino-Japanese rapprochement that the U.S. would gain forward military bases while keeping a lid on Japan's military expansionism. China now sounds alarms about Japanese nationalism being again on the rise.

It is under Koizumi's leadership that Japan's diplomatic relations with China have noticeably deteriorated. The most provocative issue has been Prime Minister's annual visits to Yasukuni, a Shinto shrine in central Tokyo at which the spirits of Japan's 2.5 million war dead are enshrined. In response, Beijing has cancelled summer visits between China and Japan.

There have been few new developments occurred in the early years of the new century, especially under the government of Koizumi, when Japan assessed the impact of war on terrorism, challenges associated with an emerging China and North Korean threats which forced Japan to rethink and reformulate its security policy, especially the post-war taboo.

Japan's new defence policy announced in December 2005 maintained that military cooperation should be identified China and North Korea as 'grave factor of insecurity.' The ruling Liberal Democratic Party led by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi put forward plans to amend the 58 years old constitution and raised the country's military profile in the region.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2006-2007) also advocated a more assertive Japanese foreign policy through Japan-U.S. alliance while steadily upgrading country's national security platform (Pilling, 2007). Prime Minister Abe also pressed for a revision of the constitution and an expanded role for the Self Defence Force.

The Japanese politicians were also worried about China's rapid development and military modernization together with North Korea's nuclear capability as among the main reasons for Asia-Pacific's military role. While realizing the inevitability of constitutional changes under way in Japan, Beijing is worried about the implications they would have on its own regional interests, particularly with respect to Taiwan. Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing said Beijing sought better ties with Washington and Tokyo, China's two largest partners. But he warned increasing Japan-U.S military cooperation should be strictly bilateral and should not encompass Beijing's arch rival Taiwan.

3. Japan-U.S. Revised Guidelines 1997

One of the most significant developments that occurred in the second half of the 1990s was the revised defence Guidelines of 1997 between the U.S. and Japan. Japanese concerns over China's military build-up intensified in March 1996 after China attempted to intimidate Taiwan by test-firing ballistic missiles off the Taiwanese coast, some of which landed within sixty kilometers of Yonaguni, Japan's western most populated land. This reassessment resulted in the 1996 Joint Declaration between U.S. and Japan. Japan agreed to provide the U.S. with logistic support during regional contingencies.

The revised Guidelines built on previously established arrangements, the foundation

of which remains the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between both the countries. 1978 Guidelines were appropriated and oriented towards Article V of the security treaty, which addressed an armed attack against Japan, but did not provide for any authorized Japan-U.S. joint operation plan, even in the event of military contingencies in Japan. The 1997 revision aims to renew the alliance for new post-Cold war security challenge and consequently, major changes in the 1997 revision was to change a focus of the alliance from attacks on Japan to include "situations in the areas surrounding Japan" (Koji, 2000)

The main reasons for the revision of guidelines were: First, during the Cold War period, the primary purpose of the Japan-U.S. alliance was to contain the Soviet Union. The collapse of the Soviet Union shifted American concerns in Asia to broader issues affecting regional stability and security. The emergence of nuclear crisis in North Korea in the summer of 1994 also posed serious post-Cold War security challenge for Japan-U.S. alliance.

Secondly, rape of a school girl by American servicemen in September 1995, and launching of Chinese missiles in area surrounded by Japan, forced Washington to move to expand the operational dimension of the alliance, shifting its emphasis from Article V of Japan-U.S. Security Treaty to Article VI-matters affecting peace and security in the Far East (Giarra and Nagashima, 1999)

4. China's Reaction

Chinese concern was focused on the question of Taiwan, or whether Taiwan was included in the scope of Japan-U.S defence cooperation 'situations in areas surrounding Japan.' China expressed its concern about the regional security role to be played by Japan, which had been strengthened in the process leading to the passage of Guidelines legislation.

The close cooperation between Japan and the U.S. made Chinese perceive that Japan's affirmation of its alliance with the U.S. constituted tendency of Japan's 'turning to right'. The Chinese concern was that the 'areas surrounding Japan' might include Taiwan and their criticism was directed mainly to Japan. But the Japanese official explanation was that it was to be determined according to the nature of the situation and was not a geographical concept (Narusige, 2000). Chinese were not convinced because this gave no assurance to the Chinese.

The Chinese find the strengthening Japan-U.S. security alliance and guidelines for military cooperation between two countries threatening and dangerous for many reasons.

- (1) Military alliance goes against the trend in the Asia-Pacific region and in the world of promoting peace and security by increasing political and economical ties not strengthening military alliance between alliances.
- (2) The scope and function of Japan-U.S. security alliance has changed from protecting Japan to assuming responsibilities for protecting the entire region.

- (3) The Guidelines now give Japan a regional security role in "surrounding areas" which can be as large as the entire Asia-Pacific, rather than restricting it to self-defence.
- (4) Area the bilateral security arrangement covers Taiwan, which is part of China. Thus it is clear that the strengthening of security alliance is targeted at China.

The Chinese believe that the Cold War hostilities between Japan and China vanished with the end of Cold War. But for different reasons, Japan and the U.S. instead of giving up the Cold War legacy, greatly strengthened it, with the scope of defence expanding to "Japan's surrounding areas." By strengthening this treaty, the U.S. wants to maintain its hegemony and become the political power in this region.

5. Japan-U.S. Missile Defence and China's Concerns

China's nuclear modernization program has worried Japanese security planners about Beijing's long-term regional aspirations. The 2001 Defence White Paper stress the necessity for Japan to be equipped with military capability that can face future arm race in the Asia-Pacific region (IISS, 2000/2001). In particular, it expresses a concern about China's modernizing military power.

Japan's growing security concerns about the strategic uncertainties posed by China are reflected in the ongoing debate over the development of Theater Missile Defence (TMD) system. An influential opposition leader of the Liberal party, Ichiro Ozawa, criticized China's military build-up. He said in his speech on 6th April 2002, "If China gets too inflated; the Japanese people will become hysterical in response. We have enough plutonium in our nuclear power plants, so it is possible for us to produce 3000 to 4000 nuclear warheads (Shuja, 2004).

TMD was suggested by the U.S. as means of protecting American forces forward deployed in Japan against ballistic missile attack. Substantive Japan-U.S. interaction on missile defence first emerged in the early 1990s. The decision that may have the greatest long-term impact on Japan's China strategy is Tokyo's plan to acquire a missile defence system that is interoperable with Washington's. The plan calls for upper and lower Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) system-the Navy Theater Wide (NTW) (Hughes, 2004).

In the past, Beijing saw the alliance as constrain on Japan and thus an element contributing to regional stability. However, since the Clinton-Hashimoto Summit, the Revised Defence Guidelines, the agreement to cooperate on Missile Defence research, Beijing is coming to see the intensifying alliance security cooperation as serving ultimately as a constrain of China's freedom of action. As Japan-U.S. TMD system could potentially reduce the impact of Chinese own threat against Taiwan, thereby encouraging forces for independents in Taiwan, and provide Japan with defence technologies. The Chinese fears were also reinforced by Japan's decision to launch its own reconnaissance satellite and by the statement by Director of Defence Agency, General Norota Hosei in March 1999 that Japan's missile defence system could conceivably be used for preemptive strike (Japan Echo, 1999).

According to the agreement signed in 1999, joint research focused on sea-based Navy Theater Wide Missile Defence System, (which was deployed in 2007 in East Asia). Neighboring countries, particularly China worries that Japan might export missile technology to Taiwan and extending the shield to cover the approaches to the Island could negate China's current missile advantage over Taiwan (Dupont, 2005).

It also decided to cooperate in missile defence system, the Tokyo Declaration of April 1996 and Japan-U.S. New Defence Guidelines and implemented legislation adopted in 1998. Over that period, Beijing has continued to develop and modernize its ballistic missile arsenal, while opposing Japan's participation in missile defence research.

From Japan-U.S. TMD dialogue in the 1990s, China repeatedly attacked Japan-U.S missile defence activities as threatening to regional stability on the following grounds:

- (1) Providing Japan an offensive military capability;
- (2) Encouraging Japanese militarization;
- (3) Being used to protect Taiwan;
- (4) Triggering a regional arm race (Washington Times, 2007).

Japan's relations with China, which had deteriorated during the tenure of Prime Minister Koizumi (2001-2006), improved during Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration (2006-2007). However, China's response to December 2007 missile defence test was relatively mild. China's Foreign Minister, Qin Gang told reporters that China hopes that the actions of Japan are beneficial to the peace and stability of the region (Dickie and Soble, 2007).

In December 2007, Japan-U.S. missile cooperation reached a new milestone when the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) successfully conducted its first missile intercept test. The test also indicated that Japan's new Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda may be as strong supporter of BMD as his predecessor Shinzo Abe, who resigned in September 2007. Abe had been vigorously advocating the revision or reinterpretation of Article 9 of Japan's constitution in order to allow Japan to deploy more extensive missile defense system and to cooperate more fully with the U.S. Fukuda, while not vocal on these issues, has continued to accelerate the deployment of missile defence systems and push for closer security cooperation with Washington. While Fukuda is continuing Japan's push toward more robust Missile Defence System, however, Missile Defence System faces on-going opposition in Japan, based both on its cost and its potential to ruin relations with China (WMD Insights, February 2008).

On the one hand, U.S.-Japan argued that missile defence system is defensive in nature and that its introduction of missile defence in Asia is irreversible, while China, Russia and DPRK are, on the other hand, expressed deep concern and strong objections to the idea of missile defence system. Missile defence system has deepened suspicions between major powers in the region. It is highly likely that the Japan-U.S. alliance, especially the possible missile deployment, will lead to more uncertainties in East Asia.

On the other hand, the Joint missile defence program will strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance further, but may do so at the expense of regional stability, ironically something which missile defence system is supposed to achieve.

6. Conclusion

The principle conclusion to be drawn from this analysis is that Tokyo's desire to pursue a more proactive security policy is not unreasonable response to the more threatening and violate security environment it faces. After nearly six decades of quasi-pacifism, it is time for Japan to move beyond the ideas of the post-World War II peace constitution and participate more fully in building and sustaining regional order and combating the emerging threats to security. Although fears that Japan might revert to militarism are real, they are ill-conceived. Democracy and the rule of law are firmly entrenched, some constitutional restrictions on the use of force will remain, and the U.S. alliance ensures that Japan has no need for nuclear weapons or major force-projection capabilities that would be inherently destabilizing and set off alarm bells in the region.

As the alliance is recast, Japanese and U.S. policy makers need to consider how best to reassure a nervous Beijing that a reinvigorated Japan, working in close cooperation with the U.S. in Asia, is not a threat to China. This will be no easy task because of the widespread view in China that Tokyo's strategic shift foreshadows a more assertive and possibly adversarial Japan. Of course, there is nothing new or surprising in this reaction, as Sino-Japanese rivalry has deep historical roots. The Chinese anxieties about Japan's support for Taiwan and BMD, resentment over legacy issues in the eyes of the Chinese, are a symbol of the country's imperial past. Chinese strategists are drawing conclusion that are troubling for future Sino-Japanese relations. Among them is the belief that Japan wants to be a military and economic power; that it is moving from a preoccupation with self-defence to accepting broader alliance objectives of collective self-defence.

So far the developments in Japan-U.S. missile defence cooperation have not had the destabilizing effects on the regional security as voiced by various critics. Current and projected work on regional missile defence systems by Japan and U.S. will counterbalance the threats of ballistic missile developments by China and North Korea, but there is no serious evidence to support the BMD is feeding a more aggressive military posture by either country. Even in the case of Taiwan, Japan-U.S. missile programs are unlikely to have serious effect on current tensions.

How the power dynamics in the Far East is shaped by the interrelationship among U.S., Japan and China will also affect global stability. The U.S. should seek to translate the emerging equilibrium among itself, Japan and China into a more structured security relationship. The U.S. still faces a potential structural crisis in Asia, where several major powers still contend, though checked by U.S. peripheral strategic presence. That presence anchored by American-Japanese connection, the rise of a regionally dominating China and unpredictability of North Korea, signal the need for a more active U.S. policy to promote, at a minimum, a triangular security relationship. Such a triangular equilibrium, to be enduring, will require a more internationally engaged Japan that will gradually assume a wider range of military responsibilities.

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