

New Development and Implications of Japan's Security Policy

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Since 2017, the adjustment of Japan's security policy has accelerated toward its goal of self-defense. In 2018, Japan will revise its National Defense Program Guidelines. According to Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, the revision, "instead of extending the existing policy line, will consider the vision of the defense capabilities truly necessary for protecting the Japanese people,"¹ which indicates that the Japanese defense force will undergo a qualitative change. With the adjustment of its security policy, Japan will adopt more progressive measures in defense spending, procurement of defense equipment, improvement of defense systems, and breakthrough of its defense regulations. Externally, Japan will further advance defense diplomacy, and consolidate and expand its security cooperation network, which will have a significant impact on regional security and thus deserves close attention.

Japan's Self-Defense Policy and Defense Capabilities Building

Ever since he was re-elected prime minister, Shinzo Abe has vigorously adjusted Japan's security policy, actively promoted the building of the country's defense capabilities, and set "self-defense" as the ultimate goal. To this end, Japan has internally strengthened defense capabilities and

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1 "Speech by the Prime Minister at Managing Editors Meeting of Kyodo News Member Companies," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, December 15, 2017, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/98_abe/statement/201712/_00010.html.

institutional building in all directions and dimensions, and externally expanded its security cooperation network, so as to create a favorable atmosphere in the world at large for “self-defense.”

Increasing defense spending is the prerequisite for Japan’s “self-defense.” The defense budget of Japan has expanded for five consecutive years. In 2017, the defense-related expenditure reached 5.13 trillion yen, an increase of 1.4 percent from that of 2016. The proposed budget in 2018 of 5.19 trillion yen would mean a year-on-year increase of 1.3 percent and the sixth consecutive year of increase in Japan’s defense spending. It is foreseeable that the increase would continue during Abe’s tenure. As his economic policy, known as Abenomics, has gained little success and Japanese economy has not registered strong growth, it will be inevitable that the defense spending will account for over 1 percent of GDP. Abe once stated clearly that “there is no such thinking in the government to cap the defense spending below 1 percent of GDP.”²

Upgrading defense equipment is the guarantee for “self-defense.” With relatively abundant financial support, Japan will upgrade its defense equipment in two ways. The first is to purchase advanced weapons from other countries, especially the United States. In order to build the “capability to attack enemy bases,” on which Abe had made clear the government would conduct a serious review, the cabinet decided in December 2017 to introduce two land-based Aegis Ashore missile defense systems. At the same time, the Defense Ministry requested an additional budget of 2.2 billion yen to cover the costs of introducing the medium-range cruise missiles carried by fighter aircrafts of the Air Self-Defense Force. What’s more, Japan plans to convert its destroyer *Izumo* into a light aircraft carrier to facilitate the taking off and landing of the US F-35B fighters, which Japan considers introducing. Japan’s introduction and transformation of a series of offensive equipment will undoubtedly breach the exclusively defense-oriented policy in a real sense.

2 “Abe: No Thinking of Capping Defense Spending below 1% of GDP,” *Asahi Shimbun*, March 2, 2017.

The second approach of Japan's equipment upgrade is enhancing independent research, development and production capabilities, and improving its global competitiveness through international cooperation, so as to achieve "defense independence" and provide substantial support for "self-defense." On one hand, the Abe administration utilizes the strength of the Japanese civilian science and technology sector to enhance its R&D capabilities. The Defense Ministry has established a so-called "original and forward-looking research support program" that provides funding to relevant researchers from universities, independent administrative institutions, and university-owned enterprises to look into certain topics. This program has encouraged civil participation in the R&D of military-civilian dual-use technologies that might enhance Japanese defense capabilities. Japan has also tried to take advantage of its leading position in laser technology and develop new-concept weapons such as lasers, microwave and electromagnetic guns, putting its defense equipment at an advanced level. On the other hand, Japan improves its defense equipment research and development through international cooperation. In addition to joint R&D with the United States, Japan has reached a joint research agreement with the United Kingdom on air-to-air missiles, with Australia on the hydrodynamics of ships and with France on a new generation of radar detection technology. What's more, Japan has signed agreements on the transfer of defense equipment and technology with the UK, France, Australia and Germany, and plans to negotiate with Italy and Sweden on similar deals, in order to introduce European high-end equipment and technologies to the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), and strengthen the international competitiveness of Japanese defense-related companies.

To build a comprehensive and integrated defense capacity, Japan has improved and expanded the SDF organizational system. The National Defense Program Guidelines of 2013 proposed building an "integrated and dynamic defense force" and enhancing its capabilities to rapidly respond to various situations. To this end, the Self-Defense

Forces will establish an amphibious mobile force by March 2018 with the Western Army's infantry regiment as its core, as well as a rapid response force. At the same time, the Ground Component Command will be set up to coordinate the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) on the whole, command its actions in the five regions of northern, northeastern, eastern, central and western Japan, and strengthen coordination and communication with the US forces stationed on Japanese territory. Besides traditional land, sea and airspace, outer space and cyberspace have been identified as the fourth and fifth battlefield. To strengthen defense capabilities in these strategic frontiers, Japan will set up a force within the SDF that can serve as a command for outer space, cyberspace and electronic warfare, which is also scheduled to be incorporated in the revised National Defense Program Guidelines in 2018. In addition, the Abe government has been continuously highlighting and elevating the status of the defense department, "to develop the SDF into an attractive organization suited to our time and circumstances."³ Following promotion of the Defense Agency as well as its chief official, Japan established the National Security Council (NSC), which is composed of the Prime Minister, the Chief Cabinet Secretary, the Foreign Minister and the Defense Minister, indicating a further elevation of the status of the defense department and its officials. The Defense Ministry becomes a core government agency responsible for formulating the security strategy. Within the ministry itself, military officers have also been promoted to assist the Defense Minister on an equal basis with civilian officials. In the future, with the advance of the "self-defense" policy, the status of the Defense Ministry will be further enhanced, and it might be an option that the Defense Ministry and the Self-Defense Forces change their names into "Ministry of National Defense" and "National Defense Forces" respectively.

The Abe government has also worked to reinforce "patriotism" and cultivate the will of "self-defense" within the Self-Defense Forces

3 "Press Conference by Defense Minister Inada," Japanese Ministry of Defense, April 18, 2017, <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/press/conference/2017/04/18.html>.

and among the Japanese people at large. On one hand, the government has fostered “patriotism” as the popular basis of “self-defense.” In addition to promotion in publications and speeches, Abe has managed to establish “foster an attitude to ... love the country” as one objective of education in the revised Fundamental Law of Education. He has tried to revive the pre-war “patriotic” education model to some degree, such as including judo in the physical education curriculum for middle school students. His education and defense ministers even supported the use of the Imperial Rescript on Education as a teaching material.⁴ On the other hand, Abe has vigorously advocated the devotion of the Self-Defense Forces. In all mentions of the SDF, Abe has highly affirmed the SDF’s actions at home and abroad with pride and admiration, believing that the Self-Defense Forces is “the pride of the Japanese people.”⁵

In terms of mechanism building, the Abe government has taken a step-by-step approach to seeking political breakthroughs of defense policy and thereafter institutionalizing and legalizing these changes, consolidating the ruling party’s interests as national consensus. After he took office again, Abe began to amend the National Defense Program Guidelines and the Medium Term Defense Program, formulate the National Security Strategy, revise the Three Principles of Arms Exports and the constitutional interpretation on the right to collective self-defense, and pass the new security legislation. Against this backdrop, Abe urged in his 2017 policy speech to “deepen concrete discussions in the Commissions on the Constitution”⁶ so that the Japanese can “carve out our own future with our own hands.”⁷ In March 2017, the ruling Liberal

4 “Ministers Back Use of Prewar Imperial Rescript as Teaching Material,” *The Japan Times*, April 4, 2017, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/04/04/national/ministers-back-use-prewar-imperial-rescript-teaching-material/#.W009GZ8jwhE>; “Abe Cabinet Says Imperial Rescript OK as a Teaching Material,” *The Asahi Shimbun*, April 1, 2017, <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201704010033.html>.

5 “Policy Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to the 193rd Session of the Diet,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, January 20, 2017, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201701/1221105_11567.html.

6 *Ibid.*

7 “New Year’s Reflection by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, January 1, 2017, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201701/newyear.html.

Democratic Party (LDP) decided to extend the term of its president and thus Abe might be re-elected as the LDP President in 2018 and as Prime Minister once again. Under this premise, Abe, dedicated to constitutional revision, may further break through the current policy and promote the revision or even deletion of the constitution's Article 9, so as to completely remove the political and legal barriers to "self-defense," and establish Japan as a "normal state" with institutional mandate, public support and necessary capabilities.

Japan has been actively promoting defense diplomacy and enhancing its international presence, in order to win international support for its "self-defense." First, Japan has continued to strengthen its alliance with the United States. At the political level, the Abe government has spared no efforts to stabilize and strengthen the Japan-US relations. In order to build his personal relationship with the US President Donald Trump, Abe broke diplomatic conventions, meeting Trump before he formally took office, and made an official visit to the US in February 2017, soon after Trump was inaugurated. Trump visited Japan in November in 2017 during his first Asia tour. The two leaders have also met many times on multilateral occasions and held multiple telephone conversations. The frequent exchanges between the two have been considered as manifestation of the firmness of Japan-US alliance. Communications and policy announcements at all levels between the two countries have also been regarded as evidence of strong alliance. During the short period from February to April 2017, Japan witnessed the successive visits by the US Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and Vice President Mike Pence, all of whom affirmed the role of Japan-US alliance and Japan's position in regional security and stability. This is seen by Japan as reassurance that its alliance with the US has stabilized again after being impacted by Trump's rhetoric during the election campaign. At the military level, Japan has been enhancing its defense capabilities internally, and expanding the scope and geographic range of the Self-Defense Forces' activities externally. By increasing the

frequency and intensity of joint exercises and training with the United States, Japan has tried all out to reinforce its alliance with the US. At the same time, these activities will also enhance the Self-Defense Forces' capabilities to operate in various situations. In May 2017, the helicopter destroyer *Izumo* of Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) conducted an escort operation for a US Navy supply ship, which was an important move for Japan to implement its new security legislation and strengthen the Japan-US alliance. In the future, Japan will broaden the scope and geographic range of the MSDF's actions. The South China Sea, the Indian Ocean, and even the Mediterranean might become arenas for SDF operations. In the meantime, Japan will strengthen defense and technology cooperation with the US in new strategic frontiers of cyberspace and outer space.

Second, Japan has been advancing security cooperation with Southeast Asian countries and seeking to establish a network of maritime security partnerships led by itself. Abe proposed to first establish an "Asian democratic security diamond" led by the US and Japan and involving Australia and India, to better coordinate diplomatic and security operations. Then Japan would establish and lead a smaller "security diamond" including Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam, creating dual embedded security circles. Within the outer circle, Japan, as the United States' regional assistant, would take the initiative to advocate bilateral or multilateral security negotiations (such as regular leaders' meetings and "2+2" meetings), joint military training and exercises, joint development of defense technology and production of defense equipment, intelligence sharing, and mutual logistic support and assistance. With the endorsement of the Trump administration, Japan has re-activated the US-Japan-Australia-India security coordination aimed at constructing the "Indo-Pacific center" and enhancing Japan's military presence and influence. Within the inner circle, Japan, who is in the leading position, has not only built up political trust among relevant countries through summit diplomacy and working-level negotiations (like the "2+2"

meetings), but has also provided support in terms of personnel, funding, equipment and even institution building. While the military capabilities of the countries are enhanced, the security ties have also deepened. For instance, Japan has provided the Philippines and Vietnam with old weapons and equipment of the Self-Defense Forces as well as personnel training for free or at a low price, offering them security funding, holding international seminars and proposing to establish a joint maritime security mechanism. Through these efforts, Japan aims to shape its regional leadership and raise its voice in the US-Japan-Australia-India outer circle.

In addition to efforts in the Asia-Pacific region, Japan has also been developing security partnerships with European countries to reduce dependence on the United States. With no historical obstacles or geopolitical conflicts, cooperation between the two sides meets their respective strategic needs.⁸ Trump's skeptical remarks on the value of the alliance system have to some extent undermined the allies' trust in the US. Therefore, relevant countries have taken self-defense measures or enhanced mutual cooperation to strengthen their security. From March to April 2017, Abe visited Germany, France, Italy, Belgium and the United Kingdom. In November, the Japanese Foreign Minister also visited the UK and other European countries to discuss joint R&D of weapons and equipment as well as joint military exercises and training. Security cooperation between Japan and different European countries is basically similar in terms of pattern and approach. The tone of cooperation is determined at the summit level before the "2+2" meeting mechanism is established. Japan has established such mechanism with France, the UK and Russia, and is negotiating establishment of this mechanism with Italy and other countries. Afterwards, a general security of military information agreement is signed to enhance intelligence cooperation and sharing, negotiations on transfer of defense equipment and technology conducted, joint R&D of defense technology and joint production of defense

8 Chen Youjun, "Japan's Major-Power Diplomacy," *Chinese Social Sciences Today*, March 20, 2017.

equipment carried out, and joint military exercises and training launched on anti-terrorism, disaster relief and interoperability under bilateral or multilateral settings.

What's more, the UN peacekeeping operations will be an important platform for Japan to demonstrate its ability and will for "self-defense" in the future. It can also create opportunities for the Self-Defense Forces to engage and cooperate with other countries, expand its international influence, establish a good image, and prompt the international community to be "desensitized" to the Japanese military forces that once conducted militarist aggression.

Motives for Japan's "Self-Defense" Policy

Japan's security policy is mapped out based on consideration of its own interests and evaluation of the external security environment. Therefore, Japan's perception of its security environment determines the direction of its security policy. From Abe's view, Japan is faced with an extremely grave security environment, hence the need for beefing up defense in order to safeguard national interests. That perspective has set the tone for Japan's pursuit of "self-defense." At the same time, domestic politics has provided enabling conditions for the Abe government and gradually become the inherent driver for the demand of "self-defense."

In its first National Security Strategy in 2013, the Abe government pointed out at the very beginning that "... Japan's security environment has become even more severe."¹⁰ The challenges brought by China's emergence and threats from North Korea were included in both of the two levels of security environment stated in the strategy, namely the "global security environment and challenges" and the "security environment

9 Yang Bojiang and Chen Tengan, "Transformation of Japan's National Strategy: Reconstruction of Perception and Choice of Approaches," *Journal of Northeast Asia Studies*, No.1, 2017, p.14.

10 "National Security Strategy," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, December 17, 2013, p.1, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/___icsFiles/afiedfile/2013/12/17/NSS.pdf.

and challenges in the Asia-Pacific region.” These are the specific and substantial security issues acknowledged by the Japanese government. Though other issues such as “challenges to human security” and “global economy and its risks” were identified, their presence in the document is mostly symbolic.

The North Korean nuclear program has been the most effective pretext for Japan to step up defense and adjust its security policy. As stated in the strategy, North Korea “has enhanced the capability of WMDs including nuclear weapons and that of ballistic missiles,” and “has repeatedly taken provocative military actions in the Korean Peninsula including the use of provocative rhetoric, some of which are directed at Japan, thereby increasing the tension in the region.” Particularly, the strategy mentioned that “North Korea’s ballistic missile development, including those with ranges covering the mainland of the US, along with its continued attempts to miniaturize nuclear weapons for warheads and quipping them to ballistic missiles, substantially aggravate the threat to the security of the region, including Japan.”¹¹ North Korea’s intensive nuclear and missile activities and continuously enhanced technologies from 2016 to 2017 further attest to the imminence of a “national security crisis” claimed by the Japanese government. Moreover, Japan has deliberately exaggerated the North Korean threat. For instance, its latest 2017 Defense White Paper described the North Korean nuclear and missile tests as “reach(ing) a new level of threat.”¹² To more effectively play up the issue, the Abe government even issued a travel warning to South Korea, called for evacuation of Japanese nationals, instructing common people on what to do in the event of missile attacks, and conducted air defense drills in parts of the country. These measures have enabled the government to spread panic among the people and win public support for its “self-

11 “National Security Strategy,” p.12.

12 “Defense of Japan 2017,” Japanese Ministry of Defense, p.61, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2017/DOJ2017_1-2-2_web.pdf.

defense” plans. Japan’s deployment and upgrade of missile defense systems, introduction of land-based Aegis Ashore systems and medium-range cruise missiles, and potential development of Japanese-version Tomahawk cruise missiles, all serve to justify its actions on the pretext of North Korean threat.

The rise of China is another excuse for Japan to push for “self-defense.” Posing itself as a guardian of the so-called “rules-based” international order, Japan claims that its defense capacity building is the response to impacts and challenges of China’s rise on the existing international order, and calls on Western countries to support its “self-defense” efforts, thus ensuring that it has the upper hand in territorial and history understanding disputes with China. “Among all the Asian countries, Japan is the most vigilant and the most unaccustomed to the rise of China, with the most obvious motive to contain China.”¹³ Particularly, the Japanese political circle is alarmed by the fact that China’s economic size has surpassed that of Japan. The subsequent “nationalization” of Diaoyu Islands, strategic pivot to the southwest, reinforcement of the Self-Defense Forces’ maneuverability, development of ground-to-ship missiles, interference in the South China Sea issue, the “diplomacy with a bird’s eye view of the globe” centered on China, and the creation of a “security diamond” in China’s southwestern neighborhood, were all Japan’s actions to restrain China. In Japan’s strategic blueprint and tactical operations against China, the most important is to develop “hard power,” especially military capabilities. As the US Asia-Pacific policy gets increasingly uncertain under the Trump administration, “self-defense” becomes the optimal choice in the face of the “China threat.”

Japan’s perception of the United States’ strategic adjustment is the decisive factor in its change of security policy. Since the end of World War II, Japan’s security policy and the US strategy have both

13 Zhao Qinghai, “The Concept of ‘Indo-Pacific’ and Its Implications for China,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No.7, 2013, p.21.

been in dynamic adjustment to accommodate each other: from a long-term perspective, Japan has been gradually improving its security system, building up its defense forces, enlarging the scope of its defense, and actively or passively sharing more obligations as an ally; when the US contracts its power or stages a war, Japan is forced to shoulder more responsibilities; and Japan is more willing to undertake security obligations when it is led by conservatives. At present, when the “America First” Trump administration coincides with the hardline nationalist Abe, conditions are basically ripe for Japan to strengthen defense, break through the post-war defense policy and achieve “self-defense.” While the US acted as a promoter of Japanese conservatism in the initial stage of bilateral interactions, the Abe government has successfully converted the US strategic needs for Japan to share burden under the Obama administration into the driving force for enhancing defense capabilities and changing the defense policy. From then on, Japan no longer “passively” responds to the United States’ demands, but proactively utilizes or even induces the US to propose burden sharing for Japan. Since Trump came to office, Abe has been vigorously probing into the United States’ strategic keynote and seeking for US support of Japan’s position in regional security. During his visit to Asia in November 2017, Trump responded to the proposal of quadrilateral security dialogue among the US, Japan, Australia and India, which Abe put forward early in 2007. The US then set up its policy framework in the Pacific and Indian Oceans under the banner of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy,” and put Indo-Pacific first in the regional strategy section of its first National Security Strategy, where China was identified as a “competitor” while “the strong leadership of our critical ally, Japan” was welcomed and supported.¹⁴ That gives Japan, who has regarded China as rival, greater policy maneuvering space. On multiple occasions, Abe has expressed to the US Japan’s intention to “expand the roles that it could take by

14 The White House, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, December 2017, p.46, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

strengthening its defense capability.”¹⁵ The shock brought by the election of Trump will give a double boost to Japan’s security policy adjustment. On one hand, although Trump claimed that the US would “stand behind Japan, its greatest ally, 100%,”¹⁶ the “Trump shock” has still undermined Japan’s “100% trust” in the US commitment to providing security for Japan, which will objectively facilitate Japan’s security policy shift. On the other hand, to highlight its support for “America First,” Japan has offered to shoulder regional security obligations and increased purchase of US weapons, including those of offensive nature, which undoubtedly runs counter to the “exclusively defense-oriented policy.”

The domestic political momentum is the inherent driver for Abe’s push of “self-defense.” Over the post-war era, there has been an underlying “victim mentality” in Japan, regarding the country as a victim of WWII and the post-war treatment. In the Japanese right wing’s opinion, the Japanese constitution is the ultimate and realistic manifestation of this victimization, while being deprived of the right to have armed forces and having the US forces stationed in Japan are the materialized consequences. Revising the constitution and lifting the constitutional restraints on military deployment has been a founding idea of the LDP, and “self-defense” can even be said as the LDP’s ultimate goal. This determines the inevitability of the path to “self-defense” under the LDP’s rule. As a representative of the conservatives in the party, Abe has set getting rid of the “post-war system” and building a “powerful Japan” as policy objectives, and most of his cabinet members are also staunch conservatives. With the absence of counteracting philosophy and opposition forces in Japan, the LDP is expected to continue ruling for a long time. Moreover, the increasingly “young-age” feature of Japanese social psychology enables the government to manipulate and dominate the

15 “Prime Minister Abe Receives a Courtesy Call from U.S. Defense Secretary Mattis,” Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, February 3, 2017, https://www.mofa.go.jp/na/st/page3e_000644.html.

16 “Joint Press Conference with President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America on the Missile Launch by North Korea,” Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, February 11, 2017, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/decisions/2017/pconference.html.

public discourse, interpret security crisis in its favor and strengthen the will of “self-defense” in common people. On top of that, the low birth rate and the aging trend of Japanese population, which leads to internalized society, conservative politics and sluggish economy, would make capability building under the slogan of “self-defense” an effective approach to revitalizing the country, especially when Abenomics fails to inject impetus in Japanese economy and society.

One additional motive of Japan’s “self-defense” policy is its ambition to fill potential power vacuum caused by adjustment of regional order. The ambiguity of the Trump administration’s Asia-Pacific strategy, the capriciousness of Trump’s foreign policy, his contempt toward traditional US diplomatic concepts (human rights, rule of law, etc.) and the unpredictability of Trump himself will encroach the United States’ established authority and credibility in the region, and may create a power vacuum. However, that will be a precious opportunity for Japan to expand its influence. The attempt to “bridge the gap” between the US and the Philippines, the efforts with Australia to prevent the hollowing out of Asia-Pacific alliance network, the promotion of Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership in the absence of the US, and the improvement of its relations with Russia, all demonstrate Japan’s appeal for regional power.

Ramifications of Japan’s Enhanced “Self-Defense”

Some obstacles still lie ahead for Japan to achieve “self-defense” in a real sense, such as the institutional barrier in constitutional revision procedure, the resistance from opposition parties, and the public’s habitual emotional appeal to the notion of “peaceful nation” in the post-war era and vigilance against constitutional revision. In addition, other visible or invisible factors are at play, such as the lack of experience of the Self-Defense Forces and the United States’ adjustment of its Japan policy, which have all made Japan’s “self-defense” policy hard to proceed. Generally speaking, however,

restrictions on Japan's future self-defense practices will be weakened, while facilitating forces will grow extensively, generating profound impacts on Japan itself, the Japan-US alliance, as well as the regional security order.

The “self-defense” policy will alter Japan’s national development trajectory and its image as a “peaceful nation.” For Abe, one major way to get rid of the “post-war system” is to revise the constitution, with the primary goal of lifting restrictions on maintaining and wielding its defense forces. By nature, it is a move that will fundamentally change Japan’s path of national development. After WWII, in order to revive and develop its economy, Japan has followed the “Yoshida Doctrine,” which was established under Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida and “prioritizes economic development over military building,” and has handed most of its security responsibilities over to the United States. In this way, Japan was able to allocate more domestic and international resources on economic development, and thus managed to emerge rapidly after the War. Since the 1970s, however, due to adjustments of its global and Asia-Pacific strategies, the US has been gradually asking Japan to shoulder more security responsibilities. In the 1980s, Japan, having created the post-war economic miracle, started to adjust the “Yoshida Doctrine” in an incremental manner, aiming to become a “major political power.” This process accelerated after the Cold War, but so far the “Yoshida Doctrine” still takes hold. Determined to abandon the “post-war system,” the Abe government has taken “bold moves” in the security field, which may probably change the basic national development framework. What’s more, the political and security legacies left by Abe may leave a profound impact on future “post-Abe” administrations, compelling them to follow the existing policy line (or even advance the “self-defense” policy more drastically) instead of completely overturning it. Hence, the Abe-pioneered policy line will truly change the nature of Japan in the post-war era. The “self-defense” policy and practices will exert positive internal and external effects on Japan. For instance, Japan’s defense equipment industry will expand its overseas market; the R&D and manufacturing of new

generations of military products will be enhanced, enabling Japan's defense industry to maintain its leading place and possibly stimulating the revival of other related industries. Despite these positive impacts, the policy would damage Japan's international image. Since Japan has established the image of a "peaceful nation" in the international community, it will be against the trend of the times if Japan attempts to regain its international position by expanding military forces; and in the long run, it would jeopardize Japan's soft power.

The qualitative changes in Japan's national development direction will also affect regional security order. A "self-defense" Japan will bring disruptions to the basis of the post-war order in the Asia-Pacific. For Western countries, the US-led democratization of Japan and the San Francisco Peace Treaty with Japan serve as the de facto legal basis for the Asia-Pacific order, the core of which is that Japan should renounce its right to war or maintain military forces. They are also the prerequisite for the "soft peace" that Japan has reached with Southeast Asian countries as well as the Asia-Pacific bilateral alliance system anchored by the United States. It is this system that has maintained the general stability of the Asia-Pacific order in the post-war era. However, the US democratization of Japan have not been complete, nor has it clarify and settle Japan's responsibility for launching the war. As a result, Japan has intentionally shunned or even negated its crimes committed during the war, which becomes the root cause of frictions and tensions between Japan and its neighbors, who remain cautious to Japan's "re-militarization." Enabling Japan to regain the right to war and maintain relevant capabilities, the "self-defense" policy will undoubtedly strengthen Japan's "normal state" mentality, change the basis of the post-war Asia-Pacific order, and probably trigger a vicious circle. The Asia-Pacific countries who remain wary of Japan's military buildup would be forced to take correspondent defense measures, thus leading to an arm race in the region and destabilizing the smooth and phased-in regional integration process. Meanwhile, the change in Japan's national nature would drastically

exacerbate the “trust deficit” among regional countries, impede economic cooperation, and undermine regional economic development and prosperity.

As for the Japan-US alliance, the “self-defense” policy can reinforce its deterrence and robustness, but it may also involve the alliance into more conflicts and disputes. As a major power in military industry which is underpinned by its superb technology, Japan only needs to loosen restrictions on its defense policy and achieve flexible global use of its Self-Defense Forces to strengthen alliance with the US. While simply enhancing the alliance might theoretically mean a perpetuation of Japan’s affiliating role, the Abe administration has been working to inject the Japan-US alliance with global significance to avoid the passivity, shifting Japan’s role from a subordinate of the US to a partner who shares benefits throughout the world. As such, alliance reinforcement becomes Japan’s approach to improve its “self-defense” capability. However, in the absence of a binding security mechanism in a region where disputes remain between Japan and its Asian neighbors, the Japanese move runs the risk of implicating the Japan-US alliance in regional tensions. For example, Japan has been taking threats from North Korea as an excuse to consolidate its alliance with the United States, change its security policy, and accelerate its defense buildup. This will trigger a stronger reaction from North Korea and drag the two countries into a vicious security dilemma.

For the United States, Japan’s strengthening of its defense capabilities has both positive and negative impacts. On one hand, the Abe government’s move can help Japan play an anchoring role in northern Asia-Pacific and shoulder some security responsibilities of the US in the region. With less burden to safeguard Japan, the US would be able to allocate more strategic resources to other areas and enhance operational flexibility around the world. On the other hand, shouldering more responsibilities means enjoying greater rights, which indicates that Japan has more bargaining power with the United States, adding to the

US costs of controlling Japan. After all, the fundamental purpose of Japan's defense reinforcement is to secure its national interests, and the interests of Japan are not necessarily consistent with those of the US. Though there is common ground between the two countries when there is no imminent threat, disagreement of interests would be exposed when such threat emerged as the two sides held different views with regard to the level and nature of the threat. Take the North Korean threat again for instance. While for the US side its forces stationed in Japan can quickly withdraw in an emergency, for Japan the North Korean nuclear and missile threat to the US bases in Japan is actually putting Japan's security in danger. Such difference in views on the degree and nature of the threat leads to different strategies. Hence, the US can possibly be "kidnapped" by Japan while Japan is likely to be "abandoned" by the US. What's more, a "powerful Japan" may no longer be as obedient to the US commanding role as before, and the US might have to give more in exchange for Japan's strategic cooperation. From a historical perspective, Japan has always been adjusting its response to the US policies according to its own interests, and actively taking advantage of the alliance to pursue its objectives. For instance, by taking advantage of the US rebalancing strategy in the Asia-Pacific, the Abe administration has managed to revise the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation and pass the new security legislation. Now, President Trump's "America First" concept will further expand Japan's policy maneuvering space in taking advantage of the US. Abe may even use the opportunity to achieve his intention of constitutional revision, through which Japan can actualize its goal of becoming a "normal state" while getting rid of the "post-war system."¹⁷ Once Japan succeeds in this transformation, its bargaining power with the United States would be further enhanced. Besides, through "diplomacy with a bird's eye view of the globe," Japan is building the so-called "arc of freedom and prosperity" and a "security diamond." While the explicit

17 Zhu Haiyan, "The Profound Change of the Japan-US Alliance According to the New Edition of *The Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation*," *International Forum*, No.6, 2015, p.18.

objective is to hold back China, the actions also serve an implicit intention to highlight Japan's leading position in Asia and achieve relative independence from the US. As the current US politics is dominated by the philosophy of "America First," Japan's diplomatic efforts to fill the vacuum in the Asia-Pacific will undoubtedly consolidate its regional standing, making it more difficult for the US to control the development of Japan's security policy.

Japan's "self-defense" policy will exert negative impacts on China. As China's neighboring country, Japan's overall importance to China has not declined, for its positive role is decreasing while its negative impacts on China's development and revival are increasing.¹⁸ Although it is highly unlikely for Japan to stop China's emergence by direct military attacks, the rhetoric of "China threat" and China's lack of military transparency, which Japan is actively playing up to justify its defense reinforcement, will jeopardize China's regional and international image and reputation, and erode China's soft power in the long run. Meanwhile, the Japanese "diplomacy with a bird's eye view of the globe," which identifies China as rival, utilizes the concept of "common value" and serves to form an exclusive clique through defense cooperation, will inevitably drive a wedge between China and its neighbors, undermine China's advance of neighborhood diplomacy, and adversely affect the settlement of China's disputes with neighboring countries. Japan's "self-defense" capacity building, along with the regional arms race it generates, will complicate China's neighboring security environment and impede China's peaceful development. Since Abe took office, Japan's development trajectory has shifted from "economy first" to "equal focus on economic and military development." Against the backdrop of North Korean nuclear crisis, Abe's national defense strategy gained much more momentum than Abenomics, and greatly helped maintain public support for his government. This internal dynamics for developing defense capabilities has triggered a

18 Wu Huaizhong, "Japan and Sino-Japanese Relations under the 'Abe Doctrine': Building the New Pattern of Sino-Japanese Relations," *Japanese Studies*, No.3, 2016, p.22.

ripple effect among neighboring countries, which will undermine the Asia-Pacific integration process founded on economic development and disrupt China's economy-centered strategic design. Despite its willingness to participate in the Belt and Road Initiative and active efforts in facilitating the China-Japan-ROK summit, Japan has not wavered in its determination to develop a "strong military," nor has it loosened the diplomatic siege against China. Hence, China should still keep alert in the face of Japan's policy adjustment.

Conclusion

The direct political objective of Prime Minister Abe is to rid Japan of the "post-war system," and vigorously promote the shift of Japan's security policy toward "self-defense," on the pretext of containing North Korea's nuclear and missile threats as well as China's emergence. As the shock brought about by the election of Donald Trump shatters Japan's "100% trust" in the security protection provided by the US, "self-defense" would become the major objective of Japan's defense policy in the future. Such a transformation would fundamentally alter Japan's national development trajectory and its nature as a "peaceful nation," disrupt the basis of the post-war Asia-Pacific order, affect or even suspend the gradual and sound adjustment of the regional order, and significantly raise the strategic costs of China's peaceful development. Although it is less likely for Japan to launch a large-scale war against China, the confrontation with Japan in the East China Sea, the disagreement on the South China Sea issue, and the competition in the Indo-Pacific region and even across the world has become a "new normal." While China has to be fully prepared for Japan's wrestling posture, from the perspective of building a new type of international relations, China should also strive to advance the bilateral relations in the direction of mutual respect and win-win cooperation. 🌐