

# BULLETIN

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## Continuity and Change in Japan's Defence Policy

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*In late 2010, the Japanese government published the "National Defence Program Guidelines," which will steer the country's defence policy over the next decade. The NDPG exhibits a mixture of continuity and change. The most notable transformation is the move from a passive to a dynamic concept of defence, which is a response to specific threats and not the changing security dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region as a whole. The NDPG refers to the Japan-US Alliance as "indispensable," which suggests a reversal in the government's earlier stance. It also calls for "enhanced cooperation" with NATO, the prospects of which are mixed.*

**Japan's Defence Policy.** Article 9 of Japan's post-World War II Constitution renounces war as an instrument of international relations and rejects the possession of war potential such as land, sea and air forces to achieve this aim. That said, successive Japanese governments since the 1950s have interpreted that Article 9 does not preclude the right of individual self-defence, which, they argue, Japan as a sovereign nation is permitted under Article 51 of the UN Charter and thus may possess military capabilities to this end. As a result, they have maintained that the possession of offensive capabilities or those suitable for power projection such as aircraft carriers is unconstitutional as it exceeds the minimum necessary for self-defence, as is the deployment of armed troops to foreign territory with the purpose of exerting force and collective self-defence. In line with this "exclusively defence-orientated policy," a ban on the export of arms and a ceiling of 1% of GDP on defence expenditure has been imposed.

Still, Japan's "Self-Defence Forces" are well-funded and well-equipped. In 2009, Japan's defence budget ranked sixth largest in the world at \$46.8 billion. It's SDF's total 230,300 active personnel, including a 138,400 strong army, a large navy comprising both surface and sub-surface platforms and a sizeable air force consisting of both fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters. Japan also has units and equipment capable of countering various missiles.

**Continuity and Change in Japan's Defence Policy.** The "National Defence Program Guidelines," published in December 2010, exhibits a large degree of continuity in Japan's defence policy. The NDPG upholds the country's "exclusively defence orientated policy," rooted in Article 9 of the Constitution. In addition, it preserves the ban on arms exports and the ceiling on defence expenditure. At the same time, the NDPG shows signs of change. Notably, it replaces the "Basic Defence Force Concept" that sought to secure deterrence through the simple existence of military capability with a "Dynamic Defence Force," which aims to increase the credibility of the country's deterrence by "promoting timely and active operations" in response to "various contingences," and to enable Japan to play an active role in "international peace cooperation activities." To achieve this end, the NDPG builds on proposals outlined in the 2004 version, especially the development of SDFs that possess readiness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability and versatility along with greater integration and coordination across relevant government ministries and agencies as well as better informed decision-making.

**The Drivers of Change.** The move to infuse dynamism in Japan's SDF is driven by specific threats to the country's security, above all China's military modernization and its mounting naval activities near Japan's southwestern islands and to a lesser extent North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. The NDPG admits Japan's unease over China's "expanding" and "intensifying" mari-

time activities in nearby waters. The Prime Minister also voiced concern over China's growing naval actions following the diplomatic row with Beijing over the disputed Senkaku Islands in September 2010, which has reinforced Japan's disquiet. The threat is reflected in the changes to the equipment and disposition of Japan's SDF laid out in the NDPG. Defences in southwestern Japan will be enhanced, including those on off-shore islands. Also, the number of submarines will be increased from 16 to 22. The specific threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes, which the NDPG calls "grave" and "immediate" is also apparent. The NDPG strengthens defences against ballistic missile attacks by the deployment of additional Patriot PAC-3 air defence units and by boosting the fleet of AEGIS destroyers, equipped with SM-3 Block IIA sea-based missile interceptors from four to six.

Still, the changes do not signify that Japan has wholly come to terms with the full extent of the shifting security environment in the Asia-Pacific region. If Japan had, a greater degree of change would be observable. For instance, the ceiling on defence spending would have been raised in order to balance China's rise (in fact, the defence budget has contracted over the last decade). The hurdles to deploying armed troops overseas would have been lowered in order to respond to the growing prospect of instability on the Korean Peninsula. Along with the above, the ban on arms exports would have been relaxed in order to gratify the United States, in this case by facilitating the eventual sale of the SM-3 Block IIA sea-based missile interceptor. Thus, this suggests that Japan's defence policy is still constrained by domestic sensitivities regarding the use of force.

**Japan-U.S. Relations.** The "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security," signed in 1960, forms the basis of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. In the treaty, Japan grants the U.S. military restricted use of its territory in exchange for a U.S. commitment to uphold its security. Japan also contributes to the cost of sustaining the U.S. military in the form of "Host Nation Support." During the 2009 election campaign, the Democratic Party of Japan signalled its intent to move away from the U.S. towards a more Asia-centric foreign and security policy. The DJP committed to build a more "equal" Alliance with, and a more "autonomous" policy from the U.S., while at the same time vowing to strengthen ties with China and South Korea with the aim of building an "East Asian Community." In addition, the DPJ vowed to re-examine an agreement reached with the U.S. in May 2006, which included the closure of the Futenma airbase on Okinawa and its subsequent relocation to the north of the island. Shortly after taking office in September 2009, the DPJ set out to make good on its word. It ended the refueling mission in the Indian Ocean, which had served the U.S.-led operation "Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan since 2001 and pushed for a renegotiation of the Futenma agreement. As a result, Japan-U.S. relations became frayed.

The NDPG refers to the Alliance as "indispensable" to Japan's security and vows to further deepen and develop the relationship accordingly. This suggests a reversal in the DPJ's earlier stance towards the Alliance. This u-turn is likely due to the resignation of senior DPJ figures in mid-2010 (i.e., PM Hatoyama and the allegedly pro-China, Secretary-General Ozawa) combined with regional conflicts towards the end of the year, including the souring of Sino-Japanese relations following the spat over the disputed Senkaku Islands and the growing prospect of instability on the Korean Peninsula after the succession of North Korean leader Kim Jong Il moved a step closer in September and the shelling of a South Korean island by the regime in November.

**Prospects for "Enhanced Cooperation" with NATO.** The NDPG specifically calls for "enhanced cooperation" with NATO on global security issues, a sentiment which is reciprocated by the Alliance. Over the last year, the Secretary General has repeatedly stressed the need to cooperate more closely with global partners, especially Japan as a way to share the international security burden. Collaboration is already well developed. Political dialogue and practical cooperation has existed since the early 1990s. Notably, Japan has provided support to NATO-led operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans, largely through financial donations, and has aided counter-piracy efforts.

The prospects for enhanced cooperation are mixed. On the one hand, Japan's Constitution will continue to limit its involvement in NATO-led combat operations overseas. Still, Japan can play a crucial role in terms of logistical support. On the other hand, the NDPG appears to boost the potential for closer collaboration in non-combat operations. The NDPG signals an "active" and "robust" role for the country in activities to deal with non-traditional security issues, such as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and counter-piracy initiatives. Further, it implies that the five principles, which currently govern (and limit) Japan's participation in UN-mandated peace-keeping operations may be relaxed.