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Young-June Park

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The East Asia Institute
909 Sampoong B/D
310-68 Euljiro 4-ga
Jung-gu
Seoul 100-786
Republic of Korea

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Japan's National Defense Program Guidelines 2010 and Its Implication to South Korean Security Policies

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Significance of the New National Defense Program Guidelines (NPDG)

On December 17, 2010, the government of Japan updated its most strategically important document entitled "National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), FY 2011-" following confirmation from both the Security Council and the Cabinet. The new defense plan released along with the "Mid-Term Defense Program for FY2011-2015" addresses the objectives and the methods of the Japanese Self Defense Forces. Moreover, the plan also outlines Japan's future military strategies as well as the fundamental tenets of its defense policy. Whereas in the United States, the White House, Pentagon, and Joint Chiefs all release new guidelines each time a new administration comes to power, Japan does not have such a regular format for its defense plan. This makes the National Defense Program Guidelines a comprehensive strategic document that covers every aspect of Japan's military defense.

First introduced in 1976, the Guidelines has only been updated twice in 1995 and 2004. The NDPG in 1976 reflected Japan's security and military strategy during the Cold War, while the 1995 and the 2004 guidelines reflected strategies for the post-Cold War era and the beginning of 21st century after 9/11, respectively. What then do these updated guidelines in 2010 signify? And in what context should this defense plan be seen?

Firstly, the structural changes that have occurred in the security environment of East Asia should be taken into consideration. North Korea conducted nuclear tests twice in 2006 and 2009. In 2010, it displayed new levels of provocation by sinking the South Korean naval vessel *Cheonan* and shelling Yeonpyeong Island. These actions not only threaten the Korean Peninsula but also the entire region. Added to that, China surpassed Japan as the second largest economy after the United States and has become more assertive over maritime disputes with Japan. How all these military and economic changes are projected in the document deserves close analysis.

Secondly, unlike previous NDPGs that were written during the long years under the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the 2010 Guidelines are part of the first strategic document that reflects the strategic outlook and security approach of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). Since the DPJ assumed power, it has long tried to differentiate itself from LDP in its decision making procedures and actual policies. Such tendencies are naturally reflected in its security policies as well. How do these guidelines differ from the NDPGs issued under the LDP?

In short, the National Defense Program Guidelines 2010 is the best resource with which to understand how Japan perceives the changed security environment, and what strategic concepts and military capability it is preparing for in face of future security challenges.

NDPG 2010 and How It Came About

There is an established pattern in the process of producing the Defense Guidelines. First, a committee consisting of the Prime Minister's experts from different fields gathers to discuss and draft a final report. Next, the administration and the ruling party both evaluate the report before the Cabinet makes the final decision for its release.

The new NDPG underwent this process. After the DPJ came to power in September 2009, it made continued efforts to push through a new direction in Japan's security policy, distinguishing itself from LDP. On February 18, 2010, then-Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama established 'the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era' and requested experts from various fields—including academics, economists, and government officials—to come up with a draft for a new NDPG. The people invited at the time included Takashi Shiraishi, President of Institute of Developing Economics, Yoshihide Soeya, Director of the Keio Institute of East Asian Studies, Hiroshi Nakanishi, Professor at Kyoto University, and so on. As they have all been advocates of enhanced regional cooperation in East Asia, their participation in drafting NDPG aroused anticipation that Hatoyama's long-pursued idea of an "East Asian Community" would be drawn out in the document. The Council went through six months of discussion and in August, 2010, published their final report entitled "Japan's Vision for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era." This Council suggested replacing the long-held concept of "Base Defense Force (BDF)" to a new one they defined as "dynamic deterrence." Their report also emphasized the importance of boosting Japan's

alliance with the United States as well as upgrading security cooperation with other countries in the Asia Pacific region including the Republic of Korea and Australia.

In the process of preparing this final report, a myriad of ideas came from various stakeholders including prominent economic organizations and opposition political parties. For example, a leading economic organization, Nippon Keidaren, released a report "Proposals for the promotion of space development and utilization as a national strategy" on April 12 2010, and later on July 20, it published another report "A Proposal for the new National Defense Program Guidelines." In these documents, Nippon Keidaren proposed utilization of space for the purpose of defense, and also suggested the relaxation of the 1967 'Three Principles of Arms Exports' that limits arms cooperation so that Japan would be able to freely invest in joint research development with other Western countries to produce technologically advanced weapons.

The 'Study Council on Foreign Relations and National Security' of the ruling party announced the DPJ's position on NDPG on November 29, 2010. This statement proposed revision of the 'Five principles of Peacekeeping Operations (PKO)' (which demands Japan's participation in Peace Keeping Operations), a new approach regarding the 'Three Principles of Arms Exports,' and the establishment of a National Security Council under the direct control of the Prime Minister. Until right before the announcement of NDPG, the Japanese government showed its willingness to represent a consensus across the main political parties, social organizations as well as the government ministries. On November 30, Minister of Defense Toshimi Kitazawa held a meeting with defense industry associates in-

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cluding Mitsubishi Heavy Industry, where he paid careful attention to the interested parties’ position on ‘Three Principles of Arms Exports.’ In early December, he adopted ideas from the Social Democratic Party (SDP), a potential coalition partner, regarding the arms export issue as well. At the last moment, a tense debate took place between the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Finance on the appropriate amount of defense expenditure related to the procurement of personnel and equipment. Discussions over the desirable number for Ground Self Defense Forces went back and forth as well. The final product after all these adjustments, National Defense Program Guidelines 2010, represents the ideas and opinions of all parties including scholars, economists, politicians, and government officials. It would not be an exaggeration to say that it is a document reflecting the ‘general will’ of Japan to its defense.

Key Issues of NDPG 2010

The new NDPG is organized as follows: the NDPG’s objective (section 1), basic principles for Japan’s security (section 2), security environment of Japan (section 3), basic policies to ensure Japan’s security (section 4), future defense policies (section 5), tasks for shaping groundwork to maximize defense capabilities (section 6), and an appendix that suggests goals for reinforcing Ground, Air, and Maritime Self Defense Forces. Compared with previous NDPGs, several points on the 2010 defense plan require further discussion.

First, regarding the security environment of Japan, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and ballistic missiles, international terrorism organizations, and piracy are identified as the main global securi-

ty threats. At the regional level, North Korea’s aggression and the lack of transparency in China’s military are of concern to Japan. In particular, the NDPG highlighted North Korea’s WMDs, ballistic missiles, expanding Special Forces, and the recent military provocations as immediate and grave factors that threaten regional stability.

On China, however, the NDPG expresses somewhat complex perception. In section two, the document reflects concerns over China’s military modernization, advanced long-distance military power projection, and a lack of transparency. But in section 4, the guideline emphasizes the necessity of strengthening trust as well as constructing and developing cooperation with China in the field of non-traditional security. This is a meaningful change from the NDPG of 2004, which only emphasized the potential threat of China’s military. Prime Minister Hatoyama’s idea of an “East Asian Community” and the cooperation-oriented views of the members in the Council he organized seem to be reflected in this part of the NDPG.

Second, as a countermeasure against such potential threats, the new NDPG proposes a three-level posture that includes Japan’s self-helping efforts, cooperation within the U.S.-Japan alliance and multi-layered security cooperation with the international community. It is undeniable that the DPJ has underscored the importance of building a symmetrical alliance with the United States which led to a tense atmosphere over the Okinawa Futenma base relocation issue. However, the NDPG 2010 states that the United States is a nation contributing the most to peace and stability in the world, and that Japan will enhance its alliance with the United States for a stable regional order and global public goods. The DPJ

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seems to be redirecting itself from the initial idealistic stance it took to a more practical one on the U.S.-Japan alliance.

What is notable regarding the multi-layered security cooperation with the international community is its emphasis on cooperation with the Republic of Korea and Australia. The new NDPG stresses that these countries share the basic values and interests in security with Japan. Therefore these countries are potential partners in the construction of a multi-layered security cooperation system in the Asia-Pacific region. Such awareness was not mentioned before in the previous NDPGs; it is clear that the report from the ‘Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era’ actually influenced the contents of the guidelines.

Third, regarding Japan’s self-helping efforts to deal with the future threats; Tokyo will develop a “Dynamic Defense Force” in place of the “Basic Defense Force (BDF)”, a concept inherent in former defense plans. The traditional BDF concept refers to a ‘minimum level of defense capabilities’ in deterring threats in the region. Constructing a “Dynamic Defense Force” will depart from old notions of defense by calling for increased promptness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability, and multi-force capabilities to secure a more practical deterrence and effective response. It is assumed that the idea of “dynamic defense” largely originated from “dynamic deterrence” that originated at the aforementioned Council meeting.

Then, what exactly is ‘dynamic defense?’ To answer this question, a closer analysis for section 5 of the new NDPG as well as for the goal and direction for improving each Self Defense Force as outlined in the accompanying “Mid-Term Defense Program for FY 2011-

2015” is required. When compared to the last NDPG in 2004, the new plans call for major changes in the force posture. The numbers of Ground Self Defense Force personnel are to be reduced by 1,000 and the number of tanks and artillery pieces are to be cut by 200 each. On the other hand, the number of submarines of the Maritime Self Defense Force is to increase from 16 to 22, and 5 destroyer units that were assigned to specific regions around Japan will be reduced to 4 but will be more flexible in the areas where they operate. The number of Aegis destroyers, which are used for missile defense, will increase from 4 to 6, and there will also be an additional acquisition of a helicopter carrier. For the Air Self Defense Force, there are plans to deploy an extra squadron to Okinawa and to replace the aging F-4 fighter jets and C-1 transport aircrafts. There is also a point to improve the combined-operability within the Japanese Joint Chief of Staff’s office. These changes reflect the posture of ‘dynamic defense,’ a shift from the focus on rigid ground forces to a more flexible defense based on air and naval units. ‘Dynamic defense’ further calls for the reinforcement of missile defense and special forces, and on top of it, the development of a Joint Chiefs of Staff office that will collect information, improve command, control, and integration of each branch of the Self Defense Forces for combined operations. Due to the cuts in Japanese government spending, the numbers of military personnel and conventional equipment have been declining since the NDPG 2004, but the concept of ‘dynamic defense’ emphasizes Japan’s will to increase mobility and integration, which in turn will boost the quality of its defense capabilities against complex security challenges.

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Its Implications to South Korea’s Defense Policies

South Korea, not only faces potential regional and global security challenges, but also the immediate threat from North Korea as vividly demonstrated in the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents. With this security issue in mind, the NDPG 2010 has several implications from which South Korea can take valuable lessons.

The first point to discuss is whether there is any problem in establishing South Korea’s security and military strategies. Japan has been collecting ideas from various fields of society every five to ten years, confirmed the guidelines, and publicized it for domestic and foreign audience. South Korea has also published national security strategy papers such as the “Peace, Prosperity, and National Security” during the Roh Moo Hyun administration and a “Mature Global Country” during the Lee Myung-bak administration. But these documents can hardly be seen as the ones that reflect the opinions and advice from various fields of society. Most citizens are unaware of the existence of these documents, and hence, they lack a consensus on national goals or security threats. Even on the most important issue about whether to designate North Korea as the ‘main enemy’ it was only covered in the “Defense White Paper” that the Ministry of Defense releases without any national-level discussion. There is also a need to evaluate how to view China’s rise from the national security and strategic perspectives. Issues that need to be discussed at the national-level and reflected in a strategic document include enhancing defense capabilities, strengthening the ROK-U.S. alliance, engaging in multinational efforts for security, and developing policies toward North Korea. However, South

Korean society seems to be dominated by itemized and separate discussions. Japan’s NDPG, on the contrary, integrates opinions from each field of the society and applies them into guidelines when carrying out practical security policies.

Secondly, whereas NDPG 2010 highlights Japan’s grave concerns over North Korea, it reflects a dual approach to China. Tokyo remains vigilant on Beijing’s military modernization but simultaneously, it emphasizes the need for building trust and cooperation. With South Korea, the NDPG strongly emphasizes the need for further security cooperation. This deserves a positive evaluation, for Seoul needs to enhance its cooperation with neighboring countries during this time of increasing insecurity caused by North Korea’s belligerence. However, the danger in strengthening ROK-Japan security cooperation is that it may give China the wrong impression that it is to contain China’s rise. Such perceptions could create an unfavorable situation by jeopardizing the possibility for multilateral security cooperation in the East Asian region. South Korea’s national strategic objective is to deter North Korea’s military threats and facilitate peace on the Korean Peninsula. For this, it has to extend bilateral cooperation with the participants of the Six-Party Talks, and furthermore, it must establish an effective multilateral security mechanism in the region. Security cooperation with Japan should proceed within this principle and operated without violating Japan’s sensitive domestic laws and its security policy of exclusive defensive. In any case, South Korea has a new task that for effectively utilizing Japan’s intention of bilateral security cooperation to achieve its own national strategic goal.

Lastly, Japan proposed ‘dynamic defense’

in place of the traditional BDF reflecting a strong commitment to reallocate resources more efficiently amidst a decreasing defense budget and increasing threats in the region. Then, with what values and concepts should Seoul build its defense capabilities against the threats it faces and will face? South Korea not only has to prepare for non-traditional security threats both in the region and the world, but also it has to deal with the traditional threats from North Korea's military, nuclear weapons, and asymmetric capabilities. The Ministry of National Defense is asking for increases in the defense budget as a solution, but like Japan, South Korea also has a limitation in considering the nation's economic size, and other financial reasons. Faced with limited budget and unlimited complex threats, how can South Korea distribute its budget efficiently while also establishing an effective defense system? Obviously this question must have been raised before. However, the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents both illustrate

that South Korea's military efforts so far have done little, if any, to deter or respond to North Korea's military threats. Policymakers in Seoul must first identify the multi-layered element of the threats they currently face, and propose guidelines to build military power and diplomatic skills in order to deter such threats. The idea of 'dynamic defense' suggested in Japan's NDPG 2010 is an unfamiliar concept for South Korea which derived from a different security environment. Yet, it questions South Korea's security policies and the direction of its military reforms. ■

—— Young-June Park is a professor in National Security Graduate School at Korean National Defense University and is currently a visiting scholar at Harvard University. Some of his publications are *Je3ui ilbon* [The 3rd Japan] (2008) and *Anjeonbodangui gukjejeong-chihak* [International Politics of Security Assurance] (2010, co-authored).