



Backgrounder

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WHY JAPAN NEEDS MORE DEFENSE MUSCLE

INTRODUCTION

Since assuming office in November 1982, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone has made some remarkably candid statements about Japanese defense issues. During a visit to Washington in January 1983, Nakasone startled even his own ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) when he stated emphatically that Japan should become an "unsinkable aircraft carrier" outfitted with a "tremendous bulwark of defense" against Soviet Backfire bomber infiltration. He further urged that Japan acquire "complete and full control of the straits commanding the approach to Moscow's Far Eastern naval bases" and advocated extending the defense of Japanese sea lanes to a 1,000 nautical mile limit. Later in May, at a conference of major Western political leaders in Williamsburg, Virginia, Nakasone publicly acknowledged Japan's role in the defense of the West and suggested that security affairs be approached from a global perspective.

Such explicit statements of Japan's defense role are indeed rare. While the opposition within Japan roundly condemned them as provocative and belligerent, the reaction abroad among Western governments was generally supportive and reassuring.

Nakasone's strong statements are encouraging and welcome. The real test, however, will be how well he delivers on such commitments. So far, the performance of the Nakasone government on this matter is mixed. The calls for increased responsibilities and strong commitments have not resulted in major expansion or augmentation of defense expenditures. In fact, the Japanese government in July 1983 set a ceiling increase of 6.88 percent on fiscal year 1984 defense requests. This is not only lower than the 8.9 percent increase requested by the Japanese Defense Agency but it is below the 7.346 percent ceiling allowed the current fiscal year's defense budget. Though the government may alter

such figures and percentages before submitting the final budget in December, it appears unlikely that next year's expenditures will surpass the sacrosanct ceiling that keeps defense spending below 1 percent of GNP--a figure that Nakasone endorses.¹

Though the \$12 billion Japanese defense budget is the sixth largest among noncommunist nations and the eighth largest in the world, its Self-Defense Forces (SDF) are so seriously deficient that many military analysts doubt the ability of Japan to defend itself against a serious hostile military operation. The reasons:

1) Emphasis has been placed less on meeting actual defense requirements than on acquiring frontline equipment.

2) More important, there are serious issues that are not even being addressed in Tokyo, namely the adequacy of the present Mid-Term Defense Estimate (covering FY 1983-1987) and the validity of the 1976 National Defense Program Outline, which purports to be the strategic basis and rationale for present and future Japanese defense efforts. Until these issues are resolved, Japanese defense efforts--though quantitatively large--will be insufficient and inappropriate. The critical issue facing Japan today is not whether and when defense requests will cross the 1 percent GNP threshold, but whether and when Japan will adopt a defense policy adequate to meet both its own specific needs and the challenges posed by the international environment.

JAPANESE DEFENSE AND THE INTERNATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

Contemporary Japanese defense planning is rooted in the Standard Defense Force concept, first introduced in the National Defense Program Outline adopted in 1976 by the government of Prime Minister Takeo Miki. This concept called for establishing a small but flexible force capable of coping on its own with a variety of contingencies up to the point of "limited and small-scale aggression." Beyond that, situations would require a Japanese holding action until American military help arrived. It was thought that such a force, having standardized and well-balanced structures backed by appropriate logistic support systems, would be expanded, as necessary, to meet larger defense needs and requirements. The Standard Defense Force concept emphasized primarily the qualitative improvement of weapons systems and equipment, but did not change substantively the overall force structure of the Self-Defense Forces. In fact, the force structure targets set by the Outline differed only minimally from those of the Fourth Buildup Plan of 1972-1976 (see Table I).

¹ The most recent manifestation of Nakasone's intent to limit defense spending to less than 1 percent GNP occurred during a weekend visit to the summer resort of Karuizawa. He there told reporters that he "will keep the limit in fiscal 1984...and try to do so thereafter." See The Japan Times, August 15, 1983, p. 1.

Table I

	Item	Standard Defense Force	Strength in 1979 at the end of 4th Buildup Plan (estimate)
	Self-defense official quota	180,000 men	180,000 men
GSDF Basic units	Units deployed regionally in peacetime	12 Divisions 2 Combined Brigades 1 Armored Division	12 Divisions 1 Combined Brigade 1 Mechanized Division 1 Tank Brigade
	Mobile operation units	1 Artillery Brigade 1 Airborne Brigade 1 Training Brigade 1 Helicopter Brigade	1 Artillery Brigade 1 Airborne Brigade 1 Training Brigade 1 Helicopter Brigade
	Low-altitude ground-to-air missile units	8 Anti-aircraft Artillery Groups	8 Anti-aircraft Artillery Groups
MSDF Basic units	Anti-submarine surface-ship units (for mobile operation)	4 Escort Flotillas	4 Escort Flotillas
	Anti-submarine surface-ship units (regional district units)	10 Divisions	10 Divisions
	Submarine units	6 Divisions	6 Divisions
	Minesweeping units	2 Flotillas	2 Flotillas
	Land-based anti-submarine aircraft units	16 Squadrons	17 Squadrons
Major equipment	Anti-submarine surface ships	Approx. 60 Ships	61 Ships
	Submarines	16 Submarines	14 Submarines
	Operational aircraft	Approx. 220 aircraft	Approx. 210 aircraft
ASDF	Aircraft control and warning units	28 Groups	28 Groups
	Interceptor units	10 Squadrons	10 Squadrons
	Support fighter units	3 Squadrons	3 Squadrons
	Air reconnaissance units	1 Squadron	1 Squadron
	Air transport units	3 Squadrons	3 Squadrons
	Early warning units	1 Squadron	
	High-altitude ground-to-air missile units	6 Groups	5 Groups, and 1 more being planned
Major equipment	Operational aircraft	Approx. 430 aircraft	Approx. 490 aircraft

Source: Defense of Japan 1977, published by the Defense Agency of Japan.

The Standard Defense Force concept was based upon two assumptions:

- 1) no major changes were anticipated in the domestic and international situation in the foreseeable future;
- 2) any aggression requiring advance preparation would allow time for the arrival, deployment, and use of U.S. forces.

Japanese defense planners felt that there was little likelihood of a full-scale military clash between East and West or even a major conflict that possibly might lead to such a clash. Furthermore, the equilibrium between the superpowers and the existence of the U.S.-Japan security arrangements precluded the possibility of a "full-scale aggression" against Japan.

While such assumptions might have been valid in 1976, more recent developments, particularly in the Asian/Pacific region, now seriously call into question the legitimacy of such premises, particularly the first. Among these developments are:

- o the 1978 invasion of Cambodia by Moscow's proxy, Vietnam;
- o the 1979 Soviet invasion and occupation of Afghanistan;
- o the reintroduction of Soviet military forces onto the "northern islands" of Etorofu, Kunashiri, Shikotan, and the Habomeis near Japan's Hokkaido Island;
- o the persistent military buildup by North Korea;
- o the unrelenting increase of Soviet conventional and nuclear forces in the Far East; and
- o a more aggressive Soviet posture in East Asia as reflected in its seizure of Japanese fishing boats, military flights into Japanese air space, and the slaughter of 269 passengers and crew aboard Korean Air Lines Flight 007 by a Soviet SU-15 fighter, near Sakhalin Island, on September 1, 1983.

While considerable and deserved worldwide attention has been focused on the heinous attack on Korean Air Lines Flight 007, there has been only sporadic and minimal notice given to the growth of Soviet military forces throughout the Far East, which upgrades significantly their size, equipment, organization, deployment pattern, and rapid mobilization potential.

A 1982 Rand Corporation report detailed some of the recent Soviet measures in the Far East. Among them:²

² Harry Gelman, The Soviet Far East Buildup and Soviet Risk-Taking Against China, A Project AIR FORCE report prepared for the United State Air Force, Rand publication R-2943-AF (August 1982), pp. xii-xiii.

- o creation of a high command for the Far East theater of operations;
- o large-scale modernization of military hardware;
- o activation of additional, "low category" (about one-quarter strength) divisions facing China;
- o increase of what the Chinese regard as the demonstrative and threatening deployment of forces in Mongolia;
- o new deployment of forces on the disputed northern islands off Hokkaido to intimidate Japan;
- o acceleration of naval and air deployments directed against Japan and U.S. forces in the area;
- o deployment of the SS-20 Intermediate Range Ballistic Missile and the Backfire bomber in the region.

Some 50 to 52 active Soviet army divisions are garrisoned in the Far East--a dramatic jump from the 20 stationed there in 1965. Commensurate qualitative improvements in weapons systems and equipment have been made. Example: the quality of tanks has risen immeasurably. Besides the T-62 and T-55, which provide better range, mobility, firepower, and protection than earlier models, the Soviets have recently introduced into the region the T-72, one of its most modern tanks. There have been similar qualitative improvements in armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, and attack helicopters.

The same is true of Soviet air forces in the Far East. Currently, it is estimated that 2,200 Soviet combat aircraft are based between central Asia and the Pacific. Bombers total about 285, including about 120 attached to the Soviet naval fleet in the Pacific. Bear and Bison heavy bombers, which are believed to have a long-range nuclear attack role in wartime (although they could be used in a medium-range conventional strike role) number about 50. Since 1980, the Soviets have deployed about 70 Backfires in Eastern Siberia; this is roughly one-third the total number of these advanced nuclear weapons bombers. Some 20 to 30 Backfires are attached to the Soviet Pacific Fleet and are located near the Sea of Japan; the remaining Backfires are attached to the air force and are situated near Irkutsk on Lake Baikal.

The Soviets also have modernized their attack fighter fleet in the Far East. According to U.S. and Japanese estimates, 50 to 90 percent of the fighters are of the latest generation: MiG-23s (220 estimated in 1981), MiG-27s (90), SU-17s (120), and SU-24s (50). These aircraft have longer combat ranges, increased weapons payload, and more speed and maneuverability than older models. Their range extends over much of northern China and the Japanese island of Hokkaido and northern Honshu. The SU-24 fighter/bomber has an especially long combat radius, permitting it to cover all of Japan and South Korea.

The most significant increase has been in the Soviet Pacific Fleet, now the largest of the four Soviet fleets. Since the mid-1960s, the number of principal surface combatants has increased substantially. Today, this fleet boasts about 85 major surface combatants.³ In 1979 alone, it received eight new ships, totaling 81,450 tons. Among the additions were:

- o the Minsk, second of the Kiev-class aircraft carriers (32,000 tons);
- o the Petropavlovsk, the fifth Kara-class missile-cruiser (8,200 tons);
- o the Ivan Rogov, first of the new amphibious assault transport/dock ships (11,000 tons);
- o the Tashkent, a Kara-class missile cruiser (8,200 tons);
- o a Ropucha-class landing vessel, a Dubna-class supply ship, and two missile destroyers of the Kirvak I and II-class (each 3,300 tons).

Besides the major surface combatants, the Pacific Fleet has approximately 130 submarines (of which 25 are nuclear ballistic missile submarines--SSBNs; over half of these are Delta-class), 215 minor combatants (below frigate size), 20 amphibious craft, and 77 major auxiliary support ships. In all, combat ships in the Soviet Pacific Fleet number 517.

Of particular interest is the fact that the Kremlin now gives priority to the assignment of Delta-class submarines equipped with nuclear missiles having a range in excess of 4,000 miles. Soviet activities to date indicate an intention to deploy the Deltas in the Sea of Okhotsk, which lies north of Japan and is nearly surrounded by Soviet territories. The stricken Korean Air Lines 747 jet, by all accounts, passed over this important and strategic body of water. The remaining submarines consist of both nuclear- and diesel-powered submarines equipped with cruise missiles and torpedoes.

Finally, Soviet theater nuclear capability has markedly improved with the continued deployment of SS-20 mobile intermediate range ballistic missiles. There are now at least 100 SS-20s (with a total of 300 warheads) in the region.

Of particular concern and significance to Japan must be the increased Soviet presence on the four northern islands off Hokkaido. Immediately after the end of World War II, the Soviets invaded these islands and stationed a corp of troops and MiG-17 fighters

³ Major surface combatants include an aircraft carrier, destroyers, cruisers, and large frigates.

on Kunashiri and Etorofu. For nearly two decades following the 1960 Khrushchev decision to cut the Soviet Union's forces by 1.2 million men, however, Soviet troops were pulled out of the islands. The forces began returning to Etorofu and Kunashiri around May 1978. Since summer 1979, military operations have extended to Shikotah (which never had been occupied) and the Habomeis group. In late August 1983, the Soviets began constructing what appears to be a permanent military facility on Suisho, an 8.8 square mile island in the Habomeis group. It is only 4.5 miles off the Nosappu Cape on the eastern tip of Hokkaido.

The total of Soviet forces on these islands is roughly the size of a division. The troops are equipped with tanks, surface-to-air missiles, and 130 mm guns. Armed attack helicopters (MI-24 Hind) and MiG-23s recently have been sighted.

In addition to the Soviets, of course, other Far Eastern military forces threaten the security of the Asian/ Pacific region. In Northeast Asia, North Korea poses a major threat. Over the past two decades, it has expanded and modernized its armed forces far beyond its defense requirements.⁴ In Southeast Asia, Vietnam maintains the largest armed forces in the region with over one million men under arms. Soviet economic and military assistance, now estimated to exceed \$3 million a day, sustains the Vietnamese economy, while nearly 200,000 Vietnamese troops continue to occupy and terrorize Kampuchea (Cambodia); another 20,000-40,000 Vietnamese troops are in Laos.

U.S. PACIFIC FORCES

In contrast to the steady improvement and expansion of Soviet, Korean, and Vietnamese forces, U.S. military power in the Far East has remained generally static. By January 1980, U.S. force levels in the Pacific had reached their lowest point in decades. Though America's Pacific Command (PACOM) currently includes four active ground divisions, 50 percent of the Navy's worldwide combat strength, and significant air power, additional responsibilities and geographical constraints impair the proper functioning of these limited forces.

The U.S. Pacific Command now is geographically the largest U.S. unified military command. Its area of responsibility encompasses more than half of the earth's surface (over 100 million square miles) and roughly 70 percent of the world's ocean area. The Pacific Command stretches from the west coast of the United States to the east coast of Africa, and from the Arctic to the Antarctic.

⁴ See William Scully, "The Korean Peninsula Military Balance," Asian Studies Center Background No. 2, July 11, 1983, for further details.

Total forces under the Pacific Command number about 360,000, of which about 160,000 are deployed west of Hawaii. The Pacific Air Forces (PACAF) have a total of over 25,000 personnel and over 300 aircraft. The primary tactical capability is based on 9 Air Force tactical fighter squadrons, with over 200 fighters based in the Philippines, Japan, and Korea. Army forces in the Pacific Command number over 50,000, of which almost 30,000 are with the 2nd Infantry Division in Korea; the 25th Infantry Division in Hawaii can be rapidly deployed to augment such forces. Approximately two-thirds of the combat strength of the Marine Corps is assigned to the Pacific Theater. Marine forces consist of two marine air ground teams--one located in California, the other in Japan. Marine amphibious units are continuously deployed to the Western Pacific and Indian Oceans.

The largest of the Pacific Command's forces is the navy. This force includes 6 carrier battle groups, 84 surface combatants, 43 nuclear and diesel attack submarines, 32 amphibious ships, and 12 anti-submarine warfare patrol squadrons. While this force is impressive, only about two-thirds of the ships usually are at sea at one time. Only one carrier and a carrier air wing, for instance, remain permanently in the Western Pacific, reducing considerably America's ability to cover contingencies in either Northeast or Southeast Asia.⁵

The Reagan Administration has emphasized modernizing and increasing the U.S. Navy to a 600-ship fleet--up from 445 ships in 1980. One beneficiary of this program is the Pacific Command. Last fall, the first Trident ballistic missile submarine, the U.S.S. Ohio, was deployed to the Pacific; in early 1983, the second Trident, the U.S.S. Michigan, arrived in the same theater. The reactivated battleship, New Jersey, was deployed to the Western Pacific in summer 1983, though it now operates off Central America. Other scheduled deliveries include attack submarines, destroyers, frigates, a nuclear-powered cruise missile submarine, and newer more capable support ships.

The growth of Soviet military power in the Far East, the dramatic expansion of its Pacific Fleet, the reintroduction of Soviet forces on the four northern islands off Hokkaido, and the overtaxed U.S. Pacific fleet seriously call to question the tenability of the 1976 assumptions of the Japanese government concerning the security situation in Northeast Asia.

JAPAN'S SELF-DEFENSE FORCES

Serious deficiencies and shortcomings plague Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF).⁶ Examples:

⁵ C. J. Holshek, East Asia and the Pacific: The Military and Strategic Balance (Washington, D.C.: The Wilson Center, 1982), p. 14.

⁶ For a more complete discussion of SDF, see William L. Scully, "Japanese Defense Policy," Heritage Foundation Background No. 141, May 6, 1981; Shin Kanemaru, "The Defense of Japan: An Alternative View From Tokyo," Heritage Foundation International Briefing No. 9, August 7, 1981; and Yukio Satoh, The Evolution of Japanese Security Policy, Adelphi Papers No. 178 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, Autumn 1982).

- o Effective combined and joint operations are nearly impossible since there is no established mechanism for crisis management, for a wartime leadership structure, for joint operations of Japan's three services, or for combined Japan-U.S. operations.
- o The Command and Control structure of the SDF is too decentralized, resulting in conflicting lines of authority and communication.
- o Readiness is at an extremely low level.
- o A mobilization system has not yet been established, and peacetime reserves of personnel and equipment are considered insufficient.
- o Sustainability in a wartime situation is suspect. Present stockpiles of munitions, fuel, food, and other equipment are considered low.
- o Both strategic and tactical intelligence apparatus are insufficient, resulting in a high possibility of a surprise attack.
- o Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) are insufficient in quality and quantity, suffering from manpower shortages, insufficient numbers of helicopters, inadequate anti-armor and anti-landing craft capabilities, and poor allocation of tank forces.
- o Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) are deemed insufficient to maintain control of the seas, to protect vital sea lanes of communication and trade, and to secure and blockade the Tsushima, Tsugaru, and Soya Straits. The present capabilities to command the seas, specifically the anti-submarine and anti-air potentials, are inadequate in terms of safeguarding maritime traffic in the northwestern Pacific or securing and blockading the three straits.
- o The MSDF suffers from lack of substantial sea-going replenishment capability and poor anti-ship, mine warfare and transport capabilities; the absence of an electronic illumination system (to determine and classify the type of intruding vessel, plane, or missile); and poor range for naval aircraft.
- o Air defense capability is insufficient and qualitatively inadequate. The Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) lack depth and sustainability in terms of bases. There is a lack of an organic air defense system. Early warning aircraft are in short supply, as are transports (C-130 and C-1s). Surface-to-air missile (SAM) coverage is weak. There is a lack of thorough training exercises to

ensure readiness; environmental and local resistance inhibits such exercises.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

In light of these deficiencies and shortcomings, efforts to improve SDF capabilities are necessary. The equipment and facility shortfalls result from underfunding and political considerations. But they also are due to poor planning, especially the emphasis on procuring new weapons systems and too little emphasis on logistics. Manpower problems, on the other hand, are attributable to politics and lack of finances. To some extent, the failure to integrate the operations of the three branches of the SDF is a legacy of the past, but it is mainly attributable to the preoccupation of the three branches with the fulfillment of their restricted missions under stringent budgets.⁷

While sharply increased defense expenditures would remedy some of the SDF deficiencies and shortcomings, a more comprehensive review and redefinition of the National Defense Program Outline are required. Issues to be reviewed should include:

- o the entire force structure of the SDF and the missions of the three branches;
- o the need for coordinated operations among the SDF branches;
- o improvement in organizational arrangements, particularly the command system, to ensure smooth coordination among the branches;
- o the selection of appropriate and alternative weapons systems (until now, modernization of weapons systems has been carried out by replacing old systems with new generations of weapons of the same kind); and
- o the policy of keeping annual defense expenditures within one percent of Japan's GNP.

The reexamination of the National Defense Outline must be considered within the changing military situation in the Asian/Pacific region. Such a review should lead to:

- 1) a clear definition as to what constitutes self-defense;
- 2) a more flexible interpretation of the "standard defense force concept";
- 3) less restrictive definitions and more adaptability as to the missions of the three branches of the SDF;

⁷ Satoh, op. cit., p. 22.

4) a more responsive selection of appropriate and alternative weapons systems.

To date, the various Mid-Term Defense Estimates detail what projects should be given priority as Japan builds its defense capability on a year-by-year basis in line with the National Defense Outline. Frontline equipment is given first priority. Until now, replacing old weapon systems with new generations of the same kind was the rule, not the exception. For example, replacing the F-104J with the F-15 fighter, M-60 tanks with M-74, P-2J patrol aircraft with P-3C. In the future, given more flexible definitions of the missions of the three branches, emphasis might be placed on acquiring such things as anti-tank missiles and armored vehicles instead of tanks, high speed missile boats instead of large ships, and missiles instead of aircraft.⁸

THE IMMEDIATE TASK

While reassessment and review of the National Defense Outline Program are important, it will require considerable time to change the overall situation. In the meantime, Japan should concentrate on:

1) Improvement of its air defense system. Japan needs to accelerate the deployment of the new BADGE radar warning network and to acquire substantial additional numbers of F-15 fighters. These aircraft, located in well-defended and prepared bases, could protect Japanese airspace from Soviet penetration. They would help the U.S. to reassert control over the Sea of Japan, prevent amphibious landings, especially on Hokkaido, as well as force Soviet maritime aircraft to by-pass Japanese airspace to attack the main sea lanes of communication. This would greatly help U.S. efforts to keep Japan supplied with vital foodstuffs, raw materials, and military hardware needed to defeat Soviet Pacific forces. Much in the same vein, Japan needs to acquire P-3C patrol aircraft on an accelerated basis in order to help the U.S. in its anti-submarine warfare duties to the south and east of Japan.

2) Preparing a better defense of the strategic waterways around the Japanese islands. This means preparing defensive positions near likely invasion beaches, deploying more ground troops to these areas, and being prepared to close the Tsushima, Tsugaru, and Soya straits in peacetime if necessary.

3) Increasing in the numbers and capabilities of the mine warfare fleet. Such vessels will be able to keep Japan's many harbors free of mines, mine the chokepoints, and sweep mines on the high seas. Other Japanese naval units should be geared to

⁸ Ibid., p. 23.

escorting merchantmen and protecting sea lanes, particularly to the southwest and east. Concentrating on this smaller area with less expensive escort ships will allow Japan to build more such ships while keeping its budget within acceptable limits. By limiting its military/ naval role to the area immediately around its islands and to 1,000 nautical miles southwest and east of Tokyo, Japan will aid American defensive efforts much more effectively than by spreading them over 1,000 miles in all directions. The protection Japan could afford the west Pacific sea lanes with only a small increase in force levels would be sufficient to free enough American naval units to safeguard southern sea lanes, bottle up the Soviet fleet, and strike at key Soviet military formations and forward bases in the event of conflict.

CONCLUSION

The most serious challenge facing the free world today is how best to counter the growing Soviet threat. This is not solely an American problem. And in Asia, the time has long since passed when the United States can carry single-handedly the entire security load. America's Pacific allies, especially Japan, must contribute more to the peace and security of the region. While the West in general welcomes the initiatives taken by Prime Minister Nakasone to expand Japan's self-defense responsibility, there is uneasiness that such commitments have not borne significant results. It is hoped that during Nakasone's second year, increased commitments will be matched by appropriate actions.

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