

BACKGROUND

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The U.S. Should Support Japan's Enhanced Security Role

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Abstract

Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has brought a new vitality to Japanese security issues, reversing an 11-year trend of annual reductions in defense spending and rhetorically embracing a number of key defense reforms. However, the time for talk is past; Abe needs to deliver now on oft-delayed Japanese security promises. As China continues to flex its geopolitical muscle, Japan's current defense force is insufficient and therefore unsustainable. Furthermore, historical grievances should not be allowed to derail Abe's reforms. The U.S. must continue to urge Tokyo and Seoul to embrace the reforms needed to secure a prosperous future—a future in which past grievances are healed and America's partnership with its Asian allies can grow even stronger.

The United States has long urged its allies to assume more responsibility for their defense and for common security threats. Specifically, Washington has asked its allies, in Europe and Asia alike, to increase their defense expenditures, accept new missions, and develop new military capabilities. While some allies have tried to meet Washington's challenge, Japan's ability to expand its security role has been hampered by lingering memories of the Second World War. Japanese politicians periodically deny Tokyo's actions, further exacerbating regional suspicions that Tokyo has not atoned for its past acts of aggression.

Despite these impediments, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has brought a new vitality to Japanese security issues, even reversing an 11-year trend of annual reductions in defense spending. While this is welcome, Abe must do more than increase defense spending;

KEY POINTS

- The U.S. has critical national interests in Asia and must remain fully and energetically engaged in the region.
- Washington cannot protect these interests alone and therefore relies on its indispensable allies—Japan and South Korea—to achieve mutually beneficial goals.
- It is in Washington's and Asia's interest to encourage Japan to adopt additional security responsibilities and engage in global humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.
- By embracing a greater role in its own security and that of its allies, Japan is not signaling a return to its militarism of the 1930s. Any assertions to the contrary are wrong and designed to appeal to base emotional responses in China and South Korea.
- Japan must realize, however, that its new role comes with new responsibilities. Tokyo must more fully redress continued emotional fallout from its colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula and wartime actions to the satisfaction of well-meaning neighbors.

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he needs to deliver on oft-delayed Japanese security promises. For too long, Tokyo has fulfilled defense agreements only grudgingly and glacially while lauding its reaffirmation of past agreements as progress.

Along with fresh hope, Abe has also sparked some anxiety by flirting with historical revisionism—behavior that is needlessly provocative and counterproductive to allied security interests. Since returning as prime minister, Abe has refrained from carrying out any of the nationalist goals feared by Japan's neighbors. While such restraint is commendable, refraining from further alienating its neighbors is not enough; Japan must make a concerted, systematic effort to alleviate its neighbors' concerns over historic issues.

The U.S. should support Japan's defense reforms, including collective self-defense, while reassuring South Korea that such steps do not pose a security risk. Washington should also urge South Korea to move beyond emphasizing its suffering at the hands of the Japanese and instead work with Japan to establish a framework for resolving differences and reciprocating when Tokyo takes positive steps.

Foundations of Japanese Security

At the conclusion of World War II, Japan's military power was limited to prevent a resurgence of militarism. These limitations were imposed through a combination of constitutional and legal constraints, self-imposed restrictions on defense spending and security roles, and the post-war pacifist views of the populace.

Over time, Japan expanded its security role, in part due to encouragement from the United States, which called on Tokyo to help counter the Soviet military threat in the Pacific. In response, Tokyo reinstated a military, called the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), though subject to severe limitations. Although the SDF gradually assumed additional responsibilities, Japan remained reliant on the United States for its security.

Recently, Japan has begun discussing the removal of some self-imposed constraints on the use of military force. Though these reforms have been considered for years, escalating security threats make their implementation more likely.

In addition, China's increased political and military assertiveness is fueling regional concern, snapping Japan out of its usual complacency. In order to confront Chinese expansionism, the Japanese pub-

lic is now more willing to temper the nation's strict post-war pacifism.

Nationalism Less Dangerous in Japan Than in China. In some quarters, this rise in nationalism and willingness to defend its territory has been mischaracterized as a resurgence of Japan's 1930s imperial militarism, but the Japanese public's shift to the right is less significant and dangerous than widely portrayed. Though "nationalism" conjures up negative images of Imperial Japan, the country is simply beginning to adopt more of the standard nationalism of other countries—and certainly a far less aggressive strain than has been exhibited in China. When emotions in both countries flared over the Senkaku Island dispute in 2012, it was widespread nationalist demonstrations in China, not in Japan, that became violent.

Indeed, it is China rather than Japan that has sought to extend territorial claims through military intimidation in both the East and South China Seas. In November, China sought to strengthen its control by declaring an Air Defense Identification Zone that included Japan's Senkaku Islands. Additionally, Beijing has asserted extralegal sovereignty claims against the Philippines, backed by extensive ship deployments and attempts at economic and diplomatic pressure.

Unfortunately, China has benefitted from its coercive policy by gaining a strategic advantage that is now difficult to reverse. Having altered the geopolitical landscape through intimidation, Beijing will likely press sovereignty claims with a greater likelihood of success.

The Obama Administration acquiesced to the intimidation of its long-time ally, which was disconcerting to Manila as well as Tokyo. Fearing similarly timid U.S. support in the Senkaku Islands, Tokyo sought to reduce its reliance on Washington by strengthening relations with Southeast Asian nations. Prime Minister Abe then internationalized the Senkaku dispute by linking it to Beijing's actions in the South China Sea.

Abe Pushing for Bigger Japanese Security Role

To allay rising Japanese concerns over China and North Korea, Abe vowed to reverse the country's security decline. He is advocating a more assertive foreign policy, increased Japanese security capabilities, enhanced cooperation with the

U.S. military, and a greater regional security role for Japan.

Abe directed a comprehensive review of Japan's defense posture, which was completed in December. The prime minister also reconvened a blue-ribbon task force, the purpose of which is to assess whether Japan should implement collective self-defense. Furthermore, Abe instructed Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera to revise the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG).

The foundation of Japan's defense program, the NDPG defines the threat environment, assesses necessary defense requirements, and sets procurement budgets for the next five years. The Abe-directed NDPG will be only the fifth such document; previous versions were released in 1976, 1995, 2004, and 2010.

2010 NDPG. The 2010 NDPG defined Japan's principal defense roles as deterring and responding to military threats, stabilizing the Asian-Pacific security environment, and contributing to global security requirements. The addition of this third role was significant because it reflected a new willingness to assume greater security responsibilities not directly related to Japan's own defense.

Japan's desire to expand its security role was fueled at least in part by the perceived decline of the United States. The NDPG commented on "a global shift in the balance of power with the rise of power such as China, India, and Russia, along with the relative [decline] of the United States."¹ Additionally, the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defense panel noted that "the decline of the overwhelming superiority of the United States" had led to a shift in the global balance of power.² The 2010 defense guidelines also more clearly identified China as a threat due to "expanding and intensifying its maritime activities in the surrounding waters [and] insufficient transparency over China's military forces."

In response to this deteriorating security environment, the 2010 NDPG directed a long-overdue shift away from the Cold War threat of Russian invasion of Japan's northern regions toward a strat-

egy that focused on defending the southwest island chain against Chinese incursion. Doing so required an abandonment of the static, garrison-based "basic defense force concept" in which military units were deployed evenly throughout the country.

To execute this new dynamic defense concept, Japan needed to:

1. Develop "a dynamic defense force that possesses readiness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability, and versatility [to enable] an immediate and seamless response to contingencies [due to] shortening warning times of contingencies."³
2. Eliminate one-third of its heavy tanks and artillery to create rapidly deployable mobile units, including converting some ground forces into amphibious units.
3. Increase air and naval assets to ensure air supremacy and the security of sea lanes near the southwest island chain.

Although the 2010 NDPG defined this new defense concept, it did not put its money (or additional forces) where its proverbial mouth was. The need for additional capacity was identified, yet Tokyo continued to reduce its defense budget.

2013 NDPG. In September 2013, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) released an interim defense review that, along with the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP's) 2013 defense recommendations, provided the parameters of Abe's National Defense Program Guidelines, which was released in December.

The 2013 MOD White Paper predicted even greater national security threats, which would in turn require Japan to enhance its military capabilities. The report highlighted escalating Chinese maritime and aviation incursions near the Senkaku Islands, "including attempts to use force to change the status quo, as it insists on its own unique assertions that are inconsistent with the order of international law."

1. Japan Ministry of Defense, *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond*, December 17, 2010, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf (accessed December 15, 2013).

2. Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era, "Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era: Toward a Peace-Creating Nation," August 2010, p. 5, http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/shin-ampobouei2010/houkokusyo_e.pdf (accessed December 15, 2013).

3. Japan Ministry of Defense, *National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2011 and Beyond*.

Due to a perceived continued degradation in U.S. capabilities, the prime minister directed the Ministry of Defense “to establish the capability to defend the Senkakus on our own. That will strengthen the Japan–U.S. alliance and serve as a check against China.”⁴

The NDPG included:

1. “Proactive Pacifism”: a new defense policy in which Japan will assume greater responsibilities for international operations to “even more proactively participate in ensuring peace, stability and prosperity in the world ... based on the principle of international cooperation.”⁵
2. Enhanced territorial defense against Chinese military incursions by:
 - Reorienting ground forces and adopting a stronger defense posture in the southwest islands;
 - Creating an amphibious force of 3,000 similar to the U.S. Marine Corps from the existing 700-troop Western Army Infantry Regiment;
 - Purchasing U.S.-produced AAV-7 amphibious assault vehicles;⁶
 - Increasing cooperation with the United States in the southwest islands;
 - Conducting a feasibility study to purchase Osprey aircraft—which can fly farther and faster than Japan’s current helicopters—to enhance reinforcement of the southwest islands; and
 - Procuring P1 maritime surveillance aircraft and improving land-based radar sites and E-767 AWACs.

Such reforms would allow Japan to better provide for its own security, in addition to creating an important check on China’s aggressive behavior.

Evolutionary Rather Than Revolutionary Change. Although the 2010 NDPG was perceived as the left-of-center DPJ’s defense strategy, the document was actually initiated by the LDP in 2008 and reflected that party’s philosophy; the DPJ made very few changes. Thus, the 2010 NDPG represents more of a bipartisan consensus than is often recognized.

Comparing the 2010 and 2013 NDPGs suggests that there will be less dramatic change than many expect from Abe. That is because the 2010 document already made the significant strategic policy shift from a Cold War focus to a focus on the Chinese threat to Japan’s southwest islands. The 2010 NDPG already called for increased Japanese amphibious capabilities to deter or defeat Chinese incursions against the islands.

Thus, the changes in the 2013 NDPG are an evolutionary continuation rather than a revolutionary divergence from long-standing Japanese defense principles. Although the 2010 NDPG postulated major changes, because of a lack of funding, few were actually achieved. Therefore, the greatest change in the NDPG under Abe may be the increase in the defense budget and the enhanced likelihood of implementation of initiatives that have been discussed for years.

Greatest Changes Will Occur Outside the NDPG

Although the NDPG is an expansive document, it does not encompass all of the Abe administration’s intended changes in the country’s security structure. The most significant and controversial initiatives are (1) to carry out collective self-defense and (2) to consider preemptive strikes on North Korean missiles. There has been considerable misunderstanding of both of these issues, which in turn has been used to inflame regional reaction against the Abe administration.

Collective Self-Defense. The right to collective self-defense enables a nation to regard the attack on another nation as an attack on its own territory—even if it is not itself directly attacked. The U.N. Charter stipulates that nothing “shall impair

4. “Senkakus—Tense Waters—Final Installment / U.S. Senkakus Vow Shows Tougher Stance,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 18, 2013, http://cached.newslookup.com/cached.php?ref_id=262&siteid=2202&id=3439353&t=1382087460 (accessed December 16, 2013).

5. “Security Strategy Draft Vows Active Role,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 23, 2013.

6. “Japan Establishes First Amphibious Regiment,” *Want China Times*, October 16, 2013, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?id=20131016000089&cid=1101> (accessed December 15, 2013).

the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations.”⁷

Tokyo’s long-standing position has been that it “inherently possesses the right of collective self-defense under international law, but the exercise of the right of self-defense as allowed under Article 9 of the Constitution⁸ is limited to what is minimum and necessary to defend the country, and exercise of the right of collective self-defense exceeds that range.”⁹

During his first term as prime minister in 2007, Abe appointed a commission of outside experts to determine whether Japan should adopt a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense. The panel, chaired by former Japanese Ambassador to the United States Shunji Yanai, concluded that Japan should loosen its interpretation in four scenarios, but its findings were rejected by Abe’s successor.

Upon returning to office in 2012, Abe reappointed the panel, again under the leadership of Ambassador Yanai. The panel’s 2008 final report is therefore likely illustrative of the group’s forthcoming recommendations as well as Abe’s intentions.

In 2008, the Yanai Commission concluded that Japan’s national security policies should evolve to “respond both to the changing threat environment as well as [Japan’s] enhanced position in the international community.” Yanai asserted that “it is time we should bring an end to the interpretation of the Constitution that does not match reality.”¹⁰

The commission delineated four scenarios in which Japan should adopt a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense:

1. Defend U.S. naval ships from attack in international waters while those ships are protecting Japan;
2. Intercept ballistic missiles targeting the United States and U.S. bases in the Pacific Theater;
3. Allow Ground Self-Defense Forces to use their weapons to respond to attacks on allied forces during peacekeeping operations; and
4. Provide logistics support to foreign forces during peacekeeping operations. The current constitutional interpretation does not allow Japanese supply, transportation, and medical units to provide support if “the country being assisted is using force and if the logistics support is deemed as forming an integrated use of force.”¹¹ Today, Japanese ships cannot, for example, transport ammunition for U.S. forces.

The Yanai Commission emphasized the need to allow Japanese missile defense of the United States since “there is no doubt that if the United States, an ally of Japan, suffers substantial damage from a ballistic missile attack, this will seriously affect Japan’s own defense and will seriously jeopardize the Japan–US alliance, which is the foundation of Japan’s security.”¹²

When Abe reconvened the panel in 2013, he directed it to adopt an even more expansive review of possible collective self-defensive scenarios. Shinichi Kitaoka, vice-chairman of the panel, commented that “we are planning to propose a new constitutional interpretation that would permit the full exercise of collective self-defense. This would go beyond the four categories of collective self-defense that were considered during the first Abe government.”¹³ Kitaoka suggested that this could include defending sea lanes of communica-

7. U.N. Charter, chap. VII, art. 51, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml> (accessed December 15, 2013).

8. Article 9 of Japan’s post-war constitution stipulates: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international dispute. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.” Japan Constitution, art. 9.

9. Japanese government position expressed on October 14, 1972, as referenced in *Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security* (Yanai Commission), June 24, 2008, p. 6, http://craigxmartin.com/wp-content/uploads/2008/09/Yanai_Report.pdf (accessed December 15, 2013).

10. “No Surprise: Abe Panel to Urge Right to Exercise Collective Self-Defense,” *Asahi Shimbun*, July 11, 2007.

11. *Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security*, p. 14.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

13. Jeong Nam-ku and Seong Yeon-cheol, “Japan Moving Toward Constitutional Revision to Allow a Military,” *Hankroyeh*, August 5, 2013, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/598377.html (accessed December 15, 2013).

tion to ensure oil transport to Japan from the Middle East.¹⁴

To make it more likely that Japan enacts collective self-defense, Abe appointed a new head of the Cabinet Legislative Bureau, the government agency that interprets the constitution. Ichiro Komatsu, Japan's ambassador to France and an expert in international law, supports a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense than his predecessors supported.

In 2011, Komatsu compared the right to collective self-defense to the use of force to help a neighbor being attacked under criminal law. Komatsu also believes that the prime minister or cabinet should make national security decisions rather than being constrained by the Cabinet Legislative Bureau as in the past.¹⁵

None of the collective self-defense scenarios being contemplated are offensive military operations. Contrary to widespread misunderstanding in China and South Korea, collective self-defense does not pose any threat to Japan's neighbors or signal a "resurgence in Japanese militarism." In fact, such reform would have almost no immediate impact, as most of the scenarios are applicable only in a time of war.

Preemptive Strikes. The most controversial aspect of Japan's potential defense reforms has been the possible inclusion of a preemptive strike option. The Ministry of Defense 2013 interim defense review recommended strengthening Japan's deterrence and response capabilities by "improving Japan's comprehensive defense posture against ballistic missile threat and hence enhance[ing] comprehensive response capability."¹⁶

As early as the mid-1950s, Japanese officials declared that attacking enemy bases could be justified in terms of the right of self-defense.¹⁷ In 2003, Minister of Defense Shigeru Ishiba stated that, even under the current constricted constitutional interpretation, Japan already had the right to preemptively attack a target—such as a North Korean missile—that was preparing to strike Japan.¹⁸

After North Korea's February 2013 nuclear test, Abe's Minister of Defense Itsunori Onodera declared that Japan had the right to develop the ability to strike against an imminent attack: "When an intention to attack Japan is evident, the threat is imminent, and there are no other options, Japan is allowed under the law to carry out strikes against enemy targets."¹⁹ Onodera emphasized, however, that such an option would be used only if Japan was attacked first and therefore did not contradict the defensive nature of Japan's Self Defense Forces.²⁰ Onodera appears to be describing a second-strike rather than preemptive attack.

For all of the controversy, the governmental discussion on preemptive strikes—called "active self-defense"—remains at the theoretical stage. While some policymakers advocate acquiring cruise missiles to conduct attacks *prior* to Japan absorbing a missile strike, Ministry of Defense officials emphasize that Tokyo would attack only *after* an initial attack on Japan.

Given Tokyo's propensity for deferring controversial issues and glacial decision-making processes, even a formal decision on adopting the option is likely years away. The U.S. government is not fearful that a rogue Japan would conduct a unilateral pre-

14. "Panel to Propose Japan Help Defend All Allies, Not Just U.S.," *Kyodo News*, August 13, 2013.

15. Yuka Yayashi, "Diplomat Caught in Abe's Constitutional Debate," *The Wall Street Journal*, September 17, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/japanrealtime/2013/09/17/diplomat-caught-in-abes-constitutional-debate/> (accessed December 15, 2013).

16. Defense Posture Review Commission, Summary, "Defense Posture Review Interim Report," http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2013_chukan/gaiyou_e.pdf (accessed December 15, 2013).

17. Kei Koga, "Japan's Clumsy Perception Management," *The Diplomat*, October 10, 2013.

18. Michael D. Swaine et al., *Japan's Strategy and Doctrine in China's Military and the US-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 3, 2013, p. 112, http://carnegieendowment.org/files/net_assessment_full.pdf (accessed December 16, 2013).

19. Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan Defense Chief: Could Have Pre-Emptive Strike Ability in Future," Reuters, February 14, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/japan-defense-chief-could-pre-emptive-strike-ability-064810920.html> (accessed December 15, 2013).

20. Martin Fackler, "Japanese Minister Proposes More Active Military Presence in Region," *The New York Times*, July 26, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/27/world/asia/japanese-minister-proposes-more-active-military-presence-in-region.html?_r=0 (accessed December 15, 2013).

emptive strike. Instead, Washington is more concerned that the current debate will inflame existing regional tensions and hinder attempts to improve Japanese–South Korean relations.

Japan’s debating an option that it is unlikely to adopt for some time is premature, disruptive, and counterproductive. Consequently, Japan should not waste precious political capital on the preemptive strike issue. Instead, it should prioritize a handful of critical defense reforms that are attainable and develop effective strategic messaging to reduce misperceptions and mischaracterizations.

Mischaracterizing Japan’s Defense Reform

The Abe administration’s announcement that it would review Japan’s defense posture unleashed a firestorm of regional hand-wringing—Japan was reverting to its wartime imperialistic militarism! Yet much of this regional anxiety is the result of misunderstanding or willful mischaracterization of Abe’s intended security policies.

Fringe elements aside, no Japanese party is advocating the creation of a militaristic Japan that severs its ties with the United States. Despite characterizations of Abe as a rabid nationalist, the new prime minister is seeking only modest changes in the rules governing Japan’s security policy. Indeed, Japan’s annual Defense White Paper for 2013 affirms that the continuation of the “exclusively defense-oriented policy means Japan will not employ defensive force unless and until an armed attack is mounted on Japan by another country, and even in such a case, only the minimum force necessary to defend itself may be used.”²¹

Beijing, however, appears determined to fuel mischaracterizations of Japanese defense plans, thereby diverting international attention from its own increasingly assertive and expansionist territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. Any potential increase in Japan’s defense budget—coming after 11 years of consecutive cuts—would be dwarfed by China’s triple-digit military budget increase.

Japan’s defense budget has declined by 5 percent during the past decade; China’s has increased by 270 percent. In 2000, Japan’s defense budget (measured

in dollar terms) was 63 percent larger than China’s, but by 2012, it was one-third the size of China’s defense budget.²²

Hostages to History

South Korean suspicion of Japanese intentions is fueled by lingering animosity over Japan’s brutal occupation of the Korean Peninsula (1910–1945), but Tokyo has pursued a post-war security policy focused on self-defense: Japanese forces have not fired a shot in anger in 70 years. Japan simply does not pose a threat of attack or invasion to its neighbors.

Japan feels that it has apologized sufficiently for its occupation and wartime actions, yet these attempts at atonement and reconciliation have often been undermined by the overly cautious wording of the government’s apologies and occasionally provocative and insensitive comments by government officials. Japanese revisionist comments are factually and ethically wrong and needlessly counterproductive since they allow China and others to divert attention away from the real security threats in Asia.

Simply refraining from contentious behavior is not sufficient. Japan must take more active and significant steps to resolve long-festering historic issues, particularly with South Korea. Tokyo must engage its neighbors, particularly South Korea, in an apology process that is sufficiently unambiguous and sincere that it effectively removes the issue from dispute.

Failure to begin such a process will undermine Japan’s ability to accomplish its strategic goals. Although some in the region will continue to exploit this issue for political gain, a comprehensive Japanese initiative would separate the truly aggrieved from those engaged in political posturing.

As a part of the process, South Korea must take reciprocal measures when Tokyo makes positive changes. Seoul’s last-minute abandonment in 2012 of a bilateral military information-sharing agreement showed the degree to which public perceptions of Japan’s historic actions overrode improving allied defenses against the North Korean military threat.

The Nationalist Dogs That Did Not Bark. There was widespread speculation that the LDP capturing both houses of parliament would embolden

21. Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2013*, Annual White Paper, p. 103, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2013.html (accessed December 15, 2013).

22. Phillippe De Koning and Phillip Y. Lipsky, “The Land of the Sinking Sun,” *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2013.

Abe to pursue a nationalist agenda. Abe has frequently been caricatured in the South Korean and Chinese press, as well as by some American analysts, as an ultra-rightwing nationalist, but during both terms as prime minister, he has proven to be a pragmatist. Contrary to countless pundits' predictions, since returning to office, Abe has refrained from revisionist, nationalist statements or provocative actions.

Indeed, the nationalist dogs that did not bark reflect a pragmatic Abe interested in asserting Japanese interests, particularly against increasing Chinese belligerence, but within realistic parameters. Since becoming prime minister, Abe:

- Has delayed his quest to revise the constitution, now seeing it as unattainable during his administration.
- Has abandoned his intent to revise the Kono statement, which apologized for use of “comfort women” during the war, and the Murayama statement, which apologized for Japan’s “colonial rule and aggression.” In January 2013, Abe stated that the Kono statement “should not be turned into a political and diplomatic issue. I, as prime minister, will refrain from making further remarks.”²³ Moreover, Abe’s LDP and coalition partner New Komeito condemned Osaka Mayor Toru Hashimoto’s provocative remarks about comfort women. In May 2013, he declared, “My administration upholds the [Murayama] statement as a whole.”²⁴
- Has not visited the controversial Yasukuni Shrine.
- Has dropped plans to declare “Takeshima Day,” which would have asserted Japanese sovereignty over islands controlled by South Korea. Nor did any Abe administration official participate in Shimane Prefecture’s February 22 event.

- Has not introduced nationalist themes in Japanese textbooks.
- Has not escalated the conflict with China over the Senkaku Islands.

Such actions, or lack thereof, hardly seem indicative of a leader determined to revive Japan’s imperial nationalism.

Washington Losing Patience with Seoul. Counterintuitively, South Korea often seems to be more fearful of 1930s Japan than 21st-century China and North Korea. South Korea should ask itself: Why is it more angered by statements by individual Japanese politicians that question the past than it is by present-day North Korean government threats to incinerate Seoul? Why is it more nervous about a hypothetical resurrection of a Japanese military threat from the past century than it is about the very real current North Korean threat? Pyongyang’s two deadly attacks on South Korea in 2010 are reminders that North Korea is the wolf closest to the sled. North Korea is a threat; Japan is not.

South Korean assertions that long-overdue reforms in Japan’s minimalist security posture represent a resurgence of imperial militarism have not been well-received in Washington. Nor was President Park Geun-hye’s chastisement of Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel during his most recent visit.²⁵

Tokyo’s exercise of collective self-defense—debated for years and long urged by the United States—in no way represents a security risk to Japan’s neighbors. For Seoul to perceive it as such and prioritize revisiting historic issues over addressing present-day security challenges has damaged South Korea’s image.

Seoul should realize that Japan provides a critical base of support for U.S. forces that would defend South Korea during a conflict with Pyongyang.

23. This statement is in contrast to Abe’s previous comments. During his first term as prime minister, his cabinet adopted a statement in 2007 declaring that no evidence existed that the Japanese government or military coerced women to become sex slaves. In 2012, before again becoming prime minister, Abe stated, “The Kono statement put dishonor on the back of Japan by indicating that the military stormed into houses, kidnapped women, and turned them into comfort women.” “Abe: No Review of Kono Statement Apologizing to ‘Comfort Women,’” *Asahi Shimbun*, February 2, 2013.

24. Karl Gustafsson, “Japanese Prime Minister Abe’s U-turn on the Murayama Statement,” East Asia Forum, May 31, 2013. <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/05/31/japanese-prime-minister-abes-u-turn-on-the-murayama-statement/> (accessed December 15, 2013).

25. Martin Fackler and Choe Sang-hun, “A Growing Chill Between South Korea and Japan Creates Problems for the U.S.,” *The New York Times*, November 23, 2013, <http://mobile.nytimes.com/2013/11/24/world/asia/a-growing-chill-between-south-korea-and-japan-creates-problems-for-the-us.html>.

Seven U.S. bases in Japan²⁶ are designated as United Nations Command (Rear) bases maintaining the status of forces agreement for U.N. forces in Japan during peacetime. These bases would provide critical strike and logistics capabilities during a Korean crisis. Japan would also likely be a key economic contributor to Korean unification.

South Korea's misguided fears and intransigence in response to Japan's attempts at reconciliation, including President Park Geun-hye's refusal to accede to a summit meeting, have led the United States to perceive South Korea as more to blame than Japan for the stalemate in repairing relations between Seoul and Tokyo. If continued, such obstinacy could lead to tensions between the U.S. and South Korea and undermine U.S. strategic objectives. Without sustained efforts by both South Korea and Japan, the ghost of history will continue to haunt policymaking.

An Agenda for the U.S., Japan, and South Korea

The United States is a Pacific nation with integral national interests in Asia. To protect and advance those interests, Washington should:

- **Declare unambiguous U.S. security commitment to America's Asian allies.** Washington should make clear to Beijing that the U.S. is committed to defending its allies, including against Chinese attempts at intimidation in the Senkaku Islands and South China Sea.
- **Highlight the valued role that the U.S.–Japan relationship plays in America's regional and global security strategy.** Washington should articulate the long-term strategic vision and policy objectives for the alliance while offering a bilateral plan for their enactment.
- **Express support for an expanded Japanese security role both in Asia and in global humanitarian and peacekeeping missions.** The U.S. should reassure Japan's neighbors that such changes pose no threat and augment rather than undermine stability in the region because

such an expansion is integrated with U.S. force plans.

- **Retain robust forward-deployed U.S. military forces in the Western Pacific.** American resolve must be backed by sufficient forces to deter or respond to regional military threats. These forces should be closely integrated with their South Korean and Japanese counterparts.
- **Create a Trilateral Security Initiative (2+2+2 meeting) to develop joint strategies for addressing common threats and objectives.** Washington should establish an annual meeting of the U.S., South Korean, and Japanese foreign and defense ministers. The initiative should develop comprehensive trilateral plans for responding to North Korean provocations and a strategy for Korean unification, including aid and development contributions.
- **Urge bilateral South Korea–Japan and trilateral South Korea–Japan–U.S. military exercises and maritime security.** The three countries should explore the potential for joint peacekeeping missions, counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, counter-narcotics, anti-submarine warfare, mine-sweeping, cyberspace protection, and humanitarian assistance and disaster response operations.
- **Advocate signing the bilateral South Korea–Japanese GSOMIA and ACSA accords.** A General Security of Military Information Agreement would facilitate the sharing of information about, for example, the North Korean military threat, enabling a more effective allied defense. The Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement would enable bilateral logistics-sharing during U.N. peacekeeping operations.

The U.S. should urge Japan to assume greater responsibility for its own defense and international security responsibilities. Japan's national interests extend far beyond its shores, but it has been unwilling to protect them, preferring to rely on others to

26. Yokota Air Force Base; Camp Zama, Army Command; Navy Fleet Activities Command, Yokosuka; Navy Fleet Activities Command, Sasebo; Kadena Air Force Base; Marine Corps Air Station, Futenma; and Navy Fleet Activities Command, Okinawa.

divert their resources for Tokyo's benefit. Japan should recognize that having global interests means having global responsibilities. To this end, Washington should express its expectations that Japan will:

- **Expand its security role for regional and global missions beyond its immediate shores.** Tokyo should assume greater responsibilities for protecting sea lines of communication and combating proliferation. It should extend the range of Proliferation Security Initiative operations, currently limited to the waters surrounding Japan, to assume primary responsibility for patrolling against North Korean maritime proliferation in northeast Asia.
- **Postpone discussion of constitutional revision and preemptive strikes.** Such initiatives are contentious, unattainable, and disruptive to allied cohesion. Tokyo should instead prioritize implementing collective self-defense and more effective Rules of Engagement, which are less provocative, are more achievable, and provide meaningful security benefits. Better to make changes in the military force *within* the existing constitutional construct rather than revising the constitution.
- **Adopt a less constrictive interpretation of collective self-defense.** Transcend anachronistic constraints that, though comfortable for a minimalist Japanese security role, result in an overreliance on the United States. Execute the Yanai Commission recommendations, which will enable Japan to defend its allies and make effective contributions to overseas peacekeeping operations.
- **Loosen unnecessarily restrictive rules of engagement on SDF forces deployed overseas.** Japanese SDF forces had to be protected by the Dutch when deployed in Iraq and by Bangladeshi forces in Sudan. This need for protection undermined Tokyo's contribution since Japanese units were a drain on coalition forces. Tokyo should move beyond merely providing logistical support or funding non-military initiatives; becoming a

full member of the team requires "boots on the ground."

- **Augment its contribution to peacekeeping operations.** In recent years, Japan has displayed a greater willingness to deploy troops overseas—but only on narrowly defined missions with no risk of being involved in combat. Tokyo should increase the allowable number of SDF that can be deployed overseas for U.N. missions and expand the missions that they can perform.
- **Increase defense spending above the historical constraint of 1 percent of GDP to fully meet national and allied security requirements.** Although Abe, by authorizing minor spending increases, reversed an 11-year trend of shrinking defense budgets, Japan needs to fully fund its defense requirements. Japan ranks 150th in the world in per capita spending on defense.²⁷
- **Continue to develop amphibious capabilities for Japanese ground forces and greater interoperability with U.S. Marine forces on Okinawa.** Japanese amphibious proficiency is improving but remains heavily dependent on the U.S. Marine Corps. Tokyo should procure Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and additional Assault Amphibious Vehicles (AAVs).
- **Enable construction of the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) on Okinawa.** Rather than offering optimistic platitudes, Abe should fulfill Tokyo's commitment and begin building the FRF. Although the U.S. has repeatedly compromised alliance military capabilities to overcome Okinawan protests, Tokyo has dragged its feet on initiating construction. For the Marines to be an effective deterrent and defense force, they must retain combined arms capabilities on Okinawa, including air units at the FRF.
- **Enhance public diplomacy efforts to explain the utility of Japan's assuming a larger security role.** Tokyo should engage extensively with South Korea and clarify that collective self-defense and the new NDPG do not pose a secu-

27. Michael J. Green, "Redefining and Reaffirming the U.S.-Japan Alliance," National Bureau for Asian Research, *Asia Policy*, Vol. 10 (July 2010).

rity threat to the region. The Abe administration should also clearly articulate to the Japanese populace that the North Korean and Chinese threats require Tokyo to augment its defense capabilities and budget.

- **Work with its neighbors, particularly South Korea, to establish an apology process with the potential for resolving divisive historic issues.** This process should include, at a minimum, an official unequivocal affirmation of the Kono and Murayama statements of contrition; a mutually agreed upon mechanism for compensating surviving comfort women; a pledge by the prime minister not to visit the controversial Yasukuni Shrine; and regular condemnation of revisionist statements by other Japanese politicians.

For its part, South Korea should:

- **Exercise pragmatic leadership by not allowing nationalism to impede security policies that strategically benefit South Korea, the United States, and Japan.** Do not prioritize historic issues over addressing common security threats.
- **Articulate a framework for resolving contentious historic and sovereignty issues between Seoul and Tokyo.** Define the parameters of a Japanese apology that would enable Seoul to move forward on improving bilateral relations.
- **Reciprocate positive Japanese initiatives by agreeing to a bilateral Seoul-Tokyo summit meeting.** President Park Geun-hye should be as willing to have a trust-building policy toward Japan as she is with North Korea.

Putting the Past to Rest

The U.S. has critical national interests in Asia and must remain fully and energetically engaged in the region, but Washington cannot protect these interests alone and therefore relies on its indispensable allies—Japan and South Korea—to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

Failure by Prime Minister Abe to achieve his security initiatives would test Washington's patience with its foot-dragging ally. Although Japan has achieved some defense reforms, the pace of

implementation has been slow and far outpaced by the more rapid increase of Chinese and North Korean threats.

Japan's assumption of a broader security role in Asia is a welcome and overdue development that should be embraced. Tokyo is a trusted ally and one that shares America's democratic values. It is in Washington's and Asia's interest to encourage Japan to adopt additional security responsibilities and engage in global humanitarian and peacekeeping operations.

By embracing a greater role in its own security and that of its allies, Japan is not signaling a return to its militarism of the 1930s. Indeed, such reform will allow Japan to shed its self-imposed constraints against assisting allies under attack or developing a capability to repel Chinese maritime and amphibious incursions—developments that will help to stabilize the region. Any assertions to the contrary are factually wrong and designed to appeal to base emotional responses in China and South Korea.

Japan must realize, however, that its new role comes with new responsibilities. Tokyo must more fully redress continued emotional fallout from its colonial occupation of the Korean Peninsula and wartime actions to the satisfaction of well-meaning neighbors. Japan must be aware that its historic actions and steps to atone for them that continued to be judged insufficient in South Korea hinder the country's ability both to defend itself and its interests and to exercise a leadership role in Asia.

For its part, South Korea must overcome its tendency to respond as a nation to every statement made by a Japanese individual. Perpetually playing the victim undervalues Korea's remarkable post-war recovery to become a significant political, economic, and security player on the world stage and tarnishes South Korea's image internationally.

Now is the time for Japan finally and fully to put the past to rest. As China continues to flex its geopolitical muscle, Japan's current defense force is insufficient and therefore unsustainable. The U.S. must continue to urge Tokyo and Seoul to embrace the reforms needed to secure a prosperous future—a future in which past grievances are healed and America's partnership with its Asian allies can grow even stronger.

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