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NEW QDR, NEW NDPG, AND NEW DEFENSE GUIDELINES

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From late 2013 to early 2014, Japan and the US rolled out new capstone documents for defense and security strategy. On December 17, 2013, Japan released the National Security Strategy, the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), and the Medium Term Defense Program. These documents established being a “proactive contributor to peace based on the principle of international cooperation” as the new foundation for Japan’s national and international security strategy. Following these documents, on March 4, 2014, the US released its Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), which reaffirmed that a “rebalance to Asia” is a key part of US defense strategy.

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This new QDR (QDR2014) is the fifth QDR since the first QDR was released in 1997. According to Title 10 of US Code Section 118, which determined the mandate of the QDR, the Department of Defense is required to examine national defense strategy, force structure, force modernization plans, infrastructure, budget plans, and other elements of the defense program for the next 20 years. In short, QDR is expected to be a document to bridge strategy and budget. Except for QDR 1997, which mentioned the end of the “procurement holiday” and partly discussed challenges for investment strategy, however, no QDR has deeply discussed budget plans. In this sense, while it might be still insufficient, QDR 2014, self-described as a “budget-informed, strategy-driven” document, is closer to the statutorily-required QDR than previous QDRs except the 1997 version. This QDR is strongly connected with the FY2015 budget proposal and warns that this budget proposal can deal with security challenges in the current world but another sequestration will endanger the US’ capability to respond to such challenges, even though the draft of QDR 2014 itself does not include specific budget plans.

In the context of the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific region, there are three important points in QDR 2014. First, it mandates continuation of the “rebalance to Asia,” in line with the Defense Strategic Guidance (DSG) released in January 2012. Contrarily, QDR 2010 presented a strategy to “rebalance” the posture for the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (QDR 2010 refers to “rebalance” 49 times in this context, and QDR 2014 refers to “rebalance” 75 times). In a sense, the DSG-QDR2014 version of “rebalance” is to re-transform US defense strategy to the pre-9/11 period when no massive stabilization operation requirement existed. In this sense, QDR 2014 has some degree of similarity to QDR 2001, which emphasized the importance of the Asia-Pacific region and the anti-access threat now called anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) threat.


Second, QDR 2014 presented the notion of a “new presence paradigm,” including additional naval forces, new combinations of forces to support steady-state and contingency requirements, regionally-focused forces, joint training facilities, and access agreements. Like the notions of “dynamic defense

force” in Japan’s NDPG 2010 and “dynamic joint defense force” in NDPG 2013, this new paradigm captures the US military presence in a more dynamic context than the traditional notion of military presence, which mainly focuses on static aspects such as the number of troops. As NDPG 2013 emphasizes, “gray zone” security challenges are especially serious issues in the current Asia-Pacific region. Making this “new presence paradigm” effective in dealing with such challenges should be treated as a high priority on the policy agenda.

Third, QDR 2014 expressed deep concern about the rising threat of high-end A2/AD capability, and it named China as a country seeking such a capability. How QDR 2014 and the FY2015 budget proposal demonstrate concrete ways and means to deal with such an A2/AD threat is a very important topic in Asia-Pacific security. In studying that, looking at the actual capabilities indicated by budget proposals would be much more important than rhetorically analyzing the language of the QDR. In short, the FY2015 budget proposal requested much more money for procurement and R&D programs to counter A2/AD capabilities (maritime intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, unmanned strike, and long-range strike capabilities) than the budget for FY2014 allocated. For example, the Unmanned Carrier-Launched Airborne Surveillance and Strike (UCLASS) system, known as X-45 during the research phase, got about \$120 million in FY 2014 and about \$400 million was requested in the FY2015 proposal, the MQ-4 Triton maritime surveillance unmanned aerial vehicle got about \$50 million in FY2014 and about \$530 million was requested for FY2015, and the Long Range Strike system got about \$360 million in FY2014 and about \$910 million was requested for FY2015. This budget allocation uptrend for such capabilities in a period of defense austerity suggests that these programs for counter-A2/AD capabilities are highly prioritized in the current US defense budget.

The two defense strategic defense documents of Japan and the US, NDPG 2013 and QDR 2014 respectively, address security challenges in the Asia-Pacific in similar ways but with different nuances. First, NDPG 2013 emphasizes the necessity of dealing with “gray zone” security challenges in the region. While QDR 2014 does not explicitly use the term “gray zone” (QDR 2010

did mention it), it minted the expression “new presence paradigm,” which will work to manage “gray zone” security challenges (or “phase zero operations” in US military jargon). Second, QDR 2014 emphasized the need to deal with high-end A2/AD threats. While NDPG 2014 does not explicitly mention specific ways to counter such threats, it prioritizes capability development for air and maritime superiority and notes the importance of base resiliency. These efforts play important roles in developing a counter-A2/AD defense posture.

Following the release of these documents, which demonstrate the reality that Japan and the US share national security challenges and the importance of collaborated efforts, Prime Minister Abe and President Obama had a summit meeting on April 24th 2014 at which these two leaders agreed to commit “to building an even more robust and effective Alliance.” One concrete item in implementing their commitment is the ongoing consultation to revise the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation. Through this process, the two countries need to work hard to develop robust and effective cooperation to deal with both “gray-zone” security challenges and high-end A2/AD threats. 

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