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TOWARD A MORE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO NATIONAL DEFENSE IN 2018

Eiichi Funada

- Japan will review the fundamental documents relating to national security in 2018.
- The security challenges this review will address include the changing security dynamics in East Asia as well as global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- The review should take a more comprehensive approach; the key issues to be considered are enhancing the Dynamic Joint Defense Force, evolving a sea power alliance, and adapting to social structural changes

The views expressed in this piece are the author's own and should not be attributed to The Association of Japanese Institutes of Strategic Studies.

Toward the end of 2018, the Japanese government is reportedly to revise the National Security Strategy (NSS) as well as the National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG) and drastically strengthen its defense capabilities. The NSS presents the guiding principles for Japan's security over the next decade and, based on the NSS, the NDPG prescribes the basic defense policy and sets the parameters for the country's defense during this period.

The main driver of these reviews is the rapid change in the security environment surrounding Japan, which includes an imminent threat from North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and serious concerns over China's military expansion, adventurism and gray-zone strategy, as well as global terrorism and WMD proliferation.

The procurement list of equipment tends to be the main focus of media attention on the defense build-up. However, to sustainably achieve the two major objectives of national defense and enhanced regional/global security, the reviews should comprehensively consider, from a short- to medium-term perspective, enhancing the "Dynamic Joint Defense Force" and evolving the Japan-US alliance as a sea power alliance while, from a long-term perspective, adapting to profound demographic changes in the near future.

Enhancing the "Dynamic Joint Defense Force"

During the past quarter-century, the post-war pacifism characterized by a military phobia that has been rampant in Japan has gradually become a minority opinion. Underlying this change in public sentiment is the trust and confidence of the Japanese people that the Self-Defense Forces have gained through activities ranging from overseas peace cooperation operations to humanitarian assistance/disaster relief activities as well as the defense of Japan.

Mr. Abe is the first post-Cold War prime minister to advocate both the qualitative and quantitative improvement of defense capabilities, and he formulated the current NDPG in 2013, calling for the building of a "Dynamic Joint Defense Force" (DJDF).

Amidst an increasingly challenging security environment, the government, with the backing of the majority of the public, should continue to enhance the DJDF from the following standpoints.

First, the DJDF should build more credible and formidable deterrence by denial, including the development of an integrated air and missile defense system. As was confirmed in the joint statement of the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee in 2017, Japan is expected to expand its role and augment its defense capabilities by reviewing its Roles, Missions and Capabilities (RMC) within the framework of the alliance. A bold and expeditious review of RMC could increase Japan's deterrence by denial.

Second, the DJDF should overcome Japan's strategic vulnerability, which has not been directly addressed for decades. The introduction of advanced equipment with greater mobile deployment capability such as STOL fighters and mobile long-range missiles, and the building of more invulnerable and resilient military infrastructure, including nuclear shelters, could close the window of Japan's geographical vulnerability as a narrow, long and densely-populated archipelago.

Moreover, in the process of enhancing the DJDF, the establishment of a seamless network of central and local government organs to effectively respond to gray-zone conflicts could significantly diminish the vulnerability that stems from sluggish decision-making in a highly democratic and bureaucratic system.

Evolving the Japan-US alliance as a sea power alliance

2018 marks the 150th anniversary of the Meiji Restoration that led Japan to join the modern international community. The subsequent history of modern Japan clearly demonstrates that a sea power alliance – the Japanese-Anglo alliance in the early 20th century and the Japan-US alliance since the latter half of the 20th century – is the best diplomatic principle for stability and prosperity in Japan.

The 2015 Legislation for Peace and Security and the new Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation have significantly improved cooperation between the two countries.

Now is the time to further develop the mutuality of the alliance, bucking the trend of inward-looking foreign policies seen throughout the international community.

The first priority of stronger alliance cooperation will be augmenting interoperability between Japan and the US to effectively deter and counter common threats. This interoperability does not necessarily mean the procurement of common equipment; more important are developing common doctrines and procedures, sharing military infrastructure, and ensuring communication among units or forces. The high level of interoperability NATO has achieved would be a good model for the Japan-US alliance in acting together more coherently and effectively.

Furthermore, employing better interoperability to address imminent threats, the Japan-US alliance should develop more proactive maritime cooperation to create an open and stable maritime order that rejects unilateral changes of the status quo by force and ensures the rule of law. The alliance will thus evolve into a creative sea power alliance for the security and prosperity of the entire liberal world. Moreover, multilateral cooperation with other sea powers, including the UK, Australia and littoral countries, for maritime safety will help bolster the Japan-US sea power alliance.

Adapting to profound demographic changes in the near future


Japan leads the developed world in terms of its declining birthrate and aging population, and its production-age population is estimated to drastically shrink in the near future. This rapid shift in demography poses a serious internal threat to national security.

In particular, a reduction in the younger population will make it more difficult for the all-volunteer Self-Defense Forces to recruit new soldiers and sailors, and conscription is interpreted as unconstitutional by the Japanese government.

In order to build up a sustainable defense posture ensuring the quality and quantity to which the DJDF aspires, it is vital that the Self-Defense Forces be made a more efficient and manpower-saving organization. The bold

introduction of weapon systems requiring few or no personnel as well as organizational reform to boost capital-intensity could meet the challenge.

In addition, the military application of artificial intelligence in future warfare presents significant issues, as well as ethical problems, for the entire international community. Despite the decline in Japan's post-war pacifism, antagonism to the application of technology for military use is still deeply rooted in some parts of academia. Now is the time to establish, from a long-term perspective, a collaborative system among industry, government and academia for national security, thereby building up defense capabilities adaptable to near-future structural shifts.

The above-mentioned issues cannot all be resolved by the Ministry of Defense and the Self-Defense Forces alone. Therefore, 2018 will be a year requiring the nation's all-out efforts to build up a comprehensive defense architecture. 

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