



Japan: Priming for New Defence Posture

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The new defence posture, articulated in the new guidelines endorsed by the Japanese government on December 17, 2010, is indicative of Japan's future capabilities and threat perceptions in a changing security environment. This marks a doctrinal shift from the Cold War to the Post-9/11 world order, in Japanese security thinking. This pronouncement has been promulgated during the deteriorating crisis in Korean Peninsula, with the rise of China's military might and the US willingness of withdrawal from active military role in Northeast Asia and issue over Futenma Air base.

Japan's New Defence Guidelines Programme (NDGP 2010) is important for policy analyst to understand Japan in new context. Officially, it dictates the future force structure, organizational reform and administration plan for Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF) over the next ten years. As expected, China had come down heavily on Japan over the new guidelines. However, the new guidelines have presented some explicit view about the current security environment surrounding Japan and share the future strategy for Japan.

NDGP-2010: Highlights

Since the inception of NDGP in 1976, it is for the first time the left-centred Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) formulated a security agenda for Japan. At the outset, the defence guidelines accept that security environment surrounding Japan is alarming; however, it foresees no war-kind situation. The new guidelines necessitate Japan to defend from all security threats, while cooperating with international community through international peacekeeping activities to address the threat before reaching the homeland.

The guidelines also emphasise response to the emerging threats, not necessarily limited to external invasion. The "new" threats such as guerrilla attack and terrorism seek resilient active

defensive. There by, it mainly seeks to address the vulnerabilities in the changing dynamics of Northeast Asia security. The new policy adopts proactive approach called "Dynamic Defence Force" that aims to "increase the credibility of Japan's deterrent capability by promoting timely and active operations."¹ This supersedes the passive approach called "Basic Defence Force," which has been viewed as a departure from the tradition old pacifist policy.

North Korea is significantly worrisome issue in Japanese security calculus. However, territorial disputes with China, its ballistic missile capabilities and PLA-Navy activities near East China Sea, have placed Beijing as security challenge to Japan.

The NDGP-2010 stresses to increase security around Nasei Island, which is a workable strategy for Japan to counter Chinese increasing activity near the Islands, thus the reorganization of Japanese troops stationed in Hokkaido prefecture is desired. Apart from that, Japan has gradually increased the deployment of battle field Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) missile batteries from three to six air-defence group to evade the threat of incoming ballistic missiles from North Korea and China.²

On security cooperation, the NDGP-2010 has pledged to increase activities with Australia, South Korea, India and other ASEAN countries through bilateral and multilateral framework in the Asia-pacific region. Moreover, the Japan-US security cooperation remains "indispensable" component of Japan's peace and security in the new guidelines. Further, the option for arms-export remains open and not circumscribed in the new NDGP-2010. However, the defence ministry is very optimistic about arms-export bill. Defence Minister Toshimi Kitazawa while pushing forward the initiative to ease the arms-export ban said,

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“We should not just sit and watch domestic defence production bases and technological platforms deteriorate in a situation in which we are bound hand and foot.”³ The declining Japanese economy may look forward for joint development in weapon system, which may reap benefit for defence industry on one

hand, and compliment Japanese economy on the other hand. The monetary constrains imposed by public debt twice the size of gross domestic product, restricted mid-term defence allocation to 23.39 trillion yen with additional 100 billion yen ceiling for unexpected situation.⁴ However, the NDGP ensures that constraints in defence budget should not hamper national security. And the adequacy will be met through appropriate force level by limiting the size of Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF) to 154,000 and reduce battle tanks strength from the current 600 to 400.

China and Japan’s Threat Perception

The China-factor becomes more prominent in the guidelines because, Japan fears that slowdown of the American hegemon in the region would pave the way for China to dominate Northeast Asian affairs. Strategic experts view Japan’s new defence guidelines “will be unmistakably oriented towards countering the rise of China.”⁵ In other words, the new guidelines endorse that Chinese military is emerging as a crucial security concern for the region and the international community. The underlining passage of the NDGP-2010 states China’s “Military modernization and its insufficiency in transparency” as a “major concern”, this emerges out to be the strongest language the guidelines have ever used for China.⁶ Its previous version (NDGP 2004) stated that Japan should “remain attentive” to Beijing future action.⁷ Previously, the NDGP 1994 guidelines, did not mention the name of the countries, but clearly reflected Japanese intention towards China.

China emerged as a single largest challenge to Japanese security, henceforth, to counter Chinese threat; Japan’s stance in the new defence guidelines was explained in terms of expanding its cooperation with the US as well as with South Korea Australia and India. Moreover, US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a prime government panel, monitors US-China security related activities. Further, the Commission stated that Chinese emerging missile capability threatens regional stability and the conventional PLA’s missiles are capable to reach five major US base

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in East Asia, including Misawa Air Base in Aomori prefecture and Kadena Air Base in Okinawa prefecture.⁸ The report also articulates China’s anti-ship ballistic missile and various other cruise missile programmes likely to threaten the US forward deployment in East Asia. Taking into

account these new developments in the region, Japan has finally formalized new guidelines to strengthen its security around its far lying islands. Specifically, call for security around Japan’s South-West Nasei Island and emphasis on maritime domain in defence guidelines clearly reflects the Japanese anxiety over rising maritime tension in East Asian region.

Maritime Dimension

China’s naval movement in the region poses grave security challenge to Japan. The focus on maritime domain in the new guidelines is essentially aimed to counter Chinese PLA-Navy. China’s increasing grip over East China Sea in particular, and South China Sea at large remains a serious security challenge to Japan’s Sea-lane trade and energy route. The unending conflict in maritime domain, such like Senkaku Island issue, Tokyo -Seoul contest over Takeshima Island and Russian dispute over Japanese Kuril Island are crucial territorial issues for Japan. Further, Tokyo-Beijing rivalry over the ownership of gas reserve in East China Sea and a tussle over drilling right in the disputed territory complicate the relationship.⁹ Thus, the maritime region remains vulnerable to potential conflict.

Therefore, the NDGP-2010 pays special attention on smaller islands and on speeding up the process of setting-up security apparatuses on the small outlying islands from armed invasion and intrusion of spy ships. Eventually, it enhances the maritime operational capabilities of Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF). Japan already a mid-ranking naval power in Asia and largest non-nuclear

naval forces in comparison with other navies of Asia, is determined to grow stronger and ready to shoulder larger responsibility in tackling the issues pertaining to maritime security of the region.

In recent times PLA-Navy poses as one of the major maritime security challenges to Japan. There have been incidents between JMSDF and PLA-Navy vessels while manoeuvring closely to deter each other ships. On 8th April, 2010

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JMSDF reported that Chinese PLA-Navy's helicopter buzzed over the ship without any provocation in East China Sea. To avoid such incidents Japanese and Chinese officials are discussing to establish a maritime communication system to ignore mistrust between JMSDF and PLA-Navy. Already Beijing established similar maritime hotline between Seoul and Washington.

In this context, the NDGP-2010 entrusted major responsibility on JMSDF, to increase in submarine force level from current 16 vessels to 22 vessels. Newly inducted JMSDF carrier Hyuga, Aegis Anti-ballistic missile system equipped destroyers and current project to equip JMSDF with "helicopter capable destroyer," are expected to play crucial role in enforcing sovereignty right. Japan's new guidelines emphasises on giving no room for the adversary to take advantage of the situation. Alongside, JMSDF have also gained international reputation, through participating in exercise, international activity such as fighting piracy in Gulf of Aden and Straits of Malacca. This also helped to bridge relationship between littoral countries, particularly India in South Asia.

Options for India

Indo-Japanese relationship is growing steadily. The recent Japanese willingness to have civil nuclear cooperation with India, followed by Economic Partnerships Agreements (EPA) and established 2+2 security level dialogue between two countries enforces strong bond between them. The NDGP-2010 also stresses the importance of India in emerging geo-political context. Inclusion of 'India' in the guidelines also in a way signals Japan's expectation for New Delhi to play increasing role in East Asian security environment. During the US President Obama visit to India in November 2010, India and US signed a joint statement mentioning to work together for peace, stability and prosperity of the Indian Ocean and Pacific region.¹⁰ This advocates India to take a lead role in Asia-pacific security.

The rapid economic growth of India is a lucrative destination for Japanese economic interest in the long term. In the realm of security, the armed forces of India and Japan are engaged in regular exercise, which helps both the nations to share their experience. The determination to strengthen the bilateral relationship in security sphere is clearly reflected in NDGP-2010.¹¹ The maritime dimension of new defence posture seeks to expand the naval capability of Japan. Since, Indo-Japan

relationship converges on maritime issues, it become easy for both nations to strengthen their maritime interoperability through regular exercise and workshop. India, a strong naval power in Asia and strong contender in India Ocean is crucially important for Japanese security.

Moreover, India will be cautious in responding to Japan's offer, while ensuring its relationship with China not affected. India stands at the midst of development; therefore its official stance with Japan is purely related to economics and trade. Japan, a market economy possibly looking for economic partner in Asia, views India as a destiny for Japanese market. On the adjacent side, politics and security aspects are limited to global issues such as piracy, international terrorism and human security issues. Besides, the bilateral relationship is remaining lucently open for the international community, therefore China need not to be anxious about the Indo-Japan relationship.

Conclusion

In the recent times, Japan's security threats are multifaceted. Incidents like sinking of South Korean warship in March 2010, collision of Chinese fishing boat with Japan Coast Guard (JCG) in September 2010 and North Korea's shelling of South Korean Island in November, convinced Japanese policy makers to device workable strategy and re-design its basic defence concepts to proactive dynamic.

However, China felt the guidelines annoying due to three major reasons. First, the guidelines advocate deploying rapid response team in

Nansei Island with surface-to-ship missile and mobile warning radar system, near disputed Senkaku Island. Secondly, Japan's quest for more dynamic defence force and moving away from the basic principle of pacifist approach and defence minister lobbying to ease arms-export ban. Thirdly, China accuses Japan for new defence guidelines being influenced by the US strategy towards China and the strengthening of Nansei Island as part of US's Quadrennial Defence Review (QDR) west pacific strategy.

Beijing has reacted strongly saying Tokyo's view is "irresponsible and no country has the right to appoint themselves the representative of the international community."¹² By negating Japan's opinion over China, Foreign Ministry spokesman Jiang Yu said that "China adheres the path of peaceful development and pursues defence policy that is defensive in nature."¹³

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On the other hand, North Korea views that the defence guidelines as a “war plan.”¹⁴ In Japanese security calculus, North Korea remains a potential security threat. However, the major emphasis of the guidelines is centred on China; replacing Russia which poses minimal security threat. According to Japan, pronouncement of China factor in the guidelines is due to historical legacy, coupled with series of territorial disputes. Another crucial reason, for Japan to adopt “Dynamic Defence Force” concept is to prepare Japanese SDF, in case the US force abandoned the region. This enforces Japan to extend strong relationship with other democratic nations in Asia-pacific, India being a regional power in Asia, definitely provides Japan a vantage advantage in ensuring Tokyo’s security in Asia-pacific region.

Note

¹ “Summary of National Defence Guidelines, FY 2011,” at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/summaryFY2011.pdf

² “Patriot batteries to be expanded,” at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20101211x1.html>

³ “Kitazawa to tell Gates of intention to ease arms export ban,” at <http://www.japantoday.com/category/politics/view/kitazawa-to-tell-gates-of-intention-to-ease-arms-export-ban>.

⁴ “Defence focus shift from Russia to China,” at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20101218a1.html>

⁵ John Chan, “Japan issues new defence guidelines aimed at China,” at <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2010/dec2010/usja-d15.shtml>

⁶ “Summary of National Defence Guidelines, FY 2011,” at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/summaryFY2011.pdf

⁷ “Defence focus shift from Russia to China,” at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20101218a1.html>

⁸ “US base in Japan are under threat of Chinese missile” Report, at <http://www.japantoday.com/category/national/view/us-bases-in-japan-are-under-threat-of-chinese-missiles-report>

⁹ “Carriers boost Japanese naval capabilities,” at http://www.bairdmaritime.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=6234&Itemid=209

¹⁰ “Joint Statement by President Obama, Indian Prime Minister Singh,” at <http://www.america.gov/st/texttrans-english/2010/November/20101108163323su0.5501454.html?CP.rss=true>

¹¹ “Summary of National Defence Guidelines, FY 2011,” at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/summaryFY2011.pdf

¹² “Japan labels China’s military Global Concern,” at <http://news.theage.com.au/breaking-news-world/japan-labels-chinas-military-a-global-concern-20101217-190rf.html>

¹³ “China Criticize Japan’s “irresponsible” defence policy,” at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/8209257/China-criticises-Japans-irresponsible-defence-policy.html>

¹⁴ “DPRK paper denounces Japan’s New defence program guidelines,” at http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2010/world/2010-12/21/c_13658620.htm



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