

# The Shift and Continuity of Japanese Defense Policy: Revolutionary Enough?

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## Abstract

*The security environment in East Asia has continuously evolved, particularly concerning China's maritime expansion and North Korea's provocative behavior. Japan, with its military that is being limited by its pacifist Constitution, has been steadily shifting its defense policy to respond to its strategic environment for its past three Prime Ministers: Naoto Kan, Yoshihiko Noda, and Shinzo Abe. Historical enmities, military capability, as well as territorial disputes have increased the threats from Japan's neighbors to Tokyo's national security. Since 2010, Japan has established a National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG), shifted its defense strategy from the Basic Defense Force (kibanteki boei ryoko) to Dynamic Defense Force (doeki boei ryoko), revised its Three Principles on Arms Exports, created the National Security Council (NSC), the National Security Strategy (NSS), and the Medium Term Defense Program (MDTP), as well as reinterpreted the Article 9 of its pacifist Constitution. While the NSC, NSS, MDTP, and Article 9 are conducted under the Abe administration, the claim that the steps Abe has undertaken to be revolutionary is misleading, as they are in fact a continuity from his predecessors despite coming from opposing political backgrounds. Despite of several significant changes in its defense policy, Japan still abides to its Constitution and its military is still limited.*

Key words: Shinzo Abe, defense policy, Japan, defense force, military

## Introduction

Located in the easternmost of East Asia, Japan is bordered by seas with other East Asian nations. On its western coasts, the Sea of Japan lies among North Korea, South Korea, and Japan. Furthermore, China lies next to Japan's southwestern most islands, separated by the East China Sea. With historical enmities with several of Japan's East Asian neighbors and territorial disputes, combined with China's maritime expansion, and North Korea's missile and nuclear threats, Japan

has a lot to consider in its strategic environment.

As of recent years, Japan seems to have been making bold moves in regards to its military and the constitution. The cabinet's approval for a reinterpretation of its Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in order to help defend foreign countries under the notion of self-defense has now given way for JSDF to fight overseas with its allies when they are under attack (Withitwinyuchon, 2016). The step has been met with criticism from its neighbor, China, whom believes that Tokyo has

endangered the peace in the region (BBC News, 2015). While it may seem bold, the steps taken by Tokyo, however, are derived from Japan's security threats from its strategic environment that needs to be addressed to achieve its national security.

This article discusses the shift and continuity of Japanese foreign policy related to the changes of its strategic environment. Most often, the defense policies of states in a particular region are influenced by the geopolitics of the region. The purpose of this is to achieve the best possible strategic environment so that national interests and ultimately national security will be attained. The significant interest of superpowers in a particular region has altered the significance of that region's geopolitics not only regionally, but also internationally. In particular, this

paper elaborates the Japanese defense policy under three different administrations: Naoto Kan, Yoshihiko Noda, and Shinzo Abe.

### Threat Perception of Japan

As one of the nations located in East Asia, Japan's wellbeing is affected by the region's strategic importance. Japan's geographical location is surrounded by the seas (**Figure 1**), ensuring that maritime security is of critical importance to Japan.

"Japan is surrounded by the sea, and has a long coastline, numerous remote islands and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Japan is a maritime state and dependent largely on international trade for its supply of food and natural resources." (Japan's 2014 National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG))

**Figure 1. Map of Japan**



In its 2015 Defense White Paper and its 2014 National Defense Program

Guideline (NDPG), Japan has identified itself as a maritime nation that depends on

sea transport to import resources such as energy and hence achieving secure sea lanes as much more vital for Japan's survival (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015). In fact, Japan's focus on its maritime capability goes as far back as its 2005 NDPG, where it has emphasized the need for maritime perimeter and strengthening its capability to deter threats away from its shores (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2004).

"In considering Japan's security, we have to take into account vulnerabilities resulting from: limited strategic depth; long coast lines and numerous small islands; and a large number of important facilities in coastal areas, in addition to frequent natural disasters due to Japan's geological and climatic conditions, and the security of sea lines of communication which are indispensable to the country's prosperity and growth." (Japan's 2004 NDPG)

The authors use various literatures to analyze the level of threats and how it affects Japan's strategic environment. Particularly, both North Korea and China who pose significantly more dangerous threats to Japan as compared to other states in the region, bearing in mind their proximity.

"The fact that North Korea is carrying out nuclear testing and strengthening its ballistic missile capabilities is a significant threat to the safety of Japan." (Japan's 2010 Defense White Paper)

The analysis on North Korea and China as threats perceived by Japan is based on the analysis of several authors. The authors base it on a combination of

Barry Buzan's, Robert O. Tilman's, and Janice Gross Stein's elements of threats (structural, geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic, and historical), as well as Ole Elgström's level of threats assessment (specific/diffuse, immediate/remote, probability/severe). The threat dimension can be specific to an issue or diffused. It can also be an immediate threat to the national security or a remote one that is not as threatening. Last but not least, a threat dimension may be in the short-term (probability) or in the long-term (severe).

As shown in **Table 1**, North Korea poses a structural threat that is specific, immediate, and can be both in a probability (long-term) and severe (short-term) under the Kim Jong-un regime to Japan. The geopolitical system in East Asia, where North Korea is an ally of another source of Japan's threats, China, is the same as its structural dimension: specific, immediate, and can be both in the long and short-term. China is North Korea's biggest trading partner, as well as its main source of food, arms, and energy (Albert and Xu, 2016). Moreover, as the most secluded country in the world (Davis and Jared Feldschreiber, 2013), North Korean people are highly homogenous and are subjected to long years of propaganda from their government (Uria, 2016). However, both the historical and economic dimensions are more to a diffused, remote, and in the long-term aspect of threat perception by Japan. Japan and North Korea have not had any direct war, and North Korea's economy is not large enough to threaten Japan's economy, considered be as one of the world's worst economy especially since its great North Korean famine in the 1990s (Eberstadt, 2016).

**Table 1. North Korea as a Threat to Japan**

	Structural Dimension	Geopolitical System	Historical Dimension	Socio-cultural Dimension	Economic Dimension
Specific	✓	✓		✓	
Diffuse			✓		✓
Immediate	✓	✓		✓	
Remote			✓		✓
Probability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Severe	✓	✓		✓	

“China is increasing its activities in waters close to Japan. The lack of transparency of its national defense policies, and the military activities are a matter of concern for the region and the international community, including Japan, and need to be carefully analyzed.” Japan’s 2010 Defense White Paper

China also poses a threat to Japan’s national security, whose structural dimension is specific, immediate, and both probable and severe. China’s regime under Xi Jinping has been more assertive, especially in its maritime expansion (Matsuda, 2014) and has increased more pressures to Japan both through its East

China Sea activities and its South China Sea ones (Dingli et al., 2016). **Table 2** below shows that in terms of geopolitical system, historical, and social-cultural dimension, China is a perceived threat to Japan that is specific, immediate, and both probable and severe. This is so as China’s proximity is very near to Japan, while its size is enormous. The historical enmity has shown considerably the bad blood between the two nations. The threat of Beijing is exemplified with the rapid economic rise of the state (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), and has also become a specific, immediate, and both long-term and short-term.

**Tabel 2. Japan's Threat Perception to China**

	Structural Dimension	Geopolitical System	Historical Dimension	Socio-cultural Dimension	Economic Dimension
Specific	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Diffuse					
Immediate	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Remote					
Probability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Severe	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

As such, bearing in mind that Japan is surrounded by seas, and its location in East Asia is in proximity to both North Korea and China that are seen as threats to its national security as mentioned in Japan’s 2014 and 2015 Defense White Papers respectively, the strategic environment of Japan is of the

utmost importance to preserve Tokyo’s position and stability. Identifying itself as a maritime nation (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), its maritime and naval prowess is at the front of its focus, especially considering China’s expansion of its open seas activities.

The vulnerabilities of Japan's security, combined with threats perceived from its East Asian neighbors, have contributed to the need to reassess Japan's defense strategy and doctrine.

### **Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF): An Overview**

Japan's military force is a conundrum; despite of its status as the military of the state, it relinquishes its right to wage wars and the use of force or threat of force in 'settling international disputes' as means since the end of World War II which then puts Japan's military as 'abnormal' in statehood (Hagström and Gustafsson, 2015), despite of the reform of Article 9 that now enables Tokyo to assist of its allies under attack (Fackler & Sanger, 2014). As such, its military force focused on self-defense and is known as Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF).

Established after World War II (Gady, 2015), and despite of its heavy limitation, the JSDF is the world's sixth best-equipped troops (Fitzpatrick, 2013). The JSDF is comprised of its Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF), Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), and Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF). Their operations are not limited to each branch specialty, but rather can also be done in joint operations (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), which will be explained further in **Section ....**

The GSDF is comprised of multiple divisions and brigades, directly controlled units with five regional Armies in charge of the defense of their respective regions. Its divisions and brigades are made of combat and logistic support units. It also has its Central Readiness Force consisting of helicopter and airborne brigades, the Central Readiness Regiment, the Central Nuclear, Biological, Or Chemical (NBC)

Weapon Defense Unit, and the Special Operation Group (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

The MSDF consists of the Self-Defense Fleet with several main units such as the Fleet Air Force, the Fleet Escort Force, and the Fleet Submarine Force. They are responsible in defending the sea areas surrounding Japan through its mobile operations (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015). The MSDF also has regional district forces that mainly protect their territories as well as support the Self-Defense Fleet.

Meanwhile, the ASDF has the Air Defense Command consisting of three air defense forces as well as a Southwestern Composite Air Division. They are tasked for general air defense tasks (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015). The ASDF also has its Air Defense Force made of several key units such as air wings, Air Defense Missile Groups, and the Aircraft Control and Warning Wing.

### **Japan under the Democratic Party of Japan (2010-2012)**

The two Prime Ministers prior to Shinzo Abe were from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), and were the precursors to Japan's military reforms. With mounting tensions and a deteriorating security environment in the East China Sea, the then Prime Minister of Japan, Naoto Kan, and his administration released a new defense guideline called the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) (Berkofsky, 2012). His successor, Yoshihiko Noda, further expanded the reform by approving the Three Principles on Arms Exports.

The DPJ is the leading opposition of Japan's current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's party, the Liberal Democratic Party

of Japan (LDP) (Liff, 2015). However, the course of actions done by the two Prime Ministers from the DPJ prior to Abe's administration was reflective of the increasingly important need for Japan to defend itself from the changing strategic environment. In particular, the need came from North Korea's ballistic missiles and nuclear threat, as well as China's maritime ambitions and expansions. In fact, Japan's

defense posture trend that predated Abe's return as the prime minister in 2012 was centered on reforms of security-related institutions, and steady expansion of the geographical and substantive scope of the JSDF's operations (Liff, 2015). The DPJ initiated Japan's most significant reforms that continue until Abe's administration today.

**Figure 2. Timeline of Japan's Prime Ministers from 2010 to Present**



### **2010 National Defense Program Guidelines – Naoto Kan**

The 2010 National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG) was adopted by Tokyo in December 2010 under the Naoto Kan's administration. It outlines Japan's ten-year defense strategy to restructure and relocate Japan's armed forces (Berkofsky, 2012) and has mapped out a significant changes in the Japanese defense policy, decision-making process, and force structure (Fouse, 2011). The 2010 NDPG is the fourth Defense Program Guidelines in the postwar era after the first three released in 1976, 1995, and 2004 (Fouse, 2011).

In particular, the 2010 NDPG focuses on increasing the capability of JDSF and equipping them to be able to react to any crisis situations going past the defense of Japanese territory on the Japanese mainland, and developing Japan's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) prowess in its

southern islands to address its security challenges: North Korea's destabilizing influence and China's maritime ambitions and expansion.

"China is stepping up and expanding maritime activities in the region's surrounding waters, and these activities, coupled with the lack of transparency shrouding China's military and security aims are of concern to the regional and global community." (Japan's 2010 NDPG)

Seeing China as a threat, the 2010 NDPG also outlines the relocation of JSDF troops and defense capabilities from north of Japan to its south, which includes its southern island chains closest to China and Taiwan (Berkofsky, 2012).

At the same time, the NDPG highlights Japan's conceptual shift of its defense strategy from its Basic Defense Force (*kibanteki boei ryoko*) that was in place prior to the 2010 NDPG to Dynamic Defense Force (*doeki boei ryoko*) (Fouse,

2011). The shift to Dynamic Defense Force that is highly mobile (Liff, 2015) enabled Japan to react accordingly to its perceived security needs, instead of just maintaining its minimum defense capacity. Moreover, to highlight Japan's focus on the maritime/navy, it substantially reduced the amount of tanks and heavy artillery and increased its number of submarines and Aegis destroyers (Fouse, 2011).

### **Three Principles on Arms Exports – Yoshihiko Noda**

After three months in office, Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda lifted a forty-year self-imposed ban on Japan's weapon shipments that barred Japanese arms manufacturers from joint development and export of military technology (Dawson, 2011) by relaxing its Three Principles on Arms Exports. The move aimed to reduce costs for developing and manufacturing advanced technology such as jet fighters and ballistic-missile defense. The Three Principles on Arms Exports were to abstain from arms exports and was mapped out in three principles to prevent exporting to 1) communist nations, 2) countries subject to a United Nations (UN) resolution or arms embargo, and 3) countries involved in armed conflict or in the midst of entering armed conflict (Wallace, 2012), and to further strengthen Japan's image of a pacifist state (Dawson, 2011) prior to the decision to lift the ban.

The reinterpretation of the Three Principles on Arms Exports ensured a more lenient approach as compared of the version prior to this revision that is reminiscent of the 1967 one. In order to reassert Japan's pacifist sentiment domestically and internationally, it further limited the 1967 Principles on Arms Exports in 1976 to include all types of military technology to all countries unless

there is an exceptional reason to do so (Wallace, 2012). The only exception to this was the United States (U.S.), or 'individual exemptions' particularly during the Cold War period in 1983. Another exception was the 2004 Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) weapons and non-BMD weapons produced by co-development and co-production between the two states that could be exported to the U.S.

Although several exceptions have been done in the past, however, the new Three Principles on Arms Exports has now 'institutionalize[d]' arms exports in a comprehensive manner (Dawson, 2011). Even though the ban has long been considered to be reinterpreted even before Noda's term in office, the move has not been green-lit until under his administration.

The Three Principles on Arms Exports has been reinterpreted under Yoshihiko Noda's administration to facilitate more collaboration in developing and producing weapons for international trade under the notion of humanitarian and peaceful purposes (Reuters, 2014). At the same, it also enabled Japan to achieve an indigenous production and procurement of its military that is state-of-the-art and avoided being too costly to strain Japan's defense budget, especially with Japan's fiscal conditions (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2004). The 2011 easing of the arms exports law allowed Japan to also take part in joint development projects on arms, as well as supplying equipment for humanitarian purposes (Harlan, 2011).

### **Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan (2012-present)**

Shinzo Abe, as part of the LDP, was elected for the second time on December 2012 as Japan's prime minister

and has since then built on and accelerated Japan's defense reforms (Liff, 2015). Within a year of his administration, Abe started three major pillars of the current Japanese security policy: Japan's first-ever National Security Council (NSC), far-reaching National Security Strategy (NSS), and the revised NDPG. Although the steps Abe has undertaken seems to be revolutionary – from pacifist-centered ideology to proactive pacifism – what he has done are based upon his two DPJ predecessors, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda's acceleration of Japan's defense policy reforms. Moreover, the security threats faced by his predecessors have not dwindled, but rather, elevated to a new level. 'The Gray Zone' contingencies initially mentioned in Japan's 2010 NDPG are situations that are not peacetime but which remain below the threshold of armed attack. This term has become pivotal to major documents under Abe's administration (Liff, 2015).

"There are ongoing regional conflicts involving various countries as well as an increase in the number of so-called "gray-zone" situation, that is, neither pure peacetime nor contingencies over territory, sovereignty and maritime economic interests.

"... North Korea has also repeatedly heightened tension in the region by conducting military provocations in the Korean Peninsula and by escalating its provocative rhetoric and behavior against Japan and other countries.

"... China is rapidly expanding and intensifying its activities in the maritime and aerial domains in the region including the East China Sea and the South China Sea... and has intruded into Japanese territorial waters frequently and violated Japan's airspace..." (Japan's 2014 NDPG)

As such, there is a continuity from Abe's two DPJ predecessors that has now become the foundation to his administration's defense policy. However, at the same time, Abe's establishment of new institutions such as the NSC and NSS as well as the recent reinterpretation of Japan's military law are bold steps that reflect Japan's steps towards military normalization process (Spitzer, 2016). Japan's declaration as a maritime state (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) and the rapid expansion and advancement of China's high seas operations further accentuate Tokyo's direction on its defense policy that is centered on its maritime and naval operations through its 'Proactive Contribution to Peace' (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2014).

### **National Security Strategy (NSS)**

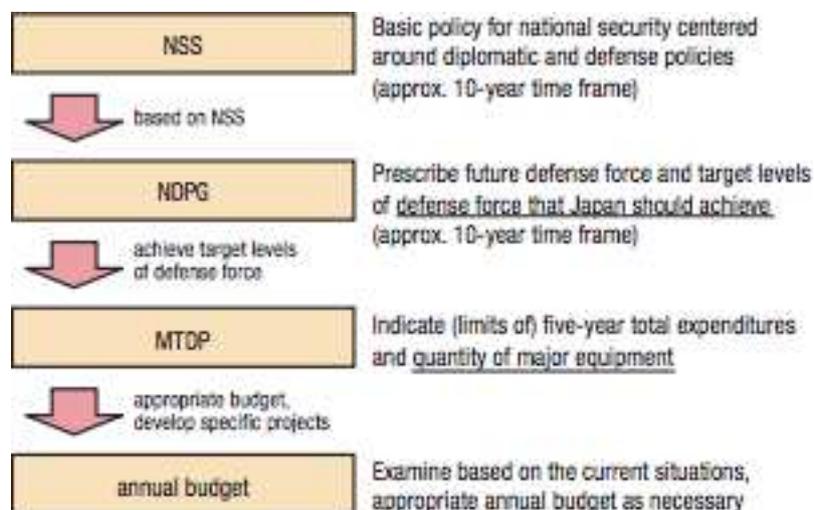
The NSS was the first for Japan in terms of policy concerning national security focusing on foreign affairs and defense policy. It outlines which approaches Japan should take according to the long-term outlook of its national interests. The NSS replaced the 'Basic Policy on National Defense' that Japan used as a foundation for its defense policy prior. In turn, the NSS was used as the basis for the NDPG and both are designed for the next decade. The NDPG was devised for a medium to long-term outlook and the Medium Term Defense Program (MDTP) highlights the budget limit and the total of defense equipment acquisition in the next five-year period to accomplish the defense posture and capability as has outlined in the NDPG.

Japan's NSC along with other basic foreign and defense policies regarding Japan's national security create the NDPG. The NSC was established on November 2013 based on the 'Act of Partial Revision of the Establishment of the Security

Council.’ The NSS, NDPG, and MTDP then become the foundation to determine Japan’s annual budget and appropriate it

based on relevant situations, as outlined in **Figure 3**.

**Figure 3. Relations Among NSS, NDPG, MTDP, and Annual Budget**



Japan’s NSS is constructed on the principle of ‘Proactive Contribution to Peace based on the Principle of International Cooperation’ as its base, outlined in the 2015 Defense White Paper, in which Tokyo reasserts itself as a major player in international politics and as a peace-loving nation to seek of its own security and peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. Japan also believes itself as ‘a proactive contributor to peace’ through the basic principle of international cooperation, and thus will provide “more than ever before to peace, security and prosperity of the international community” (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2014).

The NSS is also based on Japan’s national security objectives and national interests. In particular, Japan clearly states its national interests in the 2015 Defense White Paper (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) as follow:

- “To maintain its sovereignty and independence; to defend its territorial integrity, to ensure the safety of life, person and properties of its nationals, and to ensure its survival while maintaining its own peace and security grounded in freedom and democracy and preserving its rich culture and tradition;
- To achieve the prosperity of Japan and its nationals through economic development, thereby consolidating its peace and security; and
- To maintain and protect international order based on rules and universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.”

Furthermore, Japan also highlights its national security objectives to achieve

its national interests (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) as follow:

- “Strengthen the deterrence necessary for maintaining Japan’s peace and security and for ensuring its survival, thus deterring threats from directly reaching Japan, and defeating such threats and minimizing damage if by chance such threats should reach Japan.
- Improve the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region and prevent the emergence of and reduce direct threats to Japan, through strengthening the Japan, U.S. Alliance, enhancing the trust and cooperative relationships between Japan and its partners within and outside the Asia Pacific region, and promoting practical security cooperation.
- Improve the global security environment and build a peaceful, stable and prosperous international community by strengthening the international order based on universal values and rules, and by playing a leading role in the settlement of disputes.”

Tokyo has also outlined its NSS into six main points (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) as follow:

1. Solidification and Expanding Japan’s Capabilities and Positions,
2. Strengthening the Japan-U.S. Alliance,
3. Reinforcement of Diplomacy and Security Collaboration with Japan’s Allies for Peace and Stability in the Global Stage,
4. Proactive Contribution to Global Efforts for Peace and Stability of the Global Stage,
5. Increasing Collaboration According to the Universal Values to Settle International Issues,
6. Consolidation of the Domestic Basis that Provisions National Security and Endorsing Domestic and International Understanding

Japan acknowledges the importance of the security environment surrounding Japan as its national security challenge. With the U.S.’s focus shifting on the Asia-Pacific region, the balance of power is also altered. Nation-states possessing large-scale military force and in possession of nuclear weapons, such as China and North Korea, are considered as challenges to Japan’s national security. Japan’s 2015 Defense White Paper further mentions on the ‘gray-zone’ situations with North Korea and China.

#### **Japan’s National Defense Program Guidelines**

Similar with the 2010 NDPG under Naoto Kan, Shinzo Abe’s administration emphasizes and expands upon ‘the Dynamic Joint Defense Force’ as the center for Japan’s peace and security. Focusing on ISR activities, as well as improving Japan’s deterrence and response capability, Tokyo pursues more on joint operations, improving its equipment and hire in handling activities, and developing defense proficiencies in terms of its quality and quantity (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

Compared to its predecessor, the 2013 NDPG has increased its authorized number of personnel from 154,000 in 2010 to 159,000, active duty personnel from 147,000 in 2010 to 151,000, and reserve-

ready personnel from 7,000 to 8,000 (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

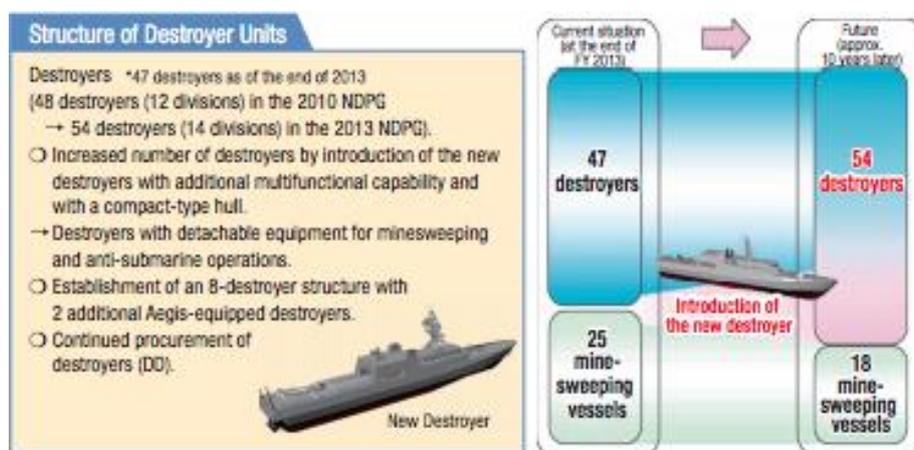
The 2013 NDPG under Abe's administration emphasizes on the security environment challenges, paying particular focus on North Korea and China. At the same time, it also reinforces Japan's status as a maritime state, especially considering its geographical characteristics and belief that it needs to address several issues concerning security challenges and destabilizing ones that are more prominent and severe through reinforcing its defense architecture, and also promoting bilateral and multilateral security cooperation with other countries. As its long-time ally, the U.S. is viewed as vital to Japan's security (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), especially when needing further deterrence from the U.S. when it comes to nuclear weapons threats.

In responding to Japan's security environment challenges, it believes the role of the JSDF is vital to deter and respond to various situations (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015). An emphasis on the sea and airspace surrounding Japan is of the utmost importance, followed by responding to attacks on remote islands, as well as ballistic missile ones, as outlined in Japan's 2015 Defense White Paper. The emphasis on the seas surrounding Japan calls for a maritime supremacy as well as air superiority. Moreover, to respond to ballistic missile

capability of North Korea, Japan specifically mentions its commitment to enhance its readiness, sustainable response, and simultaneous engagement capability (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

Although putting the term 'maritime supremacy' in its 2015 Defense White Paper, Japan uses a combination of both maritime and naval forces to defend its surrounding focus. As maritime and naval supremacy is one of Tokyo's focus in 2013 NDPG (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), the MSDF also undergoes significant changes in terms of its quality and quantity. The MSDF will have an increased number of destroyers to 54 new destroyers that have the capability to detect submarines and minesweeping underwater vehicles (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) (**Figure 4**) to enhance Japan's response capabilities in patrols and to defending Japan's surrounding waters. Moreover, the MSDF architecture is also enhanced to be able to increase its capability in information gathering as well as surveillance and warning activities. As such, Japan has increased another Escort Division in its Omura based in the southwestern territory of Japan – close to China and North Korea. The majority of the MSDF are also concentrated in the south of Japan such as in Kure, Komatsushima, Omura, Sasebo, Kanoha, and Naha.

Figure 4. Japan's New Destroyer and Plans to Increase in 10 Years



Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

Japan also emphasizes its joint operations as part of the Dynamic Joint Defense Force and plans to move its ASDF fighter aircraft units, air warning and control units, as well as air refueling/transport units deployment from the northern part of Japan to its southwestern territory (Figure 3). The

establishment of a new 13<sup>th</sup> squadron and the increased number of squadron stations in Naha to two are also located at south of Japan. One squadron is added to each air warning and control units as well as air refueling/transport units (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

Figure 5. Changes in Major Units of the ASDF



Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

### **Medium-Term Defense Program**

Created based on the NDPG, the MTDP is comprised of six programs to achieve the targeted number of defense buildup. The programs are in line with the aforementioned NDPG (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015) as follow:

1. Emphasize on ISR, intelligence capabilities, response to ballistic missile attacks, and attacks on remote islands;
2. Prioritize development of capabilities to achieve maritime and air supremacy, rapid deployment, preparations for invasions;
3. Efficiently secure defense proficiencies in quality and quantity;
4. Endorse processes to restructuring its personnel management system;
5. Strengthen the Japan-U.S. Alliance to achieve greater deterrence and response capabilities;
6. Obtain greater efficiencies and streamline the defense forces' buildup.

The MTDP, most importantly, highlights the reorganization of JSDF units, with the GSDF having the largest reform since its establishment. To be able to achieve better cooperation in its joint operations amongst units, the GSDF established a Ground Central Command (GCC) and a coast observation unit and area security units to better respond to any attacks on Japan's remote islands, particularly in its southwest region (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

The plan of relocation of the GSDF since 2010 from northern part of Japan to its southern and southwestern territory is

devised to better defend Japan's territorial waters and its surrounding seas as part of its Dynamic Joint Defense Force against incoming security threats, particularly from Japan's neighbors. The new coast observation unit in Yonaguni and area security unit under the GSDF, as well as its 'Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade' (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015), are part of Japan's strategy to defend its territory from incoming attacks that is largely defensive in nature.

### **Revised 'Three Principles on Arms Exports'**

Following the move by his predecessor, Yoshihiko Noda, Shinzo Abe's government further relaxed the 'Three Principles of Arms Exports' on March 2014 and renamed it as 'Three Principles on Defense Equipment Transfers.' The new rules allow for transferring defense-related equipment to foreign governments and to international institutions as long as it is to 'contribute to peace and be helpful for the active promotion of international cooperation' and 'Japan's national security' (Takashi, 2014).

Despite the revision under Abe's administration, however, the re-entry of Japan into the international arms market still faces several setbacks. Its joint arms development plan with Turkey in 2014 failed just three months after the revision under Abe due to concerns of usage of Japanese arms to conflict-ridden states. At the same time, domestically, the new Three Principles on Arms Exports also face scrutiny and criticisms (Knowler, 2016) in light of its failed deals. Successful submarine deal with Australia would have strengthened Abe's bid for Japan's new proactive pacifism, that is, to also

establish or expand Japan's military industry technological coordination and integration with its allies (Harner, 2014). Yet, the deal failed, and the failure was credited to the lack of apt strategy by the government (Knowler, 2016) and the industry that signifies Japan still has more to tackle before it is able to enter the international arms market as a fully-fledged player (Sentaku Magazine, 2016).

### Japan's Overseas Military Operations

The Japanese military currently functions as a self-defense force to Japan and is unable to conduct campaigns overseas outside of the notion of self-defense according to its constitution. However, Japan's reinterpretation of its pacifist Constitution is reflective of a more offensive move of a defensive purpose.

Japan reinterpreted its pacifist Constitution, allowing the JSDF to combat on foreign soil for the first time since its pacifist Constitution was established after World War II (McCurry, 2016). The security law is the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution (Ford, 2015) that also enables Tokyo to aid its allies in overseas conflicts under the term of collective self-defense. The move by the Japanese parliament is said as the biggest shift in Japan's defense policy since World War II (McCurry, 2016). The reinterpretation itself was motivated by the changing security environment of Japan, especially with North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missiles, as well as Chinese naval activities in the Japanese surrounding waters (Fackler and Sanger, 2014).

After the reinterpretation, Japan has been able to use force in the event of an attack on a foreign country that would

also indirectly threaten Japan's survival (Figure 6 and 7). The scope is no longer limited to only an attack on Japan and the United States, but also other Japanese allies (Figure 7).

The reinterpretation of the Japanese pacifist Constitution, especially in terms of the allowance of its military to now conduct overseas operation under the self-defense term, seems to imply Japan's plan to extend its defense to the nearby South China Sea, if there is an escalation of conflict. More is at stake when it involves the Spratly Islands, especially when one of the key threats perceived by Japan, China, is heavily involved in the South China Sea dispute (Dingli et al., 2016) where it is the gateway to the East Asian region.

### Military Modernization

In lieu of Japan's military focus change from its Basic Defense Force (*kibanteki boei ryoko*) that was in place prior to the 2010 NDPG to Dynamic Defense Force (*doeki boei ryoko*) (Fouse, 2011), Tokyo has continuously modernized its military to better equip the Dynamic Defense Force. Japan is considered as one of the most powerful military forces in the globe today (Mapp, 2014). In particular, its MSDF and ASDF are armed with state-of-the-art aircrafts and ships (Mapp, 2014).

The Japanese Ministry of Defense (MOD) has plan to convert its GSDF to be mobile and can be transferred to the East China Sea quickly when crisis occurs by 2023 (Gady, 2015). At the same time, the 2016/2017 shopping list for the JSDF includes amphibious assault vehicles, as well as tanker aircraft, Aegis destroyers, and mobile missile batteries.

Figure 6. Reinterpretation of Japanese Legislations

○ In order to ensure the peace and independence of Japan and the security of Japan and its people, develop the readiness to respond to armed attack situations, etc. by setting such basic matters as basic principles, the responsibilities of national and local governments, and procedures.

[Reference] Armed attack situations, etc.

- Armed attack situation.....A situation where an armed attack occurred, or an imminent danger of an armed attack occurring is clearly acknowledged
- Anticipated armed attack situation.....A situation where an armed attack has yet to occur, but circumstances are growing increasingly strained and an armed attack is anticipated
- Armed attack situations, etc.....Armed attack situation and anticipated armed attack situation

[Outline of the Revision]

○ Responses to "situations of an armed attack against a foreign country resulting in threatening Japan's survival" added

(Purpose) \* "Situations of an armed attack against a foreign country resulting in threatening Japan's survival" added

○ Develop the readiness to respond to armed attack situations, etc. and survival-threatening situations by setting basic principles, the responsibilities of national and local governments, the cooperation of Japanese people and other basic matters concerning responses to armed attack situations, etc. and survival-threatening situations, and also set matters related to the development of legislation necessary to respond to armed attack situations, etc. to contribute to the ensuring of the peace and independence of Japan and the security of Japan and its people.

↑ \*deleted

(Basic Response Plan) \* "When an armed attack situation or a situation of an armed attack against a foreign country resulting in threatening Japan's survival is recognized, reasons why the use of force is necessary should also be described."

○ The Basic Response Plan should describe matters concerning the following:

- Developments in the situation, the confirmation of the situation as an armed attack situation, an anticipated armed attack situation or a survival-threatening situation, and the facts that serve as the premises supporting the confirmation.
- When the situation is confirmed as an armed attack situation or a survival-threatening situation, reasons why there is no other appropriate means available to ensure Japan's survival and protect its people, and use of force is necessary to respond to the situation
- An overall plan to respond to pertinent armed attack situations or survival-threatening situations, and important matters related to the response measures

[Diet Approval]

○ When an order is given to the SDF for defense operations to respond to a "survival-threatening situation," prior Diet approval is required under current provisions (Article 9 of the Armed Attack Situation Response Act).

Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

Figure 7. Reinterpretation of Armed Attack Situations Response Act

○ The "use of force" is newly permitted under the "Three New Conditions" as an unavoidable "measure of self-defense" to "defend Japan," and the SDF's responses to "situations where an armed attack against a foreign country results in threatening Japan's survival" under the Armed Attack Situation Response Act are subject to Article 76 (Defense Operation) and Article 88 (Use of Force) of the SDF Act and positioned as principal missions under Article 3 (Missions of the SDF) of the SDF Act.

(Missions of the SDF) \* "against direct or indirect invasion" deleted

Article 3: The primary mission of the Self-Defense Forces is to defend Japan against direct or indirect invasion in order to keep the peace and independence of Japan and maintain the national security, and the Self-Defense Forces maintain public order as necessary.

(Defense Operation) \* "Situations where an armed attack against a foreign country results in threatening Japan's survival" added

Article 76: The Prime Minister may, in responses to the situations listed below, give the whole or part of the Self-Defense Forces the Defense Operations Order when necessary to defend Japan. In this case, the approval of the Diet must be obtained pursuant to the provisions of Article 9 of the Act on the Peace and Independence of Japan and Maintenance of the Nation and the People's Security in Armed Attack Situations etc. and Situations where an armed attack against a foreign country results in threatening Japan's Survival (Act No. 79 of 2003).

- 1 A situation where an armed attack against Japan from the outside occurs, or a situation where imminent danger of an armed attack against Japan from the outside occurring is clearly perceived
- 2 A situation where an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness

(Use of Force under Defense Operations) \* No revision

Article 88: The SDF being given the Defense Operations Order pursuant to the provisions of the paragraph 1 of Article 76, may use necessary force to defend Japan.

- 2 In the use of force in the preceding paragraph, international law and practices shall be respected when the use of force is reliant thereupon and the use of force shall not exceed the limit judged to be reasonably necessary in light of the situation.

○ Aside from the above, a variety of authorities, etc. and special measures necessary for SDF operations are provided for. However, in situations where an armed attack against a foreign country results in threatening Japan's survival, measures that are necessary in response to direct armed attacks against Japan and physical damage are not applicable.

(Examples of application) Organization of special units, Defense call-up of SDF Personnel and SDF Ready Reserve Personnel, etc.

(Examples of non-application) Establishment of defense facilities, Maintenance of public order, emergency passage, appropriation of supplies, orders to perform duties, etc.

Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

On April 2013, the Japanese Cabinet approved the Basic Plan on Ocean Policy – an initiative to ensure security of the oceans through:

“reinforcement of the wide-range routine system of surveillance, systematic improvement of warships, aircraft and other vehicles, strengthening of the system of collaboration between the SDF and Japan Coast Guard, and development of a system of collaboration to ensure order and safety on the coasts and isolated islands.” (Japan’s 2015 Defense White Paper)

Japan has also increased its defense budget and military spending as of recent years. Japan has increased its military expenditure in 2015 (**Table 3**), which further highlights and increases threats from North Korea and China (SIPRI, 2016). Furthermore, in August 2016, Abe’s administration has further requested for another increase in spending for the JSDF, particularly to expand Tokyo’s missile defenses (Rich, 2016).

**Table 3. Japan’s Defense Budget Comparison, 2014 and 2015**

(100 million)

Category	FY2014	FY2015	FY2015	
			Fiscal YOY growth (▲indicates negative growth)	
Annual expenditure (note)	47,838	48,221	383	(0.8%)
Personnel and food provisions	20,930	21,121	192	(0.9%)
Expenses Material expenses	26,909	27,100	192	(0.7%)
Future obligation (note)	33,594	39,530	5,936	(17.7%)
New contracts	19,465	22,998	3,534	(18.2%)
Existing contracts	14,129	16,532	2,403	(17.0%)

Notes: Does not include SACD-related expenses, U.S. Forces realignment-related expenses (portion meant to reduce the burden on the local community), or expenses associated with the acquisition of new government aircraft based on “The Policy Concerning Government Aircraft” (August 7, 2013 decision by the Review Committee on Government Aircraft). If these are included, the figures are 4,884.8 billion yen for FY2014 and 4,980.1 billion yen for FY2015; and for future obligation, 3,630.4 billion yen for FY2014 and 4,363.5 billion yen for FY2015.

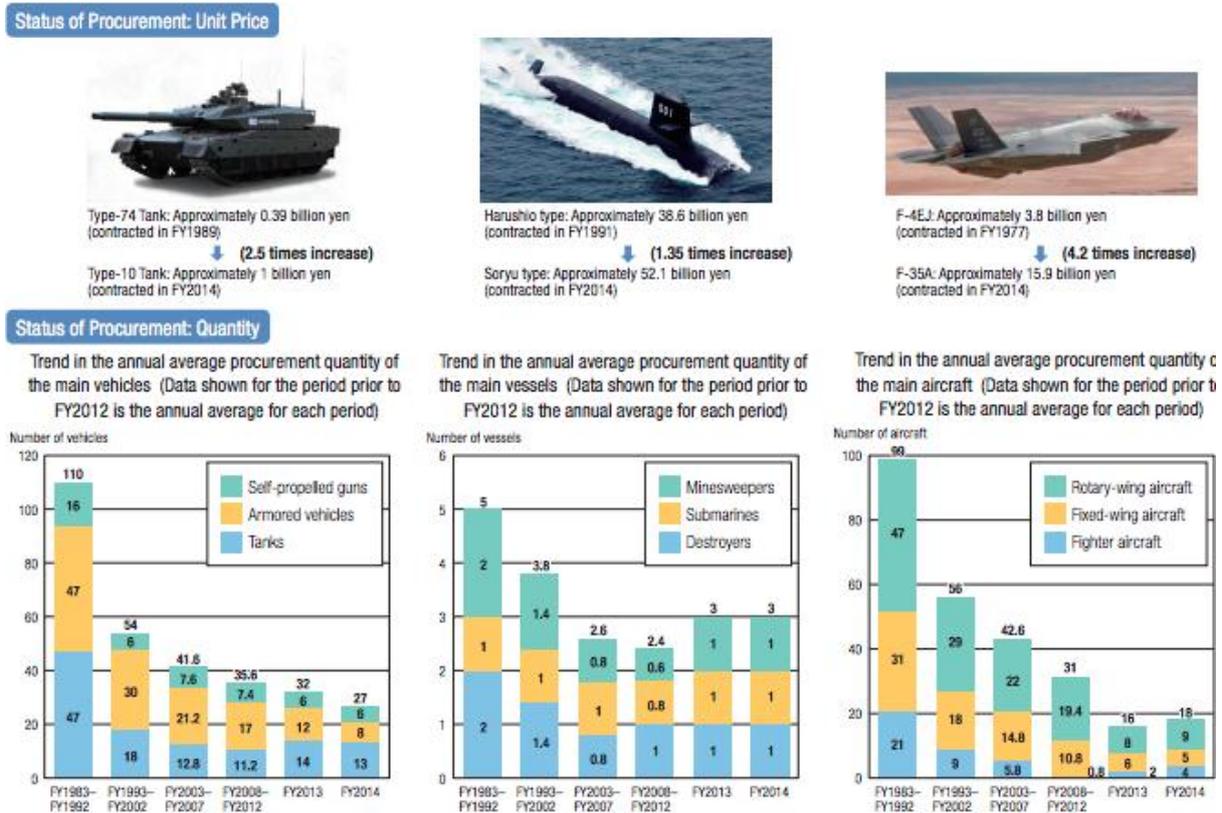
Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

The new proposal is budgeted at \$50.2 billion, another increase of Japan’s military spending for the past five years (Gady, 2015). The new proposal is also a 2.3 per cent increase in budget as compared to the year prior (Rich, 2016). As shown in **Table 3**, there is quite a significant increase from fiscal year 2014 to 2015. The increase in Japan’s defense budget is expected to create more

amphibious warfare capabilities, as well as a lighter Dynamic Joint JSDF (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015).

As shown in **Figure 8**, Japan has increased its procurements on tanks, vessels, as well as aircrafts. The MOD has increased the number of all three military vehicles in response to the growing security risks in Japan’s regional environment.

**Figure 8. Current Status of the Unit Price and Acquisition Quantity of Defense Equipment**



Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

The MSDF are equipped with 50 modern guided missile destroyers, as well as the general-purpose frigates on par with the U.S. Navy. These sophisticated guided missile destroyers have the capability of anti-ballistic missile. **Figure 8** has also shown Tokyo’s plan to continue to increase its destroyers for the next ten years. A large helicopter carrier, dubbed as a destroyer by the Japanese, was launched in August 2013 by the MSDF to be able to better project its power.

Moreover, the ASDF is also equipped with over 300 fourth-generation

combat aircraft, and is planned to further purchase the F-35 multirole aircrafts. The F-35 multirole aircrafts are connected into a state-of-the-art command and control system network that also includes the Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACs) aircrafts. Furthermore, Japan has also been extensively constructing its anti-aircraft missile system that would also have the anti-ballistic missile proficiency according to the PAC-3 missile. **Table 4** below shows other plans for Japan’s acquisition of new state-of-the-art aircrafts, naval vessels, and other military equipment.

**Table 4. Japan's Plans for Its Military Modernization**

Ensure security of the sea and airspace surrounding Japan	Acquire fixed-wing patrol aircraft (P-1), acquire patrol helicopters (SH-60K), construct a submarine, acquire new airborne early-warning aircraft (E-2D) and acquire part of the Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (Global Hawk) system, etc.
Response to attacks on remote islands	Deploy a coast observation unit to cover Yonaguni Island, acquire fighter (F-35A), newly establish the 9th Air Wing due to two squadrons added to the fighter aircraft units at Naha Air Base, conduct a study towards the construction of a new destroyer, acquire V-22 Ospreys, acquire an amphibious vehicle (AAV7), upgrade the Osumi-class LST in order to enhance its transport capability in amphibious operations, conduct research to discuss the purpose of multi-functional vessels, promote initiatives such as PFI programs with respect to the use of the private sector maritime transport, etc.
Response to ballistic missile attacks	Construct an aegis-equipped destroyer, conduct Japan-U.S. cooperative development of advanced ballistic missile interceptor (SM-3 Block IIA), recertify PAC-3 missiles, develop infrastructure for the PAC-3 unit deployment in Ichigaya, etc.
Response in outer space	Study on the specifications of the capabilities of the Space Surveillance system, empirical research on dual-wavelength infrared sensor technology in outer space, utilize the Advanced Land Observing Satellite-2 "DAICHI-2" (ALOS-2), etc.
Response in cyber space	Strengthen functions for the cyber exercises environment (cyber range), implement initiatives to introduce serious games (educational games) as a form of practical educational material and educational program etc.
Response to large-scale disasters	Maintain and strengthen functions of camps and bases that will serve as hubs during a disaster, carry out training on large-scale and special disasters, improve alternative functions in case the Ichigaya building becomes damaged due to a disaster, acquire double arm construction machines, etc.
Strengthening intelligence capabilities	Enhance HUMINT gathering capabilities, enhance research capabilities in relation to public information gathering through the analysis of big data, strengthen the system related to Defense Attachés, etc.

Source: Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2015

Japan has also focused on modernizing its southern and western hemispheres, as evidenced in Japan's Interim Defense Review in July 2013 (Mapp, 2014). Japan planned to obtain military capabilities best for defense, especially in terms of striking down enemy forces, missile forces in their home bases, increase in surveillance capability, amphibious forces, and brand new naval vessels. Moreover, the focus is on improving the Japanese capability in interception scrambles by ASDF aircraft to incoming Chinese aircrafts into Japan's airspace.

The focus on modernizing the southwestern parts of Japan has been in the picture since as early as 2011, under Prime Minister Naoto Kan and then followed by Yoshihiko Noda. The MTDP for fiscal year 2011-2015 highlights on restructuring Japan's armed forces in all three branches where there will be relocation of all three to Japan's southwestern parts. The ASDF's defense capabilities were planned to be upgraded, and its F-4 fighter aircrafts were to be

replaced with the fifth-generation ones. Moreover, the budget for Japan Coast Guard (JCG) was also increased to buy more ships and jets, while the navy would receive modern Aegis destroyers made by the U.S. Other planned purchases were 21 patrol ships, seven reconnaissance jets, and addition of its AEGIS destroyers from four to six.

#### **Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan's Shinzo Abe: Revolutionary Enough?**

During his visit to Washington in February 2013, then newly-elected Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proclaimed that "Japan is back" (Sakaki, 2015). As a right-wing nationalist, Abe had been criticized for attempting to move away from the traditional aspects of Japanese security policy (Sakaki, 2015) to proactive pacifism. The introduction of a NSC and SCC, the relaxation of the 'Three Principles of Arms Exports,' and the reinterpretation of Japan's constitution on its JSDF have given more concerns to its East Asian neighbors (Sakaki, 2015).

At the first glance, Abe's administration seems to be radical in shifting Japan's direction from a pacifist country to proactive pacifism. Various documents under the Abe administration have continuously used the term of 'Proactive Contribution to Peace,' namely the 2014 NDPG, which states that Japan will achieve as such by "proactively securing peace, stability and prosperity of the international community while achieving its own security as well as peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region by

expanding and deepening cooperative relationships with other countries" (Ministry of Defense, Japan, 2014). However, the change itself is not out of the ordinary when we observe the security environment and the geopolitics surrounding Japan in the past six years. Abe's two predecessors, Naoto Kan and Yoshihiko Noda of the DPJ, have built upon the foundations to the more prominent shifts done by Abe's administration towards Japan's military normalization process.

**Table 5. The Shift and Continuity of the Japanese Defense Policy**

	Naoto Kan (DPJ)	Yoshihiko Noda (DPJ)	Shinzo Abe (LDP)
NDPG	✓		✓
Three Principles on Arms Exports		✓	✓
NSC			✓
MTDP			✓
Article 9			✓

As shown in **Table 5** above, Naoto Kan pioneered the modified concept of NDPG, which altered the concept of the previous Basic Defense Force to Dynamic Defense Force. Shinzo Abe continued this concept in the 2014 NDPG and expanded it with the additions of NSC and MTDP to create a more comprehensive Japanese defense policy. Furthermore, Abe also further revised the initial reinterpretation of the Three Principles on Arms Export under Noda's administration. The subsequent additions by Abe are indicative of a shift to 'proactive pacifism.'

The focus on maritime and naval activities is reflective of Japan's geography and geopolitics of the region. Both North Korea and China pose great threats to Japan's national security. The increase in threat levels of its strategic environment has resulted in measures to counter the

security challenges of its region since the era of Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda.

Abe seeks to protect Japan's national security from threats in the region, as well as to better increase Japanese influence for the nation's advantage. Abe has also established a more substantial shift towards Japanese military normalization as compared to his predecessors, namely, the establishment of the NSC and the NSS, as well as the reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution. As such, defense reforms under Abe's administration are notable, but not radical and are still limited under its 'self-defense' umbrella.

### **Conclusion**

Japanese defense policy is continuous, but also evolving: it responds to its strategic environment but ultimately still follows by its maritime focus. With

the rise of China and its maritime ambitions and expansion, as well as North Korea's threats of ballistic missiles and nuclear arsenals, Japan has to shift its defense policy to protect its national security from external threats.

What the last three Prime Ministers of Japan – Naoto Kan, Yoshihiko Noda, and Shinzo Abe – have done are all a combined effort that takes years to come into fruition to address Japan's security issues. Ultimately, when considering Japan's security environment, the course of actions taken by Japan is nothing out of the ordinary. Whilst reorganizing its military and reinterpreting its Article 9 of its pacifist Constitution, Japan still abides by its pacifist Constitution – its military is still under the context for peace and self-defense only and are still a far cry from a normal military albeit being dubbed under a new name, the Proactive Pacifism under Abe's administration.

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