

Japanese Constitutional Change and the Trilateral Security Dialogue

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日本国憲法改正への動きと日米豪閣僚級戦略対話

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Abstract :

Australia and Japan both have the United States (US) as their primary ally ; all three countries have been developing closer defence ties through the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD) series of diplomatic meetings. Under the Abe Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government elected in 2012, Japan has been moving towards potential changes to its constitution, which would allow greater cooperation by its Self-Defense Forces (SDF), with its allies. Following the 2013 Upper House elections, the LDP has now secured a majority in both houses of the Diet, but still not large enough yet to readily change the constitution. Nevertheless, the Abe government has recently released its new national security strategy, which is increasing the size and operational capability of the SDF, and is overtly aimed at deterring the greater military activity of China in the region, particularly over the disputed Senkaku Islands (claimed as the Diayous by China), in the East China Sea. This could have profound implications for regional and international stability. Greater use of the region's diplomatic structures, such as APEC and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), could complement more active diplomacy between the major powers of the region, particularly the US, China, and Japan, which is required in order to avoid disputes escalating into armed conflict.

要旨：オーストラリアと日本の両国は、アメリカ合衆国を主要な同盟国としている。この3カ国は、一連の外交協議を重ねた日米豪閣僚級戦略対話（TSD）を通して、より密接な防衛協力関係を築いている。2012年に選出された自由民主党安倍内閣の下、日本は、憲法改正の可能性に向けて動いているが、このことは、自衛隊によるこれらの同盟国とのより大きな協力体制につながっていくことになる。2013年の参議院選後、自由民主党は、現在国会両院において過半数を確保しているが、憲法改正が容易に行われるのに十分な数にはまだ達していない。しかしながら、安倍内閣は、最近、自衛隊とその機動能力を拡大させるという新しい国家安全保障戦略を打ち出したが、これらは、明らかに東シナ海の領域内で活発化している中国の軍事行為、特に、尖閣諸島（中国称：釣魚台群島）問題を阻止するのが目的とされている。このことは、地域や国際社会の安定にも深い影響をもたらす可能性がある。APEC や ASEAN 地域フォーラム（ARF）などの地域外交組織のより大きな関与が、アメリカ合衆国、中国や日本などの地域の大国間の積極外交を補足する役割をにない、問題が武力紛争に拡大していくのを回避するために必要とされる。

Key words : Japanese Politics, Japanese Foreign Policy, Asia-Pacific Security

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Introduction

In December 2012, the conservative LDP regained power in Japan after a three-year hiatus, winning the Lower House elections for the Japanese parliament (known as the Diet). This article will outline how the recent electoral success of the LDP has enabled Japan to continue a more active use of the SDF, involving a higher level of operational cooperation with its allies ; primarily the US, but also with other countries with close ties to Japan, particularly Australia. Their defence relationship has become more formalised, through the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD). Returning to serve as Prime Minister for a second time, Shinzo Abe has engaged in robust diplomacy, as well as economic policy reform popularly termed ‘Abenomics’. The political success of the Abe government was confirmed with a following victory in the July 2013 elections for the Upper House of the Diet. In this election, the LDP secured a simple majority, but not a two-thirds majority ; therefore, the Abe LDP government will not be able to easily pass legislation enabling changes to the constitution at present. The LDP’s policy platform nevertheless advocates a number of potential constitutional changes, should any such proposals to do so manage to be eventually passed with a simple majority by the public at a referendum. The most controversial of these is to alter Article 9, the ‘pacifist clause’ of the constitution, which has constrained Japan’s international use of force since its defeat in the Second World War. Even before any such changes have been proposed, among various security-related bills already passed, the Abe government’s new national security strategy envisions a more assertive role for the SDF. However, the diplomatic infrastructure of the region, including the TSD, has so far proved unable to ease worsening tensions in the Asia-Pacific over territorial disputes and hegemonic competition, especially with China.

The Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD)

Even without a direct, formal change to the constitution, the Abe LDP government has already implemented a more activist defence and foreign policy ; this follows the trend embarked upon by previous administrations since the 1990s, allowing a wider deployment of the Japanese SDF. This has implications for a strategic development which has received relatively little attention in the Asia-Pacific region, namely the increasing security cooperation between Australia and Japan. This has entrenched the deepening bilateral relations between the two countries, as Australia becomes an important military, as well as political and economic partner with Japan (Anno, 2011 : 28).

The security relationship between Australia and Japan has steadily grown over the past two decades, to the extent that Japan is now Australia’s second-closest security partner, after the US. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) and JSDF have operated together in UN peacekeeping operations (PKOs), in Cambodia in 1993, in East Timor from 1999 ; and also in Iraq, in 2004–2006. Joint naval exercises have increased, and both navies have cooperated in multinational antipiracy operations in the Indian Ocean since 2009. More covertly, intelligence cooperation is believed to be increasing. Confirming the direction of these closer security ties, the Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation was signed in 2007, upgraded to the treaty-level Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), in 2010 (Cook & Wilkins, 2011).

The consolidation of security relations between the common allies emerged with the commencement of the TSD, held between the US, Japan and Australia. The TSD was first held at a sen-

ior bureaucratic official level in 2002, and was upgraded to ministerial level from 2006, with a '2 + 2' meeting of the three members' foreign and defense ministers (Burke, 2008 : 152–153). A formal trilateral military alliance could therefore seem to be a logical progression. While this proposal might seem to be advantageous from a 'realist' perspective, at present there seems little likelihood of such a development. For all practical defense cooperation purposes, there is no need for a formal trilateral alliance to carry out mutual operations, as evidenced in the recent history of joint military exercises and deployments held among the three countries (Sato, 2010 : 154–162).

While a trilateral alliance would be an overt assertion of the already existing strong relations among the three states, it would also have the diplomatic effect of generating further resentment from China, which is already highly sensitive and suspicious about the USA's strategic redeployments in the Pacific. For example, China has voiced firm disapproval of the US posting its forces into increased training rotations in northern Australia (Stars & Stripes, 2012). China would certainly view a new trilateral military alliance as further proof of a 'containment' strategy being waged against it. On balance therefore, there would seem to be little practical gain, but potentially plenty of diplomatic strife if an 'AJUS' (Australia-Japan-US) military alliance was formally pursued.

Such a trilateral alliance would also do little to settle contentious ongoing regional issues, such as the maritime territorial disputes in the South China Sea. China claims the entire area, which is contested by varying claims from Vietnam, Malaysia, the Philippines, Brunei, and Taiwan (LeVine, 2012). While neither Australia nor Japan has any direct part in these controversies, they do share a very real interest in ensuring the shipping lanes of the South China Sea, through which most trade and energy supplies flow, are not disrupted by any deterioration of stability in the Western Pacific (Chye, 2012 : 113–118).

Japan's Increasing Defense Activity

If such tensions deteriorate, there is likely to be continual implicit encouragement of Japan by the US to change Article 9 of the Constitution, which restricts the use of military force overseas, and so further allow expanded use of the SDF (Kersten, 2011 : 8). This has already been taking place, seen in : SDF deployment to Iraq in 2004–2006 (largely under the protection of Australian military forces) ; logistical support by the SDF for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan from 2001 ; and since 2009, ongoing participation by the SDF in international anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa (Heazel, 2009 : 466–468). This has been extended to a support base being established by the SDF in Djibouti in 2011, its first such overseas base since the Second World War (Martin, 2011). After taking office in 2009, the social-democratic Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) government followed the overall foreign and defence policy trend of previous LDP administrations, of a more assertive use of the SDF, encouraged by its core alliance partner the US. This has been driven by a more challenging strategic position for Japan in the 21st century, as China increases its economic, and subsequently military strength, and North Korea remains continually belligerent (Green, 2011 : 102–103).

In the wake of the March 11 2011 Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear disaster, a traumatized Japan found even greater motivation to maintain its alliance with the USA, and underwrite its national security. This endures, despite occasional difficulties such as the economic cost of burden sharing of defence expenditure. The deployment of the controversial Osprey transport aircraft, and

criminal attacks on locals by US military personnel have seen ongoing local protests over the US military presence in Okinawa (The Mainichi, 2012). The US is hoping to defuse these tensions to an extent, with plans to relocate 9,000 troops away from Okinawa to other Pacific locations, including Guam and Australia. However, the US will maintain its forces in Okinawa and Japan overall, including the contested Futenma air base ; so political opposition and resentment from the Okinawan community towards the US military presence is not set to end (Mitchell, 2012).

However, the image of both the SDF and the US military was boosted in the response to the 2011 Tohoku disaster, which was generally considered to be prompt and efficient. SDF personnel took a leading role in grim searches for tsunami victims, provided medical assistance and logistical support, and assisted in containing the nuclear crisis at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, among many other aspects of disaster assistance and recovery. Over 100,000 SDF personnel were mobilized, its largest ever deployment on active service. Over 24,000 US military personnel, 24 US warships and 189 aircraft were also immediately dispatched following the disaster, in *Operation Tomodachi* (Friend) (IISS, 2012 : 221).

During the failed North Korean rocket test in April 2012, the SDF was placed on alert, deploying its PAC-3 Patriot anti-ballistic missile (ABM) systems in Okinawa, and mobilising SDF forces in Japan's other southern islands (Asahi Shimbun, 2012). This confirmed a doctrinal shift following the National Defence Program Guidelines (NDPG) announced by the DPJ government in 2010, where Japan was already departing from its Cold War strategy of largely static anti-Soviet deterrence, to a more flexible, dynamic 'western-facing' deployment of the SDF. Japan is still yet to resolve its long-running territorial dispute with Russia over the Kurile Islands (Northern Territories), although there are signs that negotiations towards finally settling a Russia-Japan Peace Treaty may finally be advanced (IISS, 2012 : 220–222).

In light of these developments, a conventional arms race is already underway in the region, especially in maritime force projection (Norton-Taylor, 2012). The buildup in naval and air power, missile technology, and numbers of nuclear weapons by China is perceived as a great long-term strategic threat by Japan. Thus motivated, Japan is already developing a theatre ballistic missile defence system (TBMD), in cooperation with the US (Togo, 2010 : 41–48).

Recent Japanese Politics and Constitutional Change

The LDP's return to power on December 16, 2012 was a decisive defeat of the DPJ, led at the time by Prime Minister Yoshihiko Noda. The DPJ had defeated the LDP only as recently as 2009 ; however, widespread public disillusionment with the DPJ soon set in, due to its leadership instability, with a new Prime Minister in each year of its government ; a continual sluggish economy, and most traumatically, dealing with the impact of the 2011 Tohoku disaster (Shinoda, 2013 : 255–258). The DPJ's numbers in the lower house collapsed from 230 to 57 seats ; there was no great initial enthusiasm for the new LDP government though, reflected in the record low voter turnout of 59%, 10% lower than for the 2009 election (Fackler, 2012). The dismal results for the DPJ were repeated in the Tokyo municipal elections in June 2013, where the Japanese Communist Party (JCP) even outpolled the DPJ (Warnock, 2013).

Shinzo Abe's return to power was a rare event in Japanese politics, having stepped down from a previous term as Prime Minister during the previous term of the LDP government. He had pre-

sided for about a year during 2006–07, before resigning due to ‘illness’ – although a series of government scandals and poor economic performance was widely considered the true reason. His remarkable political comeback, having won a LDP leadership contest in 2012 during its previous period in opposition, has enabled Abe to embark upon the LDP’s economic growth strategy plan, strongly tied to his personal leadership. Popularly termed ‘Abenomics’, it comprises ‘three arrows’ : quantitative easing ; stimulus spending ; and a complex series of structural economic reforms, including a consumption tax increase, labour market and industry deregulation, and participation in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations. Targets for ‘Abenomics’ include sustainable inflation and growth rates of 2% each by 2015 (Tepperman, 2013).

The Upper House election held on July 21, 2013 continued to build on the LDP’s political fortunes ; it secured a comfortable majority, winning 76 of the 121 available seats with its traditional governing coalition partner, the New Komeito Party (NKP). The July election saw the continuing decline of the DPJ, losing 27 seats, being too soon for any recovery from its poor image in the wake of the 2012 defeat. Of the other minor parties, only the JCP and the nationalist Japan Restoration Party (JRP) managed to increase their (low) numbers. Other small parties, such as the neoliberal Your Party (YP), the populist People’s Life Party (PLP) (led by former LDP and DPJ powerbroker and defector Ichiro Ozawa), and the left-leaning Social Democratic Party (SDP) and *Midori no Kaze* (Green Wind) performed poorly, and so remained marginal, crowded out by the LDP’s sweeping victory (The Japan Times, 2013 a). Despite its electoral success, the LDP was still not able to achieve its ultimate desired goal of a two-thirds majority in its own right ; although the LDP will still control all standing committees of the Diet. Voter turnout was even lower than in 2012 though, at only 53% (The Economist, 2013).

Shinzo Abe and the LDP have long held a policy platform of more readily enabling changes to the constitution, drafted during the post-war US occupation. The constitution has never been altered, which the LDP argues shows its reform process is too sclerotic ; hence the need to allow easier change, so governments can adapt policies and legislation for changing national circumstances. This aim was pursued by Abe in his first administration in 2006–2007 ; a bill was passed to ease the requirements for the public referendum which has to be held to confirm any vote in the Diet to change the constitution. Now, only a simple majority is required to pass a referendum, rather than the previous two-thirds majority (Kersten, 2012 : 37).

However, under Article 96 of the Constitution, a two-thirds majority vote is still required in both Houses of the Diet to approve any such referendum for constitutional change. Once Article 96 is altered, the barrier would be lowered for further changes in other areas of the constitution, most notably Article 9 (Hook, 2012 : 526). Since the 2013 election, a two-thirds majority vote led by the LDP is now actually possible, if there is sufficient cooperation from minor parties, particularly the YP and JRP, which are also generally in favour of constitutional change (although Your Party has been split by a recent series of defections) (Yomiuri Shimbun, 2013).

Crucially through, the more pacifist-leaning NKP remains opposed ; so it remains the vital voting bloc likely to prevent revision of the constitution, frustrating the ambitions of the LDP into the intermediate future. The other possibility for the LDP to achieve the numbers required would be if the demoralised DPJ, which suffered a series of defections in the lead-up to the 2012 election, splits even further, and a bloc of its more conservative-aligned members supports the LDP in sufficient

numbers. However, the DPJ under its post-election leadership of Banri Kaieda, is unlikely to yield to such pressure from the LDP, if it ever hopes to rebuild its electoral fortunes (Sieg, 2013).

Recent Development in Japanese Domestic Security Policy

Abe and the LDP nonetheless presently enjoys a commanding position of firm domestic political dominance, as the opposition parties' numbers in both houses of the Diet are too low to present any major legislative impediment. This has been amply demonstrated in the Diet session held after the July election, where legislation was recently passed by the LDP to establish Japan's first National Security Council (NSC) and National Security Bureau (NSB), modelled on the NSC of the USA, to better coordinate responses to potential security crises (Kuromi and Tajima, 2013).

More controversial has been a bill passed to strengthen the protection of 'state secrets', amid protests by opposition Diet members. There are now harsher penalties for the prosecution of public servants who leak information, and for journalists who 'encourage' and publish such leaks. The LDP government has justified stronger protection of state secrets on the grounds it will ensure greater intelligence cooperation with Japan's allies, particularly the USA, and strengthen national security overall, in light of the recent international whistleblowing cases of Edward Snowden, Chelsea Manning, and Julian Assange's Wikileaks organization (BBC, 2013).

Public protests were held against the state secrets bill by human rights groups, lawyers, media outlets, authors and academics, concerned over the danger that freedom of expression may be eroded. Critics of the bill consider there was a lack of consultation and proper scrutiny of the legislation, effectively being 'railroaded' through the Diet. The Abe government has been vague about which criteria of information could be considered state secrets, with potential for restrictions to be expanded beyond areas such as defence, foreign affairs, espionage and intelligence. This could mean anti-nuclear protesters, and those opposing the greater international use of force by Japan could find themselves in breach of the law in future (McDonnell, 2013).

Criticism of government policies and handling of crises such as the Fukushima nuclear disaster could also possibly face restrictions, reducing government accountability and transparency overall. Human rights advocates also fear other potential changes on the LDP's constitutional reform agenda, including restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly, if such activities and associations 'harm . . . public order' (Jones, 2013). Following the passage of the state security laws, Abe suffered a 10.3% drop in opinion poll approval ratings, admitting he could have explained its implementation better – but with a recent approval rate of 47.6% for his Cabinet, this remains still far ahead of previous DPJ Cabinets, which generally struggled to get above 20% (Radio Australia, 2013).

More virulent nationalism among LDP politicians is also being expressed, seen in proposals for the 'government viewpoint' to be presented in school history textbooks, resurrecting long-running controversy about the treatment of Japan's wartime history (The Asahi Shimbun, 2013 a). Visits by LDP members to the controversial Yasukuni shrine, which honours Japan's war dead, including war criminals, have also continued. Such events strongly offend neighbouring states in the region, especially China and Korea, creating difficulties in improving relations with those countries ; however, these demonstrations of nationalism pander to the conservative support base of the LDP, as it projects an image of assertiveness (McCurry, 2013).

Recent Developments in Japanese Foreign and Defence Policy

Apart from securing the LDP's domestic fortunes, Abe is dependent on the success of Abenomics to provide the required economic and political capital to fulfil his nationalistic ambitions of restoring Japan as a premier geostrategic nation in East Asia. The SDF is already one of the best-equipped and most well-trained modern armed forces, at a strength of nearly 250,000, including large numbers of warships and aircraft, making it the third most powerful military force in the region, after the USA and China, and the fifth largest defence budget, again after the US (\$682 billion in 2012) and China (\$166 billion). A less noted component of Abenomics was an initial 3% increase in defence spending to ¥4.89 trillion for FY 2013, the first increase in Japanese defence spending in eleven years, and the highest amount of spending for 22 years. This increase has mainly been driven by the territorial tensions with China over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, which steadily deteriorated after the previous DPJ government felt driven to fully 'nationalise' ownership of the islands in October 2012. Concerns have also increased over North Korea testing its nuclear warheads and ballistic missiles, which prompted the SDF to go on alert on several occasions during 2012–13 (IISS, 2013 : 266–269, 306–309).

As well increasing military spending, the Abe government is changing the operational doctrine of the SDF. This includes expanding the size of the Coast Guard and Maritime SDF (MSDF), seen in the recent launch of its latest helicopter carrier, the largest warship acquired by the MSDF in the post-war period, to be operational by 2015 (Lendon, 2013). A new security cooperation agreement signed between the US and Japan has authorised the deployment of US surveillance drones based in Japan. Further to this, large-scale amphibious landing joint exercises are being carried out between the SDF and US forces, both in the US and Japan (Mie and Aoki, 2013).

These developments are part of the long-term aim of Abe and the LDP ; to alter Article 9, officially convert the SDF into the 'National Defence Forces', and allow participation in 'collective self-defence' – especially cooperation in military operations with the US, beyond the immediate defence of Japanese territory. This would greatly transform the use of the SDF beyond previous interpretations of the constitution, which allowed SDF participation in UN peacekeeping operations, UN-authorised anti-piracy operations, and 'non-combat' operations in support of the US during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Vosse, 2012 : 161).

The case for this far-reaching change of the use of force by Japan has been justified by Abe and the LDP as finally 'normalising' Japan's defence and foreign policy, allowing Japan to strengthen its national security in a more volatile and strategically competitive region. Japan would thus be enabled to make a greater contribution to international peace and stability, by allowing it to give full assistance to its allies in collective self-defence operations, principally with the US, as allowed in international law, under the UN Charter (Kitaoka, 2013 : 5–7).

As previously outlined though, the LDP does not presently have the numbers in the Diet to effect constitutional change. It is also questionable whether a referendum to overturn Article 9 would be passed by the public ; a strong pacifist strain endures amongst much of the Japanese public, particularly in the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and in areas enduring the burden of hosting US military bases, principally Okinawa (Clausen, 2013). The Abe government has therefore already taken practical steps to prepare for such a contingency, appointing a new head of the Cabinet Legis-

lation Bureau, with the purpose of potentially reinterpreting Article 9, to allow participation in collective self-defence. Since full constitutional change is unlikely in the short-term, existing legislative and legalistic means are therefore necessary for the LDP to achieve its goals of a more active role for the SDF (The Japan Times, 2013 b). However, this more assertive foreign policy direction of the Abe government has already worsened relations with China and the Koreans, who view the LDP policy as a return to nationalistic militarism. Abolishing the pacifist clause of Article 9 would inevitably ratchet up tensions even further, and so be very costly diplomatically (Wallace, 2013 : 504–509).

Abe has already attempted to pre-empt this, in his foreign policy termed ‘proactive pacifism’. This has been personally expressed through his high pace of diplomatic activity during his first year in office. Abe has completed a hectic schedule of visiting all ASEAN member states within his first year of office, diplomatically outflanking China’s influence in the region, with higher levels of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) pledged by Japan. This was recently demonstrated in Japan’s swift response to typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, which saw the largest postwar overseas deployment of the SDF (Ordaniel, 2013).

The Trilateral Security Dialogue and Recent Regional Diplomacy

Abe has further developed the already deepening security ties with Australia, which has Japan as its second-largest export market. Abe had his first official meeting with the new conservative Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott at the 2013 ASEAN/East Asia Summit (EAS) in Brunei, where Abbott declared Japan was Australia’s ‘closest friend in Asia’. Abbott offered Abe the rare privilege of addressing the Australian parliament on his next visit, and aimed to conclude a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Japan within a year. A growing level of defence cooperation, including a higher tempo of military exercises was also confirmed in the TSD talks held on the sidelines of the 2013 APEC summit in Indonesia (Kenny, 2013).

However, the process for another series of trilateral meetings between Japan, South Korea and China seems to have broken down, as regional tensions in Northeast Asia worsen. This diplomatic standoff further intensified after media statements by Abe at the 2013 annual review of the SDF, reiterating that Japan has to increase its defence preparedness in order to secure itself from threats, and to allow Japan to play a more active role in international security. Abe directly warned China that Japan would not allow any changes to be made by force to the territorial status quo of the region. In doing so, Abe raised the prospect of Chinese drones being shot down if they enter Japanese territory ; China angrily responded, stating any such action would be an act of war (The Japan Times, 2013 c).

Relations between China and Japan have only worsened since, after China’s declaration of an ‘Air Defence Identification Zone’ (ADIZ), incorporating the Senkakus/Diaoyus. Claimed to be in response to Abe’s SDF review rhetoric, this is a highly dangerous escalation of tensions. As well as sparking strong diplomatic protests from Japan, the US and Australia, China’s ADIZ has raised concerns among Taiwan and South Korea. The US reiterated its support for Japan, stating that while it (like Australia) does not have a formal position on the international legality of the dispute, America regards the Senkakus as Japanese-administered territory ; their defence is subsequently covered by the US-Japan Security Treaty (US Department of Defense, 2013).

US aircraft have already joined the SDF in sending patrols into the Chinese ADIZ to reinforce this point, and visits by US Vice-President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry to the region have reasserted long-standing support for Japan. Australia has also backed Japan, although this led to some rather undiplomatic public criticism of Australian Foreign Minister Julie Bishop by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, on her recent visit to China (Ryan, 2013). By contrast, South Korea has expanded its own ADIZ, over which the US and Japan have not expressed any concern. However, the South Korean National Assembly has passed a resolution opposing any change to Japan's policy on collective self-defence (Welch, 2013).

These concerning developments demonstrate the urgent need for more active regional diplomacy to reduce tensions, to finally restore the diplomatic momentum required to ultimately resolve the territorial disputes China has with its ASEAN neighbours in the South China Sea, as well as with Japan (Marcus, 2013). Gesturing towards diplomatic reconciliation, Abe has proposed a summit with China, and joint naval exercises with South Korea, despite the rivalry between the two countries over the Takeshima/Dokdo Islands. Abe's diplomatic overtures towards ASEAN has continued though, as Japan hosted its 40th anniversary commemorative summit with ASEAN, where a ¥2 trillion ODA assistance package from Japan to ASEAN was announced ; a declaration supporting freedom of the use of the air and seas was also made, making a direct diplomatic stance against China (Lies and Takenaka, 2013).

Japan's National Security Strategy

Abe's Cabinet has confirmed the more active direction of Japan's foreign and security policy, announcing a comprehensive national security strategy on December 17, the latest National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). It reinforces Abe's 'proactive pacifism' foreign policy, where Japan can contribute more actively to 'the international peace and stability of the international community'. The 2013 NDPG outlines a 5% increase in defence spending, to ¥24.7 trillion (US\$240 billion) from 2014 to 2019 (The Japan Times, 2013 d).

In a concept termed the 'Dynamic Joint Defense Force', there will be redeployment of SDF forces to the south, including an extra F-15 fighter squadron based in Okinawa, and more main battle tanks (MBTs) and artillery vehicles (mobile howitzers and rocket launchers) redeployed from the main island of Honshu to Hokkaido and Kyushu (although both sets of weapons systems will be reduced from about 400 to around 300 each). The NDPG plans for the SDF to acquire up to 28 F-35s (despite doubts over the expense, performance, and even eventual delivery of this complex next-generation fighter), 17 Osprey aircraft, two more Aegis destroyers (to a total of eight), five more submarines (to a total of 22), and possibly three Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). In an overt demonstration that Japan is willing to use force to defend its claim on the Senkaku Islands, the NDPG outlines the creation of a new amphibious brigade, supported by 52 new amphibious armoured fighting vehicles (AFVs), having the declared mission of retaking any Japanese islands seized by an enemy power (Asahi Shimbun, 2013 b).

The NDPG clearly states that China's activities in the East China Sea are a matter of concern which must be addressed – again asserting that China must not be allowed to change the territorial status quo of the region by force. It also reaffirms the centrality of the US-Japan Alliance, and re-commits Japan to increasing its levels of international security cooperation, including joint military

exercises with Australia, as well as with a range of other countries, including those in NATO, the EU, ASEAN, and India (Government of Japan, 2013).

Also part of this strategy is a review on easing Cold War-era restrictions on defence exports, which have already started to loosen, which will allow exports of defence materials to friendly countries such as the US, UK and Australia. More controversially, the NDPG encapsulates education and publicity campaigns to encourage greater feelings of ‘love for the country’ – an overt appeal to patriotism and nationalism, which is worrying for critics, including NKP Diet members concerned about a return to an aggressive, state-sponsored jingoism. Following the NDPG, reinterpretation of the principle of collective self-defence is the next stage for Abe’s defence policy transformation. This will be a more difficult and controversial stage though, particularly given the likely opposition from the LDP’s more pacifist-leaning NKP coalition partners ; with its controlling bloc of votes, the NKP is likely to be more decisive and crucial to the next step of security policy than the divided, outnumbered, splintered group of opposition parties (Asahi Shimbun, 2013 c).

Conclusions – The TSD and the Future of Asia-Pacific Security

While confronting a range of domestic and foreign policy challenges, including constitutional change, the LDP nevertheless seems set to enjoy a prolonged period of political ascendancy. After the brief period of the previous DPJ government (2009–12), the LDP may yet be destined to become entrenched again as Japan’s ruling party, returning to its long post-war period of parliamentary dominance, with Japan effectively becoming a ‘one-party democracy’ once more. The DPJ could very well split and fragment under the pressure of opposition, as the range of other small minor parties ensures the LDP remains relatively politically unchallenged for the foreseeable future, with the next general election due in 2016 (Curtis, 2013).

If the LDP finally does manage to achieve its aims of profound constitutional change, this is likely to consolidate its power, and promote the agendas of its traditional support base, particularly the business lobbies of large corporations, and influential sections of the bureaucracy, including those of the ‘national security state’. The danger lies if this comes at the expense of the general public, particularly ordinary consumers, taxpayers and wage earners, young people, women, the elderly, and other vulnerable minorities in society, such as those still displaced in Tohoku. Vigilance must be maintained to ensure civil liberties are not eroded at the expense of ostensibly protecting ‘national security’. The move by Japan to more assertive nationalism under Abe also risks provoking greater instability in the region, unless far greater diplomatic care is taken. Unsurprisingly, China remains highly critical of the direction of Japan’s new national security strategy, angrily blaming Japan for increasing tensions over the Senkakus/Diaoyus (Tisdall, 2013).

The NDPG of the Abe LDP government, pledging as it does an increase in defence spending, and an expansion of SDF operations with the US and Australia, therefore deepens the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD) as a mechanism supportive of Japan’s direction toward constitutional change overall. In increasing a deterrence capability against China’s military rise, and its associated increased maritime power projection capacity and more assertive diplomacy, a strengthened Japan will reinforce the US ‘pivot’ of the majority of its strategic power towards the Pacific, which is similarly being hosted and unconditionally supported by Australia. In doing so, such a ‘realist’ policy of deterrence is ostensibly aimed at reinforcing the stability of the Asia-Pacific region (Green, 2013).

However, the diplomatic institutional mechanisms for forestalling escalation of tensions and potential incidents into possible open armed conflict, remains inadequate. While regional Government Organizations (RGOs), such as APEC, EAS, and the ASEAN-related RGOs (ASEAN + 3, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus etc.) have and can play a useful role, more determined and vigorous diplomacy is still urgently required (Hiebert et al, 2013). The TSD may also have the diplomatic potential to help assist Japan in improving relations, or at least in reducing tensions between Japan and its two immediate neighbours, South Korea and China. There are already indications that Japan and South Korea are improving some measures of defence cooperation, particularly in maritime security, facilitated with the encouragement of the US. As Australia also maintains close relations with Japan and Korea, its second- and third-largest trading partners, it could also be more diplomatically active in encouraging reconciliation between Japan and South Korea (Miller, 2013).

While relations continue to be more fraught between Japan and China, again, since the US and Australia both have relatively firm relations with China, particularly at the leadership level (while subject to occasional tensions), both could also play a more active intermediary diplomatic role, encouraging improved relations between China and Japan. However, the recent and present state of affairs shows that much work needs to be done to even commence such a process with any real commitment or effectiveness. There remains much scope for more proactive diplomacy to be exercised, lest tensions escalate dangerously out of control, whether by accident or design.

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