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Newport, R.I.**

**The Rearmament of Japan: Increased Regional Stability in the Western Pacific or
Unnecessary Increase in Tensions**

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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04 May 2011

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Abstract

The Rearmament of Japan: Increased Regional Stability in the Western Pacific or Unnecessary Increase in Tensions?

Since its formal establishment by law in 1954, the size and capability of the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) has gradually been increased by its government. Although growing at a small rate of an addition 1.5% per year, this expansion has been carefully observed by both Japan's allies, competitors, and other surrounding states in the Western Pacific region. It is important to analyze Japanese rearmament from the perspective of the operational commander in the region for Japan's largest defense ally, the United States Pacific Commander. This paper looks at the increase in arms acquisitions by the JSDF, a key U.S. ally in the Western Pacific, and how it will have a positive effect on regional stability and security operations by balancing China's military modernization, containing of North Korean aggression, and cultivating multinational cooperation through peacekeeping missions. Finally, the paper draws conclusions concerning the civil aspect of conflict, and recommends areas for future rearmament and cooperation with the United States military forces in the Western Pacific.

INTRODUCTION

Since its formal establishment by law in 1954, the size and capability of the Japanese Self Defense Force (JSDF) has gradually been increased by its government. Although growing at a small rate of an addition 1.5% per year, this expansion has been carefully observed by both Japan's allies, competitors, and other surrounding states in the Western Pacific region. Much of this additional spending is in response to perceived local dangers, but there has been a political shift in the countries procurement posture.¹ It is important to analyze Japanese rearmament from the perspective of the operational commander in the region for Japan's largest defense ally, the United States Pacific Commander.

The increase in arms acquisitions by the JSDF, a key U.S. ally in the Western Pacific, will have a positive effect on regional stability and security operations by balancing China's military modernization, containment of North Korean aggression, and cultivating multinational cooperation through peacekeeping missions.

BACKGROUND

In 1946 at the end of World War II, General Douglas MacArthur drafted a constitution which was reluctantly accepted by the new Japanese government. This constitution closely followed many of the precepts of western countries; however, Article 9 stated that Japan would renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and never again use force as a means of settling disputes internationally.² The constitution went on to spell out that land, sea, and air forces would not be maintained by the country. However, there was a small loophole. The Japanese Constitution claimed that Japan would renounce war on "the establishment of an

¹ Will, George F. Unbind Japan's Military. *The Washington Post*. 26 August, 2006.

² Maton, William. "The Constitution of Japan." September 10, 2010.
<http://www.solon.org/Constitutions/Japan/English/english-Constitution.html>

international peace based on justice and order”.³ Since there has been no international peace since that time Japan argued that they must look to some means to secure themselves, and in 1954, the JSDF was formed.

From its inception, the JSDF had opponents, many of which were found within Japan. This was mainly due to the atrocities the Japanese people faced due to their own militarism throughout WWII. However, the Japanese Supreme Court has found that the JSDF is constitutional, and as Japan’s prosperity has increased in the past few decades, support for a force to defend its interests has grown as well. Support from the people and an increasing realization that some form of force is required to, at a minimum, defend the Japanese home islands, that even political parties such as the Japanese socialist party have stopped their opposition to the JSDF and strict views of neutrality in world affairs.⁴

The JSDF of today closely resembles any other nations military with branches divided in the land, air, and maritime domains. It is made up of platforms and systems of Japanese production and design, and those of its allies. For a defense force and not outright military, the JSDF spending is in the top tier of any other nation in the world and closely resembles the defense budget of Taiwan, and South Korea. This is mainly due to the cost of modernization of the systems Japan wishes to employ and not the size of the force. Although, as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Japanese defense spending is nearly the smallest of all major U.S. allies.⁵ In 2010, for the first time since WWII, Japanese Air Forces demonstrated a strike capability and delivered ordnance on non-Japanese soil during

³ Sidman, Howard. *Rearming Japan*. Washington, DC: National Defense University National War College, 1989, p. 2.

⁴ A Joint Report by the United Nations Association of the USA and the Asia Pacific Association of Japan, *The Japanese-American Alliance: A Framework for the Future*, (New York: United Nations Association of the USA, 1983), p. 13.

⁵ "Trading Economics." March 10, 2011. <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/japan/gdp-growth>, p. 1.

exercises with the United States. The Japanese Self Defense Force has also been a partner in the Global War on Terror by providing strategic airlift, funding, and other non-combat operation participation.

To understand why this slow rise is happening, it is important to look at the Western Pacific region, Japan's neighbors, and threats to the energy and supply lifelines of the island nation. After China's failed incursion in Vietnam in 1979, the People's Liberation Army of China decided to begin a program of modernization to compete with the western powers and not rely solely on the manpower of the peasant army it had fielded since the 1920s. In the past several years, China has had double digit increases annually to its defense budget and is closing in on using seven percent of its GDP on military spending. This increase is being fielded in an array of new technologies such as a sizeable nuclear powered submarine fleet, a new stealth fighter, and satellite killing missile technology.⁶

North Korea, one of Japan's closest neighbors, has since the 1950's been led by a regime which has constantly shown it to be aggressive and at times irrational. Although most of North Korea's rhetoric has been directed toward South Korea, Japan remains in North Korea's crosshairs due to occupation by Japan during its imperialistic era, and for its close ties to the United States. In 2006, North Korea had seven different tests of medium range ballistic missiles, and in April of 2009, North Korea launched 2 missiles over northern Japan, which landed in the Pacific Ocean.⁷

So what is the function of the JSDF and how should its ever improving capabilities be looked upon by its strongest ally in the region, the U.S. Pacific Commander?

⁶ "Double Digit Rise for China's Military Spending." Spacewar, March 4, 2011.
http://www.spacewar.com/reports/Double-digit_rise_for_Chinas_military_spending_999.html

⁷ Voice of America News, "North Korea Fires Missile Over Japan." April 5, 2009.
<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-04-05-voa2-68733937.html>

BALANCING THE RISE OF CHINA

Since the end of the Cold War, the world has mostly been uni-polar with the United States as the world's remaining super power. China is an important trading partner for the United States and Japan; however, it is important when planning for the future to consider a countries capabilities and not the "most likely" scenario as a nation's leadership and policies can often change with little notice. The current rise of China and their wish to dominate in their sphere of influence have led the United States to require strong partners in the region to help with the defense of free nations, and ensure that the flow of goods along the Western Pacific LOCs remain open for trade. That strongest ally is Japan, and their rearmament will be a benefit to the United States in the need of assistance defending Taiwan or allowing freedom of navigation of key straits and SLOCs. This balance is even more important to Japan as the key SLOCs are not just in their national interest like the U.S. and other global powers, but essential for their survival.

Defense of Taiwan

The largest point of tension between the U.S. and China in the region is the defense of Taiwan. This conflict would only arise in a situation where China attempts to retake Taiwan without their approval. To the U.S. Pacific Commander, a stronger Japan, even if not directly involved in combat action in the vicinity of Taiwan would play two major roles.

The first would be logistics and resupply. Most likely, aggression by China toward Taiwan would warrant Japanese support as Japan has already demonstrated that it would come to the aid of other democratic nations that needed it.⁸ Most likely they would not bring

⁸ Japanese Ministry of Defense, "The Fight Against Terrorism." June, 2008.
http://www.mod.go.jp/e/data/pdf/fight_terror.pdf, p. 7.

troops or direct military action to bear against China, but because of their strong ties to the U.S. security alliance, would provide supplies, transport, and other military aid functions such as medical and evacuation capabilities.⁹ These additional logistic trains would free up the strain of LOCs tied back to U.S. bases in the region, or LOCs that go back to the United States themselves. This gives the U.S. commander in the conflict much needed flexibility which he would not have in a situation where the United States was involved solitarily.

The second role would be defense of U.S. bases and interests located on the Japanese home islands. One course of action for the Chinese in an escalated Taiwan situation would be to attack the U.S. where they have forward bases, resupply, and carry out maintenance. This would give China an advantage in shaping the battlespace by not allowing reinforcements and access to critical LOCs to U.S. forces. For the U.S. in the Western Pacific this means the bases located in Japan. Japan would see this as an attack on its own country and sovereignty. This opens up the possibility of the U.S. commander using the forces it would normally hold in reserve to defend forward operating bases and bringing them to the front in Taiwan, as the stronger rearmed JSDF would take care of force protection in the rear areas of the AOR.

Pacific Sea Lines of Communication

The greatest change in Chinese policy over the past ten years is their increased attention to controlling vital SLOCs located throughout the Western Pacific.¹⁰ This is mainly due to their own protection of their growing trade in the region. As previously mentioned, planning for the future against a foreign capability and not a “most likely” scenario is an important consideration, and it can be seen why Japan is rearming for this reason as it helps U.S. interests in the Pacific.

⁹ Ibid., p. 11.

¹⁰ Brown, Peter J.. "China's navy cruises into Pacific ascendancy." *Asia Times*, April 22, 2010, p. 22.

As an island nation, Japan is almost entirely dependent on foreign trade, and this can be seen by looking at its imports. Japan imports nearly 90 percent of its raw materials from overseas, and almost 100 percent for resources critical to an industrialized nation such as aluminum and other metals. In addition, 80 percent of Japan's fossil fuel energy comes by sea transportation.¹¹ Japan is one of the U.S.'s largest trading partners and over 80 percent of U.S. trade travels by sea. Although these SLOCs are largely strategic issues, it would be up to the U.S. operational commander in the Pacific to defend and reopen these SLOCs if necessary. Many of the capabilities Japan has added in the past two decades are directed at exactly this scenario. Along with Aegis cruisers and destroyers, Japan has added other niche capabilities that help the United States such as minesweeping and anti-submarine warfare assets mainly in the form of patrol aircraft.¹²

From these examples, it can be concluded that Japanese rearmament helps the U.S. Pacific Commander with the issues resulting from China's rising power. As U.S. forces draw down in the region due to economic and strategic issues back home, having a strong ally who is aligned with the same interests is vital to keep SLOCs open for all to use in case of a situation where a strong upcoming sea power such as China starts to demonstrate its new force. A stronger Japan also helps the U.S. in keeping its promises to defend nations we have promised to defend in the region such as Taiwan in the case of Chinese aggression.

¹¹ James E. Auer, "Japan's Defense Policy", *Current History* VOL 87 No. 528, April 1988, p. 145.

¹² Woolley, Peter. *Japan's Navy: Politics and Paradox*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000, p. 89.

CONTAINMENT OF NORTH KOREAN AGGRESSION

The country which has been the most belligerent in the Western Pacific in recent years with both rhetoric and action is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) or North Korea. Along with South Korea, Japan is the United States' closest ally in the region which shares the goal of containing North Korean aggression. The largest threat to Japan from North Korea is its technological gains in ballistic missile technology, and its aggressive posturing in the seas the two nations share. A strong Japan allied with the United States and South Korea also helps as a deterrent to a North Korean invasion of South Korea.

Theater Ballistic Missile Defense

The most realistic threat in the Pacific since 2008 has been North Korea's show of force regarding their newly developed ballistic missile technology. This threat went as far as North Korea launching missiles over the Japanese home islands in 2009.¹³ This action triggered the largest support from the Japanese people for rearmament in years, and has led to proposals for Theater Ballistic Missile Defense based on the Japanese home islands. Although this has been spun by the media of Asian nations as a cause for concern, for the U.S. Pacific Commander it provides not only deterrence, but a shield against North Korea hostility that was not provided in the past. There is a logical hypothesis in world opinion that the leader of North Korea, Kim Jong Il's, real motivation is to stay in power and transfer that power someday soon to his son, and that much of the signs of aggression such as these missile launches is a display of strength of his position.¹⁴ With this assumption, the development of a missile shield as a joint venture between Japan and the United States is a positive on the

¹³ Voice of America News, "North Korea Fires Missile Over Japan." April 5, 2009.
<http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-04-05-voa2-68733937.html>

¹⁴ Hogg, Chris. "Likely North Korea Heir Kim Jong-un Appears with Father". *BBC News*. 2010,
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11509166>.

operational level of war as North Korea knows that an attack using missiles would be unsuccessful in causing any damage or casualties and would provide the U.S. and its allies a course of action to remove Kim Jong Il from power.

Protection of Shared Waters

As the JSDF's maritime presence increases with the growth of the Japanese Maritime Self Defense Force (JMSDF), Japan's ability to defend and deter North Korean aggression in its territorial waters and the Sea of Japan, which are between the two nations, increases dramatically. The use of Aegis system capable platforms such as the Japanese Destroyers, and increases in ASW technology with Japanese submarines and patrol aircraft provide a defense against North Korea taking hostile action against Japan, similar to the sinking of South Korean Navy vessels in the Yellow Sea in 2010.¹⁵ This increased capability allows Japan to defend its own interests, such as strategically important trade routes and domestic shipping, in shared waters and takes the responsibility of defense in this area off of the shoulders of the U.S. commander in the region. This does not reduce the influence of the U.S. presence in the area, but allows U.S. Naval forces to focus on other hot spots or responsibilities in the Western Pacific that it would not have been able to allocate resources to had Japan not rearmed to defend its interests in the space between itself and the Asian mainland.

Deterrence Assisting South Korean Defense

Much like with scenarios involving Taiwan, Japan would be a key ally to provide logistics, resupply, and other non-combat capabilities to the U.S. and South Korea in the event of an invasion from North Korea. Using the maritime power mentioned previously,

¹⁵ Harden, Blaine. "Explosion Sinks South Korean Naval Ship Near Disputed Sea Border with North." *The Washington Post*, March 27, 2010.

setting up and protecting SLOCs from U.S. bases in Japan to a front on the Korean peninsula would be ideal to the operational commander due to its advantage of proximity to Korea, saving both space and time. Even if Japan decided not to take part in actual combat operations as in other scenarios, using the Japanese security alliance as a means to provide medical assistance, transport, and refueling alone would relieve a strain placed on U.S. forces and would give the operational commander on the ground more options with forces and resources available.

Taken as a whole, Japanese rearmament with regard to North Korean aggression is not only warranted, but an important deterrent and resource to the U.S. commander in the region. Being able to defend the interests of the U.S. and its allies with the development in the future of a Theater Ballistic Missile shield, relying on JMSDF to patrol the Sea of Japan and other contested waters to reduce the threat of hostility by the North Korean Navy, and the reassurance of having a strong ally in such proximity in the case of a ground war on the Korean peninsula is a key in promoting security and stability in Northeast Asia with regard to the North Korean threat of opposition.

HA/DR AND OTHER GLOBAL OPERATIONS

Japan's largest contribution to the PACOM commander through rearmament has been in support of Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) operations, and UN peacekeeping operations in the region and across the globe. More than deterrence against China or North Korea, other military operations from the Middle East to Afghanistan have assisted the United States in current crises. These military actions were made possible by multiple Anti-Terrorism Special Mission Laws passed by the Japanese Diet that kept with the spirit of the law but reconciled with the Japanese populations support of helping the U.S.

The HA/DR mission was made possible by Japan's economic power and their wish to influence stability around the globe.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief

The JSDF's largest contribution to regional security and stability in the last 10 years has been their HA/DR missions. In 2005, Japan was one of the major countries lending forces to disaster relief in Indonesia and the other nations affected by the tsunami. Their missions included medical aid, refugee repatriation, logistical support, and infrastructural reconstruction.¹⁶ The Japanese Self Defense Force aid has reached even further than the Western Pacific by sending forces as far as Haiti in 2009. This demonstrates the potential for Japan to come to the assistance of the U.S. and other allies in the future, especially as rearmament provides them with more capable platforms and lift capability. In fact, had Japan been even more capable, by rearming with larger platforms able to provide more to HA/DR missions, than they may have had the ability to increase their own support of the disaster relief effort following the earthquake of March 2011, saving the U.S. PACOM commander assets in the region.

The Global War on Terror

Following the serin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway in 1995 the Japanese were much more aware of the threat of international and internal terrorism on modern society.¹⁷ For this reason, the Japanese people showed overwhelming support to the United States after the attacks of September 11, 2001. This included supporting military operations in Afghanistan. Japan did not support Afghanistan as the United States did on the premise of self-defense, but

¹⁶ Yoshikazu, Akimura. "Japan Helps Tsunami Victims." *Asia-Pacific Defense Forum*. http://forum.apan-info.net/05_special_ed/japan_1.htm.

¹⁷ Murakami, Haruki. *Underground*. New York: Vintage Books, 2000, p. 3.

instead participated based on the legitimacy of U.N. resolutions.¹⁸ This is important to U.S. commanders as it shows Japan will involve themselves in operations outside of the defense of Japan in support of its allies and the United Nations. In Afghanistan and Pakistan, Japan provided much needed security, lift, and logistical support such as medical assistance to U.S. and NATO troops. This support of Operation ENDURING FREEDOM also included the deployment of two Aegis cruisers to the Indian Ocean in December 2001 and ground force units that in addition to normal defense armament of small rifles and machine guns, also carried anti-tank munitions and armored personnel carriers.¹⁹ Although these additional arms were still used only in a defense role, Japan being deployed to Afghanistan working with partner nations provides much needed additional security in the region which is beneficial to the CENTCOM commander.

Japan also maintained a presence in Iraq, which was even further from Afghanistan and their usual area of influence. Japan was not as concerned about the threat of Iraq initially, however, the idea of WMD in the Middle East and Asia in the hands of a possible non-rational actor was too close to the North Korean situation and brought Japan into a support role for the United States.²⁰ The role of Japan in Iraq has mainly been one of nation building more than combat operations. In this way, they have been able to play an important function in security and reconstruction that will lead to a larger Japanese authority and economic power in the area which has not been seen before. Much like in Afghanistan, Japan understands that the most important thing to their security is the U.S.-Japanese security alliance and is willing to step out of their normal boundaries to protect it.

¹⁸ Hughes, Christopher W. "Japan's Security Policy, the US-Japan Alliance, and the 'War on Terror.'" University of Warwick, 2004, p. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 10.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 8.

Peacekeeping

One more example is Japan's involvement in UN peacekeeping operations in the Pacific. Japan has sent forces to Nepal and Cambodia to secure the peace and help with elections. They have also sent security forces globally to regions such as Somalia to help with anti-piracy, and Mozambique to support UN operations in Africa.²¹ This will persist to be the case in the future as Japan pushes their limits and continues to gain additional capabilities for operations outside of defense for the home islands. As Japan continues to rearm, even if only to protect the non-combat capabilities they do deploy, U.S. commanders will have an additional branch of force protection they can use operationally to defend mutual interests in Asia and beyond.

In this way, it is possible to see why a stronger Japan is beneficial for both the U.S. Commander in the Pacific and to the Pacific region in general. The examples of support from Japan in both Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, and in the ongoing operations in Afghanistan, are important to the PACOM Commander as it demonstrates that in a time of crisis Japan would be a necessary ally to alleviate the resource strain that would be put on the United States and its long sea lines of communication. In addition, the examples of HA/DR and peacekeeping show that Japan could be a source of relief for other nations that need their help, and even have more capability to help themselves in times of natural disaster, and would result in a safer more secure Western Pacific AOR.

COUNTERARGUMENT

The obvious counterargument to the rearming of Japan is the rise in tensions between Japan and countries in the region that do not view themselves as allies. Although the

²¹ Onishi, Norimitsu. "Japan to Deploy Anti-Piracy Naval Mission to Somalia Waters." New York Times, February 8, 2009.

Japanese people have reinvented themselves since World War II, becoming a democracy and focusing on economic power rather than military power, many of its neighbors have not forgotten the atrocities of the first half of the 20th century. Many of these countries including China and both Koreas feel that Japan has never properly apologized for the actions of its past governments and that a rise in Japanese military power would have the potential to result in Japanese aggression in the future.²²

The primary example which shows these increased tensions is the “tit-for-tat” rhetoric and policies of China. China has used Japan’s increase in military capabilities over the years for an excuse for why they must also pursue similar technologies and upgrades to existing systems.²³ As an emerging economic power, China is also interested in defending its interests and its vulnerable SLOCs from countries it views as potential adversaries. As a large economic power which is strategically located close to China and its SLOCs, Japan is viewed as this threat. If Japan did not continue to rearm and increase its defense spending, China maintains it would also slow down its thirst for a more robust military halting a Western Pacific arms race.²⁴

Rebuttal

However, as previously discussed above, there is strong evidence that these tensions are on the rise due to the increasing military budgets and capabilities of Japan’s competitors regardless of the steps Japan takes to defend its interests in the region. In fact, many nations in the region, such as North Korea, have gone additional steps in procuring nuclear and

²² "Has Japan offered an apology for its war crimes of the 20th century?" *Global Alliance for Preserving the History of WWII in Asia*, 2001 , <http://www.global-alliance.net/SFPT/SFPTApology.htm>.

²³ Sisci, Francesco. "Japan Re-arm Leads to Chinese Militarization." *Asia Times*, September 19, 2008, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/JI19Ad02.html>.

²⁴ Nyuist, JR. "Japanese Rearmament and the China Threat". *Financial Sense*. 2005, <http://www.financialsense.com/node/350>.

possibly other WMD that Japan has no intention of procuring.²⁵ This shows that although Japan is slowly taking steps to rearming that it has not attempted since WWII, it is not the belligerent in the region and is reacting to its neighbors regardless of the rhetoric of the opposition.

Much of the criticism from other nations is the large budget being spent by the government of Japan on rearmament for a defense force. The reality is that the money is being spent on advanced systems development and upgrades to capabilities. This enables the JSDF to “do more with less” rather than rearming with sheer volume and numbers of forces like many other countries in the region.²⁶

Overall, there is an argument that Japan rearming is causing tension in the region to increase and therefore does not support security and stability for the U.S. operational commander. However, even without the comparatively small increases in Japanese defense spending and acquisitions, Japan’s competitors in the region, namely China, would continue its own increase with no reduction in spending due to its interests that lay outside Japanese influence, such as southeast and central Asia, the benefit to its own economy and position on the world stage, and the egos of its military leadership. Many of these criticisms are based on past Japanese imperialist actions that do not reflect current Japanese policy. This is important to the U.S. PACOM commander as any perceived increase in tension due to Japanese rearmament is an excuse for others in the region to continue with their own military build-up, and Japan should not be faulted for wanted to defend its own interests and help maintain stability for itself and for its strongest allies in an up-and-coming power center of the world.

²⁵ Cronin, Richard. "The North Korean Nuclear." *THE FLETCHER FORUM OF WORLD AFFAIRS* 29, no. 1, 2005, p. 51.

²⁶ Berkofsky, Axel. "Dissecting Japan’s New Defense Guidelines". *Inteldaily*. February 16, 2011, <http://inteldaily.com/2011/02/dissecting-japans-new-defense-guidelines/>.

CONCLUSIONS and RECOMMENDATIONS

In today's world, rearmament of Japan is important to the U.S. PACOM commander. Many nations in the region do not agree with this point of view and believe it will create an arms race and increase tensions. However, the benefits greatly outweigh those perceptions as the slow rearmament of Japan gives PACOM an ally with increased capability. These capabilities support U.S. interests in the Western Pacific and across the globe by balancing China's military modernization, assisting in containment of North Korean aggression through TBMD and sea presence, and cultivating multinational cooperation through HA/DR and peacekeeping missions.

Having Japan continue its rearmament in the future will ensure the safety of not only the Japanese people and home islands, but stability and security of the region and protection of vital U.S. interests for years. A further recommendation would be increased training operations between U.S. and JSDF forces in mission areas such as strike warfare and anti-submarine warfare to ensure successful coordination in the future to the benefit of U.S. commanders overseas.

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