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About the Author

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Japan's Security Policy in the Asia-Pacific during the post-Cold War Period

The Asia-Pacific region has now emerged as the main centre of dynamic economic and technological development in the world. Though the success story of Japan's rise to the status of an economic super power is too well-known, the growth trajectories of China and India , if their current tempo of growth is sustained, will add new dimensions to the emerging economic and security architecture of Asia as a whole. One outstanding feature of the post-Cold War period is seen in the deepening of interdependence that is taking place among Asia-Pacific countries. There are strong trends towards economic integration as is evident by the conclusion of numerous free trade/economic partnership agreements and these will gather greater strength in the coming years as the efforts to build an Asian Community are accelerated. Multilateral bodies like the ASEAN, ASEAN+3, the ASEAN Regional Forum and APEC contribute to strengthen the trends towards regional integration. Many countries, which had earlier shunned multilateral security arrangements, have now changed their policies and today they are quite inclined to welcome them. However, the Asia-Pacific region is also very complex since it is home to diverse problems including those connected with territories, terrorism, ethnic and religious fundamentalism, nuclear proliferation, maritime security, and fierce competition for energy. Concerns over North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and China's military modernization, have also deepened. In addition, there are flash points like Taiwan that could flare up suddenly and destabilize the security situation of the region.

Dimensions of Japan's security policy

There are many aspects of Japan's security policy that need to be studied carefully. Despite domestic political changes, the alliance with the US still constitutes the cornerstone of Japan's security policy. Relations between Japan and the US have become more stable and balanced now and Tokyo has assumed several responsibilities, which it could not take up earlier. The rise of China and North Korea's nuclear and missile technology programme have increased the dependence of Japan on the US. In the case of China, Japan has developed a strategy of engaging Beijing in both economic and political spheres. But since there is a great deal of volatility in their relations—historical legacies, the dispute in the East China Sea on oil and gas resources and the territorial issue relating to the Senkaku islands—Japan also believes in a policy of hedging against Beijing. North Korea is another major concern and Pyongyang's relentless pursuit of nuclear and missile technologies programmes has deepened Japanese security concerns. Within Japan there is still no national consensus on amending Article Nine of the Constitution which has prevented Japan from assuming collective self-defence measures against external threats and as things stand now, there are no immediate prospects for any early constitutional change. While keeping its security alliance with the US as an anchor, Japan has been making systematic efforts to increase its diplomatic options by moving closer to countries like India, Australia and the ASEAN Group. It is significant that Japan has signed declarations on security cooperation with India and Australia. Simultaneously, it has also expanded its military capabilities through a series of mid-term build-up programmes. In the post-Cold War years, Japan's Self-Defence Forces have been playing an expanding role in the Indian Ocean region, Afghanistan and Iraq. Still, Japan is far from a position of exercising its full strategic autonomy; until then, Japan's dilemma between its growing security

concerns and the limitations laid by its Constitution will continue to be a major challenge. Japan will have to address this dilemma in the coming years if it wants to become a 'normal country'.

Japan's Security Policy during the Cold War period

A brief look at the evolution of Japan's security policy during the Cold War years would be a relevant starting point for this study. At the end of the Second World War, Japan was a shattered country both economically and politically. When Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952, the Cold War was at its height and Japan was in no position to take care of its own national security. It therefore entered into a security alliance with the US, which was allowed to maintain military bases in Japan to protect the latter against any external threat. Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1948-54) formulated a pragmatic policy, which took into account the ground realities surrounding Japan's economic position and its unpreparedness to defend its own sovereignty. The Yoshida Doctrine, as his policy was subsequently called, emphasized Japan's economic reconstruction at home, advocated a low-key profile in foreign affairs, professed minimal defence capabilities, and placed a premium on Tokyo's security alliance with the US. This low-cost and low-risk policy, indeed, served the economic and security interests of Japan very well almost until the end of the Cold War though it underwent a few modifications—more due to US compulsions than due to Japanese desire to change.¹ Until the end of the Cold War, Japan was firmly committed to its alliance with the US despite certain contentious issues like the use of military bases, Article Nine of the Constitution and the reluctance of Japan to increase its military spending, particularly during the 1970s and 1980s. Although Japanese domestic politics was divided on the question of the security alliance with the US due to the resistance from leftists, who were in a

small minority numerically, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) continuous dominance gave considerable stability to the alliance. During the Cold War years, the durability of the security alliance was directly linked to the monopoly of power enjoyed by the LDP.

Japan, which rested comfortably on the Yoshida Doctrine for well over three decades and derived maximum advantages from the Cold War particularly in terms of its security being underscored by its alliance with the US, woke up to see the realities of a new situation following the end of the Cold War. The collapse of the Cold War structures saw the elimination of the ideological hold over Japanese politics. Until then ideology was a key factor in Japanese politics which sharply divided political parties on issues including Japan's security alliance with the US, the San Francisco peace treaty, and Article Nine of the Constitution. Those who supported the security alliance, Japan's Self-Defence Forces and constitutional reforms were branded as conservatives and those who opposed them were called progressives. Stiff opposition to the alliance stemmed from the then Japan Socialist Party and the Japan Communist Party who unequivocally denounced the alliance as a ploy to keep Japan under the influence of the US.²

The end of the Cold War also brought an end to the 1955 political system in Japan which created unprecedented fluidity in Japanese politics. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), which had held the reins of power for 38 years without any break, now saw its political fortunes slipping out of its hands. However, neither the end of the East-West confrontation nor the decline of the LDP posed any serious challenge to the continuance of the US-Japan security alliance though some people questioned whether the security alliance would be congruent with the rapidly altered post-Cold War security environment. In spite of the fact that many coalition governments, that included Socialists and one even

led by the Socialist leader Tomiichi Murayama, came into existence after 1993, the alliance with the US continued to be the key element of Japan's foreign policy. What was surprising was that even the socialists, under the pressures of coalition politics, showed their flexibility not only on the alliance but also on issues like the Self-Defence Forces, the civilian nuclear programme, the national flag and the national anthem on which they had taken rigid positions earlier. Both the Socialists and the Japan Communist Party (JCP) realized that if they continued to hold on to their inflexible positions on crucial security issues, they could be pushed into political extinction altogether.

The Gulf War (1990-91)

Throughout the Cold War period, Japan was firmly committed to its security alliance with the US and showed little interest in seriously promoting regional security organizations. Opting out of any regional security responsibilities, Japan stuck to what is commonly known as the strategy of 'one country pacifism'. Under the Yoshida Doctrine, Japan chose to pursue the less controversial path of economic assistance for contributing to regional security. Japan decided to entrust its regional security interests to the US. For one thing, Japan feared that its participation in regional security mechanisms could undermine its alliance relations with the US which was equally unenthusiastic about multilateral groupings at that time. Japan therefore carefully avoided extending support to any proposals for multilateral organizations. The sudden outbreak of the Gulf War following Iraq's attack on Kuwait in August 1990 brought about a significant shift in Japan's strategic thinking. In the wake of the war, the US called upon its allies to extend both financial and personnel contributions to its cause in the Gulf. While the US expected a quick response, Japan found itself in a complex dilemma. It knew that assistance in terms of dispatching defence

personnel to the Gulf would provoke a virulent domestic debate and invite criticism from neighbouring countries. In fact, China was quick to register its concerns by stating that Japan's dispatch of its personnel would lead to the rebirth of Japanese militarism.³

However, even monetary contributions could not be taken for granted as the approval of the Japanese Diet witnessed delays due to political reasons. Though the Japanese Government managed to provide a whopping \$13 billion, it came at a slow pace which increased the impatience of the US. However, the question of sending military personnel to the Gulf did not arise due to constitutional constraints and even the SDF C-130 planes which Tokyo promised to send to the Gulf for rescuing refugees did not materialize. The US and its allies were frustrated with the slow-paced decision-making processes in Japan and strongly resented 'the chequebook diplomacy' adopted by it in such a grave crisis situation. Many in Japan complained that even though their government provided financial contributions worth \$13 billion at the expense of the Japanese taxpayers, its gesture was not properly appreciated by the US.

As the first test case in US-Japan relations after the end of the Cold War, the Gulf crisis underlined the need for both countries to understand and accommodate each other's interests and concerns. The lessons that Japan learnt from the Gulf War could be stated as follows: First, Japan's vision of 'one country pacifism' could not be pursued in the post-Cold War situation where the nature of security threats had completely changed. Second, the expectations of alliance relations had also undergone drastic changes whereby every member of the alliance was expected to render not only financial but also 'human' contributions whenever military action took place. The cozy days of the Cold War were over when Japan could entrust its security to the US and pursue 'one country pacifism'. As Professor Gerald Curtis of Columbia

University says, “an alliance for Americans now means a security relationship that is reciprocal and that responds to a global threat that cannot be met by deterrence alone.”⁴ Third, in a war of the type that occurred in the Gulf, Japan, no matter how its interests were affected, could not lightly shirk its alliance obligation of physical participation. Many in the US Congress alleged that Japan, whose dependence on the Middle East was much more than that of the US, was wavering in its response to fully cooperate with the coalition forces in the Gulf War.⁵ The strong American resentment convinced many ruling LDP leaders like Ichiro Ozawa and Takeo Nishioka of the need to send at least some SDF personnel to the Gulf War. The Japanese Foreign Ministry admitted, “Learning from its experience with the Gulf War, Japan became keenly aware of the need not merely to implement financial and material cooperation, but also to conduct effective manpower cooperation.”⁶

Japan therefore had to think in terms of a new strategy that would provide a fresh direction towards accepting multilateral approaches to security. The Gulf War in fact triggered a debate within Japan as to what approaches it should adopt to regional security. Since developing its own independent security strategy was ruled out as it was bound to arouse the misgivings of many neighbouring countries, Japanese thinking proceeded on the following lines: At the basic level, Japan emphasized the time tested bilateral security alliance with the US and, at another level, it started examining multilateralism in the security sphere as it would open a new option in addition to keeping the US engaged in the region.

Contribution of Self-Defence Forces

One direct outcome of the Gulf War was the decision of the Japanese Government under Toshiki Kaifu to submit a bill to the Diet to

authorize the government to dispatch Japanese personnel abroad to contribute to peace and security. The bill, called the UN Peace Cooperation Law, was intended to create a peace-keeping corps which would help in peace-keeping and other activities arising from UN resolutions. The corps, composed of personnel drawn from different official agencies including those of the Defence Agency, was forbidden to engage in any use of force and they were allowed to carry only small weapons to be used exclusively for self-protection. The bill was discussed on the floor of the Diet for several months without producing a result. Since the ruling LDP did not enjoy majority support in the Upper House, it had to rely on parties like the Komeito which was opposed to dispatching SDF personnel abroad. The upshot was that the government had to abandon the bill and a new bill called International Peace Cooperation Law was passed by the Japanese Diet in June 1992 after prolonged debate.⁷ The bill authorized the Japanese government to dispatch SDF personnel for non-combat operations with UN peace-keeping forces. The bill also stipulated that the dispatch of Japanese personnel depended on the fulfillment of the following conditions:

- A ceasefire among parties in dispute
- The consent of those parties to Japanese participation
- A prior UN request for Japanese deployment
- The impartiality of UN peace-keeping operations
- The right of Japan to suspend its operations
- Permission to use light arms for self-defence⁸

The new law constituted a landmark in post-war Japanese diplomacy as it opened a fresh chapter for Japan to play a more active role in its participation in UN peace-keeping activities. The first important

instance of Japanese deployment was to Cambodia where Japanese personnel participated in the UN Transition Administration in Cambodia (UNTAC). It was a great opportunity for Japan to demonstrate its strong commitment to the peace and stability of Southeast Asia. Even as early as 1977, following the unification of Vietnam, Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda enunciated his well known policy known as the Fukuda Doctrine which clearly underscored Vietnam's closer integration with the ASEAN. Japan was one of the foremost countries to strive for peace in the Indo-China peninsula ever since the Cambodian crisis cropped up in 1978. The successful completion of the election and other processes under UNTAC, which was also under a Japanese chief administrator, Yasushi Akashi, considerably enhanced Japan's credibility and cemented its relations with ASEAN countries. It created a good impression on the ASEAN countries about the peaceful and humanitarian role of Japan in the region. Japan's tangible human contribution to peace-keeping efforts augured well for US-Japan ties on issues pertaining to the Asia-Pacific region.⁹

One question that started worrying the Japanese Government after 1990 concerned the quest for a security policy that would be appropriate for the unfolding post-Cold War period. What would be the role of the US-Japan security alliance in the new scenario? Could Japan predicate all its expectations on it as had been done during the Cold War years? Japan had an unpleasant foretaste in April 1990 when the US administration announced its East Asian Strategic Initiative Report outlining its new security policy in the Asia-Pacific region. It stated the intention of the government to reduce the size of its military strength in the region in a phased manner mainly because of the diminishing Soviet threat.¹⁰ During 1991-92, the US withdrew its forces from the Subic Bay and the Clark air base in the Philippines. These

developments heightened the concerns of the Japanese Government that the 1976 National Defence Policy Outline (NDPO) that had been formulated under the influence of the Cold War needed to be revised in order to be in tune with the realities of the new era. It was with this view that Prime Minister Morihiro Hosokawa set up in February 1994 an advisory group under Hidetaro Higuchi, Chairman of the Board of Asahi Breweries, to make an in-depth study of the subject and make suitable recommendations. After studying the subject for six months, the Higuchi Committee submitted its recommendations in August. One very important suggestion made by the committee stressed the need for Japan to move away from the prevailing Cold War mindset and embrace a multilateral security strategy. It urged Japan to promote multilateral security cooperation from the viewpoint of cooperative security. The Higuchi Report stated, "Japan should extricate itself from its security policy of the past that was, if anything, passive and henceforth play an active role in shaping a new order. Indeed, Japan has the responsibility of playing such a role."¹¹

The suggestions of the Higuchi Committee created deep concerns in the US defence establishment which feared that Japan, compelled by the 'opaque and uncertain' post-Cold War environment, might gradually shift its focus from its alliance with the US to multilateral options. The report fuelled a prolonged debate within the US administration which finally culminated in the Clinton-Hashimoto Summit in Tokyo in April 1996. A significant joint statement redefining the bilateral alliance was issued by the two leaders.

The submission of the Higuchi Report was followed by two parallel developments: a) the need for revising the 1976 National Defence Policy Outline (NDPO) and b) the redefinition of the US-Japan security alliance.

a. The revision of the 1976 NDPO: The 1976 NDPO was formulated under the full influence of the Cold War. Since several developments had occurred in the region during the following two decades, including the end of the Cold War itself, it was high time for the Government to revise its national defence policy taking due cognizance of the new situation in China, the Korean peninsula and Taiwan. In November 1995, a new NDPO was adopted by the Government which highlighted the new responsibilities of the SDF. The salient thrust of the 1995 NDPO could be summarized as follows:

- In spite of the end of the Cold War, the region still experienced a great deal of tension and uncertainty due to a range of issues like tension in the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan, unresolved territorial questions, terrorism, religious fundamentalism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. It would be therefore essential for Japan to continue to maintain a basic and standard defence capability on the assumption that efforts for stabilizing international relations would continue to be made;
- The Japan-US security alliance would continue to play a key role in Japan's national security and the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.
- After the end of the Cold War, there was a change in the popular perception of the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) and the Japanese people recognized the role of the SDF in the protection of their life as well as in the sphere of international peace-keeping operations as was evident in Cambodia, Mozambique and Zaire.¹²

Simultaneously, the Japanese Government also approved a new mid-term defence programme (1996-2000) which envisaged a total spending of 25.15 trillion yen for the entire period of four years.¹³

It has been noted earlier that the recommendations of the Higuchi Committee created a great debate among those concerned with American policy in the Asia-Pacific. Opinion was sharply divided with some prominent people even going to the extent of demanding the suspension of the security alliance itself.¹⁴ Rather than allow the debate to persist too long, the US Defence Department took the initiative to review the whole range of US-Japan security relations and the report prepared by Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of Defence, reaffirmed the need for continued American engagement in Asia Pacific security and the importance of maintaining forward deployment of US forces. The report considered the US-Japan security alliance as the linchpin of US security policy in the region.¹⁵ Under the Nye Initiative several steps were taken to revitalize the alliance relations.

b. Redefinition of the Japan-US security alliance: Clinton-Hashimoto Summit and Joint Statement: When President Clinton visited Japan in April 1996 for a summit meeting with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto, the stage had been set for a reiteration of their strong mutual faith in the security alliance. It was the first post-Cold War summit meeting directed to a comprehensive examination of their security relations. Though there had been several such meetings in the preceding years at different levels, they were more concerned with bilateral economic issues. The joint statement between Clinton and Hashimoto issued on April 17, 1996 reiterated that the alliance remained “the cornerstone for achieving common security objectives and for maintaining a stable and prosperous environment for the Asia-Pacific region as we enter the 21st century.” Both agreed that since there was a great deal of unpredictability in the post-Cold War situation, the alliance should provide for numerous strategic mechanisms to cope with the new challenges. Though they did not specifically mention any particular threat, these mechanisms could tackle challenges coming

from China and North Korea. Considering the US military presence in the region as essential, Clinton assured that Washington would maintain its current force structure of about 100,000 military personnel in the region. This assurance set at rest the earlier doubts that the US would drastically reduce its military presence in the region.¹⁶

However, the most significant outcome of the joint declaration was the decision taken by the two leaders to undertake efforts for revising the defence guidelines of 1978 in order to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation. Since the 1978 guidelines had been framed under the full heat of the Cold War, they needed to be revised in order to be in line with the post-Cold War realities. In the following months, both sides were involved in a series of talks and on September 23, 1997 they formulated the new guidelines. They stated that the bilateral defence cooperation under the new defence guidelines would be based on the following conditions: a) Japan would conduct all its actions only under the provisions of its Constitution; b) the basic character of the bilateral alliance would not be altered; and c) all actions taken by both Japan and the US would be in accordance with the principles of international law.¹⁷ They identified three areas where the two countries could cooperate mutually: 1. Cooperation under normal conditions; 2. Cooperation in case of an armed attack on Japan and 3. Cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan that might have a serious impact on Japan's security and peace¹⁸

The revision of the guidelines aroused varying responses from the neighbouring countries with South Korea insisting that it should be consulted since the expanded Japan-US cooperation would have serious implications for the Korean peninsula. China strongly complained that the guidelines had enlarged the role of the security alliance and that any act which included Taiwan Straits within the ambit of the new

guidelines was an interference in and violation against China's sovereignty. When in September 1997 Prime Minister Hashimoto visited Beijing, he assured his Chinese hosts that Japan stood by the 1972 Japan-China joint communiqué which considered Taiwan as an integral part of the PRC. He further assured them that the guidelines were not formulated by Japan and the US with China or any other country in mind.¹⁹ Russia also registered its concerns by asking whether “the areas surrounding Japan covered the territory of any third country”, fearing the Russian Far East might be included within the definition of the guidelines.²⁰

That the opposition political parties in Japan had strong reservations on the issue was not surprising, but even within the ruling LDP, opinion was divided with many right wing elements insisting on the inclusion of Taiwan within the guidelines while others in a bid not to offend China wanted it to be left ambivalent.²¹ But a more formidable barrier that Japan had to cross in any attempt to enlarge its security responsibilities beyond its shores related to the constitutional restriction on its right to collective self-defence. Influential American leaders have always pointed to the glaring asymmetric commitment in the bilateral security relations and urged that if Japan were to play a commensurate security role in the Asia Pacific region, it should overcome the prevailing constitutional impediments.

In a report titled “The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mutual Partnership”, an influential bipartisan US group stated: “Japan's prohibition against collective defence is a constraint on alliance cooperation. Lifting their prohibition would allow for closer and more efficient security cooperation.” It further stated, “The revised Guidelines for US-Japan defence cooperation... should be regarded as the floor, not the ceiling, for an expanded Japanese role in the

transpacific alliance and the uncertainties of the post Cold War regional setting require a more dynamic approach to bilateral planning.”²²

9/11 terror attack and Japan's swift action

Unlike in the case of the Gulf War or the passing of the Guidelines Law, Japan's response to the 9/11 terror attacks was marked by the swiftness of its supportive action. It formulated its policy within a week after the attacks and considered terrorism as an issue of its own national security that should be dealt with in cooperation with other countries. Japan quickly passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Law which markedly expanded the role of the SDF. The Law authorized the government to dispatch SDF vessels to the Indian Ocean to provide supplies to US and British ships involved in the war against terror in Afghanistan. The refuelling mission started in December 2001 and in the next eight years provided fuel worth about 25 billion yen (\$275.42 million) to vessels from twelve countries. For the first time, SDF Personnel were deployed to a place near a military theatre. In addition to several Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) vessels, Japan sent aegis destroyers to ensure their security. One reason for Japan's prompt action was to avoid the earlier diplomatic embarrassment it had faced in the Gulf War of 1990-91. At the time of passing the anti-terror law the Japanese Government, however, clarified that its assistance which was meant to pursue the objectives as spelt out in the UN resolutions would be rendered only in non-combat areas. The concept of “non-combat” areas was devised by the Koizumi Government which argued that it was not unconstitutional for the SDF to extend logistic support in those areas. For the first time, Japan's defence forces were sent to an area where actual war was going on.

The 9/11 incidents also brought up for the first time another important issue related to ensuring internal security of Japan against potential

terrorist activities. The SDF laws were suitably amended to enable its units to safeguard SDF installations as well as US military facilities in Japan. As for support from the Air Self-Defence Forces (ASDF), C-130 transport airplanes and other aircraft transported goods between American bases in Japan and Guam. The 9/11 attacks also led the Japanese Government to undertake emergency legislation against armed attacks against the country. This issue was debated extensively during 2002-3 before bills were passed by the Diet.²³

War in Iraq and Japan's security predicament

If Japan's support to the US policy in Afghanistan enjoyed considerable approval at home, the same cannot be said about its approach to the war against Iraq in 2003. Following military action against Iraq by the US, Britain and other allies, Japan extended support to the coalition forces. However, unlike in the case of Afghanistan, the fact that the US decided on military action without a proper mandate from the UN created an extremely difficult situation for the Japanese Government. Within Japan, a majority of the people reportedly doubted the wisdom of President Bush's policy in Iraq. Koizumi's policy of sending SDF personnel to Iraq polarized Japanese politics and the Iraq issue figured prominently in the Lower House as well as the Upper House elections held, respectively, in November 2003 and July 2004. The opposition parties reaped political capital out of the controversy. The main thrust of their objection was that Tokyo's dispatch of its military personnel was tantamount to a serious infringement of Article Nine of the Constitution which prohibits Japan from enjoying the right to collective defence. Many in the media believed that the joining of the SDF personnel in the multinational force constituted a major change of policy that had important bearings on the Constitution and the foreign policy of Japan. However, Koizumi countered it by arguing that Japan's assistance was mainly limited to economic reconstruction of Iraq and

that the Japanese SDF personnel were dispatched only to non-combat areas, particularly Samawa, where they were engaged in reconstruction works like construction of roads and supply of water. But the opposition parties considered the whole of Iraq as a combat area and their contention was supported by the extensive spread of violence that included kidnapping and killing of hundreds of people, including some Japanese journalists and diplomats. Basically, the Iraq issue clearly demonstrated the strategic predicament of Japan in finding a balance between what it considered as its expanding security needs and the limitations imposed by the Constitution. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) strongly opposed SDF's refuelling missions in the Indian Ocean and made it an issue in the House of Representatives election held in August 2009. On winning the election, the DPJ Government terminated the missions in January 2010.²⁴

Need for Constitutional amendments

It is amply clear from the above account that any serious attempt on the part of Japan to pursue an active and independent security policy in the region is directly linked to Article Nine of the Constitution which technically prevents Japan from maintaining “land, sea and air forces” and puts a ban on using force to settle international disputes. Despite this constitutional restriction, Japan has developed considerable military capabilities by means of pragmatic though highly contentious interpretations of Article Nine of the Constitution. However, with the increasing strategic challenges that Japan faces today in the Asia-Pacific region, there is a new urgency for Tokyo to come out of these constitutional and administrative hurdles and move in the direction of assuming normal statehood.

Discussions on constitutional reforms have been going on in Japan for a long time though they have assumed greater salience since the end of the

Cold War. In 2000, the Diet set up constitutional research commissions in both chambers and they completed their reports in 2005. The two major parties—the LDP and the DPJ—have also prepared their reports on the constitutional revision, but there are diverse opinions expressed by individuals and groups within these parties. For instance, in the DPJ, there are strong erstwhile Socialist elements who have expressed their serious reservations on amendments. Further, it is relevant to note how the DPJ Government under Yukio Hatoyama could not get its coalition partner, the Socialist Democratic Party (SDP), to support its position on the Okinawa base issue leading ultimately to the downfall of the ministry itself in June 2010. In the new DPJ ministry under Prime Minister Naoto Kan, the SDP is not a coalition partner. The SDP also has serious differences with DPJ on constitutional amendments, the role of the defence forces and Japan's right to collective self-defence. Even within the DPJ, leaders like Ichiro Ozawa, Katsuya Okada and Yukio Hatoyama have gone on record expressing views that indicate divergences on the issue. But this confusion is not limited only to the DPJ, but seen in the LDP as well where many shades of opinion on the subject prevail. In addition, when the LDP was in power, its position was very much hamstrung by its coalition partner, the New Komeito, which is strongly opposed to constitutional amendments.

Going by the mood of the political parties, there is very little prospect of constitutional amendments taking place in the near future. Moreover, the procedures under Article 96 of the Constitution for carrying out any constitutional revision require two-thirds majority of all the members of the two Houses followed by an affirmative vote of a majority of all votes cast in a referendum. In 2007, the Japanese Government under Shinzo Abe managed to enact a law for laying down the procedures for a national referendum and the law was to go into effect in 2010. Even though the referendum law is now ready, the

political parties do not have the will to make proposals for amendments. More importantly, they cannot muster the requisite two-thirds majorities in the Diet unless, in the most unlikely scenario, the two major parties—the LDP and the DPJ—come to some limited political understanding to cooperate on constitutional change.

Successive US administrations have shown their interest in seeing that Japan undertakes certain tangible responsibilities under the security alliance. Their criticism of Japan reached a high point at the time of the Gulf War 1990-92 when Japan, constrained by its Constitution, could not make a tangible human contribution to the allies. Many Americans expressed their concerns as to how the bilateral security cooperation was adversely affected by Article Nine of the Constitution. Senior officials in the second Bush administration like US Secretary of State Colin Powell and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage even went to the extent of telling Japanese leaders that unless Japan amended Article Nine of the Constitution, it had little prospects of becoming a permanent member of the UN Security Council.²⁵ The present Obama administration has been too much involved in adjusting itself to the new DPJ administration, first under Yukio Hatoyama and now under Naoto Kan, to pay attention to the constitutional amendments. Perhaps it believes that given the present murky political situation in Japan, any indication of American pressure on this issue would be counterproductive leading to further strains in bilateral relations.

Japanese Response

Keeping the US as an anchor, Japan has made significant strides in developing its own defence capabilities. Over the years, it has carried out several mid-term defence build-up programmes which have modernized the SDF and equipped them with sophisticated weapons. It has been noted earlier how the 1995 NDPO was formulated following

the end of the Cold War. Similarly, in 2004, there was a strong feeling that since the threat perceptions in the region had changed drastically following the 9/11 terror attacks, a new national defence policy should be formulated. The new National Defence Policy Guidelines (NDPG) 2005-09 were as adopted by the end of 2004 after detailed deliberations by a high-level advisory council. The NDPG states that even though there is very little likelihood of a direct attack on Japan, Tokyo will have to respond to new threats and diverse situations like terrorism and ballistic missile attacks. According to the NDPG, “Japan should voluntarily and actively participate in activities that nations of the world cooperatively undertake to enhance international security environment”. Japan's SDF should therefore be “highly ready, mobile, adaptable and multipurpose and be equipped with state of the art technologies and intelligence capabilities measuring up to the military–technological level of other countries.”²⁶ Emphasizing the pivotal role of the US in Japan's foreign policy, the NDPG states how the two countries can promote a stable security environment in the Asia Pacific region by supporting the ASEAN Regional Forum and other multilateral efforts.

It is pertinent at this point to note how the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) at its meeting held in Washington in February 2005 identified common strategic objectives of the two countries and in effect reiterated the salient points mentioned in the NDPG. The most important objectives included—peace and stability of the Asia Pacific region, peaceful unification of the Koreas, cooperative relations with China and the peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue, and maritime security and stability of energy supplies.²⁷

The China Factor

The rise of China as an economic and military power has a critical bearing on the strategic environment of the Asia-Pacific region. For the

first time in recent history, Japan has come to have a powerful Asian country as its immediate neighbour. For a very long time, Japanese leaders and diplomats were extremely cautious and had avoided any adverse references to China and its potential role in the region. Anxieties about China's rise started figuring in some of the defence related publications from the mid-90s, but they were couched in a relatively mild language. In the last few years, however, expressions of Japanese misgivings about China's growing military strength have been strong and direct. For the first time, the National Defence Policy Guidelines 2005 stated: "China, which has a major impact on regional security, continues to modernize its nuclear forces and missile capabilities as well as its naval and air forces. China is also expanding its area of operation at sea. We will have to remain attentive to its future actions."²⁸ The US-Japan Joint Security Consultative Committee (2+2 meetings) in its annual joint communiqué has also mentioned the expanding influence of China and the imperative need for it to become a responsible international stakeholder, improve transparency in its military affairs and maintain consistency between its stated policies and actions.²⁹

Owing to long historical ties, Japan's relations towards China have a unique characteristic. Even during the early Cold War period when Japan had to toe the US policy of not recognizing the PRC, it devised a plan to maintain economic relations with Beijing. The principle of separating politics from economics (Seikei Bunri) was a peculiar Japanese innovation which enabled it to build considerable economic links with Beijing. The normalization of their diplomatic relations in 1972 gave a great stimulus for accelerating their ties at a rapid pace. During the 1990s, when China was busy implementing its modernization programme, Japan's official development aid (ODA) became a significant source of bilateral economic cooperation along with Japanese investment and trade.

Today the two-way trade, accounting for about \$ 260 billion, forms the bedrock of their relations and China has already replaced the US as the biggest trading partner of Japan. In 2009, China's trade with the US worth about \$300 billion was much bigger than Japan's trade with the US. China is also an attractive destination for Japanese investment. Until very recently, China continuously enjoyed the position of the biggest recipient of Japan's ODA. However, in the last four or five years, Japan stopped its development loans to Beijing on the ground that China had already become rich and would not need development loans. Tokyo's decision to stop extending ODA to China understandably became a source of bitterness in their delicate relations.

Historical legacies continue to cast their shadows on the bilateral ties though the present leadership in China hails from the post-war generation. During 2001-06 when Koizumi was at the helm in Japan, he made regular annual visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine (where the last remains of Japan's Class A war criminals are kept) which widened the gulf between the two countries. These visits offended China so much that it called off all high-level bilateral official meetings, and along with South Korea, refused to participate in the trilateral summits that used to be held on the sidelines of the annual ASEAN summit.

When Koizumi retired in 2006 many in Japan heaved a sigh of relief and his successor Shinzo Abe showed utmost keenness to stop this declining trend in the bilateral relations. He made his first official visit to Beijing and assured his hosts that he would not visit the Yasukuni Shrine while he served as the prime minister. China also responded positively by agreeing to resume the high-level exchanges and in April 2007, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jibao made an official visit to Japan. At the end of a successful visit, Wen and Abe signed a joint communiqué in which they

promised to establish “mutually beneficial relationship based on common strategic interests,” between the two countries.³⁰ Though China seemed satisfied with the improvement of relations, it had reservations on Abe's vision of building a quadrilateral understanding with the US, India and Australia for the security of the region and considered it as a plan directed against China. China was equally suspicious of the motives behind the Malabar naval exercise conducted by the US, Japan, India, Australia and Singapore in the Bay of Bengal in September 2007.

Abe's successor, Yasuo Fukuda, was even more strongly committed to friendly relations with China. Soon after assuming office, he gave a categorical assurance to both China and South Korea that he would not make any visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. This was followed by his warm references to China in his first policy speech at the Diet on October 1, 2007. He reiterated Japan's resolve to “establish a mutually beneficial relationship with China based on common strategic interests and work together to contribute to peace and stability in Asia.” Japan and China also instituted a high-level annual economic dialogue which was held in Beijing in December 2007. The dialogue was intended to offer a platform for both countries to discuss their views on a range of subjects including trade, investment, regional and international issues, energy security and environment protection. The Japanese delegation to the meeting comprised six cabinet ministers including Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura. The fact that China holds such high-level discussions only with the US and the EU showed the importance it attached to the talks.

Another positive development that followed was the resumption of the defence dialogue between the two countries which had been in abeyance for a decade. In August 2007, Chinese Defence Minister Cao

Gangchuan visited Japan. The visit was intended to revive contacts in the defence field and assure Japan about China's commitment to peace and transparency in defence spending.³¹ All these positive developments were capped by Fukuda's visit to Beijing in December 2007 and President Hu Jintao's visit to Japan in May 2008.

The political change that saw the Democratic Party of Japan assume power in Japan did not mean any departure from the positive trends set in by Abe and Fukuda. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama during his short tenure did his best to maintain cordial relations with China by meeting Hu Jintao first at the UN in September 2009 and later in China and stressed the importance for the two countries to pursue cooperative approaches to issues affecting peace and security in the Asia-Pacific. His successor, Naoto Kan, in his first policy speech at the Diet on June 11, 2010 stressed the importance of China in Japan's foreign policy.

Elements of fragility

While Sino-Japanese relations have significantly improved since the days of Shinso Abe, one cannot altogether ignore certain elements of fragility in their ties which could flare up at any point and vitiate the atmosphere. The territorial dispute surrounding the Senkaku island, competing claims made by both countries to natural gas and oil resources in the East China Sea and the continuing issues connected with history and textbooks are quite volatile and capable of inflaming nationalistic feelings in both countries.

Japan believes in pursuing a policy of engaging China while at the same time hedging against Beijing's emergence as a preponderant regional power. As Professor Gerald Curtis notes, since Japan's clout to influence the regional security situation is constrained by many factors including constitutional limitations and declining economic power, the hedge against China is “primarily its alliance with the United States”.³²

The crucial issue is how credible the US hedge is. Many Japanese believe that the importance of China in American diplomatic scale of priorities has significantly increased given its huge holdings of US official bonds, its increasing trade and investment ties, its big domestic market, and above all its role in the six-party talks and the denuclearization of North Korea. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council, China enjoys more clout than Japan. However, at the same time, one should not ignore certain factors that could strain their ties. For instance, any disturbance in the prevailing situation in the Taiwan Straits would not only cause serious ripples in US-China relations, but also bring Japan under tremendous diplomatic pressure. American bases in Okinawa would naturally be put to use by Washington which would infuriate China. The Japanese deeply worry about the expanding military build-up of China in recent years. China's advances in nuclear and missile technologies make them extremely uneasy and drive them to rely more on their alliance with the US. As of now, there is really no constituency in Japan in favour of nuclear weapons as an option to counter China.

The Japanese suspect that Beijing does not observe international norms in protecting the normal and legitimate Japanese interests in China. During 2004-05, there were several violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in China that caused immense damage to Japanese properties. It was suspected that the Chinese Government did not take sufficiently effective measure to curb them.

North Korea's Nuclear Programme

Having suffered the horror of atomic bombs, Japan has been a strong advocate of nuclear non-proliferation. It is a party to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Deeply committed to its three non-nuclear principles, (not to produce, not to possess and not to bring into Japan nuclear weapons) it

wants that the Asia-Pacific region should be free from the threat of nuclear weapons. Despite China's commitment to the NPT regime, Japan has always felt uneasy with China's nuclear weapon and missile development technologies. But what worries Japan now is the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and missile programme. North Korea is the only country in the Asia-Pacific region with which Japan does not have normal diplomatic relations. The end of the Cold War was not followed by any reconciliation between the two. On the contrary, North Korea remained a threat and a flashpoint. Prime Minister Koizumi took two bold personal initiatives by visiting Pyongyang (2002 and 2004) in a bid to bring a diplomatic breakthrough. Japan has been participating in the six-party talks from their very inception. Japan's main concern is centred on two issues—North Korea's abduction of several Japanese citizens over a period of time and its growing nuclear and missile technology capabilities.

The failure of North Korea to satisfactorily account for several abductees has become an emotive issue within Japan and successive governments have had to face the anger of the people for their failure to solve this problem. In its participation at the six-party talks, Tokyo had linked its future economic assistance to North Korea to the settlement of the abduction issue.

While strongly arguing for Pyongyang's denuclearization, Japan has always doubted the former's sincerity to carry out its obligations under agreements reached in the multilateral talks. In October 2006, when North Korea conducted its first nuclear test, it created shock waves even among common people in Japan. This, along with a series of missile tests conducted earlier in July, had the cumulative effect of creating demands for reviewing Japan's security policy. There were even a few voices within Japan in favour of contemplating preemptive action

against North Korea.³³ The question of Japan opting for a nuclear path was also debated in response to Pyongyang's threat.

The Japanese Government, apart from reacting sharply to the test, lent its support to a strongly worded UN Security Council resolution (No 1718) that condemned North Korea and strongly advised it to refrain from conducting similar tests or launching missiles. It also imposed a series of economic and financial sanctions. During the closing stages of President Bush's tenure, when he removed North Korea from the list of "evil states", Japan expressed its displeasure and imposed even stricter sanctions on North Korea.

In April 2009, when North Korea tested a missile again (Pyongyang claimed that it was only a communication satellite), Japan reacted strongly and swiftly: Prime Minister Taro Aso convened the National Security Council to deploy Japanese missile defence systems on both sea and land for taking suitable steps to bring down any rocket. For the first time, the Japanese Government invoked Article 82-2, Para 3 of the SDF Law of 2005 to legitimize interceptions of ballistic missiles. It immediately sent three destroyers equipped with aegis combat system and armed with Standard Missile-3 interceptors to the Sea of Japan. In addition, it also deployed PAC-3 batteries to Akita and Iwate prefectures. The US Navy assured the Japanese public of their safety from potential armed threats from North Korea.

Japan was at the forefront of mobilizing global support against Pyongyang's 'illegal' missile programme. Prime Minister Aso met several world leaders at the G-20 economic summit in London and conveyed how North Korea's actions could destabilize the East Asian region. On April 5, 2009, President Obama stated, "North Korea must know that the path to security and respect will never come through threats and illegal weapons." He asserted that the US would "maintain

its effective deterrence both for us and our allies.”³⁴ These assurances were indeed soothing to Japan which had suspected the previous Bush administration of being somewhat soft towards North Korea. This particular episode clearly demonstrates that the steps Tokyo took on North Korean missiles and Pyongyang's intransigence on the nuclear question has indeed brought Japan closer to the US.

The second nuclear test conducted by North Korea on May 25, 2009 once again drew a very strong response from all over the world, including the US, China and South Korea who called it a violation of the UNSC Resolution 1718. Both the US and Japan drafted a joint resolution which contained tougher sanctions including use of force to conduct inspection of North Korean cargo ships. But due to pressure from China and Russia, it was diluted to exclude the use of force. Resolution 1874 urged Pyongyang not to conduct any more nuclear tests or launch missiles and abandon all nuclear weapons programmes in a verifiable manner. North Korea's nuclear tests triggered many in the defence establishment of Japan to discuss the paramount need for an appropriate security strategy that would address the North Korean challenge. The incident in April 2010, in which North Korea sank a ship belonging to South Korea, further deepened Japan's concerns about the security situation in the region. Japan rallied round Seoul and Washington in condemning North Korean action.

Japan and ASEAN

Occupying a strategically important location vis-a-vis the sea lanes that pass through Southeast Asia, the ASEAN Group is a major player in the region, both in strategic and economic terms. Composed of 10 countries, it has achieved considerable cohesiveness and developed close partnership with Japan. Japan's investment, trade and development assistance (ODA) have made significant contribution to the growth of

ASEAN economies. Tokyo has always held that the security and stability of ASEAN are closely tied with those of Japan. Around 1990, coinciding with the end of the Cold War, there was a general feeling that the Asia Pacific region needed a security forum to address many problems arising out of the impending end of the East-West conflict. It was Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama who took the initiative in 1991 to propose that ASEAN post-ministerial meetings could be used as a forum for conducting dialogue on security issues related to the region.³⁵ Japan played a behind-the-scene role in the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1994.

The ARF today comprises more than 25 countries cutting across regional boundaries. In the initial years, China was highly suspicious of the objectives of the new organization, but later it changed its attitude. Considering the diversity of the region and the complexity of various political and security issues confronting the ARF, its progress has been rather slow. It has shown considerable success in undertaking confidence building measures, but has not moved to the next stage of preventive diplomacy. There has been some disenchantment in Japan regarding the ineffectiveness of ARF on matters like China's lack of transparency in military matters and North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. However, there is an understanding on the limits to the role of the ARF.

Japan's interest in community building

Within the Asia Pacific region, there is a strong trend in favour of greater integration. The ASEAN, ARF, ASEAN+ 3, and APEC are but a few examples that point to the on-going process of integration. Numerous free trade agreements/economic partnership agreements have enhanced interdependence in the region. This trend is likely to gather momentum in the coming years. Japan has always shown its

interest in constructing a regional community that would enhance peace and stability. In 2004-5, the composition of an East Asian community was seriously discussed by the ASEAN+3 countries. Japan, under Prime Minister Koizumi, succeeded in giving a broader geographical scope to the body by including India, Australia and New Zealand. While China worked hard to limit the East Asian Summit (EAS) only to the ASEAN+3 countries, Japan feared that such a configuration would give Beijing a dominant role in it.³⁶ Four summits have already taken place since 2005 and it is still not clear how the final goal of a larger Asian community is going to be accomplished. The US and Russia are likely to join the EAS in the near future once they fulfill the criteria fixed by the ASEAN.

In recent years, China has pursued very sophisticated diplomacy to emerge as a major factor in Southeast Asia.³⁷ Chinese economic assistance is liberally extended to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. China's agreement with ASEAN countries on a code of conduct in the South China Sea and its prompt response in signing the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) had put Japan on the defensive. In response, Japan quickly modified its strategy and went on to sign not only the TAC but also a comprehensive free trade agreement with ASEAN and individual trade agreements with almost all ASEAN countries. In addition, Japan has taken special interest in the economic reconstruction of the Mekong region. Southeast Asian countries have come a long way in striking a reconciliation with Japan, unlike China and South Korea which still are very much disturbed by the problems connected with historical legacies.

Partnership with India and Australia

Japan has demonstrated its quest for broadening its own diplomatic options by building economic and security partnerships with countries

like India and Australia. Strategic partnership with India has acquired prominent salience since 2000 when the two countries embarked on a global partnership. Both understand what they can contribute together for the security and stability of the Asian region. They signed a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in October 2008 followed by an action plan signed in December 2009. The Declaration places emphasis on the need for bilateral coordination in regional affairs, as well as bilateral cooperation within multilateral fora in Asia such as the East Asian Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Regional Cooperation Agreement on combating piracy and robbery against ships in Asia (ReCAPP). The Declaration essentially seeks to build on the existing tempo in defence ties while attempting to broaden the framework with a view to influencing the emerging security architecture. The two countries have identified many areas where they can cooperate such as maritime security, safety of transport, disaster management, energy security, counter-terrorism, UN reforms and nuclear disarmament. Indo-Japanese strategic partnership has immense potential in the context of the security of the Asia-Pacific region. Both India and Japan cooperate with Southeast Asian countries for ensuring maritime security in the Indian Ocean area. The safety of the sea lanes is vital for the continued transportation of energy supplies on which their economies depend so much.

Japan also attaches considerable importance to the role of Australia in the peace and security of the Asia Pacific region. It has an annual trilateral conference with Australia and the US at the level of foreign ministers. In addition, it has an annual bilateral 2+2 security dialogue at the level of cabinet ministers. Both Japan and Australia also signed a Declaration on Security Cooperation in 2007 and an action plan in December 2009. In 2009, India and Australia also forged a similar agreement on security cooperation. All these accords—between India

and Japan, Japan and Australia and India and Australia—clearly indicate the evolving commonality of interests among them on regional security. While it is wrong to conclude that these agreements will bring the earlier quadrilateral security proposal closer to realization, there is little doubt that they could facilitate speedier exchange of communication among them. At the same time, they have also clarified that their partnerships are not directed against any nation. Each one of them has strong economic ties with China and they know only too well that in any future regional configuration, China by virtue of its economic and military strength will be a prominent player. They are only keen to ensure that the rise of China does not disturb the prevailing regional balance. While they are interested in engaging China economically, these security agreements could also act as a hedge against Beijing.

Conclusion

Japan's security policy has witnessed a major transformation since the end of the Cold War. During the long Cold War period, Japan simply entrusted its security responsibilities to the US and concentrated on its economic progress. The bilateral security alliance with the US forged in 1951-2 continues to be the cornerstone of Japan's security policy even though the alliance itself was a product of the Cold War. Japan took a long time to get adjusted to the new post-Cold War environment. This was amply borne out by its ill-prepared response to the Gulf war in 1990-91. Japan learnt a bitter lesson from the war that mere monetary assistance would not be sufficient to carry out the full responsibilities in an alliance. But soon, Japan was showing willingness to make changes like the passing of international peace-keeping law (1991-92), dispatch of SDF personnel to Cambodia for peace-keeping operations under the UN, redefinition of its alliance with the US in 1996, revising the defence

guidelines in 1997 and drawing a new NDPO reflecting regional developments like the rise of China and North Korea's involvement in nuclear programme. All these were important incremental changes in Japan's security policy in the Asia-Pacific region. When the 9/11 terror attacks led to international action under the leadership of the US, Japan acted with swiftness. It passed several anti-terror measures with record speed and dispatched its MSDF ships to the Indian Ocean for extending refuelling services to the coalition powers.

Notwithstanding the controversial Iraq war, security cooperation between the US and Japan has become stronger over the years partly because of the rise of China and North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. As has been noted, it makes a lot of sense for Japan to pursue a policy of engaging China economically and in the security sphere. There are compelling reasons for them to maintain cordial relations. Their bilateral trade and investment links are too big to be ignored. But there are also elements of fragility that could vitiate their ties like historical legacies, the territorial issue of Senkaku islands, differences over the exploitation of oil and gas resources in the East China Sea, and China's growing naval power. Japan, therefore, pursues a policy of hedging against China. While most Japanese would consider the US as a hedge, there are doubts about the reliability of the US. Many still remember the 'Japan passing' attitude shown in the 1990s by President Bill Clinton. Today China enjoys much greater diplomatic and economic advantages in its relations with the US. Many Japanese fear that their country may not enjoy the same attraction as China. This particular concern drives Japan to broaden its diplomacy to opt for partnerships with India, Australia and the ASEAN. Proposals like Abe's four-power understanding and Koizumi's inclusion of India, Australia and New Zealand in the East Asian Summit were essentially intended to increase Japan's diplomatic options and to balance the

increasing influence of China. But Japan's security policy will continue to depend on its alliance with the US. Though the present DPJ Government has still to formulate its National Defence Policy Guidelines, Prime Minister Naoto Kan has reiterated that the security alliance with the US will continue to be the linchpin of Japan's security policy in the Asia-Pacific region.

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