

The new role of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) under proactive contribution to peace strategy

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Abstract

As per the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no nation can maintain security and peace on its own. Therefore, Tokyo, through the Japanese Ministry of Defense, contributes to the United Nations' efforts to maintain and restore international peace and security. Article 9 of the pacifist constitution, in force since 1947, binds Japan's defense policy. But global dangers, especially the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the Chinese threats to Taiwan, and the madness of the North Korean dictator, forced Japan to develop the proficiency of the Self-Defense Forces under the title of “proactive contribution to peace.” In this study, we will review the development of this concept through the process of building Japanese military capabilities. This will enable us to respond to societal changes from the Korean War to the present. As part of Japan's efforts to contribute to international peace and security operations have developed its military capabilities. This includes the enactment of the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) Law, the establishment of the National Security Strategy, and the purchase of advanced weapons and equipment. The Nation's commitment to international peace and security is also evident in its participation in United Nations peacekeeping operations and other regional activities.

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Introduction

CHAPTER II: RENUNCIATION OF WAR, **Article 9.** *Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized [1].*

Regarding the Japanese text above, the English translation does not make it obvious whether “war as a way of

settling international conflicts” is related to “war as a sovereign prerogative of the nation”. The Nihongo text asserts that “war as a means of resolving international conflicts” is unmistakably linked to both “the threat or use of force” and “war as a sovereign prerogative of the nation”. War is often associated with conquering other nations to resolve international conflicts. Without differentiating between offensive and defensive actions, paragraph one denounces all wars. Therefore, all military operations, including self-defense wars, can be exploited to settle international conflicts, which makes it difficult to differentiate between an invasion and a self-defense war. The introductory paragraph rejects “violence as a means of solving global disputes”.

Accordingly, paragraph two does not explicitly prohibit the right to use force for self-defense, so the pacifist Constitution does not forbid war as defined by the Charter of the United Nations.

1. A Historical overview

With the unconditional surrender of the Empire of Japan at the end of World War II [2], Japan came under foreign occupation for the first time in its long history. One of the outcomes of their defeat was the Pacifist Constitution, *Nihon-koku Kenpo*. This was imposed, not promulgated, under heavy pressure and mandatory directives from the “Supreme Command of the Allied Forces (SCAP)” led by General Douglas MacArthur. The American occupation caused a peaceful revolution, restoring civil rights, universal suffrage, and a parliamentary government. This resulted in reforming education, encouraging labor unions, and emancipating women. MacArthur was initially directed to exercise authority through the Japanese government structure, including the emperor himself. However, he became the de facto commander, organizing and structuring an independent Japan under American auspices.

The Japanese authorities, facing the inevitability of defeat and fearing the annihilation of the Japanese nation, applied the Aikido strategy that forced the nation to study and practice kata. This was a set of prearranged movements that enabled it to deal with an aggressive adversary successfully. This centuries-old art taught practitioners to use the force of an opponent against themselves, a strategy that gives the nation a definite advantage if attacked. Its tactical significance is to accommodate the opponent until victory is achieved.

2. Establishment of the Japan Self-Defense Forces

Demobilizing and disarming the Imperial Japanese Army *Dai-Nippon Teikoku Rikugun* was one of SCAP’s conditions. By abolishing Japan’s armed forces, dismantling its military organization, and eliminating the expression of patriotism from its schools and public life, Japan’s security depended completely on the United States Forces Japan’s (USFJ) *Zainichi Beigun* protection.

Amid the outbreak of the global Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocs, the international community forced dual polarization. At this stage of the occupation, Japan’s economic rehabilitation took center stage. SCAP became concerned that a weak Japan would boost the influence of the Japanese Communist Party, *Nihon Kysan-t*, which was outlawed during the imperial era [3]. As a communist victory in China’s civil war became increasingly uncertain, East Asia’s future appeared uncertain. Japan’s debilitating effects were addressed through occupation policies ranging from tax reforms to inflation control measures.

The fiery battles in the Far East were the Korean War (1950-1953) and the Vietnamese War (1955-1975), which caused Japan to become the principal supply depot for American and UN forces, led by General MacArthur himself. The conflict placed Japan firmly within the confines of the U.S. defense perimeter in Asia. After these devastating circumstances, Japan gradually returned to being a fully sovereign state with local armed forces that should be allied with the United States Army and NATO. Japan’s contribution to Western war efforts at the military level was limited to the “logistical” role [4].

In 1954, Japan strengthened its defense capabilities during the Cold War. The proposed Self-Defense Forces Law stated that the primary purpose of the newly formed armed brigades was to defend Japan against direct or indirect invasion. The bill was passed by the Diet, and the Security Agency was reorganized as the Self-

Defense Agency *Beich*. The police and coastal guard units were also reorganized as Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) *Jieitai*.

The Defense Agency, a part of the Office of the Prime Minister, was required by Article 66 of the Constitution to be completely subordinate to civilian authority. The director-general had the rank of minister of state. The highest figure in the command structure was the “civilian” prime minister, who was solely responsible for the diet. Thus, in a national emergency, the prime minister was authorized to order the JSDF into action, subject to the regime's consent. However, in times of extreme emergencies, approval might be obtained later.

3. The Post-Cold war era

By the end of the twentieth century, the Soviet Union had collapsed, and the US had become a unipolar force on the globe. Aside from Japan, China was the most visible opponent of American unilateralism. In 1992, the law concerning cooperation in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (PKO Law), which enabled the dispatch of the JSDF overseas, was passed. Nevertheless, a major setback occurred in 1994, when socialist Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama announced before the Diet a party policy change stating that a minimum level of military capacity for self-defense was constitutional. The public accepted, as it was constitutionalized, a modest JSDF whose main purpose was disaster relief rather than defense. Nonetheless, it opposed the JSDF's substantial growth in military and overseas fighting.

To head off any public fears and legislative battles that the government would expand the JSDF's activities, the bill had a built-in expiration date; it would only last for two years, then the Diet would have to vote again on whether to continue or not. The government has thus established five principles to guide the JSDF's participation in peacekeeping operations:

1. during armed conflicts, all operations must be completely impartial and not favor any party.
2. Japan should obtain the consent of both the host countries and the parties to armed conflicts prior to participating in UN peacekeeping operations.
3. Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) units may be withdrawn if any of the above principles cease to be met.
4. The use of weapons should be limited to the minimum necessary to protect the lives of personnel.
5. There must be an agreement between the parties to the armed conflict regarding a cease-fire [5].

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 marked the most extreme case of Japan's tilt towards the US in the Middle East. Japan immediately announced its full support for US military action in the Iraqi crisis. This was at a time when most other countries were hesitant and critical of a war breaking out [6]. Another JSDF legislative expansion was enacted. The Special Measures Law Concerning Humanitarian Relief Support Activities and Security Maintenance Support Activities in Iraq enabled Japan to send JSDF troops to an occupied country where small-scale fighting continued. Japan's timid start was through the participation of the medical brigade in the Self-Defense Forces in Iraq reconstruction and being stationed in Samawah with up to six hundred personnel [7]. After the Gulf War, Japan gradually relied less on military means in its security strategy, marking a turning point for Japan. In response to the Situation of Armed Attack Law of 2003, the government enacted laws and regulations to implement a contingency plan. This was to protect the nation from attack.

Under that law, the following seven bills regarding military emergencies were submitted by the Cabinet and passed by the Diet in 2004 [8]:

1. the Act to Amend the JSDF Law.
2. The law concerning dealing with prisoners of war while under armed attack.
3. The law concerning measures taken by Japan during United States military actions while Japan is under armed attack (law concerning measures relating to US military actions)

4. The law concerning measures to protect nationals in situations of armed attack (the National Protection Law)
5. The law concerning the punishment of grave violations of international humanitarian law.
6. The law concerning the use of designated public facilities, etc., under armed attack.
7. The law on the restriction of maritime transportation of foreign military supplies, etc., in situations of armed attack (Maritime Transportation Restriction Law).

Meanwhile, the Japanese “Liberal Democratic Party” emerged, with its pioneering leadership since independence and its historical symbols, represented by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (the grandson of Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi), who proposed a gradual strategic change in strengthening the Japanese army during his second term [9]. When Mr. Abe became prime minister for the second time in December 2012, the hawkish era began in the Japanese government. In July of the same year, Mr. Abe called, as the leader of the parliamentary majority, to reinterpret Article 9. Accordingly, the possibility of “collective self-defense” to protect world peace was born [10].

As part of the Sixty-Eighth General Assembly of the United Nations on Thursday, September 26, 2013, Prime Minister Abe declared that “Japan will begin to bear the flag of “Proactive Contribution to Peace,” anchored on the undeniable records and solid appraisal of our country, which has endeavored to bring peace and prosperity to the world, emphasizing cooperation with the international community” [11]. Consequently, the Japanese Armed Forces found themselves confronting enormous challenges outside their domestic scope in addition to maintaining internal security. Japan was, in other words, seeking to become a global peacekeeping power. In 2014, the Ministry of Defense (*Bei-sh*) adopted the *Ittaika* theory [12], which entailed integration in the use of force with other militaries, which was deemed unconstitutional by government legal specialists and had no clear premise neither in existing law nor in judicial rulings. They based their judgment on the fact that logistical assistance to foreign combatants should be viewed as a matter of principle and a choice in the national interest, not as a constitutionally debatable issue [13].

The following year, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe promoted a bill, which was passed on September 19, 2015, allowing the Japanese military to participate in anti-terrorism operations, overturning its previous policy of fighting only to defend the homeland [14]. This legislation came into effect on March 29, 2016. Despite the Japanese constitution's prohibition on the military acting except in self-defense, the enactment allowed Japan's military to operate overseas for “collective self-defense” to defend and protect its allies. Under these three conditions, the JSDF could mobilize overseas under government security legislation:

1. Japan's people have no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan's survival.
2. The use of force is restricted to a necessary minimum.
3. When Japan is attacked or when a close ally is attacked, resulting in a threat to Japan's survival and posing a clear danger to the Japanese people.

The involvement of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in military actions is explicitly articulated in the framework of “Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security.” This legislation establishes “Three New Conditions” under which the “Use of Force” is permitted. These conditions serve as guiding principles for the JSDF's military activities, emphasizing the necessity of such actions in particular situations.

The first condition stipulates that force is justified when no other appropriate means of evading an attack are available. Japan's survival and protection are necessary. This condition underscores the JSDF's primary responsibility to safeguard the nation and its citizens from potential threats. Moreover, the legislation allows Japan to take on an additional role in UN peacekeeping operations and participate in other international peace cooperation activities. By doing so, Japan demonstrated its commitment to global peace and security. It

contributes to the international community's efforts to resolve conflicts and maintain stability in various regions.

The JSDF is also permitted to engage in necessary support activities in situations that significantly impact Japan's peace and security. This may threaten international peace and security. This provision emphasizes Japan's readiness to take proactive measures when its vital interests and international obligations are at stake.

However, it is essential to note that the JSDF uses force strictly to the minimum extent necessary. This aspect highlights Japan's commitment to employing military means judiciously, proportionally, and as a last resort. It prioritizes diplomatic solutions whenever possible. The legislation explicitly outlines the circumstances under which the JSDF may employ military force. One such scenario is when Japan is attacked, or a foreign country is intricately linked to Japan. This poses a clear and imminent danger to Japan's survival and fundamentally threatens the people's fundamental rights to life, liberty, and happiness. In such cases, the JSDF is authorized to respond appropriately to safeguard its nation and citizens' well-being.

“Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security” presents a comprehensive and thoughtful approach to the JSDF's involvement in military actions. It acknowledges Japan's responsibility to protect its sovereignty and citizens. It recognizes the nation's role in promoting international peace and security through peacekeeping and cooperative efforts. By adhering to the principle of using force only when necessary and in a limited manner, Japan underscores its commitment to resolving conflicts through peaceful means whenever feasible. This legislation serves as a solid and eloquent academic framework that strikes a delicate balance between Japan's military responsibilities and its commitment to global peace and security [15].

After the Cabinet Decision on the “Legislation for Peace and Security,” Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced that “our activities will not be limited to dangerous situations that have a vital impact on Japan's peace and security.” Under the banner of “Proactive Contribution to Peace,” Japan is committed to contributing to global peace and stability even more actively.”

4. Domestic and internal burdens

The Japanese government was trying to address pressing weaknesses in Japanese defense, with arms procurement and training being the biggest challenges, and the solution for both was to get the budget to support the development of self-defense forces. For many years, Japan's defense budget has been constrained by two main considerations: Japan's encouragement by Washington to buy the most advanced and expensive U.S. weapons systems and the pressure from the Japanese people to limit defense spending to less than 1% of its GDP [16]. As a result, although Japan had developed its military arsenal, it suffered from severe shortages of personnel and ammunition. Japan's Ministry of Defense was focused on correcting this imbalance and ensuring its ability to continue fighting in the event of war. This would enable it to survive in the event of a protracted conflict.

There has been a lot of internal debate in Japan over the proposal to increase defense spending from less than 1% of GDP to 2% [17]. However, this debate overestimates the magnitude of the increase required in the short term. Japan already spends about 1.3% of its GDP on matters like veterans' pensions, coast guard costs, and intelligence. Correcting the disputed imbalance would thus eliminate the need for rapid accumulation and help strengthen Japan's military power.

The youth shortage was a fundamental problem, as the number of young people in Japan had been rapidly declining. This posed a demographic threat to the survival of the Japanese nation. Temporarily, the Japanese leadership was trying a three-pronged approach:

1. Creating a military environment and defense systems that empower women The concept of “tough defensive posture” has been adhered to in Japanese defense policy and reports for many years. An aggressive defense stance was strategically indefensible: in the event of an external invasion, the enemy must withdraw from occupied territories, including remote islands.

2. Investing in artificial intelligence in military operations, the most notable example being autonomous drones.
3. Raise the wages and salaries of officers and enlistees in the Japanese forces.

Successive governments have rejected this objection for years, citing the US-Japan security agreement as the shield and the US as the spear. In the event of an imminent missile attack from mainland Asia, Japan must be able not only to stand idly by and “wait for death” but also to preemptively hit enemy missile bases.

China and North Korea (also South Korea) had numerous missile bases, some of which were hidden underground, making such a preemptive strike impossible using current military technology. By contrast, retaliatory strikes, which most countries consider a legitimate and essential aspect of self-defense, can be directed against any aspect of the hostile weapon system, not just the missile bases that threaten Japan's security. Under the slogan of “proactive pacifism”, the Japanese leadership lifted the military restrictions imposed by Tokyo in earlier years by operating on three levels:

4. Reinterpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution: This reassessment allowed the Ministry of Defense to conduct military operations under the right of collective self-defense and was no longer limited to the right to defend Japanese territory only. Instead, it would come into effect in the event of an armed attack against a country with strong ties to Japan. This would be done with Japanese forces fighting in defense of the ally.
5. Revision of Arms Export Laws [18]: On April 1, 2014, the Japanese government eased restrictions on arms exports. Under the review, arms exports would be allowed if they contributed to Japan's security and complied with the principles of “positive peace”.
6. New Development Cooperation Agreement [19]: On February 10, 2015, Japan ratified the Comprehensive Development Cooperation Charter. This agreement replaced the system that had been in place since 2002. Japan may thus provide aid to foreign armies for non-military purposes such as disaster relief.

5. International trade wars and regional tensions

Today's world is experiencing a fierce confrontation represented by the US-China Trade War, even though Chinese investments dominate the US economy and domestic markets. Until recently, financial indicators clearly showed a Beijing advantage in direct competition with Washington.

Huawei has faced numerous criticisms for various aspects of its operations, especially cybersecurity, intellectual property, and human rights violations. On November 26, 2019, the US Department of Commerce issued a highly anticipated proposed rule with proposed regulations (“Proposed Regulations”) to implement Executive Order 13873, “Securing the Information and Communications Technology and Services Supply by Huawei Technologies [20]. The Pentagon engaged in economic confrontation. This was while the media was America's most effective weapon against China, even though Huawei tried to counter-attack [21]. Furthermore, the overall media coverage of the pandemic reached the point of “racism” towards the Chinese population and did not exclude other Asian communities, despite the entire world being faced with the COVID-19 pandemic.

As for Japan being the neighbor of the Chinese superpower, an ambitious dragon, in addition to contemporary rivalry and the dispute over border islands between the two countries [22], these marine rocks are rich in natural resources and buried wealth [23]. Hence, the opponent to Japanese sovereignty over the *Senkaku* Islands/*Diaoyutai Qundao* is the “Chinese People's Liberation Army”, which has two and a half million soldiers with massive nuclear capabilities. However, despite wise leadership and a massive armed force, President Kim Jong-un's temperament, and the ways he controls nukes, pose a real and dangerous threat to

Japan and the world as well as contributing to world peace. He also faces competition on the other side of the Korean peninsula.

Although South Korea revolves around the capitalist orbit and enjoys the protection of US military bases, it has publicly declared hostility towards Japan. The historical quarrels between South Korea and Japan over the islands' sovereignty eventually escalated. Furthermore, Seoul calls for changing the name of the "Sea of Japan." The Japanese government supports the exclusive use of the name "Sea of Japan" while a dispute exists over the international name for the body of water that is bordered by Japan, Korea (North and South), and Russia [24]. In recent years, the world has been amid a Japan-South Korea trade war after Tokyo removed Korean companies from the "whitelist" for preferential trading in July 2019. This dispute casts a shadow over the economies of the two countries.

Another dangerous neighbor is the Russian Federation, the heir to the Soviet Union. This country occupied the Kuril Islands in northern Japan and has since turned them into a military reserve stronghold following the inhumane expulsion of its Japanese residents.

6. The three pillars of Japan's security policy

Despite Japan's economic problems and domestic and international opposition, the government has worked to achieve its three goals:

- A. Japan's possession of defense capabilities [25]: The Self-Defense Forces describe themselves as the "only guarantee" to protect national security from any threat. Hence the importance of strengthening these forces so that they can intervene quickly in conflict zones, especially with powerful neighbors. Japan is wary of provocative missile tests from North Korea, and China represents a massive danger, especially with its ambitions to annex Taiwan, albeit by force. To counter the Chinese threat, Japanese land, sea, and air forces must be able to join hands to counter any sudden Chinese escalation. Hence, the Japanese army is trained in a flexible, fast, dynamic, and integrated manner.
- B. Alliance with the United States [26]: The U.S.-Japan relationship is a cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy, and these relationships are based on strategic interests and shared values. According to security treaties and tacit consensus, the United States is the guarantee of Japan's security. In return, Japan allows Tokyo to maintain military bases on Okinawa and the Honshu Peninsula. The Japan Defense Forces ensure flexible cooperation to ensure the smooth and effective deployment of U.S. forces. This cooperation continues across joint military programs and land, sea, and air exercises.
- C. International cooperation: In this context, two forms of cooperation initiated by Japan can be distinguished:
 - Bilateral Cooperation: There are several bilateral cooperation agreements between Japan and several countries, including Australia, India, South Korea, the Philippines, Vietnam, and Indonesia.
 - Multilateral cooperation: This is where Tokyo's relationship with major regional organizations in Asia, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ARF) [27] and the East Asian Summit (EAS) [28], comes into an effective alliance. Japan has begun to pursue projects aimed at strengthening its integration with ASEAN. This is because Japan wants its member states to have a unified attitude toward China. The Japanese government has allocated a large amount of money to this end through development projects and infrastructure support in friendly and allied countries.

7. Conclusions

Amidst this gloomy atmosphere of the regional situation and the immediate danger threatening Japan, is it logical to call for the necessity of reducing the exaggerated "peacefulness" while history since the beginning of creation testifies to "survival of the fittest" along with the factors of "intelligence and adaptation"?

Accordingly, this is the origin of the term “proactive pacifism,” which is based on a historical accumulation that built the Japanese armed forces professionally on land, sea, and air to become the fourth army in the world, which recently began building and equipping “space defense forces,” in striking resemblance to the American and Russian superpowers' ambitions.

Japan's proactive peaceful strategy was based on the following pillars:

1. building a rational defense force step by step within the necessary scope of self-defense per national circumstances.
2. Security agreements with the United States govern the response to external aggression. This is so that the United Nations can act effectively in the future to deter this aggression. To be sure, it is the fourth axis that shaped Japan's defense policy for much of the period after the end of direct U.S. occupation.
3. Stabilize people's lives, strengthen patriotism, and build a foundation for national security.
4. Support the United Nations, promote international cooperation, and contribute to world peace.

Studying the promulgation and birth of “proactive pacifism” clearly indicates that the preparation for harvesting the fruits at the national level consists of sowing suitable seeds and taking care of their growth and intensification while waiting for the appropriate moment to rely on them.

Hence, the serious construction of the Japanese army over the decades following the defeat comes from here. With a sober structure and a solid hierarchy, 2012 was the appropriate decisive moment to increase the budget of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces and expand their regional and international role to contribute to building world peace. Self-Defense Forces and expand their regional and international role to contribute to achieving world peace. Therefore, the constitutional amendments were the inevitable outcome of a continuous historical process. This was built for a stage on which Japan would assume a pivotal role regionally and internationally. At the same time, the aim was for a peaceful Japan to have an iron hand to protect its land, waters, and airspace and to preserve the “right to claim” the disputed or occupied islands.

Japan's foreign and security policy on the ground has always followed the principle of “Proactive Contribution to Peace.” The current changes did not come suddenly, but Japanese security policy has gradually changed since the end of the Cold War, and with slow but steady steps, Japan is moving to strengthen its military capabilities to counter any threat that comes from the Asian mainland.

Finally, the reformulated defensive strategy does not enforce the “reinterpretation” of Article 9 for the sake of a “proactive contribution to peace”. Its explicit defensive strategy strengthens its defense capabilities, improves its defense infrastructure, and increases the presence of its Self-Defense Forces overseas to provide a more comprehensive and effective defense. The goal of the revised defense strategy is to ensure that Japan can better defend itself, not to reinterpret Article 9 or make a “proactive contribution to peace”.

Will Japan's reformulated defensive strategy enforce the “reinterpretation” of Article 9 for the sake of a “proactive contribution to peace”?

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known financial or non-financial competing interests in any material discussed in this paper.

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