AN OVERVIEW ON JAPAN'S NATIONAL SECURITY STRATEGY

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Abstract.*This paper offers an overview of Japan's National Security Strategy. In doing so, it analyzes the controversy concerning Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and the current geopolitical concerns in the Asia-Pacific. In light of these factors, the paper wants to present the general provisions of the defense strategy, hoes does it respond to the actual threats in the area and what innovation does it bring.*

Keywords: *Japan, security strategy, United States, Russia, China, North Korea, internal balancing, external balancing, defensive realism, deterrence, proactive contribution to peace, collective self-defense.*

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On December 17th, 2013, Japan approved the first National Security Strategy (NSS) in the country's history. It is interesting to explore the possible reasons that may have determined the Japanese leadership to contemplate the necessity of such a document, considering the fact that Japan managed its national defense for 50 years without one. Releasing this defense strategy is in itself a novelty to Japan's international politics. The NSS did not come alone, as it was accompanied by other two important documents: The National Defense Program Outline and the Mid-Term Defense Plan. The National Security Strategy explains the overall foreign policy strategy, promising proactive peace, and outlines a clear intention of alignment with other maritime democracies and states in the Pacific. The defense document completes the security strategy and points to a 1.7% increase in defense ex-

penditure per year and a shift towards air and naval capabilities (Green, 2013). In the meantime, Prime Minister Abe launched Japan's first National Security Council (Martin, 2013), which has the purpose of acting as a "control tower" in the implementation of this new security strategy.

Constitutional controversy

All these changes in Japan's defense policy come at a time when there have been many debates on the constitution of Japan and, in particular, on Article 9. Over the course of following few months after assuming office, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe vowed to amend the Japanese Constitution, especially the famous peace clause through which the country renounced the possibility of war as a means of settling international disputes and prohibits the presence of armed forces and other war potential; it also renounced threat or use of force as a sovereign right in order to "maintain international peace and security" (Logos, 2013). After World War II, many nations included peace clauses in their constitutions. Article 26 of the German constitution, drafted in 1948, states that "acts tending to and undertaken with intent to disturb the peaceful relations between nations, especially to prepare for a war of aggression, shall be unconstitutional" (Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, 2010). Italy similarly "rejects war as an instrument of aggression against the freedom of other peoples, and as a means for the settlement of international disputes" in Article 11 of its post-war constitution (Constitution of the Italian Republic, 1947). Japan's Article 9 however goes much further than the others:

> 1. *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 to settle international disputes.*
>
> 2. *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.*

These paragraphs of the Japanese Constitution leave the country heavily reliant on the alliance with the United States for self-defense, and, at the same time, weaker than its neighbors. The reinterpretation of Article 9 most likely wants to allow for collective self-defense between allied nations (The Japan News, 2014). This principle actually tackles the use of force in response to an armed attack on another nation. Article 9 outlaws war as a means of settling international disputes, but does not strictly proscribe the right of collective self-defense. Abe would like to eventually revise Article 9 itself, but has settled for the more practical goal of revising collective-self-defense, a process set in motion by the last DPJ leader, Yoshiniko Noda.

With the right of collective self-defense expanded, Japan will be able to participate with fewer constraints in UN peacekeeping operations and come to the assistance of UN

forces under attack, become a more reliant ally of the United States and explore new areas of defense cooperation with states like Australia. Grey areas will still remain, but the Self-Defense Forces will be seen by allies, partners, and potential adversaries as a more effective fighting force (Green, 2013).

The NSS can be seen as a completion to the intention of the Prime Minister to amend the Constitution. As it defines the nation's survival, through its views on the relations with other states such as the United States, China, Russia, North Korea, India, and through its adding a new military component to the mix, the security document may want to restore Japan's influence in the Asia-Pacific and strengthen alliances with key partners, by proving it is a nation able to stand up for itself.

Geopolitical Concerns in the Asia-Pacific

Japan finds itself in a time filled with geopolitical concerns. The long-awaited rise of China has arrived with growth in defense expenditures and determination to solve territorial disputes. These factors are shaping the perception of China as a threat more than a partner (IPF, 2013). In 2013, this superpower came in second on the global list for military spending. With a military expenditure of 166 billion, almost 10 percent of the global investment (Rosen, 2014), and adding this to the more than one million active military personnel, China can become the most powerful global force, if properly equipped. This is not a problem in itself, but when seen in connection to their determination to solve territorial disputes such as the Senkaku islands, caution is not unjustified.

The relation between Japan and China must be understood in the light of their history. Since 1895, when China suffered a bitter defeat to Japan in the Sino-Japanese War, animosity has blighted relations between two of Asia's most powerful nations. History shows that Japan has played the role of imperial aggressor and, as of 1854, opened itself to international trade and western influence, which lead to greater economic power, hence greater military sway. China, by contrast, was until the late twentieth-century little more than an economic backwater and the whipping boy of Japan: the latter invaded China again during the 1930s through Manchuria and left in its wake a path of devastation. The massacre of hundreds of thousands during the "Raping of Nanking" in 1937 sears the memories of many in China still. Conflict, it seems, has never been far away between the two (IPF, 2013). Similar tensions continue to play out today in relation to the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands. According to China, the islands belong to them as Japan lost them after World War II. Japan, however, considers the islands to be part of the Okinawa chain and say that they were unclaimed until they were "discovered" by Japan in 1884. Moreover, in 2013, the government of Japan bought three of the islands. The official position of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared the islands as being "owned" by the state, hence they are Japanese territory.

At the same time, the United States has made efforts to strengthen its position in the Asia-Pacific through the „rebalance towards Asia" policy, also commonly known as the „American pivot to Asia". This policy consists of a shift in the focus of foreign policy from the Middle East to the Far East, in order to balance the growing influence of China and the North Korean threat. The United States has recognized China's growing geopolitical importance and has made decisive actions to strengthen its position, through balancing and engaging with China. More than this, President Barack Obama named the US a "Pacific nation", further stressing the importance of the "rebalance policy" and of the Asia-Pacific area. New security agreements, for instance with Australia, are proof of this new American policy (Global Times, 2011).

In view of all this, Japan's strategic position is troublesome; however, it must try to maintain good relations with both China and the United States. The new security strategy appears to be launched in this direction: to support the "US pivot" and to deal with a rising China.

North Korea is still unpredictable and considered a major nuclear threat. The country has already carried three nuclear tests and has added uranium enrichment capabilities to its pre-existing stock of weapons-grade plutonium. North Korea also has an extensive Chemical Weapons program which is seen as a risk to Japan and the region (Miller, 2013). In 2002, the two countries signed an agreement called the Pyongyand Declaration through which both countries promised they would make every possible effort for an early normalization of the relations. The pact essentially covered the full gamut of issues, including the abduction issue, Japanese colonialism from World War II, and the North's missile tests and nuclear weapons program (Miller, 2013).

The Russian-Japanese relations are uncertain due to the territorial disputes and the lack of a peace treaty post World War II. In the past year, the two countries have benefited from high-level contacts, as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met with Putin on multiple occasions. Also, Japan and Russia held their first-ever "2+2" meeting, at which their foreign and defense ministers discussed security cooperation. Although the meeting failed to make headlines, it was a significant step, given that Japan has held similar meetings only with the United States and Australia. For Russia, this was its first "2+2" meeting with an Asian country. In spite of these recent developments, Russia and Japan are hardlypartners. Although apparently willing to cooperate, the territorial dispute of the Kuril Islands and the lack of a peace treaty will be challenges on the road to a security partnership (Pourzitakis, 2014).

In addition to these geopolitical concerns, there seems to be a trend of "normalization" in the East Asian countries. In other words, each state is striving to become a "normal country", which means they are unsatisfied with their current status (Wang, 2014). This normality may differ from one country to another. Whether it means reunification, democratization, or eradicating constitutional limitations, the trend is present. For the

two Koreas, "normal" spells reunification. The Taiwanese are debating whether to seek independence to become a "normal country" or to reintegrate with the mainland in some way in the future and restore a "Great China" status. As for Japan, being a "normal country" refers to abolishing the still-valid constitutional limits on military development and playing a more "symmetric" role in world economic and political spheres. For many Japanese, this concept also means that Japan would no longer live in the shadow of history and it would have a normal, as opposed to apologetic, relationship with its Asian neighbors. However, many Japanese fail to realize that this process of normalization implies a reconciliation of Japan's self-image with the images its neighbors' hold of Japan's past (Wang, 2014). In the case of China, being a "normal country" may be synonym with democratization, but China's new leader, Xi Jinping, has repeatedly emphasized that China's main future objective is to realize national "rejuvenation". This concept refers to a return to greatness or a past glory. As we can see, China and Japan both want a "rejuvenation", but through different means.

"Normalization" can be linked to the search for identity. Even though China and Japan are now the world's second and third largest economies, neither one has yet fully completed its nation building. They still have major internal disagreements regarding the evaluation of their past and the objectives of their future. The question is whether East Asian countries will be able to follow their dreams of being "normal" without getting in each-other's way and, more than this, if the situation between these countries is also an identity-based conflict (because it already is an interest-based conflict). There are arguments to support this statement; for instance, both China and Japan consider themselves peace-loving and the other aggressive (Wang, 2014). This raises even more concern to the geopolitical situation in the Asia-Pacific.

General Provisions of the Security Strategy

There are several reasons why Japan formulated this document. First of all, a possible cause could be the lack of unity that neighboring ASEAN is experiencing and the lack of common political decisions that could have put Japan in a position to stand out in security policy terms. This comes of course with a reformulation of interests on the international arena. Also, in the context of all the disputes that are characterizing the Far East, Japan apparently feels the need to play an important role in maintaining the security of the area, in other terms besides economics. The important point here is that Abe's security agenda is not all that different from the general trajectory set by his predecessors in the post-Cold War era. It actually represents continuity, rather than change (Green, 2013).

A 2013 analysis of the Lowy Institute for International Policy explains that states facing a decline in their power relative to other countries have had three options: "bandwagoning" with the rising power, "internal balancing" (which means increasing their own mili-

tary strength) or "external balancing" (aligning with other similarly threatened states). After the Cold War, many international scholars were expecting Japan to bandwagon with China, but this did not occur. Instead, Japan opted for a combination of the remaining two strategies, internal and external balancing. Under Abe, both have accelerated.

Japan's options for "internal balancing" in order to balance a rising China are limited. The basis of this nation's power is the economy, and this seems to be very well understood by the Abe government (Green, 2013). The Japanese Prime Minister is trying to revive the country's economy using "Abenomics", a blend of reflation, stimulus, and reform, in order to restore it after 20 years of stagnation (The Economist, 2014). The strategy is built around "three arrows" and the first two gave quick economic and therefore political results. The third arrow, if it works, will gain more political pay-off, but this will take more time. But Abe has more control over the traditional military instruments of the state than he does over the economy. Although Japan has highly capable military forces, Abe's ability to keep up with military advances made by other states is limited by budgetary factors. The Mid Term Defense Plan declares a 1.7 percent annual growth, but this is not a significant increase. So, with relevant budget growth and new military expenditures unlikely, the area of internal balancing which is more appealing seems to be the institutional and legal reform in the area of national security and defense. The country's deterrent capabilities are seen to be less credible, given the constitutional and legal constraints that have accumulated after World War II. So at the core of Abe's strategy appears to lay the removal of these constraints and the creation of a normal democratic national security state.

These reforms in national security institutions and policies will not necessarily lead to great quantitative change in Japan's national power, but they are likely to have significant qualitative impact on the future, as many of the reforms began before Abe came to power, which suggests support from both Chinese parties for the strategy launched in December (Green, 2013).

Concerning "external balancing", Abe has been the most energetic Prime Minister of all Japan's post-war diplomats, as in the first ten months of his mandate, he travelled to more than 20 countries and held more than 100 high level meetings. The most interesting thing about his diplomacy is that it has been focused on the near and far abroad rather than the immediate neighbors South Korea and China. Mostly, the lack of dialogue with these countries is due to historical and territorial disputes. But this preference in diplomacy also reflects the view that Japan's natural partners are the democratic maritime states. Emphasizing efforts to strengthen Japan-Australia and Japan-India relations during his first term in office, Abe is now trying to boost relations with Southeast Asia and Russia. In Southeast Asia, Abe has visited all the 10 member states of ASEAN in less than a year and has made clear his concerns about the Chinese threat in the South China Sea. Also, he has leased 10 Japanese coast guard vessels to

the Philippines and dispatched more than 1000 personnel to assist with the recovery of the Philippines from Typhoon Haiyan (Euronews, 2013). He has also visited Russia with the occasion of the G20 Leaders' Summit in the autumn of 2013. He has agreed to start diplomatic talks with President Vladimir Putin in order to address territorial issues (Green, 2013).

There are three formally stated objectives of the security strategy, but the first two are more relevant, and they can be linked to the "internal/external balancing" detailed above. The first objective details Japan's focus on "deterrence". In order to maintain peace and security, Japan must dissuade the emergence of any threat to its security. It appears to be the main strategic view that this document proposes. This objective has an action-oriented approach also, meaning that if the deterrence strategy does not work, one of the objectives is, obviously, to defeat the probable threat. At a first glance, it seems reasonable if we consider the second stated objective.

This second objective is directed to further strengthening Japan's relations with the United States. The alliance is, without a doubt, highly relevant for Japan. By having a strong relation with the United States, Japan will be able to "strengthen the deterrence necessary for maintaining peace" (NSS, 2013). The idea is that other international actors, such as China, must have the impression that if they are aggressive towards Japan, they are aggressive towards the United States. And, that if they launch an attack on Japan, they attack the United States also.

Now, the US and Japanese forces are integrated on missile, anti-submarine warfare and other missions in such a way that China must assume that any military escalation would trigger a joint US-Japan response. But as the US-Japan alliance does not have any formal joint and combined command like NATO or US-ROK alliance, the security strategy tries to further strengthen that relation.

However, this is not all. If we look at Washington's actions in the Asia-Pacific in the last few years, the most prominent issue that arises is the "Rebalance towards Asia". The American "pivot" to Asia became a popular buzzword after the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton authored in 2011 the article "America's Pacific Century", in Foreign Policy Magazine. The 'pivot' strategy, according to Clinton, is designed to proceed along six courses of action: strengthening bilateral security alliances; deepening America's relationships with rising powers, including China; engaging with regional multilateral institutions; expanding trade and investment; forging a broad-based military presence; and advancing democracy and human rights. In the light of these courses of action, a possible interpretation of Japan's National Security Strategy could be a reinforcement of this American policy (2011). On the one hand, there is the United States that declared, at the end of 2011, its views and strategy in the Far East, and on the other hand, Japan, America's most important ally in the area, released a document seemingly in support

of this strategy. Moreover, it is for the first time since the end of World War II that Japan has referred in any way to a possible military component of their security strategy. Although not very clearly, the NSS states that if a threat should arise, it must be defeated, and this defeat is most probably understood in military terms. As we have previously explained, the Japanese leadership is trying to revive the economy of the country. But in a time when China is expanding (especially increasing military expenditures) at a point of becoming a possible threat, the United States is situated in between its ally Japan and its main geopolitical focus in the Asia-Pacific, China. The interesting issue here is if the US were to choose at some point between the two countries. It seems Japan believes that in order to maintain its alliance with America, the country has to be able to stand for itself. So, without dropping its disengagement policy adopted post war, Japan is trying through this objective to mitigate this policy, more likely because the economic policies seem insufficient at the moment. So, for the first time in seven decades, Japan seems to be considering the importance of the military component in its security strategy, which is in accordance with the "external balancing" policy.

Prime Minister Abe's actions in the last months may be considered in support of this vision. He has managed to create a National Security Council and to draft a defense strategy. Also, a debate about Japan's constitution, shaped during the American occupation, will be launched in a nearby future. Its Article 9 renounces warfare and the threat or use of force, and is the reason why Japan cannot act as other countries do in similar situations. Chances are that Article 9 will be "reinterpreted" in order to allow Japan to join the fight (The Economist, 2014).

Also, the document states the importance of a "proactive contribution to peace" that Japan wants to have in the region. In the past decades, the defense strategy of Japan was characterized by a reexamination of the relationship between justice and war under the name of humanitarian intervention. This aspect of humanitarian aid is found in the strategy document, but the issue of proactive contribution to peace is strengthened by the emphasis put on alliances with key states such as the US, the possible military component (Ito, 2007), and the right to collective self-defense.

The strategy defines Japan's survival in terms of maritime, energy, space, and cyberspace security policies. Defining one's survival in these terms is a realistic approach. More than this, and important to be mentioned, the domestic policy of Japan is influencing its foreign policy and security strategy in a way best explained by the concept of defensive realism. This concept assumes that a state's pursuit to increased stability and security results in greater instability because the other states (opponents) will respond to this action (Mearsheimer, 2001).

The National Security Strategy also emphasizes the protection of the sea lines of communication (SLOC). Because Japan is a giant energy consumer, heavily dependent on natural

and energy resources from the Middle East, this issue is of the utmost importance. As a course of action, Japan will provide assistance for the countries alongside these sea routes by enhancing their maritime law enforcement capabilities and strengthen cooperation with partners who share similar strategic interests with Japan. Special emphasis is placed on the relation with India, as the country is "in the center of the sea lines of communication, being of geopolitical importance for Japan" (JNSS, 2013; Laird, 2014).

All these aspects concerning the meaning of the National Security Strategy of Japan are even more relevant if we look at Japan's stance with some of its neighbors.

In the last years, the relations between China and Japan have not been warm, which explains why Japan's security strategy is predominantly focused on China. The primary driver for Japanese strategic thinking over the past years has been China. With more than $300 billion in bilateral trade and $13.5 billion in Japanese investment in China, this economic interdependence serves as a restraint for conflict. In terms of trades and larger investments however, Tokyo and Beijing need each other less. Japanese trade with China has fallen up to 7 points in 10 years, while Japanese exports to the ASEAN economies have risen significantly in the same period. This relative shift away from China could reflect Japanese frustration with Chinese labor costs, anti-Japanese demonstrations and poor rule of law (Green, 2013).

On the political and security side, Sino-Japanese relations have reached a low point. Japanese military defense white papers have been more and clearer concerning the rising Chinese military threat each year. This is due to the fact that since 2009, China has increased the deployment of maritime security ships to disputed territories like the Senkaku islands (Green, 2013). Also, let us not forget the latest developments concerning China's ADIZ that poisoned the relations between the two countries. The announcement of this new "Air Defense Identification Zone" was issued on November 23rd last year by China's defense ministry, while claiming that its enforcement was in immediate effect. The problem is that China's ADIZ overlaps with similar zones maintained by Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan, and covers widely contested territories with these neighbors. While China' ADIZ provocation has not been necessarily the main trigger for Japan's NSS, it certainly was an accelerating factor. Also, the actions that Japan is able to undertake in the event of a Chinese challenge to Japan's claim of Senkaku are highly controversial. The Japanese Constitution allows Japan to respond to any direct threat against its people and territorial integrity. The controversy is whether the Senkaku islands are seen as Japanese territory or not. The official position of the Foreign Affairs Ministry of Japan stipulates that the islands are "owned" by the country (MOFA, 2012). If "owned" means in fact the islands are part of the territory, and it appears to be so considering Japan's actions, then a Chinese attack can trigger a response of the "owner". If not, Japan is not allowed by the Constitution to respond in any way to a Chinese occupation of the disputed islets as they are not a recognized territory of the state.

As the new security strategy guidelines note, "China has been rapidly advancing its military capabilities in a wide range of areas through its continued increase in its military budget without sufficient transparency". The document also criticizes Beijing for its aggressive actions in the East and South China Seas, insisting that they are "incompatible with the existing order of international law" (Foreign Affairs, 2014). Japan's strategy likely intends to demonstrate that Chinese coercion will not lead to Japanese compromise (Green, 2013).

Furthermore, China and the Senkaku islands are not Japan's only concern. North Korea is still unpredictable under the leadership of Kim Jong Un and is considered to be a major nuclear threat. Japan already has some missile defense systems, along with South Korea, (Mullen, 2013) to thwart the DPRK's menace, but the NSS makes provisions for the upgrade of the existing capabilities and for the acquisition of new ones. Concerning this issue, the new strategy specifies that Japan will cooperate closely with its allies to urge North Korea to take actions towards its denuclearization.

Last but not least, Japan's relations with Russia are not very good either. The two countries have been unable to sign a peace treaty after World War II due to territorial disputes. There is an ongoing quarrel between Japan and the Russian Federation over sovereignty of the South Sakhalin and Kuril Islands. They were occupied by Soviet forces towards the end of the Second World War, and are currently under Russian administration as South Kuril District of the Sakhalin Oblast, but are claimed by Japan, which refers to them as the Northern Territories. In the strategy, Japan points out the importance of cooperation with Russia in all areas, in accordance with the "external balancing" concept, and stresses out that it will begin negotiations concerning the Northern territories with the purpose of signing a peace treaty (The Wall Street Journal, 2013). This issue was previously encountered in September 2013, in the official talks between Shinzo Abe and Vladimir Putin.

In addition to these particular issues with Japan's neighbors, they are sharing one common aggravating controversy. Constant visits by government officials to Yasukuni Shrine are unhelpful and detrimental for the country's ties with its neighbors. In December 2013, Abe visited the shrine where Japanese leaders, convicted as war criminals by an Allied tribunal after World War II, are honored along with those who died in battle. This act has infuriated China and South Korea, both of which were occupied by Japanese forces until the end of the war, and prompted concern from the United States about deteriorating ties between the Asian neighbors (The Guardian, 2013).

Considering all this, the National Security Strategy tries to address every one of these issues, putting emphasis on strong alliances, proactive contribution to peace and the deterrence of possible threats.

Conclusions

As Shinzo Abe declared almost a year ago at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, "Japan is back". The set of measures proposed by the National Security Strategy appear to be coherent and might ensure that Japan remains a "tier one" player in the Asia-Pacific. On the one hand, the Prime Minister is demonstrating a firmness that can be useful on the international arena and, on the other hand, the fact that his security strategy is based on previous work of the Liberal Democratic Party and the Democratic Party of Japan is a sign that the strategy is backed in the country (Green, 2013).

There are still many factors that could influence Japan in the following years. First of all, the United States must also ensure the credibility of deterrence, as well as security commitments made with its ally, with respect to the East China Sea and the Senkaku Islands. If not, if America will pressure Tokyo to compromise with China, fundamental damage will be done to the American-Japanese alliance and the result will be less US control over an escalating crisis in the East China Sea. Japanese economy is also an important variable. If "Abenomics" works and Japan were to succeed in doubling its gross national income in the next 30 to 40 years, the region may become more stable. But if Japan were to slide to "tier two" status, the world will become less stable. If we agree that the "normalization" of the Asia-Pacific and the peaceful integration under democratic norms require stability, then a strong Japan, linked to both maritime democracies and China's economy, is essential, because it might limit Beijing's expansion (Green, 2013).

All in all, Japan's National Security Strategy appears to be designed mainly to prevent threats from reaching the country, and, in order to do so, to strengthen its relations with the United States. The novelty consists in the possible military component declared in the objectives of the strategy and the attenuation of the country's non-engagement policy from the post-war decades. The purpose is not to revive Japanese militarism, but to ensure stability in the region by safeguarding the right of Japan to act in its own defense.

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