MILITARY MODERNIZATION

in an Era of Uncertainty

Edited by

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Country Studies

Japanese Military Modernization: In Search of a “Normal” Security Role

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Executive Summary

This chapter analyzes changes in Japan’s security strategy, the modernization of JSDF capabilities, and the upgrading of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the post-Cold War and post-September 11 periods.

Main Argument:
Japan is moving along a long-term trajectory to assume a “normal” security role, as evidenced by (1) the JSDF’s acquisition of enhanced power projection capabilities and (2) the gradual strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance to play a more effective part in both regional and global security.

Policy Implications:
• Japan is becoming a more reliable ally that will seek to support U.S. regional and global strategies in the post-September 11 period.
• Like all “normal” allies, Japan is, however, continuing to hedge against over-dependence on its alliance with the U.S. Not only will Japan continue to impose limits on the degree of its military cooperation with the U.S. over such issues as Taiwan and Iran, but it will also explore UN-centered security options.
• As a more “normal” ally seeking reciprocity in alliance ties, Japan will also be more demanding over base issues in Okinawa, seek more equal treatment in decisionmaking within the alliance, and expect support for its UN Security Council bid.
• This “normal” ally behavior notwithstanding, Japan’s increasing military integration with and dependence upon the U.S.—especially when combined with rising concerns regarding China and North Korea—indicate that, ultimately, Japan will see little alternative but to continue to strengthen the bilateral alliance relationship.
Japan's grand strategy, security policy, and military doctrine and capabilities have undergone a significant round of change over the last ten years, and have recently begun yet another round of major transformation. The first cycle of military modernization began in the mid-1990s when Japan moved to revise both its National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) and the Japan-U.S. Guidelines for Defense Cooperation. These efforts upgraded both Japan's national military capabilities and the functions of the U.S.-Japan alliance to respond more effectively to regional security contingencies. In the aftermath of September 11, Japan has already dispatched the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in support of many U.S. global security initiatives.

In late 2004, moreover, Japan took initial steps toward a second cycle of military modernization and upgrading of the U.S.-Japan alliance. As part of this effort, Japan undertook a second revision of the NDPO (now renamed the National Defense Program Guidelines [NDPG]), released a new Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP) in December 2004, and is now committed to a Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) with the United States over the future course of alliance cooperation. This new cycle will set the overall trajectory for Japan's security policy over the next decade and will potentially encompass changes far beyond those of the first cycle. Increasing emphasis on military modernization will provide a route for Japan to achieve its long-debated, more proactive and "normal" role in regional and global security, and one closely identified with expanded U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation.
This process of military modernization and adjustments to both security policy and the alliance relationship will not, however, always progress smoothly. First, Japan is seeking more reciprocity within the alliance by seeking to assert greater leverage over the strategic orientation of the United States. Second, while venturing to push outwards the potential envelope of alliance cooperation beyond traditional geographical and functional confines, Japan's policymakers will remain cautious and selective about the actual level of commitment to overseas military operations. The military support proffered to the United States will still be based upon careful calculation of Japan's perceived national interests. Japanese policymakers—as is the case with other “normal” key allies—will remain mindful of entrapment, and will thus seek to maintain their “double hedge” against both exclusive reliance on military power and the U.S.-Japan alliance as a security guarantee.

Nevertheless, even as Japan attempts to exploit these hedging options, Japanese policymakers will find it progressively harder both to exercise such options and to resist the logic of tighter and expanded U.S.-led alliance cooperation. Japan's very enactment of hedging strategies has created legal, political, and military-operational precedents that engender momentum and expectations on both sides for the continued expansion of alliance cooperation. At the same time, Japan's declining defense production capabilities along with its participation in ballistic missile defense (BMD) will further tighten U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation. Moreover, Japan's room to hedge against reliance on the United States will be continually eroded by the structural pressures manifested in the perceived threats from North Korea and China. Japan's next decade of security planning, initiated in 2005–06 is, therefore, likely to be characterized by Japan's re-emergence as a more “normal” power, but one that will continue to fulfill this security role chiefly through the mechanism of the bilateral alliance.

This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first overviews the past trajectory of Japan’s comprehensive security policy and the U.S.-Japan alliance, and investigates the regional and global drivers modifying each. The second section overviews Japan's two cycles of security policy and alliance change. The third examines how Japan has sought to modernize its military in order to support Japan's emergent global security role via the strengthened U.S.-Japan alliance. A final section considers the implications of Japan's shifting security policy for regional stability and the global strategy of the United States.
Japan’s Comprehensive Security Policy: Origins and Pressure to Change

Japan’s Comprehensive Security Policy

The grand strategy that Japan adopted at the end of World War II was one that involved the pursuit of a comprehensive security policy. Resulting from Japan’s wartime defeat, anti-militaristic norms, and constitutional prohibitions, this strategy has consisted of both military and non-military (i.e., economic and diplomatic) components. Japan’s policymakers—in the guise of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), Japan Defense Agency (JDA), and governing Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)—have in large part entrusted the military component of the nation’s security to the U.S.-Japan security treaty. This treaty is based in part on the strategic bargain of accepting U.S. military protection in return for Japan’s provision of bases to facilitate U.S. power projection in East Asia. Japan’s reliance on the U.S. military guarantee has always been tempered, however, by Japanese hedging against the dual alliance dilemmas of abandonment and, most especially, entrapment in U.S. regional and global military strategy. Japan’s security role in East Asia and beyond in the postwar period has thus been based on a U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation that is complementary but asymmetrical.

Japan’s postwar security policy has traditionally been predicated upon both individual national self-defense and the non-exercise of the right to collective self-defense; Japan has, for instance, prohibited itself from defending its U.S. security treaty partner outside Japanese territory. Throughout the Cold War period, Japan also chose to emphasize military cooperation with the United States under the security treaty in line with Article 5 (the immediate defense of Japan) rather than Article 6 (the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East). Moreover, fear of entrapment has been the motivation behind Japan’s avoidance of integrating JSDF capabilities and missions with those of the U.S. military. This was true even in the latter stages of the Cold War when Tokyo, hoping to counter the USSR’s ability to threaten the airspace and sea lanes around Japan, embarked on a qualitative and quantitative build-up of JSDF capabilities that served to
