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Should Japan Adopt Conventional Missile Strike Capabilities?

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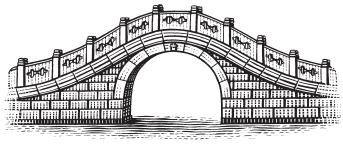

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This article evaluates the three strongest arguments in favor of Japan obtaining an independent conventional missile strike capability: rising regional threats, the country's right to defend itself from such threats, and the potential to make a stronger contribution to the U.S.-Japan alliance.

MAIN ARGUMENT

With North Korea's growing nuclear capabilities and China's increasing military assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific, the issue of Japan's right to defend itself via a conventional first-strike capability has regained salience in the security discourse. High-level interviews and in-depth analysis, however, show that the main three arguments for Japan to seek an offensive strike capability are not justifiable in the current political and economic environments. First, developing a conventional missile strike capability is not a practical solution for Tokyo to abate the North Korean threat, and the move could be perceived by Beijing and Seoul as aiding a U.S. strategy of containment. Second, the current political restrictions on the Japanese defense budget would not practically allow the buildup of the military capability required for a conventional missile strike force, and this restriction cannot be changed without support from a military-wary public. Finally, though the U.S.-Japan alliance may be unbalanced in terms of capabilities, the U.S. should consider its broader interests in regional stability. A strike-capable Japan may not only escalate tension in an already tense relationship with China, it also could elicit a harsh response against Tokyo and Washington. This could challenge the credibility of the U.S. "nuclear umbrella," potentially leading to increased militarization throughout Asia.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- If the conditions surrounding any of the three arguments examined in this article change—for example, if the actions of the U.S. discredit its reliability to protect Japan under the alliance, if Japanese public support allows an increase in the Japan Self-Defense Forces' budget, or if the U.S. can no longer maintain credible military deterrence in the East Asian region—Japan would have a strong argument to move forward with conventional missile strike capabilities.
- Both Tokyo and Washington should exercise discretion in their public communications of any planned alliance cooperation on Japan's move toward conventional missile strike capabilities. Hawkish suggestions of the potential to increase U.S. or Japanese dominance in the region should be avoided.

Since the end of World War II, Japan has been a self-proclaimed country of peace, with a constitution renouncing belligerence and prohibiting the maintenance of "war potential."[1] However, the changing East Asian security environment with the start of the Cold War and the Korean War forced Tokyo to re-evaluate its defensive capabilities. As a result, it established the Defense Agency and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) in July 1954, and shortly thereafter, in 1956, Japanese officials began to discuss the interpretation of their constitutional ban on the "use of force" in relation to the "right to defend" against an imminent attack.

With North Korea's growing nuclear capabilities and China's increasing military assertiveness in the Asia-Pacific, Japan is again facing a rapidly changing security environment. The issue of Japan's right to defend itself has regained salience in the public discourse on security. The country instituted its first-ever National Security Council in 2012 and subsequently published its first National Security Strategy in 2013. The following year the Abe administration loosened the self-imposed "arms export ban."[2] The United States has thus far supported its ally in these moves toward "normalcy," including the more recent cabinet decisions allowing for collective self-defense (CSD).

In addition to these reforms, as the North Korean and Chinese threats continue to grow, talk in Japan of acquiring conventional missile strike capabilities as a way to preemptively defend itself against an imminent attack is becoming louder. In fact, many observers expect legislation advancing this goal to be pushed forward within the next decade—a move that will influence both regional stability and perceptions of U.S. credibility in East Asia.

This article evaluates the three leading arguments for Japan to acquire a conventional missile strike capability. The discussion is organized as follows:

[1] Article 9 of the Japanese constitution states in its entirety: "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 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." "The Constitution of Japan," Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet, November 3, 1946 ~ https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

[2] For a thorough evaluation of the changes to Japanese defense policy during the Abe administration, see Adam P. Liff, "Japan's Defense Policy: Abe the Evolutionary," *Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 2 (2015): 79–99.

- pp. 73–79 describe Japan's capacity for conducting such a strike in the context of its "right to defend" and evaluate the capability gaps in its inability to effectively mitigate the perceived threats. This research, in addition to reviewing relevant literature, included interviews with senior American and Japanese government officials and security experts on the feasibility of Tokyo acquiring a conventional missile strike capability.[3]
- pp. 80–86 assess the impacts that such a decision would have on the U.S.-Japan alliance, Washington's regional interests, and the credibility of the U.S. "umbrella."
- pp. 86–87 conclude by looking ahead and considering options for the United States to manage the competing "right to defend" and alliance narratives in light of U.S. regional interests should the Japanese legislature pursue a conventional missile strike capability in the coming years.

BACKGROUND

A Continuing Debate

Most of the discussion in the media and academic literature has focused on the legal framework surrounding the debate over whether Japan should seek offensive capabilities. Daniel Pinkston and Kazutaka Sakurai, for example, provide an analysis of the regional reactions to the 2006 missile launch by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) and the legislative difficulty facing the Japanese government in proposing to obtain a conventional missile strike capability.[4] They also discuss alliance implications and the infeasibility of Japan carrying out a strike on its own. Pinkston and Sakurai focus primarily on the proposition of "preemptive strike" legislation, leaving the question of the nature of those strike capabilities to future research.

In a 2005 dual-language publication from Tokyo's National Institute of Defense Studies, Sugio Takahashi argues against the effectiveness of any conventional strike capability against a North Korean ballistic missile threat through case analyses of the Gulf and Iraq Wars. Takahashi ultimately concludes that Tokyo would benefit from a cruise missile or air strike capability, "with the objective of providing quantitative support for a U.S.

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[3] Author's interviews with senior officials from the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japanese Cabinet Office, Japanese Ministry of Defense, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, Okinawa Defense Bureau, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Department of State, and civilian international security experts in Tokyo, Naha, Ishigaki, and Honolulu in 2015 and 2016. Most of the interviewees asked not to be identified, but the author would like to thank both Pacific Forum CSIS and the Japan Institute of International Affairs for their introductions.

[4] Daniel A. Pinkston and Kazutaka Sakurai, "Japan Debates Preparing for Future Preemptive Strikes against North Korea," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 18, no. 4 (2006): 95–121.

military strike force."[5] He highlights the hurdles the government would have to overcome to pass such legislation, but he does not address the regional implications of Japan pursuing such a capability.

More recently, Brad Roberts has analyzed how the United States and Japan can avoid a "security deficit" in the region.[6] He briefly outlines the new threat that long-range missiles from the DPRK pose to Japan, discusses the risks of the United States not upholding alliance commitments, and explains the stability-instability paradox vis-à-vis China. Roberts argues that to maintain credible deterrence in Asia, the United States and its allies must demonstrate collective resolve against threats and work on deterring conventional provocations.[7] He suggests that Japanese strike capabilities would strengthen deterrence, especially in "grey zone conflicts."[8] Moreover, he proposes that Japan's acquisition of ballistic missiles might aid the United States in achieving a conventional prompt global strike capability. Roberts briefly mentions possible Chinese reactions but prioritizes maintaining the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella and "strategic stability" in the region.

The majority of analyses have neglected the issues of whether the current nature of the threat to Japan would warrant an "offensive defense," the regional implications of the development of such a capability, and whether such an initiative would be in the United States' interests. Literature focused on capabilities and alliance implications, such as Takahashi's publication, has not been reviewed in over a decade. This article serves to fill that gap by revisiting the question of what a "strike capability" for Japan could look like, analyzing whether such a move is warranted based on the current East Asian security environment and the potential reactions of neighboring countries, and hopefully sparking a much-needed conversation on whether a Japanese offensive strike capability would help or hurt U.S. interests in the region.

Defining "Strike Capability"

Before discussing the necessity or feasibility of Japan acquiring conventional strike capabilities, it is important to distinguish between the words most commonly used by the media and the Japanese government

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5 Sugio Takahashi, "Dealing with the Ballistic Missile Threat: Whether Japan Should Have a Strike Capability under its Exclusively Defense-Oriented Policy," *NIDS Journal of Defense and Security* 7 (2006): 92.

6 Brad Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia," National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), NIDS Visiting Scholar Paper Series, no. 1, August 9, 2013, 8.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 22.

to describe this strike capability. The language has changed as the "right to defend" (*jieiken*) narrative has evolved. Since the end of World War II, Japanese public identity has formed around an antimilitarist image of a nation of peace.[9] The public has a strong aversion to any language depicting Japan as an offensive, outward-focused nation.[10] Therefore, the words "strike" or "attack" (*kogeki*/*tataku*) have been either merely implied or used in the context of self-defense—i.e., the preemption of an imminent threat or the deterrent value of strike forces.[11]

When the terms were originally verbalized as an acceptable means of self-defense by Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama in a 1956 Cabinet meeting, he used the phrase "striking the base within the territory of the aggressor nation" (*shinryakukoku no ryoikinai no kichi o tataku*).[12] Today, the government more commonly uses the phrase "capabilities to attack/strike enemies' military bases" (*teki kichi kogeki noryoku).* A 2007 analysis issued by the Japan Institute of International Affairs referred to the desired development of "offensive defense" (*kosei bogyo*) capabilities to attack ballistic missile bases and highlighted the frustration surrounding the public's misunderstanding of the intended preemptive strike purpose.[13] The literal translation of "preemptive strike" (*sensei kogeki*) is used primarily by the media. Because a preemptive strike can take many forms—including against counterforce and countervalue targets—the use of such a general term is discouraged by government officials in favor of the more specific language of targeting enemy military bases.[14]

To avoid the potential confusion created by overly general language, this article will use the term "conventional missile strike capability," which most accurately captures in English the narrative of the evolved phrasing. The two most plausible conventional systems that Japan would seek to

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9 See Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

10 See Brad Glosserman and Scott Snyder, *The Japan–South Korea Identity Clash: East Asian Security and the United States* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 22–30.

11 The *Defense of Japan 2018* white paper restates that one of the conditions to justify the use of armed force in the exercise of self-defense is "when there is an imminent and illegitimate act of aggression against Japan." Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018* (Tokyo, 2018), 212.

12 Takahashi, "Dealing with the Ballistic Missile Threat," 79–94.

13 See Hideaki Kaneda et al., "Japan's Missile Defense: Diplomatic and Security Policies in a Changing Strategic Environment," Japan Institute of International Affairs, March 2007 ~ http://www2.jiia.or.jp/en/pdf/polcy_report/pr200703-jmd.pdf.

14 Author's interview with a Japan defense affairs consul, Tokyo, July 2015. According to this interview, the term "preemptive strike" also carries a negative connotation with the Japanese public, which sees it as reminiscent of the George W. Bush administration's decision to launch a preemptive strike against Iraq in 2003.

develop for "capabilities to attack enemies' military bases," or "offensive defense," are ballistic or cruise missiles. Land-attack cruise missiles (LACMs) and air-to-surface missiles (ASMs) would be the most cost-effective strike capability that Japan could presently develop if it wanted to become a strike-capable country.[15] Although the implementation of a missile strike would require not only missiles but also appropriate training and technological capability, this support would most likely be provided by the United States in its initial stages. The use of "conventional missile strike capability" throughout this article refers to missiles in the possession and under the authority of the JSDF.

Arguments

The intensifying threats from North Korea and China are influencing the narratives surrounding Japan's right to protect itself as a sovereign country, its restrictive legal framework, and its alliance relationship with the United States. The three most common arguments found through both research and interviews are that (1) threats from the changing regional security environment prompt the need for new capabilities, (2) Japan has a right to defend itself from such threats, and (3) Japan can be a better alliance partner to the United States with a stronger military capability. But do the threats from North Korea and China warrant the move to develop an independent conventional missile strike ability? The subsequent three sections will evaluate the three main arguments for Japan acquiring such a capability.

THE FIRST ARGUMENT: THE CHANGING REGIONAL SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

Tokyo is acutely aware of the changing security environment in East Asia. The Ministry of Defense's 2018 white paper calls specific attention to both the North Korean nuclear threat and the increasing intrusions of China (as well as Russia) into Japan's territorial waters and airspace. However, as this article will show, the increased threats from the changing Northeast Asian security environment do not make a strong case for Japan to obtain a conventional missile strike capability.

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[15] See Dennis M. Gormley, Andrew S. Erickson, and Jingdong Yuan, *A Low-Visibility Force Multiplier: Assessing China's Cruise Missile Ambitions* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2014), 1.

North Korea

North Korea poses both a practical and psychological threat to Japan. However, in the case of an imminent attack from the DPRK, the ability to strike with conventional missiles would be insufficient to abate the threat. Japan would also need to wield its own nuclear weapons—a protection already guaranteed by the U.S. alliance.

In discussions of adopting a conventional missile strike capability, the DPRK is the threat most commonly cited by Tokyo due to the country's verbal provocations, missile arsenal, and growing nuclear capability.[16] North Korea's 1998 overflight of a "satellite" test and the resulting public fear shined a spotlight on Japan's inability to adequately protect its citizens.[17] The DPRK has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006, most recently in September 2017. The first testing of intercontinental ballistic missile–categorized systems also began in 2016, with an unverified claim earlier that year that the regime had successfully miniaturized nuclear warheads.[18] Threatening statements, combined with the North's significant increase in military capabilities, have forced Japan to re-evaluate its right to defend against imminent attacks on its population—and the legal framework that is limiting its ability to do so.

Pyongyang has a fine-tuned ability to strike fear into the hearts of the Japanese people. North Korea has consistently threatened Japan, including a statement that Tokyo would be the first target in the event of war.[19] Japanese faith in the ability of international institutions to deal with nuclear crises has been damaged by the ineffectiveness of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the United Nations' inability to resolve the North Korean crisis.[20] The DPRK's threats and missile provocations, as well as its abduction of Japanese citizens, have made it increasingly clear to the public that their government does not have the ability to adequately respond to such threats.[21] Tokyo is being forced to re-evaluate its security strategy in the event that diplomacy and deterrence fail to protect Japan from an imminent North Korean attack.[22]

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16 Author's interviews with senior Japanese officials at the Cabinet Office and Ministry of Defense, Tokyo, January 2016.

17 Pinkston and Sakurai, "Japan Debates Preparing for Future Preemptive Strikes," 95–121.

18 See Jeffrey Lewis, "Five Things You Need to Know about Kim Jong Un's Photo Op with the Bomb," 38 North, March 11, 2016 ~ https://www.38north.org/2016/03/jlewis031116.

19 "N. Korea Warns Japan against Hostile Stance," Yonhap, April 12, 2013 ~ http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2013/04/12/0200000000AEN20130412009100315.HTML.

20 Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan–South Korea Identity Clash*, 25.

21 Ibid., 124.

22 Author's interview with Deputy Director General Atsuo Suzuki from the Bureau of Defense Policy at the Japanese Ministry of Defense, Tokyo, January 13, 2016.

There are still conflicting expert opinions on the exact threat level posed by North Korea to Japan, which is important to evaluate when considering the practicality of the right to defend against such threats. The 2018 defense white paper discusses the myriad threats from the DPRK, including its nuclear and missile tests, the range of its ballistic missiles, and the possibility that it has succeeded in miniaturizing a nuclear warhead. The document stipulates, "Such military trends in North Korea pose an unprecedentedly serious and imminent threat to the security of Japan and seriously undermine the peace and security of the region and international community."[23] Arguably, the most prominent threat posed by the DPRK is its arsenal of around one thousand ballistic missiles, some of which could be fitted with its estimated twenty nuclear warheads or other WMDs.[24] Markus Schiller, a North Korea missile expert, has investigated the "spectacular success" of the country's missile program over the past few years, noting the recent testing of missiles that have the capability to reach Japan and even the United States.[25] Regarding the accuracy of such missiles, though, he points out that the majority of North Korea's tests have taken place over the sea, where it is almost impossible to judge if a missile hit its intended target.[26] The 2017 issue of *The Military Balance* concludes that "there is no conclusive evidence to verify that North Korea has successfully produced a warhead or bomb capable of being delivered by these systems [ballistic missiles or bombers]."[27] Jeffrey Lewis argues that although experts are still unsure as to whether the DPRK has successfully developed a miniaturized nuclear weapon able to survive the shock, vibration, and temperature change associated with ballistic missile flight, what really matters is that the regime believes it has.[28] The *Defense of Japan 2018* white paper echoes this argument. Despite the currently inconclusive evidence, "with the passage of time there will likely be a growing risk that North Korea would

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23 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 64.

24 John Schilling and Henry Kan, "The Future of North Korean Nuclear Delivery Systems," Johns Hopkins University, U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS, 2015, available at https://www.38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/NKNF_Delivery-Systems.pdf.

25 Markus Schiller, "North Korea's Missile Progress: Spectacular Success—With No Easy Explanation for It," *Global Asia* 12, no. 3 (2018): 16–23.

26 Markus Schiller, *Characterizing the North Korean Nuclear Missile Threat* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 2012), 7.

27 International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2017* (London: Routledge, 2017), 275.

28 Jeffrey Lewis, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: The Great Miniaturization Debate," 38 North, February 5, 2015 ~ https://www.38north.org/2015/02/jlewis020515.

deploy ballistic missiles mounted with a nuclear warhead that have ranges covering Japan."[29]

Also worth mentioning is that, according to a white paper by the Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), North Korea possesses close to one hundred missile launch pads.[30] As Takahashi addresses in detail, even with questions about the reliability of North Korean missiles, in the event that Japan identified an "imminent threat" from the DPRK, it would have to target all of North Korea's military bases—not to mention elusive mobile launch vehicles and hidden underground silos—to conduct a strike that would effectively eliminate the enemy threat.[31] Only one nuclear-tipped missile need be reliable for North Korea to deal a devastating blow to Japan; yet destroying all the possible launch sites in the DPRK is a challenge that even the United States would find daunting. In addition, offensive strikes are time-sensitive and require quick decision-making based on reliable intelligence. The amount of reliable intelligence that would be needed to convince the Diet that an attack was imminent is impractical, and any decision would not likely be quick. There is a lot of room for error, and a preemptive strike would more likely be launched by mistake or escalate to a crisis that would inevitably involve the United States.

Although the exact level of threat that Pyongyang poses to Tokyo is questionable, acquiring conventional missile strike capabilities would more likely exacerbate the situation than defuse it, with an increased likelihood of a DPRK attack requiring U.S. involvement. In the case of a confirmed imminent strike against Japan, Tokyo can already rely on its U.S. ally to help resolve the situation. The only independent and effective protection from an imminent DPRK attack would involve Tokyo pursuing a nuclear option, which would face greater hurdles to obtain than conventional missiles and is a deterrent already provided by the U.S. alliance. Based on this analysis, the threat from North Korea does not support a convincing case for Japan to adopt a conventional missile strike capability.

China's Military Rise

Although North Korea poses a more immediate and urgent threat in the eyes of the Japanese public, China's increasing prominence and assertiveness

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29 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 46. A more extensive analysis of the North Korean intercontinental ballistic missile threat is provided on p. 76.

30 Ministry of National Defense (Republic of Korea), *2014 Defense White Paper* (Seoul, 2015), 239.

31 Takahashi, "Dealing with the Ballistic Missile Threat," 79–94.

near Japanese-claimed waters and airspace is seen by the Japanese government as a long-term reason to develop the JSDF into a military that is capable of "offensive defense." The 2018 defense white paper goes into great detail about the changing security environment in the Asia-Pacific, highlighting "China's attempt to change the status quo by coercion" and "unilateral escalation of activities in areas close to Japan."[32] Although China is not directly mentioned in conversations surrounding Japan's offensive defense strategy, much attention is devoted to its military activities. Graphs depict the increase in the Chinese defense budget, the number of scrambles of JSDF aircraft, and the flight patterns around the Senkaku Islands (known as the Diaoyu Islands in China). The National Security Strategy draws special attention to "China's rapid rise and intensified activities in various areas," laying out the future role of the JSDF to provide "effective deterrence of and response to various situations" and ensure "security of the sea and airspace surrounding Japan."[33] The main programs to build up defense capabilities in FY2018 include the acquisition of technologies "intended for the defense of remote islands." The program for responding to ballistic missile attacks was simply to deploy more surveillance and early-warning aircraft and to further research ballistic missile defense (BMD) systems.[34]

Japan could not realistically hope to preempt a Chinese invasion of its mainland islands through the acquisition of conventional missile strike capabilities. China is building its ballistic missile arsenal by adding more than a hundred or so missiles each year, with a growing interest in cruise missiles as well.[35] It would take Japan many years to develop an "offensive defensive" capability sufficient to thwart such a threat. A more likely scenario, as both Japanese and U.S. security experts noted in interviews, is one in which Japan would use the latent threat of its conventional missile strike capabilities to deter China from using force to capture one of the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or from further infringing on its air and sea space.[36] Interviewees consistently identified China's presence in Japanese territorial waters and

32 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 115.

33 Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), *National Security Strategy* (Tokyo, December 17, 2013), 6–7.

34 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 227.

35 See Dennis M. Gormley, *Missile Contagion: Cruise Missile Proliferation and the Threat to International Security* (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), 74.

36 For a discussion of this option in detail, see Ken Jimbo, "Rethinking Japanese Security: New Concepts in Deterrence and Defense," in *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century*, ed. Benjamin Self and Jeff Thompson (Washington, D.C.: Stimson Center, 2003).

rapidly growing military arsenal as drivers of Tokyo's debate about building up an offensive defense capability.[37]

If Japan desires a deterrent, then BMD capabilities and the U.S. alliance should theoretically suffice. Missile defenses are the best conventional deterrent of surprise attacks, and the country's capable BMD system has arguably deterred any attacks to date. The active and retired Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) officers interviewed, though, believe that it is important for Japan to acquire the ability to defend its territorial waters independently, citing a desire for anti-access/area-denial capabilities. Yet should Japan obtain a conventional missile strike capability, there is concern that China might engage in provocative behavior to protest this increased offensive posture, and that the United States may be drawn into a conflict. Therefore, deterrence based on the U.S.-Japan alliance remains more practical and effective than Japan pursuing such a strike capability to assume greater responsibility for its own independent defense.

Summary

Although North Korea is improving its nuclear capability and China has intensified its maritime presence near Japan, these security challenges currently do not warrant Japan building a conventional missile strike capability. LACMs or ASMs would not eliminate the nuclear threat posed by North Korea because of its use of mobile launch vehicles and underground silos. In addition, Japan's intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities are limited, not to mention the inherent difficulty in recognizing an "imminent attack" that would justify first-use of a conventional arsenal. There is also no evidence that Japan's own conventional missile strike capability would deter China's activities, as Beijing has not yet been deterred even by U.S. capabilities in the region. In fact, many experts argue that an offensively armed Japan would likely increase tensions with China, which would use Japanese rearmament as an excuse to further increase its aggressive presence around the disputed territories.[38]

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[37] Author's interviews with security experts at the U.S.-ROK-Japan Extended Deterrence Trilateral Dialogue, Maui, July 19–21, 2015. Key findings of the dialogue are summarized in Brad Glosserman, "Struggling with the Gray Zone: Trilateral Cooperation to Strengthen Deterrence in Northeast Asia," Pacific Forum CSIS, Issues and Insights, October 2015 ~ https://www.pacforum.org/sites/default/files/issuesinsights_vol15no13.pdf.

[38] See, for example, Lora Saalman, "Prompt Global Strike: China and the Spear," Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, April 2014.

In the event that Japan suffers an attack from either country—or an attack is indeed determined to be imminent—the United States is obligated to step in and defend Japan. If Washington does not fulfill its alliance duties in such a situation, then Tokyo would be justified in advocating for its own conventional missile strike capability. As of yet Japan has no reason to suspect that the United States would back down.

THE SECOND ARGUMENT: JAPAN'S RIGHT TO DEFEND

Whether or not to adopt conventional missile strike capabilities to defend against an attack has been debated in Japan since 1956, but the idea has gained traction in government circles more recently in the changing security environment.[39] However, without public support for such an initiative, such legislation is not likely to advance. There is currently not sufficient evidence that the Japanese public wants or sees a need for its government to provide this type of protection. This has been changing slowly over the decades, though, with the government passing more militaristic legislation in small increments rather than leaps. There are also not enough resources budgeted for defense to realistically allow for the buildup of a conventional missile strike capability. If public opinion reaches a tipping point in the next decade, the budget restrictions could be relaxed as well, making a stronger case for the right to defend.

Public Opinion

Japan's "right to defend" (*jieiken*) itself from an imminent threat as a sovereign, "normal" nation is the reason most commonly cited in both the United States and Japan in support of Japan's acquisition of a conventional

[39] Much literature and government discussion is devoted to constitutional interpretation regarding conventional strike capability. The most commonly cited quote is from Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama's 1956 statement: "If Japan were in imminent danger of an illegal invasion, and the method of invasion were a missile attack against Japan's national territory, I simply cannot believe that the spirit of the Constitution requires that we merely sit and wait to die. In such a case, I believe that we should take the absolute minimum measures that are unavoidably necessary to defend against such an attack, so that in defending against a missile attack, for example, if no other suitable means are available, striking the missile base should be legally acceptable and falls within the range of self-defense." "Dai 24 kai Kokkai Shugiin Naikaku Iinkai Giroku dai 15 go" [24th House of Representatives Cabinet Committee Meeting Minutes, No. 15] (meeting minutes for the 24th House of Representatives Cabinet Committee meeting, Tokyo, Japan, February 29, 1956). In addition, the 1978 and 1997 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation authorize the United States to use air strike capability for offensive operations. For Sugio Takahashi's analysis of the exclusively defense-oriented policy in his seminal work on the topic, see Takahashi, "Dealing with the Ballistic Missile Threat," 79–94.

missile strike capability.[40] When the author first began research on this debate, interviews with experts in the United States suggested that Japanese public opinion would be the greatest barrier to Tokyo obtaining this capability. The government would need to either pass new defense guidelines or modify or reinterpret the constitution. However, Japanese government officials interviewed in Tokyo did not consider public opinion as significant a hurdle as it was even just a decade earlier.[41] Japanese interviewees reiterated that their country already has the right to defend against an imminent attack, and the FY2014 National Defense Program Guidelines allowed Tokyo to acquire that capability. Thus, public support on the matter, although politically desirable, would not be legally necessary.[42]

In a documented interview following North Korea's third nuclear test in February 2013, Japan's then defense minister Itsunori Onodera implied that his country could already legally conduct a conventional strike if it chose to do so: "When an intention to attack Japan is evident, the threat is imminent, and there are no other options, Japan is allowed under the law to carry out strikes against enemy targets."[43] This was not an off-the-cuff remark; five months later, Onodera reiterated this point at a press conference:

> Debate over striking enemies' military bases and strategic bases has been concluded to be acceptable in the Diet session in view of the constitution. Our stance is that we basically follow a defense-only policy in a steady manner. And when exposed to various threats, Japan will use its defense capabilities to soundly protect ourselves from these threats. For instance, if a series of attacks is aimed at Japan, we as the organization in charge of security ought to consider the use of our striking capabilities to attack enemies' military bases and strategic bases for the sake of self-defense. However, in such a situation, discussions in the government and between Japan and the United States

40 This was also found to be true in interviews with American and Japanese senior government officials.

41 Author's interview with a senior Japan Cabinet official who asked to remain anonymous, Tokyo, January 14, 2016; and author's interview with Atsuo Suzuki, deputy director general of the Bureau of Defense Policy at Japan's Ministry of Defense, Tokyo, January 13, 2016.

42 Interviewees were referring to the "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond," which states the following: "Response to ballistic missile attacks[:] To counter North Korea's improved ballistic missile capability, Japan will pursue comprehensive improvement of its response capability against the threat of ballistic missiles. With regard to the BMD system, Japan will enhance readiness, simultaneous engagement capability and sustainable response capability to strengthen the capability to protect the entire territory. Based on appropriate role and mission sharing between Japan and the U.S., in order to strengthen the deterrent of the Japan-U.S. Alliance as a whole through enhancement of Japan's own deterrent and response capability, Japan will study a potential form of response capability to address the means of ballistic missile launches and related facilities, and take means as necessary." See Ministry of Defense (Japan), "National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2014 and Beyond," 2013, 20.

43 Kiyoshi Takenaka, "Japan Defense Chief: Could Have Pre-emptive Strike Ability in Future," Reuters, February 15, 2013 ~ https://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-defence-idUSBRE91E0DK20130215.

> will be necessary since there has been a division of roles in the framework of the Japan-U.S. alliance.[44]

The JMSDF sailors interviewed for this article were of a different opinion.[45] They felt that, despite Tokyo's legal right to defend itself, if the government decided to pursue this ability, it would take many years to implement, even with U.S. cooperation in providing technology and training. Due to the extended implementation timeline, public support for the right-to-defend narrative would be vital, given that opposition could derail progress. Therefore, the sailors suggested a gradual, transparent introduction of these capabilities, combined with public dialogue and engagement, to inform the public on the nature of the weapons and reduce fear that the government will abuse its power. Gradual implementation and continued public reassurance would be key.

Indeed, Tokyo seems to have adopted an incremental approach to implementing the increasingly outwardly focused security initiatives, which has been somewhat successful in recent years. The most notable initiatives are the Aegis BMD system, joint training with the U.S. Marine Corps on amphibious capability, and legislation allowing for collective self-defense. It is possible that with continued DPRK provocations or an extreme offensive action by China, Japanese public opinion could sway in favor of a more offensive JSDF architecture. For example, in April 2017 a public opinion poll of one thousand Japanese found that over 75% agreed that Japan needs "the capability to attack enemy bases" (*teki kichi kogeki noryoku*), with 30% of those approving a "preemptive strike."[46] It is therefore conceivable that within the next decade, especially with a continued pattern of DPRK provocations and Chinese incursions into Japanese territorial waters, a nationalist prime minister might succeed in obtaining both public support and constitutional allowance for a conventional missile strike capability to "defend" against an imminent North Korean or Chinese threat.

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44 The press used both the phrases "preemptive attack" (*sensei kogeki*) and "capabilities to attack enemies' military bases" (*teki kichi kogeki noryoku*). Onodera rebuked the press's use of the word "preemptive attack" and instead referred more specifically to "capabilities to strike enemies' military bases and strategic bases" (*sakugenchi ni taisuru dagekiryoku*). See Itsunori Odera, "Summary of the Press Conference," Ministry of Defense (Japan), Press Conference, July 26, 2013 ~ http://www.mod.go.jp/j/press/kisha/2013/07/26.html.

45 Author's interviews with Ishigaki Coast Guard officers, Ishigaki, January 18, 2016.

46 The report on the poll uses the words "preemptive strike" (*sensei kogeki*); however, the question was presented to respondents as "if a launch by North Korea is imminent" (*kitachosen ga hassha no gutai tekina kamae o misetara kogeki*). Results are from a poll conducted by *Sankei Shimbun* and Fuji News Network, April 15–16, 2017 ~ https://www.sankei.com/politics/news/170417/plt1704170037-n1.html.

Japan's strict pacifist constitution poses an obstacle for any legislation that the public suspects might give the JSDF more than the basic capabilities necessary to defend the nation. Over the last decade, though, the government has issued revised defense guidelines and constitutional reinterpretations that have gradually chipped away at the public's aversion to expanding the capacity of the JSDF.[47] Despite public wariness, since re-entering office in 2012 Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has successfully implemented a number of security initiatives previously considered impossible to pass, including a reinterpretation of Article 9 of the constitution to allow for CSD. In 2014, Abe was able to lift the self-imposed ban on arms exports, thereby allowing Japan to develop weapons systems with allies and giving Japanese industries access to new technology.[48] In 2015, Abe successfully pushed bills through the Diet to allow Japan a greater military presence in the international sphere. Following these accomplishments, it is not infeasible that in the near future the public might become receptive to the idea of developing conventional preemptive or retaliatory strike capabilities.

It May Be Legal, but Is It Practical?

The Japanese government has been making incremental changes not only on the legal front but also in the capabilities of the JSDF. Most experts agree, though, that even if a bigger budget for defense spending were approved tomorrow, it would be at least a decade until Japan would have a usable, independent conventional missile strike capability.

In 2006, Pinkston and Sakurai conducted an analysis of the debates in Japan on a preemptive strike against the DPRK. The analysis concluded that the JSDF would need significant time and U.S. support to acquire the appropriate aircraft, weaponry, and training required for a strike against North Korea.[49] More specifically, their analysis noted that Japan would need to obtain the following systems or capabilities to carry out a successful strike: the ability to destroy air defense radars, low-flying aircraft capable of avoiding radar detection, ASMs or cruise missiles, and the ability to collect intelligence

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47 The Ministry of Defense's 2015 white paper shows Japan taking an increasingly active role in defensive operations vis-à-vis the "changing security environment." See Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2015* (Tokyo, 2015) ~ http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2015.html.

48 See Tomohiko Satake, "Japan's Defence and Strategic Posture under the Abe Administration," in "Partners for Global Security: New Directions for the UK-Japan Defence and Security Relationship," Royal United Services Institute, Whitehall Report, August 11, 2015, 9–10 ~ https://rusi.org/publication/whitehall-reports/partners-global-security-new-directions-uk-japan-defence-and-security.

49 Pinkston and Sakurai, "Japan Debates Preparing for Future Preemptive Strikes," 95–121.

on enemy missile facilities.[50] Tokyo has been working with Washington to make progress toward these goals.[51]

With the exception of ASMs or LACMs and military training, Japan is in a strong position to acquire much of the equipment necessary to carry out an independent conventional offensive strike:[52]

- The capabilities for launching LACMs—two Aegis Baseline 7 cruisers, four Aegis Baseline 4/5 destroyers, and eighteen non-Aegis destroyers, equipped with the Mark 41 Vertical-Launching System (Mk41 VLS)[53]
- 542 combat-capable aircraft, including 189 fighters (F-15J Eagle) and 143 ground-attack aircraft (88 Mitsubishi F-2A/B, 51 F-4E Phantom II [F-4EJ] and, in test, 4 F-35A Lightning II), equipped with Type-80 and Type-90 anti-ship missiles and Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM) systems[54]
- Air-refueling capability, which would extend the range of fighters (two KC-130H Hercules and four KC-767J tankers)[55]
- Airborne early warning and control systems that could guide a preemptive strike operation (thirteen E-2C Hawkeye and four E-767)
- three electronic warfare planes (one Kawasaki EC-1 and two YS-11E)
- two dedicated X-band military communication satellites (Kirameki-2, launched January 2017, and Kirameki-1, launched April 2018), with one more planned[56]

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50 Pinkston and Sakurai, "Japan Debates Preparing for Future Preemptive Strikes," 112. Pinkston and Sakurai reference in a footnote "The 156th Diet Session, the 4th Minutes of the Diplomacy and Defense Committee of the House of Councillors," House of Councillors of the Japanese Diet, Diet Session Minutes, March 26, 2003 ~ http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp.

51 Tokyo's five-year defense acquisition plan includes more tanker aircraft (in addition to their four Boeing KC-767 tankers), and in July 2012 Tokyo formally committed to purchasing four U.S. F-35 aircraft. See IISS, *The Military Balance 2015* (London: Routledge, 2015), 257; and Richard Dudley, "Japan Formally Commits to Buying First F-35s at Increased Price," Defense Update, July 4, 2012 ~ http://defense-update.com/20120704_japan-formally-commits-to-buying-first-f-35s-at-increased-price.html#.VdJanPlcDx4.

52 See IISS, *The Military Balance 2018* (London: Routledge, 2018), 219–314.

53 Japan does not have LACMs to launch from the Mk41 VLS. The Mk41 VLS is a multi-missile, multi-mission launcher, capable (with modifications) of launching Tomahawk missiles, in addition to standard missile variants and antisubmarine rockets. See "MK 41—VLS," U.S. Department of the Navy, January 15, 2019 ~ https://www.navy.mil/navydata/fact_display.asp?cid=2100&tid=550&ct=2.

54 Type-80s in practice could be used against surface targets. See "Type 80 ASM-1," GlobalSecurity.org ~ http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/japan/type-80.htm. JDAM is a guidance kit that expands the range of unguided bombs, equipping them with GPS and allowing for beyond-line-of-sight range.

55 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense Programs and Budget of Japan: Overview of FY2016 Budget Request* (Tokyo, 2015), 10.

56 This communications network would allow the branches of the JSDF to collaborate on missions in real time with shared tactical and target information, a capability they currently lack.

The JSDF has also been participating in joint military exercises with the United States and Australia on maritime defense and island recapture exercises.[57] In addition, Japan has five ISR satellites in orbit, primarily to monitor North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear programs.[58] U.S. and South Korean satellites, however, are still much more capable in this regard, and Japan would most likely rely on intelligence sharing rather than its own ISR satellites for updates on adversary movement in the short term, while it upgrades its space assets. Furthermore, the 2018 white paper noted the planned acquisition of the Global Hawk unmanned aerial vehicles, which will further enhance Japan's ISR capabilities.[59]

Practical Limitations

All members of the JMSDF who were interviewed agreed that the force is having a hard enough time focusing its limited resources on the priority of protecting Japan's territorial waters; acquiring conventional missile strike capabilities would be impractical under current budget conditions. As has become an accepted postwar political tradition, the budget for defense spending does not typically exceed 1% of Japan's GDP. This historical restriction severely limits the resources available to the JSDF and does not realistically allow for a current buildup of conventional missile strike capabilities. Tokyo has made recent efforts to boost defense spending, announcing a progressive series of nominal increases every year since 2012. In FY2016, Japan's defense budget topped 5 trillion yen ($41.4 billion) for the first time.[60]

Time is another practical limitation. A conventional missile strike arsenal could not be built overnight but would need to be gradually introduced. The first steps would be technological integration and upgrades, along with joint-strike training exercises. It would be many years before command and control on strike operations could shift to Tokyo. Japanese and American

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57 For Japan-U.S. island recapture exercises, see Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense Programs and Budget of Japan: Overview of FY2015 Budget* (Tokyo, 2015), 10. For Japan-U.S.-Australia exercises, see "Rift Grows over South China Sea as Japan Joins U.S.-Australia Military Exercise," *Newsweek*, May 25, 2015 ~ http://www.newsweek.com/south-china-sea-rift-grows-japan-joins-us-australian-military-exercise-335519.

58 Ankit Panda, "Japan Launches Spy Satellite," *Diplomat*, February 2, 2015 ~ https://thediplomat.com/2015/02/japan-launches-spy-satellite.

59 Ministry of Defense (Japan) *Defense of Japan 2018*, 227. Even with combined ally ISR capabilities, though, it is difficult to assess North Korean missile movement and the location of underground silos, rendering detection of an imminent threat both unlikely and potentially inaccurate.

60 The budget for FY2018 is 5.1911 trillion yen, up 66 billion yen from FY2017. See Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 229.

experts interviewed all emphasized that close coordination with the United States would be imperative during the buildup period should Tokyo decide to move forward on acquiring an independent conventional missile strike capability. The capabilities to attack enemies' military bases would most likely come in the form of Tomahawk missiles or a similar weapon, as well as ASMs. These weapons would need to be phased in over many years because Japan currently possesses neither the technology to control precision-strike cruise missiles nor the training to use such capabilities.

Summary

Both Japanese public opinion and the limited resources of the JSDF pose challenges to Japan's right-to-defend narrative. Although Japan has the legal right to defend itself from an imminent attack, the government—recognizing the public's aversion to a more military-oriented posture—has been working to gradually build the country's military capabilities and pass legislation that lifts the restrictions on the use of the JSDF. Some say these gradual steps, combined with the recent provocations from North Korea, have set the stage for Tokyo to consider conventional missile strike capabilities.[61] American experts interviewed estimated that Japan should be able to acquire a conventional missile strike capability within five to ten years of making the decision. The Japanese Cabinet official interviewed said that the acquisition of an "offensive defense" capability by 2020 was not unreasonable. The JSDF provided a more conservative estimate, stating that it would take at least a decade, perhaps longer, to properly equip and train forces for an effective offensive capability.

Even with new defense guidelines, Japanese public support would be vital in lifting the traditional 1% GDP restriction on the defense budget, which severely limits the JSDF's resources. Barring a significant budget increase, the development of a conventional missile strike capability is not realistic for Japan at this time. In the event that public support is gained and a larger budget is passed, the buildup time to acquire this capability would still likely span a decade, during which time the JSDF would continue to rely heavily on U.S. training and defense. Thus, although the appeal to the right to defend may be legally sound, it is not a strong argument if a conventional missile strike capability is neither publicly supported nor practically obtainable.

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[61] In December 2014, Prime Minister Abe appointed a new defense minister, Gen Nakatani, who is notably in favor of Japan obtaining preemptive strike abilities. See Elaine Lies, "Japan PM Set to Launch New Government, Defense Minister May Rile China," Business Insider, December 23, 2014; and "Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe Unveils New Cabinet, Defence Minister May Rile China," ABC (Australia), December 24, 2014.

THE THIRD ARGUMENT: JAPAN CAN BE A BETTER ALLIANCE MEMBER

Japan's acquisition of a conventional missile strike capability could challenge the Japan-U.S. alliance narrative, for better or worse. From the perspective of both American and Japanese interviewees for this article, the country's gradual efforts to adapt its capabilities in response to the threats of the changing security environment in Northeast Asia could allow Japan to contribute to the alliance as a "normal" ally. However, Washington would need to consider the impacts of such a decision on its broader interests in East Asia. If Japan seeks a conventional missile strike capability as a legitimate way to defend against regional threats, such a move could be perceived by U.S. allies in the region as a sign that Tokyo has lost faith in the deterrent value of the alliance. Conversely, China could see this move as an attempt to further U.S. efforts in containing its regional influence—that is, an allied attempt to balance against China's growing military power. Both scenarios could heighten regional instability in an already tense security environment. The United States must consider the regional implications of this changing alliance narrative as well as the destabilizing effect on regional security architecture.

The "One-Sided" Alliance Narrative

Many Japanese and American experts interviewed consider the U.S.-Japan alliance to be "one-sided," given the United States' nuclear capability and Japan's inability to contribute to the international security field as an equal member. Under the alliance framework, Japan is understood to be protected by the presence of U.S. forces and the nuclear umbrella. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States of America and Japan states in Article V that "each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and *declares that it would act to meet the common danger* in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes" (emphasis added).[62]

The U.S. nuclear umbrella theoretically provides the deterrence or counterforce ability that Japan would require in the event that North Korea

62 "Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States of America and Japan," Washington, D.C., January 19, 1960 ~ https://www.cia.gov/library/readingroom/document/cia-rdp07-00469r000100950001-2.

were to launch or take steps to launch a nuclear weapon at Japan.[63] If Japan seeks its own conventional missile strike option, other U.S. allies may interpret the move as a loss of faith in the credibility of the U.S. umbrella, which is already being debated in the Asian region.[64] Washington would therefore have to carefully manage this narrative to reassure Japan and other allies that the United States will give them full support in a crisis situation.

Although Washington has not publicly discussed whether it would support Japanese legislation approving the adoption of a conventional missile strike capability, the United States has been an advocate of its ally acquiring other right-to-defend abilities, including joint training on amphibious operations and CSD. The latter allows the JSDF to play an increased role in international security cooperation. Indeed, the primary argument from U.S. military officers interviewed for this article was that Japan is a sovereign country and deserves to have the ability to protect its own people from an imminent threat or to retaliate after an attack on its homeland. Even given the strength of the U.S.-Japan alliance, these officers argued that it is a military's job to prepare for the worst-case scenario—in the case of an imminent threat to Japan, this would be Washington refusing to honor its alliance commitment.

Collective Self-Defense

The JSDF is gaining more responsibility in regional security. It has been taking on a greater role via non-combative or peaceful means, such as by refueling and supplying coalition forces in Afghanistan and providing humanitarian aid and disaster-relief assistance during natural disasters. The Ministry of Defense sees Japan taking an ever more active role in international

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63 Both the 1978 and 1997 Japan-U.S. guidelines mention "nuclear deterrence." The 2015 guidelines omit the word "nuclear" and instead mention "extended deterrence." This is because the concept of deterrence has evolved from solely relying on nuclear weapons to include conventional capabilities as well. As such, extended deterrence in the 2015 guidelines includes both nuclear and conventional deterrence for Japan. Since 2010, Tokyo and Washington have been regularly engaging in the Japan-U.S. Extended Deterrence Dialogues, an official Track 1 forum to address alliance issues and strengthen cooperation.

64 For an extensive analysis of how Southeast Asian countries see the credibility of the U.S. umbrella, see Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014).

defensive operations vis-à-vis its security environment.[65] The overwhelming opinion of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command officials interviewed is that Japan should be playing a more active role not just in regional security but also in its own defense—something conventional missile strike capabilities would allow the JSDF to do.

Over the last decade, there has been a strong interest in the U.S. military, given its declining budget and strained resources, for Japan to legally allow itself an increased role in international security through the adoption of a CSD policy. For example, retired admiral Dennis Blair noted in a 2014 speech that without CSD, Japan's ability to defend both Japanese and international interests will continue to be limited.[66] He discussed scenarios where the exercise of CSD by Japan would be vital, such as in the event of China's invasion of the Senkaku Islands or Taiwan, North Korean aggression, or even peacekeeping operations. He stated:

> The JSDF has the platforms, weapons, communications equipment, doctrine and trained personnel to perform all the missions that I have discussed. What it does not have is the system to provide clear political direction when a crisis occurs so that it can form a task force, then join a bilateral or multilateral force as a full partner.[67]

Admiral Blair stressed that Tokyo would be expected to protect U.S. forces in such cases, just as U.S. forces would protect the Japanese. At the time of his speech, constitutional interpretations only allowed the JSDF to protect Japanese forces. That changed with the passing of Abe's 2015 security legislation. Admiral Blair's advocacy for a more active military role for the JSDF goes beyond CSD, however. He asserts:

> The United States should continue to make it clear to other countries in the region—the ROK and China, especially—and around the world, that we very much favor Japan playing a

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65 In the *Defense of Japan 2015* white paper, "in light of the new security environment" the Ministry of Defense unveiled "three new conditions" for the use of force in defense of allies: "When an armed attack against Japan has occurred, *or when an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result threatens Japan's survival and poses clear danger to fundamentally overturn people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness*, and when there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan's survival and protect its people, use of force to the minimum extent necessary should be interpreted to be permitted under the Constitution as measures for self-defense in accordance with the basic logic of the Government's views today." Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2015*, 7 (emphasis in original).

66 Dennis Blair, "Operational Impacts of Japan's New Security Strategy and Capabilities on the U.S.-Japan Alliance" (remarks at Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA's U.S.-Japan Security Forum, Washington, D.C., April 30, 2014) ~ https://spfusa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/D.Blair_Speech-201.pdf.

67 Ibid.

> bigger role in addressing common security challenges. We should actively oppose and discredit groundless accusations that these Japanese actions constitute a threat to peace and security, much less that Japanese militarism is being reborn.[68]

Support for CSD has continued into the Trump administration, with *Defense of Japan 2018* positively noting that in the 2017 U.S. National Security Strategy "the United States has demanded that its allies and partners demonstrate the will to confront shared threats and contribute the capabilities."[69] There has not been much public discussion, though—if any at all—about U.S. opinions on CSD serving as a springboard for Japan to acquire a conventional missile strike capability, which many Japanese interviewees argued would allow the country to contribute more equally both to the alliance and to international security.

Regional Implications

The reaction of Japan's neighbors to past militaristic considerations and the more recent defense legislation regarding CSD offers a window to what we might expect if Tokyo proposes allowing for offensive strike capability. The neighbors that have been most vocal against the constitutional reinterpretation of Article 9 are also the two countries with high stakes in the North Korean nuclear issue: China and South Korea. Despite a nearly 70-year record of passivity, Japan is still perceived by its neighbors as an inherently militaristic, aggressive country that would project unnecessary force in the region if given the opportunity.[70] That perception, combined with unresolved historical disputes and wartime grievances, promotes public outcry in Northeast Asia against any increase in Japan's military ability, even through defense-forward legislation like CSD.

American proponents of Japan obtaining a conventional missile strike capability interviewed for this research argued that the United States could use a more capable ally in the region to address the threat posed by heightened Chinese naval activity. While that prospect might be a tempting short-term fix to offset the U.S. Department of Defense budget cuts over the last decade, the long-term interests of the United States in maintaining regional stability should also be considered. In addition to the negative reactions of Beijing and Seoul, a Japanese offensive strike capability could decrease regional

68 Blair, "Operational Impacts of Japan's New Security Strategy."

69 Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 55.

70 Glosserman and Snyder, *The Japan–South Korea Identity Clash*, 95–113.

confidence in the credibility of U.S. power in Asia. As noted above, some experts argue that if Japan strengthens its offensive capability, such a move might be interpreted by neighbors reliant on the U.S. nuclear umbrella as a sign that Tokyo is losing confidence in the United States' credibility.[71] This could start a chain reaction that causes more U.S. allies to hedge with China or to develop their own strike capabilities, further increasing instability in Asia.

China. China would likely be the most vocal in its disapproval of a Japanese conventional missile strike capability, potentially offering not just harsh words but also harsh actions that could further decrease regional stability in an already tense security environment. China expressed dissent when Japan considered a preemptive strike option against the North Korean threat in 2006, arguing that the move was "extremely irresponsible" and would severely interfere with international diplomatic efforts, aggravating tensions in Northeast Asia.[72] Over ten years later, the regional environment is even more tense as a result of North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons and China's island reclamation efforts in the East and South China Seas. Support from Washington for Tokyo's armament would likely fuel Beijing's narrative that an aggressive and hegemonic United States is fixated on containing China and would be used to justify China's own increased militarization. It would likely also end any chance of dialogue between Washington and Beijing on facilitating peaceful resolutions to regional territorial disputes.

Brad Roberts points out that adopting strike capability would assist Japan in cases where its interests do not align with those of the United States, as in potential gray-zone conflicts.[73] However, the ensuing heightened mistrust between the alliance partners and China may work to increase the likelihood of a gray-zone conflict—such as the 2010 collision of Japanese and Chinese boats in disputed territory—possibly escalating into war. In addition, if Japan had a conventional missile strike capability that could be used to "preempt" a perceived imminent attack from China, Beijing would in turn be more likely to consider preemption of Japanese strike abilities, causing a premature escalation of the crisis that would undoubtedly draw in the United States.

South Korea. Despite significant progress on U.S.-ROK-Japan trilateral security cooperation in recent years, Japan-ROK military relations remain increasingly tense, a situation that could easily spiral out of control if Japan

71 Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability," 23–24.

72 "Chinese FM Spokeswoman Criticizes Japanese Remarks of 'Preemptive Strike' against DPRK," Xinhua, July 13, 2006.

73 Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability," 22–23.

adopted an offensive capability.[74] When Japan, sparked by North Korea's provocations in 2006, publicly debated the legality of a "preemptive strike" option, South Korean officials bluntly expressed their negative opinion of Japan's intentions. A spokesperson for the Blue House secretariat, for example, remarked, "We have been alerted by this display of Japan's inclination to aggression," and that Japan was using the crisis "as an excuse to beef up their military."[75] South Koreans demonstrated a similar sentiment after Tokyo's 2014 CSD proposal, with a 2015 poll showing that the majority of the public (56.9%) perceived Japan as "militaristic," up 3.8 percentage points from the previous year.[76] If Tokyo were to push forward with the discussion of adopting a conventional missile strike capability, South Korean public opinion would likely become even more unfavorable toward Japan.

At a time when enhanced trilateral cooperation is important to deter the evolving threats in the region, Japan advancing legislation to allow for conventional missile strike capabilities would likely derail those efforts, especially if labeled "preemptive." Such a move could even push Seoul to hedge with Beijing, as the ROK is increasingly reluctant to join any initiative perceived to be aimed at containing China.[77] With China as South Korea's largest trading partner and the United States as its greatest security ally, the ROK is not eager to choose between the two sides.

Southeast Asia. Countries in Southeast Asia are watching the Trump administration closely to see where Washington will draw the line on China's military rise and growing regional assertiveness, and many are already hedging accordingly. For example, countries such as Vietnam and the Philippines are increasing their own conventional arsenal and naval capabilities as a result of Washington's "slow erosion of credibility" in the region during the Obama administration.[78] *Defense of Japan 2018* seems to have confidence in the Trump

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74 U.S. Department of Defense, "U.S., Japan, South Korea Hold Trilateral Security Talks," April 17, 2015 ~ http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=128618. See also Andrew Jeong, "Bad Blood between Japan, South Korea Tests American Strategy in Asia," *Wall Street Journal*, November 29, 2018 ~ https://www.wsj.com/articles/bad-blood-between-japan-south-korea-tests-u-s-strategy-in-asia-1543495504.

75 Myo-ja Ser and Su-jin Chun, "Seoul, Tokyo Continue a War of Words," *JoongAng Daily*, July 11, 2006 ~ http://joongangdaily.joins.com/200607/11/200607112209591479900090309031.html.

76 "The 3rd Japan-South Korea Joint Public Opinion Poll (2015): Analysis Report on Comparative Data," Genron NPO and East Asia Institute, May 28, 2015 ~ http://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5251.html.

77 Jennifer Lind, "Between Giants: South Korea and the U.S.-China Rivalry," *Atlantic*, July 19, 2012 ~ http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/07/between-giants-south-korea-and-the-us-china-rivalry/260060.

78 See Patrick M. Cronin and Alexander Sullivan, "Preserving the Rules: Countering Coercion in Maritime Asia," Center for a New American Security, March 11, 2015; and Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*.

administration's commitment to maintaining a powerful presence in Asia.[79] However, as discussed earlier, if Japan were to pursue an offensive defense strategy, the Southeast Asian countries could see this as a sign of Tokyo's loss of faith in the United States' willingness to uphold its defense commitments. China's seizure of the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippines in 2012 has already eroded these countries' confidence in the U.S. security guarantee to some extent.[80] Declining credibility and corresponding hedging—through either growing armament or alignment with China—could not only further increase tensions and heighten the risk of a gray-zone escalation but also lead to greater Chinese military assertiveness and dominance in the region.

Summary

Despite the seemingly unbalanced nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance, the argument for "balancing" the alliance with Japan's development of an independent conventional missile strike capability does not take into account important repercussions that could undermine both regional stability and U.S. credibility. In addition, updated Japanese defense guidelines, such as CSD, already give Japan a "greater role" in global security. Unless future U.S. administrations drastically reduce the U.S. military presence in Asia, the benefit of a more equal alliance would not outweigh the potential costs of Japan's adoption of a conventional missile strike capability.

CONCLUSION

The arguments supporting Japan's acquisition of a conventional missile strike capability do not hold weight in the current regional, economic, and alliance environments. The development of such a capability is not a practical solution for Japan to abate the threat from the DPRK, and the move could be perceived by China and South Korea as facilitating a U.S. strategy of containment. Traditional restrictions on the Japanese defense budget would not practically allow the buildup of the military capabilities required for a

[79] The *Defense of Japan 2018* discusses the 2018 U.S. National Defense Strategy in a reassuring light with regard to the balance of power in Asia: "While the Trump administration has fundamentally accepted the threat perception of the previous Obama administration, it is addressing threats posed by China and Russia with particular emphasis as priority issue." It also states, "While the Trump administration has stopped using the key phrase 'rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region' set forth by the Obama administration, it has shown a stance of placing importance on the region through the United States' commitment to the region and strengthening its presence since the inauguration of the administration." See Ministry of Defense (Japan), *Defense of Japan 2018*, 54–55.

[80] See Cronin and Sullivan, "Preserving the Rules."

conventional missile strike force, a restriction that cannot be changed without support from a military-wary public. At first glance, a "normal" Japan that is capable of contributing to U.S. deterrence efforts might seem appealing from an alliance perspective, especially after the 2010 U.S. defense budget cuts, and an increasingly threatening regional security environment. Yet, though the U.S.-Japan alliance may be unbalanced in terms of capabilities, the United States has broader interests in regional stability that will be better promoted if Japan maintains a purely defensive force. A strike-capable Japan might not only escalate an already tense regional standoff with China but also elicit a harsh response from other countries against Tokyo and Washington. It could also erode the credibility of the U.S. nuclear umbrella, potentially leading to increased militarization throughout Asia.

If the environment surrounding any of these three arguments changes—for example, if the United States' actions discredit its reliability to protect Japan under the alliance, if Japanese public support allows an increase in the JSDF's budget, or if the United States can no longer maintain a credible military deterrence in Asia—Japan would have a strong argument to move forward with conventional missile strike capabilities. In that case, both parties should exercise prudence in their public communications of planned alliance cooperation on the matter and about how or why the alliance would choose to employ such abilities. Hawkish suggestions of the potential to increase U.S. dominance in the region should be avoided.[81] China is rightfully wary of any reference to conventional prompt global strike. Such rhetoric coming from Japan or the United States combined with the decision to move forward on conventional missile strike capabilities could be considered a threatening signal by Beijing.[82] Without calculated prudence in regional dialogues, even the discussion of Tokyo acquiring conventional missile strike capabilities could ultimately worsen the regional security environment rather than improve it. ◈

[81] For a discussion of the pros and cons of Japan contributing a conventional strike capability in support of conventional prompt global strike, see Roberts, "Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability," 20–21. However, it should be noted that with the retirement of the nuclear Tomahawk LACM, the hundreds of U.S. Tomahawks in the region would not likely be mistaken for nuclear weapons.

[82] Saalman, "Prompt Global Strike."