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Chapter One: The Trajectory of Japan's Remilitarisation

Christopher Hughes

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The Trajectory of Japan's Remilitarisation

Japan has demonstrated the features of both a militarised and a demilitarised state. This chapter provides an overview of Japan's security policy and military posture from the aftermath of the Second World War to the contemporary period, with a particular focus on developments over the last decade or so in order to provide the necessary context and benchmarks for evaluating the extent of remilitarisation under Koizumi and his successors. It outlines the strategic challenges underlying the short-term inertia in Japan's security policy, and the strategic imperatives pressing for continuing and longer-term change in the key indicators of remilitarisation considered in the subsequent chapters.

Japan's post-war remilitarisation

In the pre-war period, Japan maintained a powerful military establishment, with a high level of military spending, mass conscription and a paramilitary force (the *Kempeitai* military police) under the partial direction of the powerful Home Ministry (the *Naimusho*). Progressively removed from civilian control, the military assumed increasing influence over the top

political leadership, and a growing, if at times uncoordinated, military-industrial complex emerged.¹ Japan was also deeply immersed in the 'militarism of the mind', with a body politic centred on the emperor system and nationalistic and militaristic education.²

In the immediate post-war period, during the early phases of the Allied Occupation, Japan was pulled to the other extreme, becoming a fully demilitarised state. The Imperial Army and Navy were disbanded, the defence-production industry was broken up and the militarism of the pre-war period was rejected in the country's new, post-war constitution.³ The Preamble of the constitution states Japanese ideals with regard to security:

We, the Japanese people, desire peace for all time and are deeply conscious of the high ideals controlling human relationships, and we have determined to preserve our security and existence, trusting in the justice and faith of the peace-loving peoples of the world. We desire to occupy an honoured place in an international society striving for the preservation of peace, and the banishment of tyranny and slavery, oppression and intolerance for all time from the earth. We recognise that all peoples of the world have the right to live in peace, free from fear and want.

Chapter 2, Article 9, 'The Renunciation of War', reads as follows:

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 recognised.

However, with the onset of the Cold War, Japan began to move away from this highly demilitarised stance. Japan's programme of demilitarisation and democratisation halted as policymakers and the US-led occupying powers focused on reinforcing Japan's position as a bastion of anti-communism in the Far East. Japanese policymakers originally interpreted Article 9 as prohibiting both offensive war and the right of national self-defence, but from the 1950s onwards they have held to an interpretation allowing Japan, in line with its position as a sovereign state under the UN Charter, to exercise the right of individual self-defence (*kobetsu-teki jieiken*), and to maintain military capabilities for this purpose.⁴ (This is in line with an amendment made in the National Diet before the article's promulgation which led to the insertion of the phrase 'in order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph', thus opening the way for the interpretation of Japan maintaining military forces as long as these were not designed for the settling of international disputes.) Hence, Japanese leaders, encouraged by the US, moved to rearm within the limits of national economic capacity, with the formation in 1950 and 1952 respectively, of the National Police Reserve (NPR) and National Safety Force (NSF), the forerunners of the JSDF, which was established in 1955. The bilateral US–Japan security treaty was signed in 1951. This was a 'grand strategic bargain' under which Japan accepted alignment with and security guarantees from the US in return for the provision of bases from which the US could project power onto the East Asian continent.⁵ Japan also accepted that the price of the security treaty was to conclude only a 'partial peace' solely with

the US and its aligned states, excluding the Soviet Union and China. A peace treaty with China was not signed until 1978, and no treaty was ever concluded with the Soviet Union (nor with its successor state, Russia).

For the remainder of the Cold War, gradual remilitarisation continued through the incremental building up of the JSDF's quantitative and qualitative capabilities and closer military cooperation between Japan and the US, to the point that, by 1981, Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki was able for the first time to publicly refer to US–Japan security arrangements as an 'alliance'. Japan and the US developed a relatively robust division of labour in security during the latter stages of the Cold War in order to deter the Soviet Union in the Far East. Under this arrangement, the JSDF defended Japan's own territory and the surrounding sea and airspace, providing an effective 'shield' for US deployments in Japan and to complement the US 'sword' of offensive power projection in East Asia.

Japan consolidated its military posture through the 1976 National Defense Programme Outline (NDPO), the country's first attempt to set out the principles of its military doctrine and the force structure necessary to implement it. The NDPO was notable in stressing not only the need to build up the JSDF, but also that Japan would maintain forces designed to repel aggression in the first instance, and would seek US support if this proved impossible, thus developing a military doctrine predicated upon the closer coordination of US and Japanese forces. Japan further strengthened its coordination with the US through the 1978 Guidelines for US–Japan Defense Cooperation, which outlined for the first time areas for bilateral cooperation relating to Japan's immediate defence under Article 5 of the security treaty (including tactical planning, joint exercises and logistical support), and for cooperation in regional contingencies in the Far East under Article 6.

Nevertheless, even as Japanese remilitarisation advanced it was subject to significant brakes, because Japanese policymakers feared the costs of entanglement in the Cold War and US regional and global military strategy. Policymakers erected a number of domestic barriers to remilitarisation. Japan held strongly to its policy of an exclusively defensive posture (*senshu boei*), founded upon its adherence to the right of individual self-defence and reinforced by a number of constitutional prohibitions and anti-militaristic principles. Most famously, the size of the JSDF was limited by imposing a ceiling of 1% of gross national product (GNP) on defence expenditures in 1976, and the range of its capabilities was constrained by prohibitions preventing the acquisition of weapons that were overtly offensive in nature. In practice, this has meant that the JSDF does not possess power-projection capabilities, including intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), long-range strike aircraft and 'offensive' aircraft carriers.⁶ The National Diet further constrained military capabilities by passing a resolution in 1969 restricting Japanese activities in space to peaceful purposes (*heiwa no mokuteki ni kagiri*).

Japan also imposed rigid civilian controls over the JSDF, and restricted the growth of a military-industrial complex by subordinating domestic military industry to the civilian sector. Meanwhile, a determination to maximise national autonomy by maintaining an indigenous defence-production base meant that defence-industrial cooperation with the US was limited. Bans were imposed on the export of weapons technology in 1967 and 1976, preventing Japan from exporting arms and becoming involved in the militarisation efforts of other states; Japan remained reluctant to dispatch troops overseas, and resisted open-ended commitments under its treaty obligations to the US.⁷

Alongside its interpretation of Article 9 as permitting individual self-defence, Japan maintained an additional interpretation prohibiting the exercise of the right of collective self-defence (*shudan-teki jieiken*). Japan's government recognises that, as a sovereign state, it possesses the inherent right of collective self-defence under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, but since 1954 has taken the position that the actual exercise of this right would exceed the minimum force necessary for the purposes of self-defence and would be unconstitutional. Japan's prohibition on the exercise of collective self-defence thus limited its external remilitarisation and ability to assist its US ally outside its own immediate territory.

Japan's policymakers also sought to minimise external alliance obligations by insisting that the use of US bases for overseas military operations required bilateral consultation, and that the geographical scope of the US–Japan security treaty was limited to the Far East. Military command structures remained fundamentally separate from those of the US, limiting the risk of becoming embroiled in US regional military actions. Moreover, Japan's policymakers showed a marked reluctance to conduct bilateral research on Article 6 contingencies, preferring instead to focus on the defence of Japan itself.

Finally, Japan's process of remilitarisation was arrested by the continuing strength of domestic institutions and anti-militarist norms, including public mistrust of the JSDF, adherence to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles (*hikaku sangensoku*: not to produce, possess or introduce nuclear weapons) enunciated in 1967, resistance to attempts to revise Article 9, and suspicion of the promotion of patriotic education and of the legitimacy of the use of force for national security ends. Indeed, Japan attempted in the post-war period to articulate alternative conceptions of comprehensive security, emphasising the use of diplomacy, economic engagement and official development assistance (ODA).

As has been noted elsewhere, and as outlined in more detail below, these brakes on remilitarisation certainly became less of a restraint during the Cold War period. The 1% of GNP ceiling on defence spending was first breached in 1986, the Three Non-Nuclear Principles were weakened with the introduction into and transit through Japanese ports of nuclear weapons on US ships, direct US–Japan military-industrial cooperation began in projects such as the co-development of the FS-X fighter, and US–Japan alliance cooperation expanded.⁸ However, many observers were struck by Japan's stubbornly incremental approach to remilitarisation in this period, which rendered it still essentially a highly constrained military power by the end of the Cold War.⁹

Japan's new security environment

Japan's propensity to shift incrementally towards remilitarisation has been accentuated by changes in the regional and global security environment since the end of the Cold War. The most immediate regional security threat confronting Japan is North Korea. Japanese anxieties have focused on North Korea's development of nuclear weapons, demonstrated most graphically by the North's detonation of a nuclear device in October 2006. These anxieties have been compounded by the North's ballistic-missile programme, raising concerns that Japan could face attack by conventional missiles, or that Pyongyang may eventually master and miniaturise nuclear technologies so that its missiles could be used to deliver nuclear warheads. Japan's vulnerability to missile attack was demonstrated by the '*Taepo-dong-1* shock' in August 1998, when North Korea test-fired a missile over Japanese airspace, and again by the North's testing of ballistic missiles in the Sea of Japan in July 2006, although many of these missiles actually splashed down closer to Russia, China and North Korea itself. In March 2009, North Korea was

believed to be preparing to launch a *Taepo-dong-2* missile into the Sea of Japan or Eastern Pacific area. Additionally, Japanese policymakers have been concerned about the incursion of North Korean 'spy ships' (*fushinsen*) on espionage missions, leading it to use force against the North's ships in March 1999 and December 2001, and are worried about possible guerrilla attacks on key facilities, such as nuclear-power installations on the Sea of Japan coastline.¹⁰

If North Korea represents the most immediate threat to Japan's security, then China poses the greatest challenge in the medium to long term. Japan has been concerned at China's modernisation of its conventional and nuclear forces since the early 1990s, in particular the lack of transparency in its double-digit increases in defence expenditure over the last decade.¹¹ Japan's military planners watch carefully the augmentation of China's ballistic- and cruise-missile capabilities, including new submarine-launched cruise missiles with a range of around 2,000 kilometres and with capabilities similar to US *Tomahawks*, and the general upgrading of its air-defence and offence capabilities through the deployment of Su-27 and Su-30MK strike aircraft, indigenously developed J-10 and FB-7A combat aircraft, a new J-X stealth fighter and the airborne and early warning and control (AWACS) KJ-2000 programme.¹² China's military ambitions in space are an additional concern. Japan was alarmed at China's test of an anti-satellite system in January 2007, which is probably capable of disrupting US satellite capabilities and Japan's burgeoning military satellite programme.¹³

Japan's concerns vis-à-vis China focus not just on its military build-up but also on signs that it is now willing to project military power beyond its borders in support of its national interests. Japan is aware that China could disrupt sea lanes with only a small blue-water surface, submarine and amphibious naval capacity and through the assertion of its territorial claims

in the East China Sea and the Senkaku/Daiyou islets. Hence, Japan has viewed with some apprehension China's introduction of Type 052C *Luyang* II destroyers, Type 051C *Luzhou* destroyers and Type 054A *Jiangkai* frigates, which will provide capabilities similar to those of the *Aegis* air-defence system operated by the US and Japan. China also remains interested in aircraft-carrier technologies, demonstrated by its refurbishment of the former Ukrainian carrier *Varyag* in Dalian since 2002, and there is speculation that China might purchase Su-33 fighters from Russia modified for carrier use. Japan has also taken note of Chinese submarine incursions into its territorial waters: it detected the passage of a Chinese nuclear-powered submarine in its waters on 10 November 2004 (China apologised and claimed the vessel had unintentionally veered off course), and claimed that a Chinese submarine entered its territorial waters in September 2008 (which China denied). Tokyo has also taken note of China's decision in December 2008 to dispatch two destroyers for anti-piracy missions off Somalia, which has been taken as a sign of Beijing's global naval power-projection ambitions.

Bilateral ties between China and Japan have been further complicated by issues connected to Japan's colonial past, the status of Taiwan and Sino-US strategic competition. Japan viewed with alarm the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995–96 and China's intimidation of Taiwan through the test-firing of ballistic missiles, seeing this as another indication of China's willingness to project military power in pursuit of its national interests, and possibly to challenge the US militarily in the region over the longer term – perhaps even striking at US forces in Japan in the event of a full-blown conflict resulting from any Taiwanese move to declare independence.

Japan's list of regional security concerns do not stop with North Korea and China. Security planners now have to contend

with the emergence of Russia as a more assertive regional player. In February 2008, two Japanese F-15s were scrambled to intercept a Russian Tu-95 strategic bomber that had violated Japanese airspace at the end of the Izu island chain, some 650km south of Tokyo. Another two Tu-95s were reportedly intercepted in October 2008, prompting Russia to send two Su-27 fighters to the scene.¹⁴ Russian railing against US missile-defence plans, and by implication Japan's cooperation with the US on ballistic-missile defence, has also been disconcerting. Meanwhile, mindful of its own territorial dispute with Russia over the Northern Territories, Japan watched with alarm Moscow's resort to force in its dispute with Georgia in August 2008. In response, Japan cancelled search-and-rescue exercises with the Russian Navy scheduled for September 2008, which would have involved Russian ships sharing Japanese ports with US vessels. Finally, South Korea has continued to increase its defence expenditure and to build up its blue-water naval capacity, notably in the shape of *Aegis* destroyers. Japanese policymakers are mindful that, despite South Korea's status as a fellow US ally, it is locked in dispute with Japan over the sovereignty of the Takeshima islets, often involving demonstrations of military force.

Developments outside its immediate region have also presented Japan with a new series of global security challenges that demand a new set of answers. Japan's response to the 1990–91 Gulf War – it underwrote the allied war effort financially to the tune of \$13 billion, but refused to commit the JSDF – was criticised internationally, making Japanese policymakers aware for the first time of the need for a more active and direct stance in support of international efforts to address major post-Cold War security crises. In the wake of the 9/11 attacks, Japan became aware of the threat of transnational terrorism and felt the need to support the US-led coalition in

its efforts to expunge this threat in Afghanistan and elsewhere. Japanese policymakers agree with their US counterparts on the need to halt the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and have demonstrated an awareness of the security threats posed by failing states and humanitarian crises in areas such as Darfur. The resurgence of maritime piracy in Southeast Asia and in the waters around Somalia is another source of concern.

Japan's response to regional and global challenges

Japan's preferred role in responding to this security agenda has been non-military, relying on economic power and diplomacy. Tokyo has continued to search for means to engage North Korea diplomatically on nuclear and missile issues, as well as on its particular concerns over past abductions of Japanese citizens. Koizumi visited North Korea in September 2002 and May 2004, and Japan has provided important support to the Six-Party Talks process.

Similarly, Japan has sought to engage China. Since 2006, Koizumi's successors have attempted to forge a 'Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests', covering cooperation in politics, economics, development, energy and security. Japan accepted the first-ever visit by a Chinese destroyer to its ports in November 2007, and reciprocated by sending a destroyer to China in June 2008, carrying relief supplies for earthquake victims in Sichuan. Japan and China also discussed using ASDF aircraft to transport relief supplies, but public opposition to what would have been the first Japanese military presence in the Chinese interior since the 1940s put paid to the plan. Meanwhile, Japan has where possible sought to construct a strategic partnership with Russia and improve bilateral defence exchanges, and has considered ways to deepen military cooperation with South Korea.

Alongside these diplomatic efforts, however, Japan has also increasingly accepted the need to bolster its military capacity to respond to regional and global threats. In particular, Japanese policymakers are aware that the US–Japan alliance, the essential foundation of Japan’s security policy in the post-war period, risks coming undone if Japan is not seen to be making greater efforts to support its ally. The potential vulnerability of the alliance first became clear during the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994–95, when the US asked Japan for active support in the event of a conflict on the Korean Peninsula, including rear-area logistical support. Japanese policymakers were unable to respond effectively, revealing the alliance’s lack of military operability, prompting a crisis of political confidence in the bilateral relationship with the US, and raising the prospect of Japan’s abandonment by the US as an unreliable ally. Japan’s alliance travails were exacerbated by tensions connected with US bases in Okinawa, mainly over the costs of supporting this presence, but also linked to crimes by US service personnel, military accidents and environmental pollution.

From the mid 1990s onwards, Japanese policymakers concluded that, to respond to emerging regional security challenges and new demands from the US for regional and global security cooperation, they needed to reformulate national defence doctrines and JSDF capabilities, and to redefine certain aspects of the US–Japan alliance. In June 1992, Japan passed an International Peace Cooperation Law (IPCL) to enable JSDF forces to participate in non-combat peacekeeping operations mounted by the UN. The JSDF has subsequently taken part in UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO) in Cambodia (1992–93), Mozambique (1993–95), Rwanda (1994), the Golan Heights (from 1996) and Timor Leste (2002–04). In 2002, Japan ‘unfroze’ provisions in the IPCL allowing the JSDF to participate in a

wider range of UN missions, including the monitoring of cease-fires, weapons collection and prisoner exchanges.

More significantly, in November 1995 Japan issued a revised NDPO. This stressed the need for stronger US–Japan alliance cooperation and contained a new clause stating that, should an adverse situation arise in areas surrounding Japan (*shuhen*) that impacted upon national peace and security, Japan should seek to deal with it in cooperation with the UN and within US–Japan security arrangements. Japan and the US then issued a ‘Joint Declaration on Security’ in April 1996 that opened the way for a revision of the US–Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation. In 1997 the revised guidelines specified for the first time the extent of Japanese logistical support for the US in the event of a regional contingency (*shuhen jitai*), thereby beginning a process of switching the emphasis of alliance cooperation from Article 5 to Article 6 of the security treaty. Finally, in 2001 and 2004, Japan provided non-combat logistical and reconstruction support to the US-led coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Since the end of Koizumi’s administration in 2006, signs of caution and even retrenchment have become evident, in line with domestic political changes. However, Japan faces the same fundamental security pressures, and these will entail continued, if less dramatic, remilitarisation. In particular, demands from the US have continued for Japan to upgrade its military capabilities and the US–Japan alliance to enhance its ability to respond to global contingencies. Japanese policymakers are aware that the US has sought to activate its regional alliances in support of global security. The US has stressed a move away from ‘threat-based’ regional alliances to ‘capabilities-based’ global ones, with the capacity to construct flexible coalitions with interoperable military assets suited to the ‘arc of instability’ stretching from the Middle East to Southeast Asia. In addition, the Global Posture Review (GPR) of 2004 made clear the US intention

that bases provided by regional alliances should be integrated into its strategy for the 'surging' and global deployment of its forward forces.¹⁵ Under Koizumi and his successors, Japan has been forced to contemplate long-term responses to this emerging US military agenda. Although the exact military priorities of the Obama administration were still emerging in early 2009, Tokyo is likely to receive little respite from US demands for a more global security role within the alliance. Japan is thus engaged in a long-term process of shaping its security policy and defence capabilities such that it can provide for its own national defence and support US–Japan alliance cooperation.

Conclusion

Over the last decade and a half, Japan has faced growing, indeed near relentless, demands from a series of regional and global crises, from its US ally and from domestic constituencies to contribute more actively to international military affairs. It has responded by seeking an expanded regional and global military role involving the increased use of the JSDF overseas and the enhancement of US–Japan bilateral military cooperation. The succeeding chapters analyse the impact of these pressures on Japan's long-term remilitarisation, in terms of evolving military capabilities, civilian control, defence production, US–Japan alliance cooperation and societal attitudes towards the military and the use of force.