

## 4 Japan's security policy in the context of the US–Japan alliance

### The emergence of an “Abe Doctrine”

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#### **Introduction: from “Yoshida Doctrine” to “Abe Doctrine” in setting the US–Japan alliance trajectory**

Japan's national security policy and fate have always been closely intertwined in the post-war period with those of the US. Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru's initiative to regain Japan's independence from the US-led Occupation by concluding simultaneously the San Francisco Peace Treaty and US–Japan Security Treaty in 1951—in effect forging a strategic bargain of US security guarantees and economic access in return for Japan's provision of bases and minimal rearmament, often referred to as the “Yoshida Doctrine”—meant that Japan chose Cold War alignment with the US and to “outsource” much of its military security to the new superpower (Samuels 2003, 200–211; Hughes & Fukushima 2003; Hughes 2004). Japan's policy-makers have thereafter in the Cold War and post-Cold War periods pushed security policy along the essential trajectory of the Yoshida Doctrine and focused on ties with the US, ensuring that as the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) have grown incrementally in their capabilities this has occurred in ways to complement the gradual deepening of US–Japan security cooperation (Soeya 2008, 6–10). The result has been that from the 1980s onwards Japan's strategic alignment with the US has given way to a more fully formed alliance relationship helping to undergird the dominant US military presence in the Asia–Pacific. At the same time, though, Japan's policy-makers and citizenry, while acquiescing in the need to rely on superpower sponsorship and capabilities (not least the presence of US Navy, US Air Force and US Marine Corps [USMC] forces and the extended nuclear deterrent) for many aspects of national security, have remained cognizant of the risks of alignment and alliance with the US. Japanese policy-makers have thus employed for much of the post-war period cautious hedging tactics to obviate the “alliance dilemmas” of entrapment in US-led regional or global contingencies that might entail Japan's own national territory coming under attack or the dispatch of the JSDF on expeditionary warfare, and alternatively abandonment if the US were to choose that other strategic priorities meant that it might not maintain its defensive obligations to Japan under the security treaty (Samuels 2006).

Japan's strategic doctrine, security bargain with the US and careful domestic security consensus have endured remarkably for much of the past 70 years. But the question now posed is whether, given current strategic circumstances in the Asia-Pacific and globally, and most notably the relative decline of the US and rise of China, combined with shifts in Japan's perception of the external security landscape and change in its own domestic politics and institutions, this story of essential security continuity and alliance ties may come under significant challenge. In particular, these questions have been thrown into sharp relief in recent years by the advent of the administration of Prime Minister Abe Shinzō that is seemingly determined to not just build upon the trends for change in security policy promoted by previous Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) administrations, but to also push ahead with its own agenda of radical and revisionist reforms of security policy, including the significant upgrading of US–Japan alliance relations. Moreover, the even-more-recent shifts in US policy, first under the Barack Obama administration involving the “rebalance” to Asia, and then Donald J. Trump's “America First” stance, reinforce questions for Japan and the US over the future direction of the alliance.

Consequently, the objective of this chapter is to explore the recent developments in US–Japan alliance cooperation under the Abe administration and to consider their degree of divergence and radicalism from previous trajectories. In turn, the chapter considers the implications of Abe administration policies for the substantive and increasing degree of US–Japan military cooperation and its impact on the region. The chapter argues that Abe has indeed been intent on setting US–Japan alliance cooperation on a more radical path that in many ways is beginning to diverge from the post-war course of the Yoshida Doctrine and in this regard can even be termed the “Abe Doctrine” (Hughes 2015, 8–23; Dobson 2016). Moreover, it is argued that these changes are significant as they will greatly amplify the effectiveness of US–Japan military cooperation and the US presence in the region, and draw in a range of new partners, but will also exacerbate security tensions with other countries, most especially China and North Korea. Accompanying this analysis of the potential for and largely realized radical change in Japan's security policy and its furthering through the US–Japan alliance, the chapter examines the continuing impediments to the full implementation of the “Abe Doctrine”. Abe has embarked on a more radical security direction for Japan, but it will not proceed without hindrances due to domestic anxieties about this dramatic shift, residual concerns over entrapment and abandonment, and alliance tensions with the US.

### **Japan's transforming international security environment and alliance pressures**

Japanese policy-makers' increasing recognition of the need to adjust, or even overturn, the Yoshida Doctrine and concomitantly significantly expand the degree of bilateral security cooperation with the US has been driven by a

combination of external structural changes interlinked with changing domestic political attitudes. Japan's exposure to an apparently deteriorating security environment—manifested in the Asia-Pacific by North Korea's nuclearization and the rise of China, and territorial tensions in the East China Sea and South China Sea, and globally by the challenges of the Gulf War of 1990–91 and the conflicts ensuing from 9/11 in Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s—has raised consciousness of the impact on Japan of broader regional and global security trends, amplified threat perceptions and further pushed to the forefront questions of the need for US assistance to respond to these challenges.

More specifically, in regard to the critical security role of the US, the unfolding environment has posed renewed concerns for Japan over scenarios of entrapment and abandonment. Japan's perceived failure to respond effectively to US expectations for assistance in the Gulf War in the form of the dispatch of the JSDF due to constitutional restrictions under Article 9 raised concerns both regarding possible abandonment by the US and the reliability of the alliance. Conversely, although Japan headed off concerns of abandonment following the onset of the "war on terror" by swiftly dispatching the JSDF to the Indian Ocean and then to Iraq on non-combat and logistical missions to support the US-led international coalition under the George W. Bush administration, concerns of entrapment were raised by this engagement in US conflicts outside the region. During the Obama administration, Japanese concerns swung back more towards risks of abandonment by the US as Washington appeared less committed to halting North Korea's nuclear programme and to the defense of the Japanese-controlled Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands under Article 5 of the security treaty against potential armed seizure by China. At the start of the Trump administration, Japan's alliance dilemmas look likely to oscillate between entrapment and most especially abandonment. On the one hand, Trump as candidate and president-elect has indicated a more hard-line security stance vis-à-vis China over the South China Sea and new support for enhanced relations with Taiwan, all of which might generate regional conflict into which Japan could be drawn. On the other hand, during the campaign, Trump essentially accused Japan of free-riding on security at the expense of the US.

The impact of these changes on the external security environment, and fluctuations in the perceived solidity of US security guarantees, has led Japanese policy-makers to rethink past understandings of national security and the role of the US–Japan alliance. LDP and DPJ administrations have increasingly accepted a new convergence of Japanese and US security interests, and recognized the need for Japan to demonstrate more active and extensive support for its US ally in order to present itself as an indispensable ally and strengthen influence over its security behavior, and to thereby obviate the risks of entrapment and abandonment. The result has been that in terms of specific security behavior, Japanese policy-makers have edged beyond the minimalist support for the US manifested in the Yoshida Doctrine to consider more collective responses to security threats both in conjunction with the US and working with other security partners aligned with the US.

The current Abe administration has proved to be the strongest manifestation of the new cognitive attachment to the importance of the US–Japan security alliance. Abe and his advisers have argued vehemently that the nature of international threats and military technology means that no state can defend itself alone and that Japan and the US must work collectively to defend their interests (Anzen Hoshō no Hō-teki Kiban no Saikōchiku ni Kansuru Kondankai 2014). In addition, the Abe administration has stressed not only joint interests with the US, but also a new attention to shared values, positing that the alliance should be buttressed by promoting liberal democracy, free markets and the rule of law (Abe 2013).

This gradual shifting of Japanese thinking around the role of the alliance in recent years, accelerating greatly under Abe, has further led to the challenging of the Yoshida Doctrine. The doctrine's emphasis on a minimalist Japanese contribution to the US–Japan alliance, non-integration of military strategies and capabilities, and hedging of commitments, has been significantly eroded, thus leading to new substantive developments in alliance cooperation as outlined below.

### **Japan's strengthening support for US–Japan military cooperation under the Abe administration**

The “Abe Doctrine” has shown a determination to build upon the trajectory of previous administrations in expanding Japan's capabilities that can contribute to US–Japan alliance cooperation and to further stretch these to new levels. Japan's establishment of a National Security Council (NSC) and production of the first National Security Strategy in 2013 stressed the US–Japan alliance as the continued cornerstone of Japanese security and the need to raise its combined deterrence capabilities (NSC 2013, 14–16). The revised National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) of 2013—the document that sets out military doctrine alongside the required JSDF force structure—has continued to emphasize the concept of a Joint Dynamic Defense Force (JDDF). This JDDF structure is characterized by lighter and more technologically advanced forces with power projection capabilities for defending Japan's periphery in regional contingencies rather than the static defense of just Japan itself, and so geared to respond to challenges from North Korea and China and capable of supporting the US more effectively in regional and global contingencies.

In terms of military assets, the NDPG will increase the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) destroyer fleet from 48 to 54, including the addition of two further *Aegis* ballistic missile defense (BMD)-equipped destroyers to the existing four *Kongō*-class and two *Atago*-class vessels. The MSDF will continue to procure four new 25DD *Akizuki*-class multi-mission destroyers, and two 27,000-ton 22/24DDH *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers embarking up to 14 helicopters, providing a very strong anti-submarine warfare (ASW) capability and versatile naval assets. MSDF submarine capabilities are to increase significantly, with the revised NDPG continuing the build-up of the MSDF

fleet from 16 to 22 boats, and the introduction of the *Sōryū*-class submarine platform providing leading-edge technologies in air-independent and fuel-cell propulsion. The MSDF's air fleet is strengthened through the procurement of the P-1, a maritime patrol aircraft with an 8,000-kilometer range that is capable of patrolling and ASW operations deep into the South China Sea. The revised NDPG and Medium-Term Defense Program maintain the Air Self-Defense Force's (ASDF) acquisition of 42 F-35A fifth-generation fighters. The ASDF continues to procure the 6,500-kilometer range C-2 transport and BMD Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC)-3 and is set to procure unmanned aerial vehicles to patrol Japan's extensive coastline and remote islands. The Ground Self-Defense Force will create a 3,000-personnel unit akin to a marine corps for the retaking of remote islands, equipped with 52 amphibious armored personnel carriers and 17 MV-22 Ospreys, the vertical take-off and landing military transport aircraft (JMOD 2013).

Japan under Abe also appears determined to fund more fully Japan's build-up of national military capabilities. Shortly after taking power, Abe initiated the first, if modest, rise in Japanese defense spending in over a decade, and the Japanese Ministry of Defense's (JMOD) budget has increased at rates of one to two percent over the last four years, reversing the trend of stagnation over the last decade, and with 2015–16 marking the largest defense budget in the post-war period.

In turn, Abe's next steps in reinforcing the alliance has been the revision of the US–Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, the first such revision since 1997. The original Defense Guidelines of 1978 initiated discussions on bilateral cooperation that affected not just Japan's own security directly under Article 5 of the security treaty, but also under Article 6 “in the case of situations in the Far East outside of Japan which will have an important influence on the security of Japan”. Japan in 1981 did commit for the first time the MSDF under the Defense Guidelines to take responsibility for the sea lines of communication up to a range of 1,000 nautical miles and thus for a new security role outside Japan's own territory. Nevertheless, thereafter Japanese administrations in discussing cooperation with the US under the Defense Guidelines devoted the majority of their efforts to in-depth studies of Article 5 bilateral cooperation, rather than Article 6 concerning regional contingencies that spelled risks of entrapment. Similarly, following the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994 and the revealed inability of the US and Japan to operationalize alliance cooperation in response, and then compounded by concerns over possible regional contingencies involving Taiwan in 1995–96, the Defense Guidelines were revised in 1996–97 and Japan passed the Regional Contingencies Law in 1999, which specified for the first time the non-combat logistical support the JSDF could provide to the US in Article 6-type situations under the security treaty. Japanese administrations, though, continued to hedge strongly their security commitments and insisted that support for the US was predicated on having “an important influence on Japan's peace and security”, should be conducted outside combat zones, and most crucially would not involve the use of force (Hughes 1999).

By contrast, the Abe administration's 2015 revision of the Defense Guidelines has greatly expanded the range of Japanese support for the US in contingencies, with a declining concern about entrapment and instead moves to prevent abandonment by more closely integrating with US military strategy. First, the functional range of support is increased to specify intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance; BMD; maritime security asset protection; joint use of facilities; peacekeeping operations (PKOs); humanitarian assistance and disaster relief; and now defense activities in cyber space and outer space. Second, the revised guidelines stress a concept of "seamless cooperation" and a "whole of government approach", removing the previous rigid separation of bilateral cooperation into "peacetime", "Japan" and "regional" contingencies. The intention is that military cooperation will operate more smoothly across all potential scenarios and levels of conflict escalation. Third, the revised Defense Guidelines emphasize that bilateral cooperation should now be global, and not necessarily be restricted geographically, as in past formulations, to Japan itself or the surrounding region. Fourth, and most significantly, and designed to interlink with Japan's breach of the longstanding ban on the exercise of collective self-defense, the revised Defense Guidelines outline the areas where the JSDF can now exercise force to defend US forces, such as the protection of US shipping, interdiction of other shipping, BMD and providing logistical support during conflicts (MOFA 2015).

Indeed, the most important element of the "Abe Doctrine" in changing the nature of US-Japan security cooperation and shifting radically from the Yoshida Doctrine has been the breach on the ban of collective self-defense. In July 2014, the Abe government issued a Cabinet Decision formally rescinding the near 60-year-old ban, and enabling a "limited" form of collective self-defense. In the face of considerable political and public opposition, Abe then pushed on to pass a raft of security bills in the National Diet in September 2015. The Law on Response to Contingencies enables Japan's exercise of the right of collective self-defense in various scenarios and under "three new conditions" where an attack on another state in a close relationship with Japan poses a clear danger to the Japanese people's right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, where there is no other appropriate means to repel the attack and where the use of force is restricted to the minimum necessary to repel the attack. The Law to Ensure Security in Contingencies Significantly Affecting Japan replaces the 1999 Regional Contingencies Law and is designed to boost Japanese non-combat logistical support for the US and now other states regionally and even globally. The International Peace Support Law removes the need for Japan to enact separate laws for each JSDF dispatch to provide logistical support to multinational forces; and revisions to the International Peace Cooperation Law enable the JSDF during United Nations PKOs to use force in pursuing certain duties rather than just defending JSDF personnel. The Abe administration argues that the "three new conditions" significantly circumscribe the extent of Japan's likelihood and extent of collective self-defense military actions in support of the US. However,

these constraints appear largely hollow in reality, given that the Abe administration has consistently avoided defining in detail the actual conditions that might constitute a clear danger that could trigger a military response, and thus potentially even encompass economic threats. Similarly, the Abe government has not made clear what the threshold might be for deciding when there is no alternative to military action and has obfuscated definitions of what might constitute the minimum use of force. The government has thus retained considerable flexibility to interpret the need for military action as it sees fits and to respond to US calls for assistance (Hughes 2017).

In this way, by finally breaching the ban on collective self-defense, and placing alongside it a blueprint for operationalizing military action in support of the US through the revised Defense Guidelines, the Abe administration has largely abandoned the cautious hedging and minimalist military commitments embodied in the Yoshida Doctrine. Japan under Abe has indicated a new resolve to function as a more capable and willing US ally, or a “normal” ally in the sense of being willing not just to provide support, but now, in certain contingencies, even to fight alongside the US.

While strengthening core military functions and the interoperability of US–Japan forces, Abe has further sought to boost alliance relations by tackling the long-running tensions over Okinawa base issues and the relocation of the USMC Air Station in Futenma within the prefecture. Japan and the US have been attempting to relocate Futenma since 1997. This was partly a response to widespread protests against the US presence that were provoked by a notorious incident in September 1995 when three US servicemen kidnapped and raped a 12-year-old local girl. Futenma’s current site is also considered highly hazardous given its position in the center of densely populated Ginowan City. Its relocation is further deemed necessary as part of overall bilateral efforts to reduce the basing burden in Okinawa, which hosts around 70 percent of US exclusive-use military facilities in Japan. Futenma continues to be viewed by Japanese and US defense planners as a critical facility for maintaining the USMC presence in Okinawa and the deterrent posture of the US in Japan and across the Asia-Pacific. After a series of abortive attempts to relocate Futenma to the Henoko area in Nago City in the north of the prefecture, Prime Minister Koizumi Junichirō’s LDP administration and the US government agreed in 2005 to a Roadmap for Realignment Implementation which settled upon a plan to create a new landfill site for a Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) at Camp Schwab off the coast of Henoko. The plan’s implementation was slowed by local civil society opposition and then by the advent in 2009 of the new DPJ administration under Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio that initially considered the relocation of the FRF outside Okinawa Prefecture or even Japan entirely (Hughes 2011). The DPJ, after a mini-crisis in US–Japan relations, eventually reverted back to the original relocation agreement. Abe after assuming office pledged not only to follow through on the relocation agreement but also to cut through opposition and speed up its implementation. His administration ordered the JMOD to conduct the necessary environmental assessment for the landfill at the

end of 2012, so indicating renewed determination to complete the project but also pitting the central government against majority prefectural opinion.

Abe has further looked to beef up the US–Japan alliance relationship by demonstrating broader support for the US’s regional strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Japan has continued forging relations with US allies in the region, and in particular Japan and Australia security ties have advanced relatively steadily. Japan and Australia first concluded a Joint Declaration on Security in 2003, and then signed an Information Security Agreement in May 2012, modelled on that between Japan and the US and opening the way for further trilateral cooperation. In April 2014 both sides also concluded a new bilateral economic partnership agreement and pledged further cooperation on cyber security and defense technology exchanges (MOFA 2014). The NSC in April 2015, in line with the new Three Principles on the Transfer of Defense Technology and Equipment approved in April 2014, and the end of the blanket ban on weapons exports in favor of an approval system, enabled Japan’s participation in the competitive tender to provide new submarines for Australia. The Abe administration has similarly sought to upgrade defense cooperation relations with India and South Korea as two other key US strategic partners and allies, and Japan has sought to augment strategic ties in Southeast Asia with the Philippines and Vietnam that have generally moved closer to the US in terms of resisting the rise of Chinese influence in the South China Sea. Japan in seeking to further develop “strategic partnerships” with the Philippines and Vietnam agreed in July 2013 to export 10 patrol boats to the former through an Official Development Assistance yen loan, and in January 2013 to investigate providing similar maritime security support to Vietnam (MOFA 2013a; 2013b). Japan and the Philippines signed a defense ministry-level Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in January 2015, and in June 2015 issued an Action Plan for Strengthening of the Strategic Partnership (JMOD 2015).

Meanwhile, the Abe administration largely embraced the Obama administration’s regional economic strategy to enhance geopolitical cooperation targeting China. For example, Abe in 2013 fully committed Japan to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) arrangement, and so to a US-led vision of economic cooperation in the region, and concluded Japanese ratification of the TPP in January 2016. Moreover, the Abe administration was resolute in refusing from 2014 onwards, alongside the US, to join China’s Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (Hughes 2016).

Abe has justified Japan’s stance on strategic grounds, but also in terms of allegedly reinforcing values shared with the US in seeking to shape the vision of the region and the international order. Abe has argued that the US and Japan are increasingly bound together by values of democracy, liberal market-oriented economies, respect for human rights, and the rule of international law. Abe has also attempted to remove issues of wartime history from the bilateral agenda in order to strengthen ties, most notably by concluding in 2015 an agreement with South Korea regarding the comfort women system of sexual servitude. President Obama’s visit to Hiroshima in May 2016 marked

an important point of US–Japan historical reconciliation, and was reciprocated by Abe’s visit to Pearl Harbor in December later that year.

### **Conclusion: the ‘Abe Doctrine’ and continuing impediments**

Abe’s set of bold initiatives has undoubtedly strengthened the US–Japan alliance relationship as the core of Japanese security policy, diplomacy and grand strategy. Despite concerns related to President Trump’s erratic behaviour and rhetoric, it appears that the February 2017 summit bolstered the alliance and eased fears of abandonment; the president signalled his 100 percent backing of the alliance in the wake of Pyongyang’s missile test as the leaders dined in Florida. The fact that Abe has been willing to overcome various previous taboos, such as collective self-defence, means that his administration has significantly shifted the trajectory of Japan’s security posture away from the minimalist and expedient stance of the Yoshida Doctrine, and now started the switch to a more fully-committed and pro-active regional and global stance in support of the US. In other words, Japan is now beginning to move along the lines of a new “Abe Doctrine”.

Nonetheless, it is clear that the shift towards an “Abe Doctrine” is not free of complications or complete, given a range of continuing challenges to its implementation domestically and internationally. Most prominently, Abe’s alliance agenda continues to face the obstacle of residual domestic anti-militarism. The move to breach the ban on collective self-defence and pass the enabling legislation in 2015 generated a considerable backlash and widespread disquiet. There is strong public opposition to both this new security agenda and the methods used to enact it, which rely on constitutional reinterpretation rather than formal revision. This has provoked public protests on the streets of Tokyo of a scale not seen since the revision (1960) and extension in perpetuity (1970) of the US–Japan security treaty. While Abe has nevertheless forged ahead regardless of public opposition, he still needs to maintain caution about not pushing too far or too fast on alliance commitments, not least because of potential resistance from the LDP’s own coalition partner, the Kōmeitō, although this party has tended overall to follow the LDP line on security policy.

Abe’s agenda has encountered even more active opposition within Okinawa Prefecture. The administration’s plans helped to precipitate the June 2014 re-election of Inamine Susumu, an anti-base relocation mayor in Nago City. Moreover, in the gubernatorial election of December 2014, the LDP-supported candidate Nakaima Hirokazu, who had granted permission for the landfill necessary for the construction of the FRF, was defeated by Onaga Takeshi, running on a platform of opposition to the relocation of the air station within the prefecture. Onaga has attempted to block the construction project through legal challenges and succeeded in slowing progress throughout 2015 and 2016. However, the Abe administration has determinedly pushed forward its plans, winning a ruling in December 2016 in the Supreme Court to enable it to continue construction, and resuming construction activities at the end of

the year. The prefectural government is likely to continue to try to use various administrative means at its disposal to disrupt the project, while popular protests continue in Okinawa.

At present, it appears that Abe's plans are likely to be only slowed rather than derailed by domestic resistance, but the implementation of his doctrine faces greater challenges internationally and even with the US. In the short term, residual strategic differences and hedging behavior toward the US as well as immediate domestic political expediency may constrain Japan not to move too fast with the actual exercise of collective self-defense. The alliance partners still do not have absolute strategic convergence. The US under the Obama administration tended to focus on bilateral cooperation for regional and global contingencies, whereas Japan has been more preoccupied with Japan-related contingencies, especially in the East China Sea. Under the revised US–Japan Defense Guidelines, Japan is the first responder in any Senkaku Islands contingency. Japanese policy-makers still harbor some concerns over entrapment in US-led contingencies out-of-area, while the US remains concerned about its own entrapment in Japan's territorial disputes. Both powers, therefore, retain some wariness about fulfilling their mutual collective self-defense obligations.

More broadly, beyond the intricacies of collective self-defense, the “Abe Doctrine”, and its determination to move Japan ever closer to the US in security terms, has faced strategic challenges from the resurgence under the new Trump administration of previous concerns of abandonment. The new US administration posed potential challenges for Japan given that during the presidential campaign Trump had called for enhanced burden-sharing by Japan and more financial support for US bases in Japan, and suggested it might be beneficial for Japan to acquire its own nuclear weapons (*Asahi Shimbun* 2017). The visit of new US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis to Japan in February 2017 provided important reassurances about the US not seeking to abandon its ally (*Japan Times* 2017). Mattis reiterated that Article 5 of the security treaty applied to the Senkaku Islands, and praised Japan as a model for base-hosting arrangements. Japanese policy-makers, however, remain concerned that the Trump administration may return to pressuring Japan on defense expenditures and base costs, and that its degree of willingness to deter North Korea and China remains uncertain.

The Abe administration has clearly also been left exposed by the Trump administration's withdrawal from the TPP. For Abe, the TPP was more about geopolitics than economics, seeing it as a means to keep the US engaged in Asia and containing China. The TPP also was the centerpiece of his domestic economic reform policies, and a touchstone of common values that bind the allies. The Abe administration is adjusting to a narrower alliance with the Trump administration that emphasizes core national interests rather than values, but this security-first approach removes some of the stabilizing ballast in the alliance. It also limits participation of other actors in building stronger ties that help confer legitimacy and build trust.

Abe's dalliance with building a broader set of strategic relations in support of US strategy in the region has also met with mixed success. Japan's security relations with Australia continue to strengthen, but were knocked backwards somewhat by the failure in 2016 of its bid to sell submarines to Canberra. Japan maintains strong ties with the Philippines, but President Rodrigo Duterte has made it clear that he does not intend to become too closely aligned with the US or Japan so as not to provoke China. As for Japan–South Korea security ties, these continue to be hampered by issues of colonial history.

The other risk posed for Abe's strategy in moving closer to the US is simply that it may exacerbate the existing security dilemma with North Korea and China. The US–Japan alliance under Abe is emerging as a more effective construct and continues to assist the US to dominate Asia-Pacific security. The argument of the Abe administration is that the strengthened alliance will enhance deterrence and head off the risks of conflict. However, the fact that North Korea continues its nuclear and missile provocations, and that China continues to rail against its perception of the alliance as a threat suggests that the "Abe Doctrine" also presents concerns of a destabilizing downward spiral in tensions and may not be a sustainable answer to ensuring Japan's security.

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