

Japan's Strategic Reorientation and The Erosion of Antimilitarism: Consequences for Asia-Pacific Security Architecture

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Abstract

Japan has long maintained a defensive posture in the post-World War II security architecture of the Pacific region, as the United States has provided security guarantees, thus carrying the maximum burden of Japan's security. But the changing geo-political landscape and the military modernization by China make Japan's policymakers uncomfortable. The acquisition of long-range weapons by Japan can disturb the delicate balance of power in the Pacific region, thus igniting tensions. The complex interlinked relations between the states can transform this region into an arena of conflict, thus affecting the global supply chains. By employing a qualitative method, the analysis has been drawn exclusively from policy papers, scholarly literature and diplomatic statements. This paper tends to focus on the regional factors which can contribute towards the Japanese acquisition of offensive capabilities, domestic challenges which constraints the ability of the Japanese government to pursue the required military modernization according to the changing contemporary global world order. This paper also sheds light on the responses from the regional states as they also tend to secure their national interests in the wake of regional military modernization aimed at securing their sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Keywords: China, Japan, People's Republic of Korea, Pacific Ocean, United States

Introduction

The forfeited defeat of the Japanese imperial Army in WWII has rewritten its fate by enforcing a constitutional constraint on its offensive military gesture. By learning the past experiences of German reemergence as an offensive power after the Versailles Treaty allied powers tried to enforce a complex mechanism for the

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revised military doctrine of Japan. After 1945, America clearly restructured the Security Apparatus of Japan with the doctrine of antimilitarism, which was adopted in the article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. General MacArthur ordered to draft a constitution to put a ban on the Japanese Army, Navy and Air Force endorsed by the international community with the backing of revolutionary views about Japanese disarmament (McNelly, & Hosmer 1989).

Japan has adopted the clause of Pacifism in the article 9 of the constitution, which strongly forbids and renounces the Japanese war potential as a sovereign right (Beer,1998). This clause was interpreted in many ways; more specifically, the Japanese right to self-defense remains intact. Article 9 of the Japanese constitution was mirrored by Idealistic views of the IR Scholars on one side, but on the other side was viewed with skeptic lenses of the Realism. The schism of idealism and realism was entrenched in the political spectrum of international arena throughout the second half of the 20th century. Realist claims about the transition in the political and regional security environment will influence the demand to revise the Japanese pacifism, which was entrenched in the 1990s and heightened a debate in the domestic political arena of Japan.

Japanese antimilitarism is not a monolithic concept but an amalgamation of three elements, one of which is pacifism, which renounces the role of the military to pursue the Japanese national interests. The security environment of the post-world war II motivated the Japanese government to adopt a policy where Japan would not join any bloc, either Western or the Soviets. Hence Pacifism is the policy of neutrality, is entrenched in the security architecture of the Cold War. Defensive Realists like Richard Samuels and Eric Heginbotham consider Japan as techno nationalist state in the context of the Doctrine of Pacifism, where technological advancement and economic growth is a mean to pursue the national interest of the Japanese State (Heginbotham & Samuels 1998).

The second imperative of Japanese anti-militarism is anti-traditionalism, which claim that Japanese traditional cultural, institutional, and ideological norms dragged it to the catastrophic war. Provide a major motivation and foundational grounding to the antimilitaristic sentiments by rejecting the traditional norms of 'Kokutai' that depict Confucian civilization as a superior with a divine mission. This normative argument vested in the institutional arrangement of Japan that provided legal cover for imperial power projection (Kitagawa,1974). Hence, anti-

traditionalism in post war era heightened the need of breaking out the traditional norms by revisiting the institutional architecture of the Japanese State.

The third imperative is fear of entrapment, which is a multifaceted conception and antimilitaristic isolating the Japanese State from others' ventures is the basic motivation for this fear. The US-Japan Security treaty in 1951 raised concerns of Japanese State to be entrapped by the alliance, hence it resulted in the stringent mechanism of pacifism. These three imperatives guided the Japanese Post War Security and Foreign Policy, which is called the Yoshida Doctrine (Hoshiro, 2022). The reason is the doctrine which was adopted by Yoshida Shigeru during the critical transition period of post war. Japanese Foreign and Security Policy in the second half of the 20th century was guided by the principles of the Yoshida Doctrine, where economic primacy is the key driver of national interest and puts a constitutional restraint on the military ventures of Japan.

The Yoshida Doctrine and the Economic Priority (1950s–1990s)

Yoshida Doctrine, under the leadership of PM Shigeru Yoshida, is a conceptual argument generating a response to a question of correlational linkage of Japanese Economic growth and military spending, anomalous to the rest of the world. This doctrine is based on four main pillars intertwined with each other to adhere to the norm of pacifism. The first and foremost pillar is the economic priority, where economic recovery in post war was the prior interest, which can be achieved by rebuilding industries and infrastructure. This interest can be achieved by adopting a low-profile military spending. Hence, the element of external threat is unavoidable, which is outsourced by the dependency on U.S security guarantees. This buck passing Strategy of Japan gave the opportunity to focus on economic growth with minimal defense spending without compromising its security (Lind, 2004). Furthermore, the Japanese Self Defense Force was allowed at a minimum without obtaining any offensive capability. Finally, Japan adopted a Pacifist Strategy which renounced war and presented Japan as a peaceful trading nation steering to the Economic Growth.

Since the 1950's, after Yoshida, the policy preference was to adhere to the pacifist norms, and this led the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan to secure its position as the most dominant political party. LDP's security policy strengthened the norms of Pacifism, which included a ban on arms export, observing the three non-nuclear

Principles, prohibiting the possession, testing and deployment of Nuclear weapons on Japanese soil, non-military uses of space and prohibiting the Japanese Self Defense Forces from being deployed overseas. These policies have evolved till 1970s, stamping the Japanese demilitarization commitment.

The Yoshida doctrine was implemented in the 1960s during the reign of Hayato Ikeda and Eisaku Sato. These leaders were considered acolytes of the Yoshida school and favored the economic growth as a priority while restricting military expenditure to 1% of GDP and the prohibition of collective self-defense (Hoshiro, 2022). While the successor of Yoshida in the 1950s was considered a political enemy, and had differences of opinion with its doctrine. This political drift resulted in the rejectionist philosophy of traditionalist political elite like Junichiro Koizumi and Shinzo Abe. The rejectionist front of the LDP was against the security dependence of Japan on U. S security guarantees, and it considered this Alliance as 'Slave Alliance' (P. Envall, 2023). This rejectionist front 'Seiwa Seisaku Kenkyūkai' within LDP was a strong conservative front intended to revise the pacifism and wanted an independent security Policy of Japan (Lee, 2024). The main leaders of the conservative fraction were Kuzuimi and Abe, who took hold in the era of the lost decade and found an opportunity to reconsider the Japanese Foreign Policy guided by its sovereign right and new strategic calculus.

Lost Decade and conservative Fraction in Japan

Japan has gone through two lost decades where political and economic stagnation of the state led to the verge of decline, with no hope of revival. Despite grazing the fruits of the Yoshida doctrine the dark end of the 20th century engulfed it socio political discontent within Japan and externally squirming its role in international Community as captured by Michael Green "what a decade (the 1990s) might have been...Japan might have emerged as a new kind of superpower" (Dobson, 2017). But the Japanese trajectory of decline accelerated in the 1st decade of the 21st century in multiple domains such as a stagnant economy and the challenge of deflation, along with the fragmented leadership with a history of political turnover. The External security environment, with the rapid rise of China in the Pacific region, further accelerated the ambiguity about the effectiveness of the Yoshida Doctrine (Paavo, 2025). Furthermore, Japan had lost its diplomatic influence abroad, and demographic challenges further compounded the Japanese government. Despite having a backlash on the domestic front Japan had now taken its first step towards

a normalization strategy abroad, and Kuzuimi supported the debate of collective defense.

These Internal and External factors led the Kuzuimi to revive Japanese Foreign Policy on conservative norms, and he cautiously stepped to normalize the Japanese Security and foreign Policy. The International environment has supported the Conservative Norms as the World has now moved into a new era where new challenges have emerged, and Kuzuimi was in favor of strengthening the US-Japan Alliance and playing an international role for collective defense. Kuzuimi dispatched the Japanese troops to Iraq and Afghanistan, which was the first international venture of a Japanese force since the WWII (Watts, 2023). This conservative faction of Japan is highly nationalist and traditionalist evident by Kuzuimi's frequent visits to Yasukuni shrine, a war symbol of national identity. Furthermore, Japan's bid for the UNSC seat as a global leader further indicated the restoration of the normal traditional foreign Policy (Takeuchi,2023).

Shinzo Abe and Doctrine of Normalization

Despite the Kuzuimi economic liberalization policy, Japan suffered another decade of stagnation till the second term of Shinzo Abe in 2012. The first term of Abe was also influenced by the challenges, and the adoption of Abe's nationalistic policy had shepherded his short-lived term. But lessons from the past marshalled the victory, and the Abe Era revived in 2012 with a more pragmatic strategy focusing on the realistic tenet rather than ideational and nationalistic sentiments. Abe intended to reboot the Japanese domestic and Foreign Policy, motivated by the policy of normalization by adoption of an inter alia approach, one on "Abenomics" through structural reforms aiming to revive the economic strength of Japan (Xu, 2018). Abenomics strategy was a win for the Japanese economic revival with the 60% rise within six months of Abe's second term, which resulted in a landslide victory in the lower house of Japan and made Abe Stronger enough till 2020. The Economist Magazine published its edition of May 2013 with a cover picture of a Superman body with a photo-shopped face of Shinzo with the title depicting the future, "It's Japan" flying like a bird or a plane (The Economist, 2013). Later on, Abe was interviewed in the Foreign Affairs magazine, which published it with the title 'Japan is Back' as it depicted the revival strategy of Japan under the leadership of Shinzo (Abe, 2023). Shinzo Abe not only focused on the revival of the economic strength of Japan, but also strived to mend the Japanese foreign policy with a proactive strategy and

reinterpretation of the Japanese experience of the Pacific wars. His strategy is known as the Abe Doctrine or the doctrine of normalization (Liff, 2018).

Abe's Doctrine is considered the turning point for the Japanese strategic shift, moving beyond the pacifist gesture towards a more assertive foreign policy. Since 2012, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe proposed a policy shift, which is normally called the Abe Doctrine. This doctrine was somehow a normalization strategy of Japan, which was intended to expand the military capability of Japan and expand its role at the global level. Many scholars like Adam P. Liff (2018) and Linus Hadstorm (2015) viewed this shift as a revisionary move rather than a complete rupture (Hagström (2015)). This revisionist stand of the Abe Doctrine was intended to balance the persistent constraints of the constitution, but not the complete alteration of its post war Strategic paradigm. Kuzumi policy was the idea of normalization implemented by the Abe Administration, considering the geostrategic environment realistically, where ontologically threats can only be countered by the means of capability rather than economic strength. H. Dobson considered the Abe doctrine as a comeback move of Japan intended to grab its share in this new post-unipolar era (Dobson, 2017).

Reinterpretation of Article 9 and Collective Self-Defense

Another landmark revisionist attempt by the Abe administration in the second term was the reinterpretation of Article 9 for the first time in the Post war history, which allowed the limited collective self-defense perceiving exigency from the Chinese rise in the regional horizon and North Korea's assertive Ambition (Akiyama, 2014). It was not a revolutionary amendment but an evolutionary requirement which allows Japan to send its forces for UN Peacekeeping missions abroad, while requiring an existential threat to use military offensive. Resolution of the evolutionary amendment of Article 9 was proposed in July 2014, cautiously allow to expand defensive capability of Japan despite having a domestic heated debate over the transition. Abe did not formally amend the constitution, which require public Referendum. This security resolution, in effect since 2016, opens up space for further expansion of the Joint Self-Defense Force. Without a ground footing for the defensive capability, it was impossible for Japan to participate in a joint exercise of a peacekeeping mission abroad and help an ally like the United States, which pushed Japan to rewrite the seminal document articulating the allies' respective

responsibilities and procedures for operational coordination (Government of Japan, 2016).

The Comprehensive Peace and Security Legislation, which was enacted in 2015, which allows Japan to use force under strict conditions. The legislation, which was introduced, had three conditions which required an armed attack against a close ally that threatens the Survival of Japan. Hence, using force as a last resort is allowed to the minimum extent, and it further extends the role of JSDF to provide logistical support to Allies to counter an attack on Japanese Security. These actions indirectly altered the Japanese defense posture, thus allowing the military action for collective self-defense (Government of Japan, 2016).

Secondly, Abe intended to modernize the Japanese Defense Force, and for this purpose steadily increased defense budget, which was used to acquire advanced military equipment like F-35 fighter jets, UAVs and Aegis missile defense System and fueled the relaxation in arms control policy (Kawai, 2024). The third Initiative of Abe was Free and Open Indo- Pacific (FOIP). This vision promoted the rule of Law and Freedom of Navigation across the Indo-Pacific. Aiming to counter the Chinese influence intended to strengthen the partnership with democratic nations like the U.S, Australia and India (MOFA Japan, 2016).

National Security Strategy after Abe

After Shinzo Abe, the defense Policy of Japan did not take a U-turn, which further accelerated under the leadership of Yoshihito Suga and Fumio Kishida. Japan has adopted a proactive National Security Strategy in 2022 in response to the perceived regional threat. Since the Abe administration, the Japanese military strategy has been transforming without amending the constitutional and financial restraints, thus it took a turn of revolutionary move to a more proactive self-defense. This strategy is stemmed by the perceived assertive behavior and defense capability of China in the region on one side and the development of modern missile technology by North Korea. Regional uncertainty was present there in the past, but Japan never tried to adopt such a revolutionary move then why did Japan adopt such a revolutionary provocation, which can trigger a more threatening regional security environment from which Japan was escaping to be trapped for decades? This complex question can be answered under the conception of “Punctuated Equilibrium Theory” which suggests that “Equillibberia” is maintained during the

period of stability without bringing it to the public spectrum, policy makers often make regular policy adjustment over time but “Punctuation”(Period of Change) occur when on political and strategic arena new actors emerge and try to bring the shift in strategic horizon then new dimensions with new problems emerged which enforce the Political actors to revolutionize the Policy (Jolicoeur, 2018). This theory clearly depicts the strategic situation of Japan in the 21st Century which can be integrated as a punctuation mark of the 20th century Pacifism as there was not a major threat on the regional platform of Pacific where Chinese rapid rise and its assertive military gesture in the region along with the rapid development of North Korea’s Missile Technology forced the policy makers of Japan to think about its active involvement with its allies. This perceptual shift was implemented by the regular evolutionary policy of Kuzumi and Abe administrations in the first two decades of the 21st century, where they strengthened their alliance pattern by moving beyond the spectrum of “Slave Alliance”. These regular adjustments furthered active Japanese involvement in International conflict and the Collective defense mechanism of the UN. Despite the involvement in international conflict, Japan adopted a neutral policy when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. But this third decade is a landmark where Japan has been aligned with NATO when Russia attacked Ukraine and indicated its proactive stance on the international stage.

The Strategic Reorientation of Japan: Deterrence, Dilemmas, and the Future of Indo-Pacific Stability

The Japanese government released three foundational documents in December 2022, which were the National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy and the Defense Buildup Program, which highlighted the diversion of Japanese security posture adopted in Post-World war II era. This shift in Japanese posture was highlighted by its commitment to double its defense spending to up to 2.0% of its GDP until 2027 and, most importantly, the Japanese interest in acquiring long-range strike capabilities, which are commonly called “counterstrike capabilities” (Murano, 2024). According to estimates, Japan spends 55 billion \$ according to the capped 1% spending of its GDP on defense and if this is increased to 2%, then this will be a minor increment in given Japan’s massive economy (Euro News, 2025). This alteration is deeply rooted in the assessment of Japan’s security policy makers as the region is becoming unstable due to North Korea’s rapid testing of its long-range nuclear tipped missile arsenal, China’s military modernization and Russia’s increasing tensions with the West due to its conflict with Ukraine.

This strategic restructuring of its armed forces, which is centered on enhancing deterrence while increasing the offensive capabilities, are simultaneously having direct implications on the regional stability. This pushes the re-evaluation of Japan's role from the theoretical lens of the Security dilemma because Japanese expect the severe reactions from its regional rivals and ultimate overhauling of the U.S-Japan alliance, which will have long-term implications on domestic and ethical attitudes, as for decades Japan has vowed not to gain any offensive capabilities.

Japan's Response under the Theoretical Framework of Security Dilemma

The Japanese posture represents an important case study of international relations in the dynamics of the security dilemma. The defensive actions taken by a state are taken as aggressive actions by other states, which exacerbates the sense of mistrust, thus creating an arms race and mistrust. The official Japanese narrative revolves around the concept of deterrence as it asserts that it seeks to protect its nation and national interests by achieving military prowess that guarantees that any attack on Japan will not achieve its goals. The increase in Tokyo's military capabilities is considered as a response towards the Beijing's increasing military footprint, which is, although focused on Taiwan but in such case conflict spillover is likely to be happen.

The increase in Tokyo's capability is dramatic because for decades Japan had self-imposed constitutional restrictions which resulted in limitations for the Japanese Self Defense Forces and its projection of military capabilities. In order to understand, we can look at the fact that the maximum range of any missile in the Japanese arsenal was restricted to 200 km, and it was the Type 12 surface-to-ship missile. In the contemporary era, Japan's plan to procure the Joint Strike missiles for its F-35 fleet can alter the calculation as it provides Tokyo with the offensive capability which it lacked previously (Simensen, 2025). The major stress which arises is from the indistinguishability between offense and defense weapons because the latest armaments which are used to counterstrike enemy launch sites after an initial attack are highly similar to the missiles which are used in a pre-emptive strike. Thus, the rival states which are operating under the circumstances of strategic uncertainty can assume the worst-case scenario that Japan can use these assets in an offensive capacity. This scenario can reposition the regional dynamics away from the relatively stable Deterrence model, which makes Japan heavily reliant on U.S

security guarantees and its response towards the aggressor. After the introduction of indigenous and dual-strike capability, Japan has achieved a significant uncertainty regarding its behavior in the pre-crisis phase, thus pushing the security outlook towards a spiral model, which is fueled by mistrust. Under the discourse of the spiral model, Beijing's and Pyongyang's military buildup, which includes the accelerated deployment of hypersonic weapons or missile defense systems, can be internally justified as a necessary response in order to prevent the perceived Japanese aggression.

Moreover, the Japanese government has been cautious in building up the narrative as it uses the sanitized terms like "counterstrike" which satisfy the domestic legal requirements while simultaneously complying with its Exclusively National Defense-oriented policy (EDOP). But in reality, the Japan's increasing capability itself is a threat rather than the political narrative building. In times of rapidly evolving crisis, the gap between adherence to legal domestic requirements and the requirement of external strategic deterrence only serves the risk of misinterpretation. The acquisition of these capabilities by Japan will also put stress on the U.S.-Japan alliance as it will have to integrate the newly acquired offensive capabilities into its existing Command and Control mechanisms, thus inviting China to view this integration as a unified structure and a coordinated threat ultimately igniting the escalatory cycle in response.

Chinese Response: Accusing Japan of Militarism

Chinese security policy experts have been swift in their response towards the Japanese acquisition of long-range capabilities by utilizing their historical rhetoric to denounce the new alterations in Japanese security policy and the legitimacy of U.S alliance-based security architecture of Asia. China has explicitly labelled Japan as "unprecedented and greatest strategic challenge", thus placing Japan and the U.S alliance at the core of its strategic calculus (Alexandra & Sakaki, 2018). The Chinese officials have repeatedly warned that Japanese militarism has historically inflicted "profound suffering across Asia" and, in contemporary times, it is again pursuing the same path towards military expansion. China warns that it "will not allow Japanese militarism to make a comeback" (Chen, 2025).

The language used by Chinese officials serves strategic functions. Firstly, it acts to isolate Japan diplomatically by reminding the regional partners of historic Japanese aggression particularly in South East Asia. China seeks to corner Japan by

reinforcing the narrative of “zero-sum confrontation” (Kyodo News, 2022). Secondly, Beijing uses this narrative by Japan as a preemptive justification to counter its own remilitarization by framing Japan’s commitment towards increased defense budget and loosening the restrictions of arms export as an evidence of military expansion. China has created a public narrative that legitimizes its own rapid build-up thus transforming its reactive measures into a necessary response so that perceived Japanese military resurgence should be prevented.

An important dimension of Beijing’s counter-strategy towards Japan’s military modernization is criticism of Japan’s post-war settlement. It claims that Japan has gravely violated its pacifist constitution and its defense-oriented policy, thus undermining the post-war international order. This criticism is aimed at delegitimizing the entire U.S- Japan alliance because it believes that Japan is committed towards the violation of international law, and it specifically challenges the entire regional security. China also strongly considers the issue of Taiwan by underscoring that Taiwan’s return to the mainland was the most important outcome of World War II, by urging Japan to stand by its commitment, and it should cease making inappropriate remarks against Taiwan.

South Korea: Distrust vs Strategic Rapprochement

The South Korean approach has been different because it has responded with strategic pragmatism. Due to the continuous testing of nuclear-capable missiles by North Korea, the South Korean security experts have pushed for shared security concerns, as it has been facilitated by institutionalization of the US-led trilateral framework despite having deeply rooted tensions with Japan. The relations between ROK and Japan began to thaw after the Kishida-Yoon summit in March 2023, which had provided the necessary momentum for the restoration of relations and commitment towards a future-oriented bilateral relationship. Simultaneously, this also paved the way for a critical Camp David trilateral summit in August 2023 to formalize cooperation with the United States.

The primary driver behind this approach is a strategic imperative, which is the intensified threat environment in East Asia, which is spearheaded by North Korea, as it rapidly and continuous testing of nuclear capable long-range missiles. The defense cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul is an explicit priority for both states. The rapprochement can be easily understood through the concept of “Negative

cooperation”, which translates into cohesion between the states, which is primarily shared by fear of external threats rather than shared domestic or cultural values (Govella, 2025). This raises a primary question that: if the external threats are diminished, then historical conflicts should reassert themselves at the center stage between ROK and Japan, which can threaten the strategic gains achieved since Kishida-Yoon Summit of March 2023.

The trilateral cooperation between the U.S, Japan and the ROK has been heavily institutionalized in order to protect the framework against the domestic political volatility in each capital. The important factor in the trilateral cooperation is “Commitment to Consult” which requires three leaders to share information and coordinate response actions in the event of a regional crisis. This check and balance acts as an internal deterrent, thus making Tokyo and Beijing understand that any derailing from the agreed framework will be costly, as it can result in the withdrawal of Washington, ultimately affecting regional stability. Despite a strong commitment towards strategic alignment, the challenges remain across the political and economic domains. It is because in May 2024, a trilateral summit was held in Beijing with the participation of Seoul and Tokyo to stabilize the economic and strategic dialogues. This underlines the need to maintain strong defense alignment against China while simultaneously working with Beijing to stabilize the economic relations. Japan’s acceleration of its defense shift complicates this balance for Seoul as it forces the ROK to navigate between China’s sharp reactions.

Impacts on Indo-Pacific Stability: Flashpoints and Alliances

The Japanese militarization directly contributes towards the concrete reshaping of the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. This involves a move toward deeper alliance integration and the use of mini-lateral groupings and a highly alert military readiness in order to avert a crisis in critical maritime flashpoints.

U.S -Japan alliance and Integrated Deterrence

The U.S-Japan alliance is the foundational cornerstone of Japan’s national security policy. However, Japan’s new defense capabilities require a full transformation of the alliance towards a full model of Integrated Deterrence, which should be capable of managing strategic responses across all domains. The acquisition of long-range precision strike capabilities by Japan signals the dissolution of the traditional post-

Cold War division of responsibilities commonly known as “shield and spear”, in which the responsibilities are divided between the U.S and Japan, in which Japan has to act like a “shield” while the U.S had to “spear” the offensive in case of any threat to Japanese sovereignty (Ozawa, 2024). This shift makes it mandatory for Japan to undergo an urgent transformation in its existing Command and Control structure, as the existing Japanese C2 is based on the concept of division of labor thus requiring urgent integration. This integration will also act as a unified command and operational design in which the Japanese Self-defense forces, U.S Forces Japan and the U.S Indo-Pacific Command are adjusted according to the required needs. This aligns with the Japanese plan to establish a joint headquarters to enhance military readiness, which can facilitate a coordinated response in the event of crisis. This integration raises legal questions about the collective defense versus national sovereignty.

The concept of Extended deterrence, which is backed by the U.S and its powerful military, including nuclear capabilities, remains unyielding. The mutual alliance has been deepened with the commitment by inclusion of new guidelines that have further strengthened U.S extended nuclear deterrence in an increasingly volatile environment. Simultaneously, the newly established guidelines bind Japan and the U.S to communicate with each other regarding the use of nuclear weapons by using the coordination mechanisms. This reverses the role of JSDF and is a two-pronged approach, firstly, as it reflects Japan's direct involvement in nuclear decision-making, and secondly, it serves as a powerful deterrent against North Korea's testing of nuclear weapons and China's military modernization as it signals that Tokyo is an active and consulted partner in the high-stakes nuclear planning.

Moreover, the integrated deterrence also includes an economic pillar. The U.S-Japan framework for critical minerals and rare earth is focused on securing the supply chains so that the vulnerabilities cannot be exploited by rival states. This strategic cooperation acknowledged that economic coercion is the first stage before kinetic confrontation. Thus, strengthening of the supply chain resilience, the alliance engages in deterrence by safeguarding essential industrial capacity from becoming hostage in the event of a crisis.

Minilateralism

Minilateral groupings serve as the platforms through which the integrated deterrence capabilities between the U.S and its allies can be amplified and projected across the wider Indo-Pacific theatre.

QUAD & Evolution

The QUAD is a grouping comprised of U.S, Japan, Australia and India has evolved significantly as it has presented itself as an important pillar of the security architecture in Indo-Pacific region. The revival of QUAD complements the traditionally followed “hub and spoke” alliance model which uses resources from a pool of different states thus putting the states in a much better position to counter China’s power and influence in the region. The QUAD focus has not been limited to military coordination in fact it has expanded comprehensive strategic coordination. This facilitates the consultations between the member states regarding the Chinese foreign policy and military initiatives on critical disputes, e.g. East and South China Seas and the Taiwan Strait. Importantly, the member states have enhanced their cooperation beyond the military horizons, i.e. climate change, public health, space, cybersecurity, etc. The trajectory of QUAD can be seen toward the strengthening of cooperation and consultations so that Chinese capabilities can be balanced. For Example, Japan uses the QUAD forum to advocate its security interests i.e. freedom of navigation in sensitive areas like the South China Sea, opposition towards changes in the status quo in the region without relying solely on a U.S mandate. So, the QUAD mechanism allows Japan to extend its influence and legalize its broader security agenda.

U.S-Japan-ROK Trilateral Defense Cooperation

The institutionalization of U.S-Japan-ROK cooperation was accelerated by the Camp David framework, which was very crucial for the stability in Northeast Asia, particularly to balance threats from North Korea. This framework provides concrete support towards the existing secure communication channels and continues towards building of respective communication channels. The trilateral agreement has a multi-domain mandate which deals with modern and evolving security challenges. It provides communication and coordinating channels to challenge the Foreign Information Manipulation (FIM) and the misuse of surveillance technologies. This trilateral arrangement ensures that all three nations will collaborate in advancing common principles so that emerging technologies, i.e. AI,

should be used responsibly. This broad spectrum of agreements allows the states to smooth the interoperability and secure supply chains so that this bloc can control the future technological environment, and it also weakens China's grip in critical emerging domains. This commitment by members underlines the cooperative structure against domestic internal factors, which can result in complicated situations and can hamper the operational framework (Kim, 2025).

Stability in the East China Sea

The East China Sea can be considered an important flashpoint between China and Japan due to the dispute between the Senkaku/Diayou islands. China has been consistent in expanding its efforts unilaterally to change the status quo by force, besides trying to gain a qualitative and quantitative edge to enhance its military capabilities. The Japanese acquisition of counterstrike capabilities is fundamentally aimed at deterring escalation in its immediate region. The procurement and deployment of long-range missiles provides the Japanese Self-Defense Forces with a capability to target the Chinese military assets in the East China Sea and airfields and naval strike capabilities located along the mainland Chinese coast. This strengthens the Chinese use of military force, particularly in the context of "grey zone" (EFSAS, 2024). These new capabilities increase the risk of escalation as striking the mainland can escalate the conflict vertically if the horizontal aggression, i.e. maritime conflicts cross a threshold which complicates China's operational decision matrix.

In a high-stakes conflict scenario, if China launches a massive missile barrage against Japanese assets, the contemporary defense doctrine requires destroying the launch sites before a second salvo is launched. This counterstrike capability is a latent preemptive tool for survival under the Japanese Exclusively Defense Oriented Policy (EDOP) (Bartlett, 2020). This acquisition of long-range strike capability and its ability to independently target Chinese targets lowers the burden for the U.S as it strengthens the credibility of extended deterrence commitment under Article 5 and lowers the perceived cost of U.S intervention.

Taiwan Strait: Policy Clarity and Ambiguity

Japan's geographical location and its proximity to the Taiwan strait makes it an inexorable factor in any Cross-Strait contingency. Japan's government acknowledges that in case of any conflict between mainland China and Taiwan shall spill over to its nearby territories, presumably the Senkaku/Diayou islands. This provides Japan a pretext to strengthen its national security rationale under the revised EDOP. The acquisition of long-range capabilities and their deployment on the Ryuku island chain can create an effective Anti- Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) against PLA's embarking points and landing facilities, as it also puts missile facilities at risk (Chang, 2021).

China has urged Japan to adhere towards its commitment on Taiwan and exercise caution in military and security issues. The Japanese government has to navigate a tough choice, i.e, honoring the alliance between the U.S and Japan, which requires direct U.S access to its military bases, while also avoiding initiation of direct conflict with China. Although the Japanese government has maintained ambiguity regarding its military intervention, Japanese actions and acquisition of its military capabilities establish deterrence by positioning. This operational reality transforms Japan's political ambiguity into relative operational clarity in the case of crisis.

Future Challenges and Future Pathway

The policy of Japan's strategic transformation is focused on addressing the existing issues, but its long-term success is dependent on overcoming its internal challenges while also carving its way as it has to navigate through the highly sensitive issue of nuclear deterrence. The transition of Japan for the acquisition of long-range weapons requires political will and a massive financial burden. The primary commitment involves the doubling of defense spending to 2.0% of GDP by the fiscal year of 2027. To achieve this financial commitment, taxes had to be increased to sustain this burden, but in a highly ageing society where the government must bear the expenditures of social services, healthcare and related sectors, this poses a serious challenge because if financials are not managed, then this can create a deterrence gap as it can delay the acquisition of new weapons and upgradation of older weapons. Besides the acquisition of new weapons, human capital is also required, which should have specialized training for operation, maintenance and command of these systems, but Japan's demographic constraints raise a new challenge.

In the post-World War II environment, Japan has strictly adhered to the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, which include non-possession, non-production and non-introduction. But in present times, the strategic consultations which Japan has been carrying out with U.S. questions the Japanese principle of Non-Introduction. Although the principle of non-Introduction has barred Japan from placing nuclear weapons upon its territory but new U.S.-Japan framework formalizes the communication regarding the use of U.S. nuclear weapons, which requires intelligence-sharing, targeting mechanisms and warfighting scenarios, thus publicly articulating Japan's involvement in U.S. nuclear decision-making. Depending upon the situation, any future crisis requires public debate on Japan's three principles; otherwise, it can risk the stability of the entire alliance. Furthermore, the future depends upon the successful implementation of institutional crisis management among the allies. The stability of the alliance requires secure communication channels and quick consultation mechanisms, which can allow the allies to rapidly cooperate and coordinate with each other in time or crisis. The cooperation on the newly emerging technologies and setting higher yardsticks in setting AI standards is very necessary, as we have seen that the domains of warfare have rapidly changed. So, it is necessary to establish a mutual, secure technological infrastructure; otherwise, they will be unable to achieve the integrated response of the Command and Control mechanism, which in result accelerated arms race spiral.

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