



Japan's first step toward a national security strategy: Assessing the Araki Commission report by Yuki Tatsumi

Last week, the Japanese Prime Minister's Council on Security and Defense Capabilities (better known in the United States as the Araki Commission) issued its final report on the future direction of Japanese national security policy. The report demands special attention as it will provide a base as the Japanese government revises its National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) in the next several months.

The report is important for a host of reasons. For one, it is the first report to clearly articulate the goal of Japan's national security policy. It argues that Japan has two major goals: the defense of Japan and prevention of threats in the international security environment. It further suggests that Japan should mix and match three approaches: 1) build up Japan's own defenses; 2) cooperate with its ally, the United States; and 3) cooperate with the international community in accordance with these goals. The report is the clearest statement yet on how Japan seeks to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance while cooperating with the international community (including the United Nations) in ways that are not mutually exclusive. In this context, the report also identifies important strategic issues for Japan (such as maritime security) as well as the structural challenges in Japanese security policy-making (including procurement reform, enhancement of the Cabinet Offices, and strengthening of information gathering/sharing/analytical capabilities).

The report is also noteworthy because it touches upon issues that have been considered "taboo" in past discussions of Japanese security policy. For example, it discusses the potential need for revising Japan's long-held principles on arms exports (which essentially ban them). The report also discusses, for the first time, concrete plans to reorient the defense posture of the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). No other report openly states, for example, the need to shift the force structure of the Ground Self-Defense Forces away from its emphasis on artillery and tanks to an infantry-oriented structure. The report makes parallel arguments for the force posture of two other services, proposing the expansion of long-range air transport capability for the Air Self-Defense Forces, and a shift from a force posture designed for anti-submarine warfare for the Maritime Self-Defense Forces to one more focused on maritime security and ballistic missile defense.

The report's limitations are evident when looking for issues that it did *not* address. For example, while the report starts off with the statement encouraging Japan to mix and match the three security approaches to maximize its security objectives, the rest of the report is U.S.-Japan alliance-centric. Cooperation within the Asia-Pacific region and beyond only gets a passing reference. That is not to say that the U.S.-Japan

alliance does not need constant adjustments in order to be strengthened. But it is equally important that Japan present a vision of security relations with other countries (South Korea, China, Singapore, and Australia, to name a few).

Neither does the report address the financial implications for Japan as it builds up its defense. While it does note that the resources available for national defense will continue to be limited, it does not adequately discuss how realistic it is for Japan to maintain its qualitative defense capabilities as it introduces costly new systems. While there is the urgent need to streamline and rationalize the way Japan procures weapon systems and other defense equipment, there must be a more detailed discussion of the practical measures required to achieve these goals; merely stating them is not enough.

Most important, the report left out the most crucial issue that underlies its proposals. Nowhere in the report can one find a deep discussion of Japan's right of collective self-defense or the ongoing discussion of constitutional revision. There is a token page that touches on it: it argues that the Araki Commission's purpose was to discuss the modality of Japanese security policy and defense capability, *not* constitutional revision.

However, the core of Japan's future national security policy and capability depends entirely on the outcome of the debate about constitutional revision, including the right of collective self-defense. Japanese decisions on constitutional revisions that would allow the right of collective self-defense will influence the entire spectrum of Japanese security policy, including security relations with Washington. This "policy now, constitution later" logic has prevented Japan from conducting a comprehensive review of its national security policy since the end of the Cold War. At a minimum, the report should have introduced the competing arguments, which up to now, have hardly been heard outside Japan's foreign and defense policy establishments.

The Araki Commission did important work. It paved the way for an active debate on the fundamentals of Japanese security policy. We should, however, have no illusions that it will be a smooth ride getting from where Japan is today to where it is envisaged to be in this report. It will take much political courage to tackle the issues laid out in the report. That said, this exercise is long overdue, and Japan will be better off going through this process in the most transparent way possible.

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