



## JAPAN'S QUEST FOR A NEW SECURITY STRATEGY AND THE JAPAN-US ALLIANCE

BY HIDESHI TOKUCHI

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Almost seven years have passed since the Government of Japan established its first National Security Strategy in December 2013. It defines Japan's national security interests and security objectives, as well as how to achieve those objectives through a whole-of-government approach. The National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), another basic document of Japan's national security policy, were established along with the strategy. It defines the roles and missions of Japan's defense forces and establishes the goal of defense force build-up as the guideline for medium-term and annual defense programs.

The Government of Japan announced in June that it will abandon its plan to install the Aegis Ashore missile defense system and instead consider alternatives by reviewing the present National Security Strategy. Reportedly, the government will also deliberate whether to acquire the capability to strike the missile launching sites of its adversaries.

In fact, the government has studied whether to acquire so-called strike capability since 2013. If Japan decides on acquiring such capability in the new National Security Strategy, it should not be the only issue discussed in the strategy's renewal.

Japan needs a new framework that will guide Japan's strategic thinking and planning to cope with the flux of the international order.

### The Need to Renew the National Security Strategy

The NDPG of 2013 had already been replaced by a new one in December 2018, reflecting the rapid shift in the security environment in the recent years, but the National Security Strategy has remained intact.

The NDPG of 2018 declares: "The security environment surrounding Japan is changing at extremely high speeds. Changes in the balance of power ... are accelerating and becoming more complex, and uncertainty over the existing order is increasing." However, the NDPG is focused on the military build-up and operations and it is not the appropriate policy platform to fully address the increasing "uncertainty over the existing order."

While the Government of Japan was working to revise the 2013 NDPG in 2018, several think tanks in Tokyo, including the Japan Institute of International Affairs and Research Institute for Peace and Security, issued policy recommendations for the revision of the National Security Strategy to address the new environment. It is an overdue issue, but not too late because the large international shift continues.

Strategy is about where to go and how to go there. The national security interests and objectives defined in the 2013 strategy document are probably still valid, and thus the destination remains the same. However, the world today is very different than that of 2013, and thus, the route to the destination must be redefined. The National Security Strategy is Japan's declaration of intent to contribute to the shaping of the international order. Japan needs a new strategy to direct itself in this more acute, uncertain, rapidly changing environment and mobilize all the instruments of its national power in a coherent way to generate synergy.

In 2012, when the present National Security Strategy was established, North Korea was developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. China was expanding to the East and South China Sea. These activities have not stopped since then, but North Korea did commit to “denuclearization” to both South Korea and to the US in 2018, no matter if the commitment was sincere.

China’s challenges are about more than just the maritime sphere. Today, the US-China competition is over worldviews and governance. In 2012, the US government was promoting the American rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. It is promoting the vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific now. Both emphasize the critical importance of the huge seascape of Asia. However, the US, at least in recent years, has been reluctant to demonstrate American leadership and is turning its back on alliance cooperation and international partnership. So, the rules-based liberal international order is seriously challenged from both inside and outside. On top of it, the spread of the novel coronavirus is accelerating the flux of the international order.

### **Points Covered by the New Strategy**

Japan must review its security strategy with all of these points fully in mind. The present strategy is an organized expression of a set of security principles and measures that existed at the time of its creation. It cannot fully address the huge flux, and decline of the rules-based international order, which Japan and the world now face.

Reportedly there are three main themes of discussion: first, missile defense to replace the planned Aegis Ashore; second, economic security to protect advanced technology; and third, coronavirus-related measures, though the details are utterly unknown.

But there is more to discuss if Japan is to squarely face the present international environment. I would like to highlight four themes in particular.

First, the Japan-US alliance must be redefined to fully address the erosion of the international order. In this context, Japan’s choice from among the competing worldviews (the US’ “rules-based liberal order” and

China’s “community of common destiny for mankind”) and the competition of the different models of governance (liberal democracy and digital authoritarianism) should be made clearer than ever by strengthening the alliance and engaging the US in closer partnership with other members of the US alliance network in the region and in the world.

Second, the new strategy should clearly define the vision for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) in security terms and elaborate on how it will be achieved. It will also entail closer alliance cooperation with the US in the region to synergize the visions of the two countries.

Third, the new strategy should take a truly holistic approach. A serious question for Japan is whether it has enough resources to cope with more diverse security challenges, both traditional and untraditional. Its economy is weakening, its fiscal conditions are worsening, and its population is shrinking and rapidly aging. The right ways to address these challenges must be articulated and presented to the Japanese public in a transparent manner.

Finally, the issue of strike capability is important. Although non-traditional issues such as Covid-19, natural disasters, and climate change are more important than ever, the Indo-Pacific region remains full of traditional challenges. Even international cooperation to deal with such non-traditional issues remains overshadowed by traditional challenges. In Northeast Asia, where large amounts of military capabilities are accumulated, it may not be a wise option to depend on either defensive or offensive capabilities alone. An optimal combination of both will be necessary to address the saturation attacks of adversaries. However, this is not an issue solely of installing one system or another. It is an issue of the entire posture and doctrine. The issue of opportunity cost will be involved too. It could not be obtained without much closer cooperation with the US in technology, equipment, intelligence, and interoperability terms. The credibility of the US’ extended deterrence should not be undermined.

All these issues necessitate a more robust alliance cooperation between the two countries, and therefore the new National Security Strategy should clearly demonstrate Japan's stronger commitment to the alliance.

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