

## **Japan's Security Policy and Related Risks, 2017 to 2020**

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In May 2017, Shinzo Abe became the third-longest serving prime minister in post-war Japan. And with term limit rules for party president that his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) approved in 2016, he could become the country's longest serving leader. If Abe remains head of the LDP and wins re-election in 2018, he could serve as prime minister until September 2021—enough time for him to accomplish his Abe Doctrine goals. Abe's eponymous doctrine has arguably replaced the Yoshida Doctrine, named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, Japan's leader for most of the mid-1940s to mid-1950s. The latter doctrine—which guided Japanese security policy for all of the Cold War—stressed a low-key and even introverted security policy, reliance on the U.S. under the auspices of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, and Japan's post-war re-integration into Asia. Now, Japan will use the Abe Doctrine to drive its security policy for at least the next few years, but this doctrine increases the risks to Japan and its prime minister.

After serving exactly one year as prime minister from September 2006 to September 2007, Abe resigned partly due to what the Japanese electorate saw as his disproportionate focus on nationalistic and militaristic policies at the expense of the economy. Prior to and during that failed year in office, Abe unabashedly displayed ultraconservative and even right-wing ideologue tendencies. But having learned his lesson from his ouster, prior to the December 2012 and subsequent elections, he publicly emphasized his economic policies (given the moniker "Abenomics") and domestic micro issues. Throughout his time in office, he has pursued mostly pragmatic security policies, embarking on trilateral and bilateral summits in attempts (sometimes with success, albeit temporary) to resolve controversial issues with South Korea, China, and Russia. If anything, Abe has taken pragmatism to the extreme, such as courting the outspoken and very controversial president of the Philippines, Rodrigo Duterte. More than most previous administrations in Japan, however, revisionism frequently seeps through to the public. In sum, Abe can be described as a pragmatic ideologue.

## **Abe Doctrine**

The Japanese government has not formally named Abe's policies after him, but the sum of his foreign policy has earned the Abe Doctrine term. The end goal of the doctrine is a more proudly powerful Japan; its re-establishment as the leading power in Asia—economically, militarily (albeit under the guise of self-defense and pacifism), and diplomatically; and increased global influence. The Abe Doctrine stresses a more high-profile, “values”-based foreign policy (seemingly a way to counter China) and a stronger defense, all tinged with nationalism and revisionism. And Abe's nationalism and revisionism roots run deep. His right wing, maternal grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, was a Class A war crimes suspect (never prosecuted) who staged an amazing political comeback and rose to become prime minister in 1957. Kishi was forced to resign three years later due to his highly unpopular yet successful effort to renegotiate and ratify an updated U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Abe has been very open about his admiration of Kishi, his world view, and his policies. And Abe's father, Shintaro Abe, served as foreign minister for the very conservative Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in the early to mid-1980s.

These nationalist roots might partly explain Shinzo Abe's efforts in his second term (he is the only Japanese prime minister to return to office after being forced out) to reinterpret the Japanese constitution in 2014, and to have the Diet (parliament) approve the associated “Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation” in summer of 2015. He was successful, much to the chagrin of many Japanese citizens and opposition parties. Even the LDP's coalition partner, Komeito, was not fond of the legislation and forced the LDP to include several restrictions in the legislation. However, Japan can now engage in collective self-defense. One example that government officials and Japan analysts commonly provide is a hypothetical situation in which Japan Maritime Self Defense Force ships provide security for American ships engaged in combat operations not directly linked to the defense of Japan. And in early May, Japan deployed the JS *Izumo* helicopter carrier to escort a U.S. supply ship supporting the Carl Vinson Carrier Strike Group.

The *Izumo* and its sister ship, the *JS Kaga*, commissioned spring 2017, are the largest ships in Japan's fleet (One example of Japan's tone deafness vis-à-vis its World War II aggressions: *Kaga* is the name of the aircraft carrier that attacked Pearl Harbor). They bring the number of Japanese helicopter carriers to four. However, Japan officially refers to them as "helicopter destroyers", instead of "carriers", as the former implies defensive capabilities, while "carriers" connotes offensive characteristics. Japanese political and social culture have historically interpreted the constitution as preventing offensive weaponry. Similar word play surrounds the name of Japan's military, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF). "Self-Defense", as the Japanese government and scholars have traditionally interpreted Article 9 in Japan's constitution as not allowing a military.

The Abe Doctrine not only seeks to broaden the interpretation of the constitution, but also to change the document. Hence, Abe's statement in May that he wants to constitutionally codify the existence of the JSDF by 2020. Significant improvements to the JSDF, to include increasing its force projection capability, are additional changes to the JSDF under the Abe Doctrine. Beyond the procurement of the massive *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers, Abe declared earlier this year that he does not intend to cap defense spending at one percent of GDP, which has been the Japanese government's self-imposed restriction for decades (for comparison, the U.S. and Singapore each spend a little over three percent of their GDP on their militaries, while Italy and the Philippines each spend a little over one percent). Abe has already taken advantage of landslide victories in the December 2014 snap election (a political gamble by Abe that paid off), and the July 2016 election to increase spending on the JSDF.

### **North Korea and China**

North Korea and China are the main justifications for this military budget increase. In terms of the Hermit Kingdom, its ballistic missiles are the main drivers, despite the fact that threat against Japan has not increased significantly in more than two decades. North Korea's recent test launches of the Musudan/Hwasong-10 and the newer KN-15/Pukguksong-2 intermediate-range ballistic missiles, and the KN-11/Pukguksong-1 submarine launched ballistic

missile do give the rogue state *some* improved capability (seven of eight test launches of the Musudan/Hwasong-10 have failed) such as greater mobility and quicker launches. But from the 1990s the North Koreans have had Scud-Extended Range and Nodong medium-range ballistic missiles that can hit some parts of Japan. However, the hermit kingdom's recent missile launches provide the Abe administration an excuse to pursue improved and even new anti-ballistic missile defense capabilities. The same goes for any future North Korean nuclear tests. Japan might also use North Korean provocations to justify an increase in intelligence capabilities and requests for increased intelligence sharing from the U.S. and possibly South Korea.

The Abe Doctrine also provides an effective means for its nationalist namesake to counter China, which Japanese officials perceive as a higher or more immediate threat than North Korea. Japan's wariness of China is due partly to the territorial dispute in the East China Sea over what Japan refers to as the Senkaku Islands, and what China calls the Diaoyu. The Senkaku/Diaoyu are eight uninhabited islets and barren rocks that Japan has administered since 1895 and nationalized in 2012. China and Taiwan also claim the islands. Since Japan nationalized the Senkaku, the East China Sea has been the epicenter of a coast guard arms race between Japan and China. The communist state has steadily increased the capability of its coast guard, even repurposing large People's Liberation Army Navy ships as coast guard vessels. It has also drastically increased the number of government ships, which usually accompany Chinese fishing boats that patrol Senkaku/Diaoyu territorial and contiguous waters.

In response, Japan has significantly increased its coast guard and self-defense force presence on its islands that are in proximity to the Senkaku. And the number of Japan Air Self-Defense Force scrambles against Chinese People's Liberation Army Air Force patrols entering the Japan's air defense identification zone over the East China Sea rose dramatically in 2016. JSDF budget increases include funding for placing forces on islands closer to the Senkaku, in addition to purchasing F-35 stealth fighters, V-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft, and amphibious assault craft.

Unlike in the East China Sea, Japan does not have territorial claims in the South China Sea, thus that water body is of lower priority for Tokyo. However, over \$5 trillion of shipping trade passes through the South China Sea annually, and 60 percent of Japanese energy supplies. It is also an area in the Pacific where Japan can counter China and use all instruments of national power to do so. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) arguably gives Japan the most “bang for the buck” to counter China in the south. Because several ASEAN members (Japan is not a member) have concerns about China’s actions in the region and especially in and around the South China Sea, the organization desires geopolitical balancing. Member states see Japan as such a “balancer”, which Abe Doctrine practitioners presumably welcome. In addition to JSDF deployments to the South China Sea—to the annoyance of China—Japan will strengthen its cooperation with ASEAN through overseas development assistance, cultural and military exchanges, and the export of military equipment (new for Japan). The most recent example of several of these elements coming together is the JS *Izumo*’s three-month tour of the South China Sea, which included a four-day embarkation of officers from ASEAN member states.

### **Doctrine Evolution vice Revolution**

Contrary to alarmist news reports and proclamations by pundits, Abe’s policy of purchasing and deploying major weapons systems, re-interpreting the constitution, and pushing through laws that codify such interpretations are not all unprecedented departure from the last 70 years of Japanese governance. Many aspects of the Abe Doctrine continue the evolution of Japanese security policy. From as early as the 1950s, the Japanese government “reinterpreted” the Constitution to justify the creation of the National Police Reserve, which was required to keep the peace when the American occupying force left to fight the Korean War. And the decision to produce the two aforementioned *Izumo*-class helicopter carriers was announced in November 2009, when the Democratic Party of Japan briefly held power. However, what makes the Abe Doctrine so controversial to Japan’s neighbors is the provocative combination of increasing force projection capabilities, reinterpretations of the constitution and related laws, and the prime minister’s penchant for revisionism and nationalism. Even the

U.S. government rebuked Abe's controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013. Yasukuni's war dead include over a dozen Class A war criminals.

Abe has for the most part learned to tone down his nationalism and ultraconservatism, in favor of pragmatism. He has not visited Yasukuni Shrine since that ill-advised 2013 visit, and in December 2015, the Japanese and South Korean foreign ministers worked to settle the "comfort women" issue. Comfort women were mostly South Korean sex slaves for the Japanese military during World War II. It seems that Japan's favorite description of the agreement with South Korea is that it is "resolved finally and irreversibly". Tokyo agreed to pay 1 billion yen (\$8.7 million) to surviving victims. But Abe's pragmatism goes only so far. In January, Japan recalled two top diplomats from South Korea after a civil group placed a statue commemorating comfort women at its consulate in the South Korean city of Busan. And a month prior, in December 2016—almost exactly three years after Abe's controversial visit to the Yasukuni Shrine—Defense Minister Tomomi Inada visited the shrine. As expected, China and South Korea voiced their disapproval of the visit. And Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, and Technology continues to approve Japanese textbooks that seem to whitewash Japan's adventurism during World War II, which also irks its neighbors (these textbooks tend to comprise less than one percent of Japanese textbooks).

### **Risks**

Historically these type of controversial actions by Japanese officials tend to partly negate official Japanese government apologies and other diplomatic overtures towards its neighbors. Japanese officials tend to be tone deaf in regard to their actions, and bewildered at their regional counterparts' subsequent outcry (to be fair, South Korea and China sometimes engage in anti-Japanese propaganda and occasionally stoke anti-Japanese nationalism among their citizens). This trend will likely continue for the remainder of Abe's time as prime minister, potentially exacerbating tensions with China and South Korea and negating hard-earned progress on key contentious issues.

With Japan's significant buildup of both law enforcement and military forces on the southwestern islands close to the Senkaku/Diaoyu, and drastically increased Chinese maritime and air patrols, there is an increasing risk of an accident, miscalculation, or a less likely purposeful physical confrontation. This is especially the case between August and April; China's yearly, unilateral fishing ban (ostensibly to mitigate against overfishing) usually lasts from May to August. An incident between Japanese law enforcement and Chinese commercial fishing vessels, or their Chinese paramilitary or law enforcement escorts, is more likely outside those three months of the ban. Both governments have limited their Senkaku/Diaoyu area maritime deployments to *mostly* law enforcement operations, specifically the Japan Coast Guard and the relatively new China Coast Guard. Military deployments to the area by either side could inflame tensions. Nationalistic, domestic pressure in both countries might also exacerbate any future incidents.

The U.S. would be expected to play at least a behind-the-scenes role in any future incident involving the disputed islands. However, such a crisis could risk an uncomfortable test for the United States' commitment to Article V of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, which calls for the U.S. to defend Japan. While at least three recent U.S. secretaries of defense, a secretary of state, and even a president have explicitly affirmed the applicability of Senkaku to Article V, Washington would likely loath being dragged into a military conflict over uninhabited islands.

Despite the potentially severe consequences of an international incident in or above the East China Sea, the more likely risk inherent in the Abe Doctrine is domestic. Regardless of his high approval ratings, Abe risks a downfall similar to that of his grandfather he so highly respects. Like Kishi in 1960, Abe in 2015 used his coalition majority in the Diet to force through controversial legislation related to Japanese security and treaty obligations. And similar to the public reaction to Kishi's legislation in 1960, there was widespread opposition to Abe's legislative efforts in 2015—60,000 protested outside the Diet. The protest organizer in 2015 was a student group, which should give the Abe administration pause. And this month, more than 2,000 citizens protested in front of the Diet after Abe pushed through anti-conspiracy

legislation (protests against the bill started late 2016, months before the law was passed). The United Nation's Special Rapporteur, the Japan Federation of Bar Associations, and opposition parties have also criticized the controversial law, which outlaws 277 pre-crime activities. And Abe's next step of revising Article 9 of the constitution to "normalize" the JSDF faces resistance from even some senior officials in his own party.

Additionally, scandals related to right-wing organizations threaten Abe's legacy, and potentially his longevity in office. It is slightly ironic that the highest risk to the Abe Doctrine's controversial, yet mostly evolutionary, security policy is Abe himself.

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