



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG POLICY BRIEF

Japan's Security Paradigm: A Transformational Shift?

Author

Anil Chopra

Volume VII, Issue 47

December 23, 2022



Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

DPG Policy Brief Vol. VII, Issue 47

December 23, 2022

ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

Author

Vice Admiral Anil Chopra, PVSM, AVSM (Retd.), Senior Fellow for Global Security Dynamics, Delhi Policy Group

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.

Cover Photographs:

PM Kishida releasing National Security Strategy 16 December. Source: Public Relations Office, Government of Japan

Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security. Source: Facebook (Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

PM Kishida at NATO Summit (June 2022), Source: Facebook (Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

© 2022 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org

Japan's Security Paradigm: A Transformational Shift?

by
Anil Chopra

Contents

A Perfect Storm of Deepening Threats.....	1
Storm Measures.....	3
Security Cooperation and Outreach.....	4
Economic Compulsions Impacting Japan's Security	7
Conclusion.....	7

Japan's Security Paradigm: A Transformational Shift?

by
Anil Chopra

A Perfect Storm of Deepening Threats

The uncertain and worsening geo-strategic environment unleashed by the events of 2022 has impacted almost all nations globally, but few have had to contend with as steep a decline in their security milieu as Japan. Tokyo must now contend with multiple challenges in North-East Asia, its immediate strategic neighbourhood, primarily emanating from an emerging China-Russia axis, both members of which have territorial claims on Japanese islands. The joint deployment of H-6 and TU-95 bombers by Beijing and Moscow near Japan in May this year, co-incident with the Quad summit being held in Tokyo, and the launching of Chinese missiles into its EEZ in August, were perhaps defining moments for Japanese policy-makers.

On this Westphalian canvas is superimposed the growing threat from an unpredictable regime in North Korea, which has launched over fifty missiles thus far in 2022, and has no compunction in intimidating Tokyo by firing them over Japanese territory. Overlaid on this menacing scenario is the possibility of a conflagration over Taiwan, which could likely lead to Japanese military involvement.

To add to Tokyo's discomfiture, its main ally and security guarantor, the United States, is increasingly focused on the war in Europe, with the natural consequence of a dilution of its energies and attention towards the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, despite recent efforts by both sides, Tokyo's relationship with Seoul continues to be strained. Further, though Japan's security alliance with the US provides a modicum of deterrence against China, the security challenges specific to North-East Asia are unlikely to be mitigated on the ground by Japan's engagement with other groupings, such as the G7 and the QUAD.

The Japanese economy, still the third-largest in the world, has been negatively impacted by both Covid-19 and the fall-out of the Ukraine conflict, with the resultant energy squeeze and the draw-down in global trade and investment. Furthermore, Japan continues to be economically intertwined with China, its largest trading partner, which accounts for a quarter of both its imports and exports. This hard reality limits Tokyo's freedom of action in respect of Beijing.

Japan faces the acute dilemma of responding to security threats whilst being severely constrained by a pacifist constitution, and an equally pacifist populace. Efforts initiated by former PM Shinzo Abe to modify Article 9 of the Constitution, and legitimise a self-defence military, have not yet borne fruit. In such a political environment, the possibility of Tokyo ever acquiring a nuclear deterrent is remote, though a discourse on 'nuclear sharing' (akin to some NATO partners), permitting US nuclear weapons on Japanese territory, has been initiated, something which would have been unimaginable in the past.



PM Kishida releasing National Security Strategy 16 December. Source: Public Relations Office, Government of Japan

What then are the choices and the way ahead for the Japanese leadership, confronted as it is by the necessity to make quick decisions and take decisive action to address the dangers Japan faces in the agitated cauldron of North-East Asian geopolitics? While these are no easy answers, it is evident that Japan may have to dispense with its longstanding cautious, 'wait and see' approach, especially in the aftermath of the 20th Congress of the CPC, which may embolden Xi Jinping to pursue a more aggressive realisation of his China Dream.

Signs of such an attitudinal change were already apparent in recent decisions and initiatives emanating from Tokyo, such as PM Kishida's participation in the NATO summit in Madrid in June this year. The revised Japan- Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC), signed shortly after the end of the CPC Congress in October, with a decidedly more military slant, was another example of a changing mind-set. That Japan is now on the path of a

transformed security paradigm is distinctly apparent from the flurry of pronouncements and revisions to three key security related documents over the last month, ever since the submission of the recommendations of a Cabinet appointed expert panel on November 22.

Japan has historically been saved from invasion by fortuitous typhoons, such as those that demolished the invading Mongol fleets twice in the 13th century. The current rulers of Japan, cognisant of the increased threats to Japan's security, now face the difficult task of marshalling the political consensus and resources necessary to combat a different kind of 'perfect storm' bearing down on Japan.

Storm Measures

Whilst diplomacy and economic resilience would surely be needed to address the prevailing situation, the thrust of Tokyo's response may necessarily have to be military— primarily by signalling a change in posture to deter aggression from adversaries. A beginning has certainly been made by way of the amended National Security Strategy, National Defence Strategy, and Defence Plan.

The six striking provisions in these documents relate to a major increase in planned defence spending, the acquisition of a 'counter-strike' capability using long-range missiles, the revitalising of the defence industrial base, a review of the strict guidelines on exporting defence equipment, the naming of China, DPRK and Russia as threats/challenges, and acknowledging the need to enhance cyber-security at all levels.

Tokyo had faced a Hobson's choice in respect of increased budgetary provisions for strengthening its entire self-defence apparatus. Whilst there was a marginal increase in the funds appropriated for defence in 2022, the amount still hovered around 1% of GDP. However, following the recommendations of the expert panel, PM Kishida had indicated that the defence budget would be increased to 2% of GDP by 2027. Japan's Defence and Finance Ministers have reportedly finalised plans to spend around ¥ 43 trillion (\$ 315 billion) on defence over the next five years, nearly doubling the roughly ¥ 27.47 trillion earmarked under an earlier plan. This significant increase of the defence budget has now been formalised in the NSS.

Stable funding was proposed to be provided by increased corporate and luxury taxes to account for a quarter of the proposed growth of the defence budget, and adjustments in current appropriations for other programs and purposes for the remaining three quarters. However, these measures have already invited strong criticism from within the LDP, the opposition parties and the public.

The decision to acquire conventional "counter-strike" capability, 'politically-correct' terminology for a response to an attack or a pre-emptive strike when an enemy attack is imminent, is another major shift in Japan's defence policy. It has been the focus of public debate recently, and has also been the subject of controversy due to its inherently offensive nature, despite safeguards that may be put in place. It is now proposed to spend five trillion Yen to import US Tomahawk missiles, and upgrade the indigenous A12 missiles over the next five years.

Besides the reinforcing of the indigenous arms industry, research and development for dual-use cutting-edge technology, and modification of civil infrastructure for military use is also on the cards. The stage appears to be set for joint ventures and joint development with foreign companies, and for some relaxing of restrictions on export of military equipment to third countries.

Security Cooperation and Outreach

In addition to the impetus being given to bolster its hard-security capabilities, Tokyo has substantially enhanced its defence cooperation and strategic ties with a number of like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific, though with an increasing emphasis on the West Pacific.

Defence cooperation between Japan and Australia has been greatly strengthened in 2022, through the Reciprocal Access Agreement signed in January, the Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation in October, and the 2+2 meeting on 9th December. The upgraded security pacts with Canberra envisage, inter-alia, significantly increased interoperability including between the F-35s of the Air Forces, and joint bilateral exercises of ground forces in Australian territory, a step which is more likely to broaden military ties between the two countries. A joint approach to strengthening the QUAD and the US-Japan-Australia tri-lateral also finds mention, as does a common stance on ASEAN and Oceania.

The enhanced interaction would likely also increase Japan's linkages with the AUKUS grouping, though a JAUKUS appears unlikely to materialise. This could enhance underwater and strategic deterrence for Tokyo in the medium to long term.

Tokyo will likely step up its security cooperation with South East Asian states in general, with the Philippines and Vietnam in particular. The recently concluded International Fleet Review in Sagami Bay off Tokyo in early December drew

participation from South East Asian nations, as well as from South Korea. Russia and China were conspicuous by their absence.



Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security. Source: Facebook (Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

Japan's defence cooperation with the Philippines has been increased significantly, with the two nations now interacting in the 2+2 format, with the first such meeting held in Tokyo in April this year. Japan has transferred advanced air surveillance radars to the Philippines Air Force, with space cooperation also on the anvil. This bilateral enhancement of ties is also leading to the strengthening of the Japan-Philippines-US security trilateral.

With Hanoi, Japan has indicated a willingness to transfer equipment and technology in multiple domains, including space and cyber. A series of meetings and agreements were concluded during the latter half of 2021. However, stepping up ties with Vietnam will pose challenges, given Hanoi's reluctance to be seen to be allied against China. The reassurances given to the Chinese leadership by Premier Trong during his recent visit to Beijing underlines the difficulty of making Vietnam a dependable supporter of any bulwark fashioned to address Beijing's geopolitical aggressiveness.

In regard to Taiwan, Japan has made a number of bold, attention-grabbing statements in support of Taipei, even suggesting the possibility of military assistance in case of any hostilities. However, there is understandable scepticism about Tokyo walking the talk in this regard, given the continuing ambiguity about its military role. Nonetheless, the recurring mention by senior Japanese leaders since 2021 of the Taiwan situation, the criticality of cross-

strait stability, and the existential threat to Japan by any invasion of Taiwan by China, underscores a more proactive Japanese stance.

In the face of an increasing China-DPRK menace, it may also be possible to bridge the simmering Seoul- Tokyo divide, despite the very deep scars of the past. In this regard, tentative steps are being taken by the two governments, but it remains to be seen if any lasting thaw emerges.

The recent exchange of missiles between the Koreas, with 25 being fired on November 2 alone, underscores the advisability of a mutually supportive relationship, should South Korea and its populace be more receptive to a lasting rapprochement.



PM Kishida at NATO Summit (June 2022). Source: Facebook (Prime Minister's Office of Japan)

In line with its general thrust to widen security relationships in Asia beyond the established US alliance framework, as seen in its recent initiatives with respect to Australia, Philippines, and Vietnam, Tokyo has also been cultivating its relationships with the West far beyond traditional US linkages. It has prominently upgraded ties with the EU, NATO, UK, France, OECD and G7 in the recent past.

It would be safe to conclude that Japan's security- related initiatives and statements in the current year are indicative of the fact that Tokyo is fully

cognisant of the need to elevate its military profile in North East Asia and the West Pacific, including by supplementing the bilateral US security alliance framework through a defence build-up.

Economic Compulsions Impacting Japan's Security

Japan remains uneasy at the prospect of disturbing its extensive economic ties with China, which would entail loss of markets, investment and manufacturing opportunities for Japanese firms and hurt the Japanese economy itself. This will remain a challenge with no discernible solutions in the medium term.

In a similar vein, Japan has decided to maintain its stake in the Sakhalin oil fields even after Exxon exited the venture, which is now being steered by a Russian operator. Though Tokyo relies on West Asia oil for 90% of its crude oil imports, it can clearly not afford to decouple from this vital neighbourhood source, especially given Beijing's stranglehold on the South China Sea, and its consequent ability to impact all SLOCs therein in the event of a military conflict.

With an economic focus on the Asia Pacific, as opposed to the Indo-Pacific, Tokyo will continue to focus on East Asian economic architecture, from RCEP to CPTPP, APEC to IPEF. It is also leading supply chain resilience initiatives in both the G7 and the Quad.

However, given the critical importance of the Indian Ocean region for Japan's energy needs and resources, as well as for markets and investments, Tokyo cannot afford to neglect the larger Indo-Pacific. The IOR is also the gateway to South Asia, Central Asia and Africa, regions that are vital for sustaining the long-term interests of the Japanese economy.

Conclusion

There is no gainsaying the magnitude of current challenges to Japan and its interests in East Asia.

Japan's leadership appears to have finally overcome past caution and has initiated concrete measures to strengthen deterrence in response to its deteriorating security environment. However, it remains to be seen how this trajectory unfolds, given lingering uncertainties about a public and political consensus to pursue defence capability beyond the traditional "defence only" posture.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org