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## Japan's Defense White Paper 2014 and Coping with the China 'Threat'

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The Japanese government released the Defense White paper 2014 on 5 August, the 40<sup>th</sup> released since 1970. The significant tenor of the defense document was how Japan must bolster its vigilance against China's maritime provocations. In recent times, China has been proceeding with its maritime expansion through force of arms and engaged in relentless surge of provocative actions towards its neighboring countries, thereby causing a sense of unease. In the wake of this development, the White Paper seeks cooperation with other nations concerned.

In particular, China's recent saber-rattling moves in the East China Sea are seen as a major cause for alarm in Japan and it is reflected in the White Paper. In November 2013, China unilaterally declared Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) over an area of the East China Sea that covers the Senkakus, the uninhabited islands administered by Japan but claimed by China, where they are called Diaoyu. The White Paper termed it as dangerous, adding that the Chinese move could result in "unintended consequences" and expressed strong concern over China's expansion of military power. Japan is understandably concerned that China's ADIZ over the East China Sea includes the Senkaku Islands, "as if they were a part of China's territory", and is prepared to appropriately respond when necessary. The White Paper observed that Beijing "unjustifiably infringed on the principle of freedom of flight in airspace above high seas" because foreign aircrafts entering the zone are forced to follow Beijing's rules and identify themselves. Indeed, China's actions are destabilizing the security environment sur-

rounding Japan. The White Paper expressed concern that China's rapidly expanding maritime and airspace activities around the Senkaku Islands could trigger an unwanted clash.

Indeed, China's assertion of maritime claims is counter to existing order of international law. In May and June 2014, Chinese fighter jets flew abnormally close to Air Self-Defense Forces planes in area where Japan's ADIZ and China's ADIZ overlap. Air Self-Defense Force jets confirmed for the first time passage of China's early-warning aircraft in July 2013 and bombers in September over waters between Okinawa Island and Miyakojima Island and over the Pacific Ocean. According to the White Paper, the ASDF scrambled its fighter jets 810 times in fiscal 2013 in response to growing activity by the Chinese and Russian military, and threat to enter Japanese airspace, including their aircraft deployment. It was for the first time since fiscal 1989, the ASDF planes scrambled more than 800 times. Almost 95% of the cases were in response to Chinese and Russian aircrafts.

Noting with alarm, the White Paper observed that China's defense budget quadrupled in the past decade, reaching 808.2 billion yuan (about ¥12.9 trillion) for fiscal 2014, up 12% from the previous year, while Japan's defense budget stood at ¥4.78 trillion in fiscal 2014, an increase from ¥4.68 trillion the previous fiscal year. China continues its modernization of equipment under the presumption of maritime military clashes. China is expected to launch its first domestically built aircraft



carrier in the early 2020s and drastically strengthen its fleet of new lightweight warships. These are worrying for Japan.

Besides China's assertive behavior, North Korea's actions are also cause of worry. In early parts of 2014, Pyongyang successfully fired short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. Its confidence level has considerably increased after the performance of its missiles, whose types have also been diversified. The White Paper therefore raised concern that North Korea may commit more military provocations, stemming from its overconfidence and misconception of its military power, thereby aggravate circumstances and create a messy situation. Its confidence in its deterrent power will be further bolstered if it succeeds in developing miniaturized nuclear warheads, and thus step up its military provocations.

For the first time, the White Paper mentioned "gray zone" incidents. It defined gray zone situations that neither the Japan Coast Guard nor the police can adequately handle even though such situations fall short of an all-out war. Gray zone incidents refer to infringements that do not involve the use of force. This was a clear reference to China as China is making many attempts to alter the existing order with a view to obtain economic interests, with potential seeds of triggering gray zone incidents. Gray zone situations cover a wide range of events that are neither normal nor a military emergency. The White Paper feared that such gray zone situations are likely to increase in the future. In reference to the government's decision of 1 July on the reinterpretation of the Constitution allowing the country limited exercise of the right of collective self-defense, the White Paper termed it as "historic" as the move of Abe government is to further bolster Japan's peace and safety.

Though the White Paper categorically named China as the key concern because of the latter's "dangerous" actions at sea and air as it seeks to exert control in waters around Japan and elsewhere in the region, it also listed North Korea and Russia as contributing to the region's "increasingly severe" security environment. Besides warning that North Korea's missile and nuclear programs were a grave destabilizing factor, the White Paper also noted that Japan was keeping an eye on Russia's involvement in Ukraine. According to Japan, Russia is also showing signs of expanding its military actions in recent months and conducting large-scale operations with its navy and air force in the region.

Though Japan's annual defense reports in recent years have become the routine platform for Tokyo to voice its security concerns, the section on the Chinese military got significantly larger space because of what Tokyo says has been China's increased intrusion into Japanese territory both in the air and at sea. Japan's Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera observed: "The report is only seeking to state the facts about China's actions and that Japan is not the only country concerned about

the unilateral establishment of an ADIZ. The United States and the international community have voiced concerns as well". The report warned China against its attempts to change the *statu quo*, and called on Beijing to observe international norms.

The White Paper also urged the Chinese military to be more transparent, both about its hardware and intentions in the region, as Japan fears that there is trend towards arms buildup and modernization by neighboring countries in response to their perceptions of threat from China.

### Naming Five Isles near Senkaku

Before the White Paper was released on 5 August, Japan gave names to five small isles near the disputed Senkaku Islands on 1 August. This drew immediate protest from Beijing. The Headquarters for Ocean Policy in the Cabinet Secretariat announced that 158 uninhabited islands lying near the outer edge of Japanese territorial waters were given new names that will appear in official maps. Since most of the new names were popular ones already used by local residents, the five islands near the Senkaku were given utilitarian names. Three small islands in the vicinity of Kubashima were named Higashi-Kojima (east small island), Nanto-Kojima (southeast small island) and Seihokusei-Kojima (west-northwest small island). Two islands near Minami-Kojima were named Nanto-Kojima (southeast small island) and Nansei-Kojima (southwest small island). It was not clear who actually owned the islands. For record, territorial waters are defined as the area 12 nautical miles (about 22 kilometers) from land, while a nation's exclusive economic zone is defined as an area 200 nautical miles (about 370 km) from land.

According to the policy document, Tokyo will ease the heavy burden on southern Japan's Okinawa Prefecture of hosting the bulk of US forces in Japan. Japan is increasing focus on defending remote islands, especially the uninhabited Senkakus. It has plans to station a coastal surveillance unit on the country's westernmost island of Yonaguni and to set up an amphibious force similar to the US Marines. These moves have upset China.

### Reaction of China

As usual, the response from Beijing was on the expected line. The Chinese Defense Ministry was quick to accuse Japan of deliberately embellishing the threat the Chinese military poses to adjust its military and security policies. Chinese security analysts read the report as another sign of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's effort to turn Japan into a regional military power.

China took umbrage with Japan's naming of the five islets. *The People's Daily* condemned Japan's move, saying that in the capacity of a foreign country, Japan has no right to 'name' islets that have been part of the Chinese since ancient times, and Tokyo's any unilateral move can never change China's sovereignty over them. It further said that



Japan's unilateral move to name the five islets were illegal and invalid by both historical facts and international law. According to China, the earlier historical record of the names of Diaoyu Dao (Diaoyu Island), Chiwei Yu and other places can be found in the book *Voyage with a Tail Wing* (Shun Feng Xiang Song) published in 1403 (the first year of the reign of Emperor Yongle of the Ming Dynasty). China claims that it had already discovered and named Diaoyu Dao by the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries. China alleges that Japan "stole" the Diaoyu Islands in 1895 in its war with China and then forced the Qing court to sign the unequal Treaty of Shimonoseki and cede to Japan the island of Taiwan, as well as Diaoyu Islands and all other islands appertaining or belonging to Taiwan. China claims that the Cairo Declaration of 1 December 1943 issued by China, the US and Britain stated in explicit terms that "all the territories Japan has stolen from the Chinese, such as Manchuria, Formosa (Taiwan), and Pescadores" shall be restored to the Chinese. Therefore, China argues, in international law, the Diaoyu Island and its affiliated islands have been returned to China since then. It further reiterates its position by arguing that Article 8 of the Potsdam Proclamation of 26 July 1945 reaffirmed that "the terms of the Cairo Declaration shall be carried out".

When Japan took the unilateral move to "purchase" and "nationalize" the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, China saw the Japanese move as an attempt to legalize its act of theft in brazen violation of both the Cairo Declaration and the Potsdam Proclamation. Seeing in the same perspective, Japan's naming the five islets was seen in Beijing as yet another attempt to break the world order established by international law, and "an illustration of Tokyo's unapologetic attitude towards historical issues".

### Reaction of South Korea

China was not the only country that raised concerns about Japan in the region and its territorial claims. Soon after the Defense White Paper was released, South Korea summoned the Japanese military attaché in Seoul and warned against the mention of Takeshima/Dokdo as part of Japan's territory. Japan calls the Korea-administered Dokdo Islands as Takeshima, over which a dispute remains between the countries.

### Russia

Japan has a long-standing territorial dispute with Russia on the Russian-held Kurile Islands off Hokkaido, known as the Northern Territories. A breakthrough has eluded so far. Abe is treading carefully with President Vladimir Putin and is being forced to strike a balance between acting in concert with the US and Europe over the Ukraine crisis, and maintaining his personal relationship with Putin with the hope to reach a breakthrough on the island issue. This, however, did not prevent Japan to criticize Russia's annexation of Crimea as it undermined Ukraine's sovereignty and territory, besides violating in-

ternational law. Japan has legitimate worry that such attempt by Russia to change the status quo by force poses global challenge as they have repercussions for Asia and other regions.

### Concluding Observations

While China is free to interpret Japan's policy the way it likes, this is clearly not the case in the eyes of a neutral observer. It is unfortunate that ties between Tokyo and Beijing have been seriously strained since Abe assumed office in December 2012. The shadow of history, the legacy of Japan's wartime aggression, visits to Yasukuni Shrine by Japan's political leaders, 'comfort women' issue, and a dispute over a group of islands in the East China Sea continue to fray ties.

On more than one occasion, Abe has expressed desire to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping. He is believed to have sent a personal message to Xi, saying the two leaders should meet to repair bilateral relations. With sincere intentions to mend ties with China, Abe conveyed the message through former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda who secretly met with Xi in late July as chairman of the nongovernmental Boao Forum for Asia. It remains unclear if Xi will agree to meet with Abe on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum summit in Beijing in November, as proposed by Japan.

While in Brazil, Abe had stressed that dialogue was needed between Japan and China to resolve their differences. That Abe is sincere for an early summit meeting with Xi can be seen also from the meeting by Masahiko Komura, the Vice President of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, in May 2014 with Zhang Dejiang, ranked third in the Chinese Communist Party's powerful seven-member Politburo Standing Committee, during which Komura stressed the need for a summit meeting.

Since both countries are at odds over territory and views on history, China has said there will be no bilateral summit unless Japan acknowledges a territorial dispute over the Senkaku group of islands in the East China Sea and Abe promises not to visit the war-related Yasukuni Shrine in Tokyo. Japan insists that the two leaders should meet without preconditions. With both sides hardening their positions, a summit meeting even in November seems unlikely. In the larger interests of peace in the region, it is desirable that both show some flexibility with a spirit of accommodation and try to find a middle path that either can sell to their people.

The real danger is both Japan and China sees and accuse each other as engaging in military provocations in their "preparation for a potential conflict". A recent report released by the US Defense Department on China's military strength notes that China has placed its principal focus on attaining the capability to fight and win in preparation for "potential regional conflicts, including those related to Taiwan ... [and] defense of territorial claims in the South China Sea and East China Sea". As



per plan, China is expected to build amphibious assault landing vessels around 2020. With this power, China will be able to attack and seize remote islands. The commissioning of such vessels is a cause of concern for Japan and other neighboring countries. The new security initiatives initiated by the Abe government may be seen from this background.

With neither willing to concede an inch, the situation is pregnant for a regional conflagration. Even an accidental or unintended move by either party can lead to a major escalation, drawing in the process other powers. If both Japan and China continue to base their respective claims based on history and the way they interpret, correcting the historical wrong seems to be unthinkable. Best to resolve the disputes is to seek international arbitration.

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