

“Japan’s New Security Outlook: Implications for the US-Japan Alliance”

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Abstract : This paper explores the most significant change to Japan’s security strategy since the end of World War II, in particular Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s government publication, in late 2022, of 3 policy documents (the National Security Strategy [NSS], the National Defense Strategy and the Defense Buildup Program) that basically propose to expand the country’s military capabilities and to increase military spending over a 5-year period. These policies represent a remarkable transformation of Japan’s defense-oriented policy followed since 1946. These proposals have been under analysis and debate since they were announced, as it was also Japan’s historic ambition to strengthening its deterrence capabilities in the context of a more complex regional security environment. Even though this new defense posture has attracted significant international attention, it is far from representing a done deal because of the fact that there is still a long way to go to implement this vision because of a wide variety of political and economic issues. Japan is currently experiencing the most dangerous security environment since the end of World War II, and this situation led Japan to intensify its dialogue with the United States to reflect a re-evaluation of deterrence in the face of a rapidly worsening security environment, a changing balance of power in East Asia, and the arrival of a new era of “great power competition”. Japan’s new documents, for instance, identify China and North Korea’s as posing, respectively, a strategic challenge and an imminent threat. Japan has also noted that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has contributed to erode the foundation of the international order. It is considered that Russia’s aggression was possible because Ukraine’s defense capability was not enough for effective deterrence. Moreover, Japan’s call for “counterstrike capabilities” results from a recognition that China and North Korea’s ballistic and cruise missiles could overwhelm Japan’s air and missile defense systems, and therefore there is an urgent need to strengthen deterrence and resilience. In this context, this paper will focus on the impact of these changes on the US-Japan alliance. Adapting this alliance to Tokyo’s new ambitions and capabilities could be critical in terms of updating their traditional protection/access to bases arrangement, interoperability and joint command and control issues, as well as regarding the security–economy nexus. While China is Japan’s largest trading partner, and trade between the two has been growing, US-Japan economic relationship has been slower, notwithstanding the fact that US-Japan security cooperation has strengthened significantly in recent years.

Keywords : us-japan alliance, japan security, great power competition, interoperability

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