



Japan-U.S. Defense Guidelines Revised

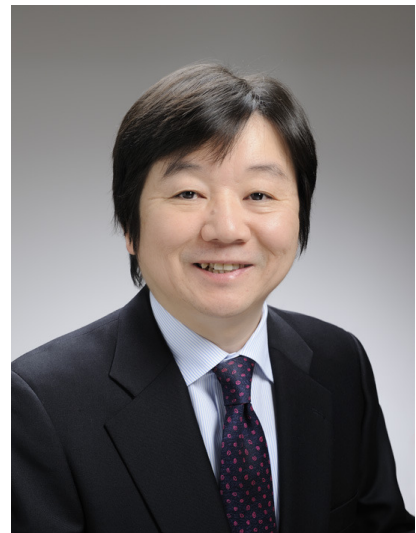
KAMIYA Matake, Professor, National Defense Academy

What exactly is “new” about the recently revised Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation? National Defense Academy Professor Kamiya Matake comments.

On April 27, Japan and the United States revised the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation for the first time in eighteen years. The guidelines represent the basic framework and direction of defense cooperation between Japan and the United States as allies based on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, and serve as a document setting forth the division of roles between the Self-Defense Forces and U.S. forces. The guidelines were first created in 1978 and underwent a revision in 1997 after the end of the Cold War. The latest changes are the second revision to the guidelines.

The mainstream Japanese media have run headlines such as “Essence of Japan-U.S. Alliance Transforms” or “Historic Reform of Japan-U.S. Alliance,” and extensively reported that the nature of Japan-U.S. cooperation will change significantly from its present state. Given all this attention, exactly what will change? Let us briefly summarize the details of the guidelines on which the Japanese and United States governments have reached a new agreement. (The full text of the new guidelines and the joint statement of the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee [two-plus-two] announced on April 27, as well as the full text of the past guidelines announced in 1978 and 1997 respectively, can be viewed on the Ministry of Defense website at www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/index.html.)

In the opening sentence of the new guidelines, the purpose of Japan-U.S. defense cooperation is declared as being to “ensure Japan’s peace and security under any circumstances, from peacetime to contingencies, and to promote a stable, peaceful, and prosperous Asia-Pacific region and beyond.” What is meant by “Asia-Pacific region and beyond” is the entire world.



KAMIYA Matake, Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan



With regard to cooperation to protect the security of Japan, the spelling out of “seamless” cooperation from peacetime to contingencies is characteristic of this section. Matters concerning Japan-U.S. cooperation are divided into “Cooperative Measures from Peacetime,” “Responses to Emerging Threats to Japan’s Peace and Security” (responses to “situations that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security”), “Actions in Response to an Armed Attack against Japan” and “Actions in Response to an Armed Attack against a Country other than Japan,” with details elaborated under each section.

Within these, it is specified that “peacetime” includes “situations when an armed attack against Japan is not involved.” This kind of situation is referred to as a “gray zone situation,” where Japan is not subject to an armed attack, but where its territory or sovereignty has been infringed upon by a foreign country and the matter cannot be handled with police authority. Specifically, this envisages cases such as where an armed group of foreign individuals illegally lands on a remote island such as the Senkaku Islands. In the previous guidelines, no actions had been laid out concerning Japan-U.S. cooperation in the event of such circumstances.

In addition, “situations that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security” refer to situations which, if left unattended, could threaten the security of Japan, and it is noted that where such situations will occur “cannot be defined geographically.” For example, since roughly eighty percent of Japan’s total crude oil imports are transported through the Strait of Hormuz, a blockade of the strait with underwater mines would have a serious impact on the peace and security of Japan. Under the previous guidelines, except for cooperation from peacetime and cooperation in cases other than when Japan was attacked, only cooperation in the event of situations in “areas surrounding Japan” was set forth. In contrast, the new guidelines establish that Japan and the United States shall cooperate in the event of situations that threaten Japan’s security wherever in the world such situations occur. However, the new guidelines hold that “Japan will conduct actions and activities in accordance with its basic positions, such as the maintenance of its exclusively national defense-oriented policy and its three non-nuclear principles,” indicating that Japan taking part in combat operations has not been considered. Cooperation provided to the United States by Japan would primarily involve activities such as logistic support.

As for cooperation in the event Japan were subject to an armed attack, the description of cooperation with respect to “islands” has garnered attention in the latest guidelines. This description envisages locations such as the Senkaku Islands which are threatened by China’s behavior. The new guidelines also stipulate that when the United States conducts “operations involving the use of strike power,” “the Self-Defense Forces may provide support, as necessary.” While Japan must rely on the United States for strike power under its exclusive defense-oriented policy, this indicates that in the future, Japan may be involved in some capacity with the United States’ exercising of strike power.



Continuing on from the above, the new guidelines also establish the cooperation Japan and the United States would undertake to deal with “an armed attack against the United States or a third country.” A particularly important passage is reproduced below.

The Self-Defense Forces will conduct appropriate operations involving the use of force to respond to situations where an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result, threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to overturn fundamentally its people’s right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, to ensure Japan’s survival, and to protect its people.

This shows that based on the revised interpretation of the Japanese constitution employed by the Abe Shinzo administration in July 1 of last year, Japan will exercise the right of collective self-defense on a limited basis in the future. Specific examples would include cooperation with regard to minesweeping to defend sea lanes when international straits such as the Strait of Hormuz are blocked using underwater mines, and cooperation in the form of missile intercepts where Japan would shoot down flying ballistic missiles headed for the United States.

In addition to cooperation to protect Japan’s security, the new guidelines also set forth matters regarding “Cooperation for Regional and Global Peace and Security” and “Space and Cyberspace Cooperation.” “Cooperation for Regional and Global Peace and Security” includes things such as Japan-U.S. cooperation when taking part in United Nations peacekeeping activities, cooperation in international humanitarian assistance/disaster relief activities, and capacity building in partner nations such as Southeast Asian countries.

Historic?

The items described above more or less serve as a summary of the new guidelines for Japan-U.S. defense cooperation.

But precisely what about these changes makes them “historic”? Perhaps many readers are wondering the same thing. The allies have envisioned various eventualities up to and including one of the allies being attacked, and will engage in military cooperation in the event of such. Wherever in the world such a situation occurs, if the development seriously impacts the security of an allied member, all of the allied nations are to cooperate in dealing with the situation. Allied nations similarly join forces in international peacekeeping efforts, humanitarian support and disaster relief activities. When conducting these kinds of activities, should there be a need to exercise the right of collective self-defense as recognized in international law, allied members will exercise those rights. Are not such actions entirely expected of a member nation on account of their being an ally? Just what, if anything, is “new” about Japan and the United States doing so?



In fact, for almost a quarter of a century since its formation, the Japan-U.S. alliance lacked any joint planning aspects due to the postwar Japanese population's strong sense of caution towards the military. The 1976 edition of Japan's self-defense white paper admitted that "to date Japan and the United States have not engaged in any discussions with respect to defense cooperation in contingencies, nor was there any organization tasked with discussing operational cooperation during such eventualities." When the first guidelines on Japan-U.S. defense cooperation were established in 1978, Japan and the United States finally began joint research into elements such as joint operational planning in the event of contingencies. However, at the time Japan and the United States did not yet have any actual joint operations plans. Moreover, the consultation and discussion between Japan and the United States went no further than research into joint operations in the event Japan were attacked, and cases where regional (external to Japan) peace was threatened were hardly discussed. This is because the Japanese public continued to be wary of defense cooperation with the United States.

Following the Cold War, with the North Korean nuclear and missile problems becoming increasingly serious, Japan and the United States started to become concerned about the fact that it had still not been clearly established in what capacity Japan would be able to cooperate with the United States in the event the United States engaged in a regional conflict in areas surrounding Japan. In light of the 1996 redefinition of the Japan-U.S. alliance which positioned the alliance as a means to stabilize order in the Asia-Pacific region, the 1997 guidelines presented a framework for Japan-U.S. cooperation concerning "Cooperation Under Normal Circumstances," "Actions in Response to an Armed Attack Against Japan" and "Cooperation in Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan that will have an Important Influence on Japan's Peace and Security." Japan and the United States also started developing joint operational plans for such eventualities. However, the geographic range over which Japan and the United States would engage in defense cooperation will still be limited to "areas surrounding Japan." Furthermore, as Japan was unable to exercise the right of collective self-defense under its constitution, Japan was unable to perform many of the activities member nations would naturally carry out under a regular alliance. For instance, Japan would not be able to shoot down a ballistic missile bound for the United States or conduct joint operations against an underwater mine blockage of an international strait, as these actions would constitute the exercising of the right of collective self-defense.

In the sense that the latest guidelines eliminate these peculiarities of the Japan-U.S. alliance to quite an extent, the changes are historic and hold groundbreaking significance. However, the roles Japan assumes under the new guidelines are all those naturally expected of the regular member state of a regular ally. In fact, as Japan's exercising of its right of collective self-defense will only take place in a limited fashion under stringent limitations in the future, Japan's role in the Japan-U.S. alliance will continue to be limited compared to a regular member nation within an ordinary alliance.



Criticism to the effect that Japan has become a “nation that wages war” with the establishment of the new guidelines are therefore wholly without merit. It is very much to be expected that the guidelines for defense cooperation between Japan and the United States established based on international circumstances eighteen years ago would be revised based on situational changes which have occurred in recent years such as the rise of an increasingly assertive China. I hope that the international community has a proper understanding of this.

Note: The views expressed here are the author’s own and do not represent those of the National Defense Academy of Japan or of Japan’s Ministry of Defense.

Reprint from “Japan-U.S. Defense Guidelines Revised,” The Japan Journal, June 2015 (Vol. 12 No.3), pp. 14-15.

KAMIYA Matake

Born in 1961, he graduated from the University of Tokyo and Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Columbia University (as a Fulbright Grantee), and is a Professor of International Relations at the National Defense Academy of Japan. He is also a member of the board of directors of the Japan Association for International Security, and a visiting superior research fellow at the Japan Forum on International Relations. He is the co-editor of *Introduction to Security Studies*, 4th edition (Chinese translation published by World Knowledge Publishing House in Beijing), and has published extensively on East Asian security, Japanese foreign and security policy, Japan’s postwar pacifism, U.S.-Japan security relations, and nuclear topics.
