



On the New National Defense Program Guidelines

YAMAGUCHI Noboru, Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan

On December 17, 2014, the Government of Japan (GOJ) released two key documents for its national security policy: the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the new National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG). The NDPG proposes Japan's defense strategy and policies to implement the strategy including the structure and posture of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) with a time span of at least ten years. The first NDPG was issued in 1976 and the GOJ has revised it in 1995, 2004 and 2010.

The new NDPG has several remarkable characteristics: it is the first NDPG developed under a new document, the "National Security Strategy"; it contains several key phrases such as "proactive contribution to peace," "Dynamic Joint Defense Force," and "Seamless response to various situations including so-called 'gray-zone' situations"; and it gives serious consideration to the two most important factors in the strategic environment in the Asia-Pacific region, China's rise and the United States' rebalancing towards the region.



YAMAGUCHI Noboru, Professor, National Defense Academy of Japan

The first point to make on the characteristics of the new NDPG is with regard to the drafting process. The NDPG 2013 was released along with the GOJ's first National Security Strategy describing a broader context encompassing the defense strategy. A defense strategy and policies to implement it in general should fit into the wider context of a national security strategy.

In the case of the United States, a national security strategy is issued at the presidential level that leads to a national defense strategy at the level of the Secretary of Defense following which the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff develops a national military strategy. The National Military Strategy sets a strategic context for subordinate strategies such as those of service chiefs (army, navy, air force, marines) and unified commanders (Pacific Command and so on).

In the past, planners working on NDPGs had to surmise what a national security strategy would describe. While the NSS 2013 may not be perfect as it was the first try for the GOJ, it provides the defense strategy and policy with a broader context within which defense planners along with those working on diplomatic, economic, and other various aspects of national security will be able to comprehend the roles of defense in national security as a whole. This change in the process of developing defense strategy and policy will ensure that they are in consonance with all other aspects of the GOJ's security strategy such as those on diplomacy, commerce and trade, while fitting precisely into a broader picture of



national security strategy.

This could be further reinforced by another policy the Abe administration took to establish a Japanese version of the National Security Council and its permanent staff. The newly established NSC that was designed to function as the control tower of Japan's security policy will enable the GOJ to plan and execute security policies in a far more comprehensive manner than before.

The second point to mention with regard to the new NDPG is related to one of the key phrases found in the document, "proactive contribution to peace." Both the NSS and the new NDPG state that "Japan will contribute more actively than ever to ensure peace, stability, and prosperity of the world," following "the policy of 'Proactively Contributing to Peace' based on international cooperation." Since 1991, when the GOJ dispatched the Maritime Self-Defense Force's (MSDF) mine sweepers to the Persian Gulf after the Gulf War, and 1992, when Japan for the first time participated in a UN peacekeeping operation (UN PKO) in Cambodia, the SDF has been active in UN PKO, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) missions and post-conflict reconstruction missions. In terms of legal status, however, these missions had been categorized as miscellaneous activities as opposed to primary missions until 2007, when the SDF law was revised to list international cooperation activities as primary missions along with other key SDF missions such as the defense of Japan. The new NDPG declaring that Japan should "Proactively Contribute to Peace" properly placed the SDF's international missions at the center of national security policy.

The third point to make with regard to the new NDPG relates to another key phrase, "Dynamic Joint Defense Force." The new NDPG, with an emphasis on "defense posture buildup in the southwestern region" states that priority of the SDF should be placed on capabilities to ensure "maritime and air superiority, which is the prerequisite for effective deterrence and response in various situations" and capabilities to "deploy and maneuver forces." The NDPG also declares that "the SDF will develop full amphibious capability" in order to deal with invasion of remote islands.

These basic ideas are further translated into particular programs in the Mid-Term Defense Program (MTDP) for FY 2014–2018. The following are examples of such programs focusing on defense of remote islands in the southwestern region. Programs for defense posture buildup in the southwestern region include establishment of a Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) watch station and activation of an Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) early warning squadron equipped with E-2C aircraft as well as GSDF security units in charge of initial response to contingencies on remote islands in Okinawa Prefecture. For maritime and air superiority, procurement of F-35 fighters, Aegis destroyers and the GSDF's medium range surface-to-air missiles as well as the ASDF's updated Patriot missiles (PAC-3 with Missile Segment Enhancement: MSE) is scheduled. To enhance capability to deploy and maneuver necessary forces, the SDF will introduce Osprey tiltrotor aircraft while continuing procurement of C-2 cargo aircraft and CH-47J heavy lift helicopters. As to amphibious capability, the GSDF will procure amphibious vehicles while the MSDF will conduct studies on a new type of ship that supports amphibious operations with command and control, sealift and aircraft launching capabilities.



The case of island defense stated above involves “Joint,” one of the key words of the new NDPG, meaning cooperation between different services namely Ground, Maritime and Air Self Defense Forces. Operations for island defense — amphibious operations in particular — require an extremely high level of joint operations where the priority should be given to capabilities to gain air and maritime superiority that guarantee the freedom of maneuver of defending forces. For this, fighters and surveillance assets of the ASDF along with MSDF vessels such as Aegis destroyers with high anti-air combat capabilities should be employed in a harmonized manner. Such anti-air operations should be reinforced by deployment of air defense assets to remote islands in order to provide cover for key facilities such as airports and seaports as well as surveillance stations for sustainment. In amphibious operations, the highest degree of cooperation and coordination is required among units from different services including landing combat forces and the sealift and airlift capabilities to deploy them, as well as maritime and air assets to provide fire power and logistical support to overcome the distance and obstacle of the waters.

The fourth point to make on the NDPG is with regard to another key phrase, “seamless response to various situations including so-called ‘gray-zone’ situations.” This is based on the threat perception expressed by both the NSS and the new NDPG. For example, the NSS states, “the Asia-Pacific region has become more prone to so-called ‘gray-zone’ situations, situations that are neither pure peacetime nor contingencies over territorial sovereignty and interests,” and “there is a risk that these ‘gray-zone’ situations could further develop into grave situations.” In response, the NDPG emphasizes the need for unified efforts of central and local governments as well as the private sector by stating that “the entire government with strong political leadership will make appropriate and quick decisions, and seamlessly respond to situations as they unfold, in cooperation with local governments and the private sector, in order to ensure the protection of lives and property of Japanese people, and the integrity of Japan’s territorial land, waters and airspace.”

Response to crisis indeed needs to be seamless in two aspects: between different organizations with particular areas of responsibilities, and between different rudders of escalation or different phases of events from pure peacetime through crisis to serious contingencies. The new NDPG recognizes that the SDF is increasingly required to cope with various situations including “gray-zone” situations. It is urgent to define what roles the SDF should and could play in the efforts of the entire government to prevent such “gray-zone” events from escalating to grave incidents such as armed conflicts as well as lowering the tension towards a pure white situation of peacetime. In this context, in addition to the efforts for defense buildup described in the new NDPG and the MTDP, the GOJ may have to work on the legal basis for SDF operations in case of “gray-zone” events in particular. With regard to the legal basis for national security it is worth scrutinizing the discussion by the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security established in 2007 by the first Abe administration and reconvened by the current administration. The panel’s report submitted in June 2008 notes that “an order to the SDF to conduct defense operation is a prerequisite for Japan to exercise the right of self-defense” and “the GOJ has to follow extremely strict procedures in order to issue that order,” which



“include deliberation by the Security Council of Japan, followed by a Cabinet Decision, and then prior approval by the Diet.” The report warns that “Japan would not be able to effectively respond to new types of threats, such as ballistic missiles and terrorism.” It is urgent for the GOJ to go through legal restraints hindering prompt response to various cases such as small-scale but abrupt armed attacks and to take necessary measures to promote readiness to cope with such contingencies.

The fifth point on the characteristics of the new set of Japan’s national security policy is the serious consideration made to both the United States’ rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific region and the rise of China. China’s rise is a given fact with the only questions remaining being in what direction and how fast. The United States has announced its policy to “rebalance towards the Asia-Pacific region.” The best scenario for Japan is a region with strong U.S. commitment and the benign rise of China. Thus Japan should take policies to keep the U.S. commitment and to establish constructive relations with China through engagement policies while hedging China to prevent it from going in the other direction through its own efforts and its cooperation with the United States.

The NSS recognizes that “the U.S. remains the country that has the world’s largest power as a whole, composed of its soft power originating from its values and culture, on top of its military and economic power” while admitting changes in relative influence of the United States in the international community. As to its policy of “rebalancing” towards the Asia-Pacific region, the NDPG points out that “the United States has clearly communicated its strategy to put greater emphasis on the Asia-Pacific region and is maintaining and strengthening its involvement and presence in the region despite fiscal and various other constraints, while enhancing its relationship with its allies and other countries.”

On the other hand, the GOJ’s assessment of China is cautious or even alarming, although the NSS expresses its expectation for China to “play a more active and cooperative role in regional and global issues. For example, the new NDPG clearly points out concerns as China “is rapidly expanding and intensifying its activities in waters and airspace in areas including the South China Sea and the East China Sea, showing its attempts to change the status quo by coercion.” In the meantime the importance of better relations with China is widely shared as the NSS states that “stable relations between Japan and China are an essential factor for peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region,” and “Japan will strive to construct and enhance Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Interests with China” in various areas.

Based on the recognition stated above, Japan’s choices are: (1) to enhance the alliance with the United States while assuring U.S. commitment to the region through alliance management efforts, the GOJ is trying to further strengthen the alliance with the United States; and (2) to build constructive relations with China through engagement while hedging China to avoid a situation where Japan and the United States have to consider China as a hostile entity. As to alliance management, it is important for the two countries to revise the “Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation.” The first guidelines were adopted in 1978 to describe



operational cooperation between U.S. forces and the SDF and revised in 1997 to adapt the document to the post-Cold War environment in the efforts to redefine the Japan-U.S. alliance. The ongoing efforts to revise the guidelines should be extended to include bilateral response to so-called gray-zone situations as well as bilateral cooperation for other peacetime activities such as counter-piracy, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations and cooperation to deal with issues related to new domains such as the open seas, outer space and cyberspace.

As to Japan's policy on China's rise that should comprise a combination of policies for hedging and those for engagement, the SDF's shift towards the southwestern region and defense buildup to be a Joint Dynamic Defense Force will work well for hedging purpose. Such policies will also work well to enhance the credibility of the Japan-U.S. alliance by showing Japan's determination to defend itself. Meanwhile, as policies to engage China are paid less attention, the GOJ needs to develop and elaborate its strategy and policy for the engagement part. The new NDPG points out that as China's attitude has great influence over security in the region, Japan, for mutual understanding "will promote security dialogues and exchanges with China and will develop confidence-building measures to avert or prevent unexpected situations."

As China and Japan are in a state of high tension centering on issues over the sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands (known in China as the Diaoyu Islands), it is hard for the SDF and China's People's Liberation Army to make progress in military-to-military dialogue and exchange programs. It is however far more important for the two militaries to talk to each other for confidence building because the tension is extremely high.

Conclusion

As stated above, the new NDPG describes the role of defense in a comprehensive context of the National Security Strategy, and depicts the defense strategy and policies to implement it. The document is also remarkable in declaring Japan's active involvement in international efforts for peace and stability of the world with the catchphrase of being a "Proactive Contributor to Peace." The term "Joint Dynamic Defense Force" also represents what the SDF is aiming at for the future force structure and its posture. In terms of SDF operations, the NDPG makes it clear that importance is given to "Seamless Response" for smoother cooperation between different actors that are responsible for different aspects of contingencies and smoother transition to and from different phases of crisis. The key is how to implement these ideas. For example, amphibious capability as proposed by the NDPG will take a tremendous amount of efforts to implement including: financial resources to procure equipment and to man with capable people; intellectual endeavor to develop operational doctrines; and massive training for individuals and units to be ready for such complex operations. Establishing the legal basis for SDF operations mentioned earlier also will take a fair amount of diligent work at the bureaucratic level and will require the political assets of lawmakers in order to achieve the goal. The key is hard work for implementation. In parallel to these efforts it is extremely important for the GOJ to make serious efforts to coordinate its security policy with that of the United States. The governments of Japan and the United States are working to revise the "Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation" as explained earlier. The two



governments should take this golden opportunity to compare threat perceptions and to adjust their respective policy priorities.

Originally written for Discuss Japan. [February 2014]

YAMAGUCHI Noboru

Born in Tokyo in 1951. Graduated from the National Defense Academy of Japan and joined the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force in 1974. Received his master's from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in 1988. Retired from office in 2008 after holding positions such as Visiting Research Fellow at the John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies at Harvard University, Defense Attaché at the Japanese Embassy in the United States, and Commanding General, Research and Development Command (Lieutenant General) of the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force. Has been a professor at the National Defense Academy of Japan since 2009.