



Preface: A Nation of Proactive Pacifism — National Strategy for Twenty-first-Century Japan

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Japan's first National Security Strategy, along with the new National Defense Program Guidelines, which were approved by the Cabinet on December 17, 2013, established the idea of “proactively contributing to peace based on the principle of international cooperation” as part of the basic principles of Japan's future diplomacy and national security policies.

This shift is based on the “proactive pacifism” approach that has been advocated by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo since September 2013. For more than a few foreign observers, it came like a bolt from the blue when Abe began to assert that Japan should become a more proactive contributor to peace, and they therefore found it somewhat difficult to discern his real intentions. However, in fact, Abe was not the first to conceive of a “proactive contribution to peace.” Since the end of the Cold War, certain circles within Japan's diplomatic and national security community have continued to call for Japan to transform its postwar pacifism from being passive to being proactive. I am actually one of them. This isn't about doing away with postwar pacifism, but an attempt to maintain its virtues while correcting its shortcomings so as to conform to Japan's increased national power and the drastic changes that have taken place in international society since the end of the Cold War.



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Memories of World War II and the remorse felt as a result of their country's actions in that war engendered a sense of determination among the Japanese people that Japan would never again take part in an invasive war after being reborn as a peace-loving “nation of peace (*heiwa-kokka*).” This was the genesis of Japan's postwar pacifism. However, there were two kinds of passivity inherent in Japan's postwar pacifism. One was the lack of willingness to take proactive action toward peace (the first passivity) and the other was the lack of willingness to utilize its military power for peace (the second passivity).

To begin with, when it came to Japan's postwar pacifism, there was a lack of intention within the country itself to take action toward peace. Immediately after Japan lost the war,



for the Japanese people the concept of becoming a “nation of peace” was nothing more than a denial of militarism. Becoming a nation of peace was understood to be tantamount to Japan saying that it would never again abuse its military power to fulfill its ambitions and start a war. Maintaining a policy of only using the minimum amount of military force necessary for self-defense—in the narrow sense of the term—was considered to serve as the greatest contribution to world peace by the newly reborn Japan. However, as time passed and Japan made a miraculous recovery from the devastation of war, the international community started to call upon this country, which sees itself as a nation of peace, to provide more than what is considered to be a passive contribution founded on the notion of not destroying peace. This refers to the intention of proactively taking action for peace.

Second, after the war pacifism in Japan lacked the recognition that military force plays an essential role in building and maintaining peace, and that the intention to use military power is sometimes expected of a nation that wants peace. The Japanese people, who experienced defeat in a reckless war and occupation, came to distrust the validity and legitimacy of military force as a part of statecraft, and this led to the idea that Japan’s foreign and security policy must rely as little as possible on military methods. In order to do this, Japan tried to keep its distance from the power politics aspect of international relations and limit its involvement in disputes outside of its territory and territorial waters to non-military areas. As Boston University Associate Professor Thomas Berger reasons, Japan’s postwar pacifism has been bordering on anti-militarism.

However, in reality, peace and order cannot exist without force. Military force can be a tool that destroys peace, but its dual nature makes military force indispensable for safeguarding peace. Based on this common sense, the international community started to call upon Japan, which had become an economic power, to provide military assistance on par with that of other countries for justifiable international activities without eliminating the possibility of dispatching its Self-Defense Forces.

Japan should be proud of itself, as it has maintained its resolve to not aim to become a military major power, even after it came back as an economic major power in the late 1960s. But under the new and changing international environment in the post-Cold War years, the pacifism embodied by this powerful nation must be reborn into one that surmounts these two kinds of passivity. This is the foundation of the idea of “proactive pacifism.” Specifically, it advocates the need for Japan to start proactively contributing to world peace (the first condition of being proactive) along with accepting the concept of the role of military power for peace (the second condition of being proactive).

Of these, the first condition of being proactive can be seen as having progressed remarkably in the twenty-four years since the end of the Cold War. The idea that Japan must take proactive actions toward peace took off suddenly as a result of the Gulf Crisis, which occurred immediately after the end of the Cold War. Japan contributed a huge amount of funds, totaling 13 billion dollars, toward resolving this crisis, but wasn’t really able to contribute human resources, and as a result, was bombarded with harsh international criticism that all it did was send money. Shocked by this incident, a movement to explore Japan’s taking an active role in world peace (or a so-called international contribution),



including dispatching its Self-Defense Forces overseas, suddenly took off in Japan.

At first, the Japanese people were notably hesitant about using their Self-Defense Forces for international peace activities. There was also deep-rooted concern that such a move might make East Asian nations wary about Japan. However, the performances of Japan's Self-Defense Forces around the world, such as in Cambodia, Zaire and East Timor, have earned praise from the international community, as well as from local residents. Observing that, support for dispatching the Self-Defense Forces abroad as part of the United Nation's peacekeeping operations or for humanitarian relief efforts quickly gained ground among the Japanese people.

However, a critical point here is that the impact of the Gulf War did not necessarily bring about a major change in anti-militaristic sentiment among the Japanese since the end of the war. After the Gulf War, the Japanese people started to allow the Self-Defense Forces to be dispatched overseas as a way to increase Japan's "international contribution" and engage in activities such as peacekeeping operations and disaster relief. At the same time, however, the Japanese people wanted—almost to the point of being overly sensitive about it—a clear line to be drawn between the content of these activities and use of force, or participating in combat operations.

That doesn't mean that the Japanese people's anti-militaristic attitude made no change. Having witnessed the growing threat of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles from North Korea and China's increasing assertiveness as well as provocative actions around the Senkaku Islands in recent years, the Japanese have begun to understand that excessive anti-militaristic sentiment could jeopardize their country's security. Consequently, Japanese people's way of thinking about security have become markedly "normalized" compared with the past. The Japanese have started to acknowledge the role of military force in the security of Japan itself to a considerable extent.

Still, a change that befits an awareness of "the role of military force for international peace beyond Japan's territories" cannot be seen yet. The Japanese people continue to avoid facing head on "the role of military force for peace," and consequently, they continue to call for the international peace efforts of the Self-Defense Forces to be kept as far as possible from military affairs.

Therefore, while remarkable progress has been made in the twenty-four years since the Cold War in conquering the first passivity of Japan's postwar pacifism, surmounting the second passivity remains incomplete, and the Japanese people have not been able to sufficiently acknowledge the role of military power for peace. Unless a sea change in awareness regarding this point occurs among the Japanese people, the transition from passive pacifism focused only on not destroying peace, to proactive pacifism that approves reasonable and appropriate action—including the deployment and employment of the SDF—to build and maintain peace will not be fully achieved. This has been the assertion made by proponents, including myself, of proactive pacifism (in discussing this issue, it was my original idea to separate the passivity of Japan's postwar pacifism into two conditions).

The proactive pacifism that was recently incorporated into Japan's National Security Strategy and its Defense Program Guidelines can be read as Prime Minister Abe making it



clear that his own administration will advance this second condition of becoming proactive.

So specifically, in what form has this proactive pacifism been advocated to date? Below is an essay based on this theme that I published in early 2009. Almost five years have passed since I wrote the piece, and there are some passages that have become somewhat obsolete, but I think it can serve as a general reference for overseas readers.

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A Nation of Proactive Pacifism National Strategy for Twenty-first-Century Japan

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Japan's National Goals in the Twenty-first Century

What should Japan's national strategy in the twenty-first century look like?

At the root of this question lies the issue of how Japan should set its national goals. Postwar Japan aimed for (1) national security under the alliance with the United States in a state of Cold War, (2) economic recovery under cooperation with the United States, and (3) postwar settlement with Asian countries. It had mostly achieved (2) and (3) by the early 1970s, and as the Cold War ended, (1) no longer held its conventional meaning as a national goal. Under these circumstances, Japan has, from as early as a quarter of a century ago, constantly discussed its lack of national goals and its need to set new ones.

There have been times in the mid 1990s, when prime ministerial candidates such as Ozawa Ichiro, Takemura Masayoshi and Hashimoto Ryutaro all announced their proposals for Japan's new national goals. To date, however, no one has been able to define a set of national goals that could earn the support of the majority of Japanese citizens.

So what should the national goals of Japan in the twenty-first century look like? Talking about the national goal is – using a term that has become well known in recent years – the process of identifying the “face” of Japan. But merely expressing the Japanese people's rather self-satisfying desire to be “a small but brilliant country” [a phrase used by Takemura Masayoshi in the mid 1990s] is not enough. The process must start from a realistic appraisal of what circumstances Japan faces nationally and internationally and what direction trends of the times are taking, so that the identified face will actually help to achieve the wishes of the Japanese people.



So what kind of a face should Japan wear? The wish of the Japanese people on this subject can still — even sixty-three years after the war ended — be summarized in the phrase, “nation of peace (*heiwa-kokka*).” But overseas assessments of Japan as a Nation of Peace have been with reservation. Is it enough for a nation of peace to merely stick to its determination to not become a destroyer of peace again? Does it not need the will to act for peace? The Japanese people have not offered a satisfactory answer to these questions. What Japan needs is a new national image that could reconcile public aspirations to maintain Japan as a nation of peace with these questions.

A national image I advocate is “a nation of proactive pacifism.” A nation in this state would never use military force to fulfill national ambition, but does not eliminate the option to make military contributions commensurate with its national power, in order to create and maintain peace in the international society. As a nation of proactive pacifism, Japan would pursue the ideals of this concept in that it will (1) not aim to become a military major power and would retain as many aspects of postwar self-restraint concerning military power as it can, even in the times of change, (2) refrain from military action in cases other than self defense and international joint action for peace, but will (3) develop the military capabilities necessary for self defense and cooperate with other nations without any notions of taboo, and (4) actively play a role commensurate with its national power in both military and non-military forms of international joint action for peace.

The idea of proactive pacifism is, in fact, not one of my own creation. Readers may recall a paper published in the Summer 2008 volume of this Journal [*The Yomiuri Quarterly*] titled, “The Coming of a No-war Era and Proactive Pacifism” by Ito Kenichi, president of the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR). This paper advocated that in the current day when all wars are illegal, every country has the obligation to participate in international sanctions against any country that causes war, and Japan’s pacifism should also evolve to approve participation in such actions.

Mr. Ito mentioned in this paper that the JFIR had recently founded a Study Group on Japan’s National Strategy. He chairs this study group, and I am its research leader. We basically agree on the idea that Japan’s pacifism should transform itself from its previous, passive form that merely pledges that the nation “would not become a destroyer of peace again” to a proactive form that prompts proactive action for international peace. In that sense, this article serves as a sort of sequel to his paper.

I believe that this concept of a proactive pacifist nation embodies the fundamental ideals for Japan’s national strategy in the twenty-first century (the “face” of Japan). The ideals of proactive pacifism will also serve as Japan’s declaration: that it would play a role in stabilizing the world order. This gives Japan’s national strategy a significance beyond simply pursuing its own benefits, and stabilization of world order is the preferred aspect for a nation that consistently benefited from that order throughout the postwar period. The fact that the ideals of a proactive pacifist nation conform with the values of freedom, democracy, human rights, prosperity and environment that postwar Japan had emphasized is another important point.



The “Grand Situation” that Surrounds Japan

But does this national image of a proactive pacifist appropriately base itself on the national and international “grand situation” that surrounds twenty-first-century Japan? Let me discuss this below.

The national image of a proactive pacifist matches the post-9/11 world. That is because the world has come to view war as illegitimate and is seeing innovative changes arise in ideas concerning the relationship between peace and military powers.

Traditionally, threats to peace primarily involved war between states. But with the movement since the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928 to illegalize war, war in its traditional sense as a legitimate act of state for its own benefit has become logically inconceivable. This is what Mr. Ito referred to as “the coming of a no-war era.” Consequently, military power has come to serve an important role of being a means to take action against a country that initiated an illegal war (in other words, military action for peace). To oppose Japan’s contributions to such actions in terms of “war or peace” is outdated behavior.

What’s more, globalization and advancements in science and technology have allowed the rise of a completely new type of threat that is different from war. The 9/11 terror attacks showed that even non-state actors such as al Qaeda now possess the power to disrupt world order. Should they obtain weapons of mass-destruction or ballistic missiles, the world would be in jeopardy. That is why international society now considers the threat of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction and ballistic missiles of greater importance than that of war. It is under these notions that the international society has now come to see graver issues in failed states whose governments are dysfunctional due to civil war-type conflicts and who could become hotbeds for terrorists. Advanced countries in particular now consider international joint operations to create peace in conflict regions as actions that are part of their “fight against terrorism” to maintain world order and indispensable to their own national interest.

But the role of military power in these peace-building operations differs significantly from that of conventional war. The main objective of traditional military forces was to fight wars, but the main objective of a military serving to build peace is not to fight. They go to conflict regions to create peace through roles that the traditional military had not served, such as restoring public order, and offering humanitarian relief and cooperation in reconstruction and development. The root causes of today’s civil war-type conflicts include issues such as ethnic or religious conflict and poverty. In order to tackle them, both military and non-military measures, including economic development and education enhancement using Official Development Assistance (ODA) and other means, are necessary. Here again, the notion of “war or peace” is obsolete.

The international society after 9/11 believes, more than ever before, that advanced nations are responsible for such operations. Therein lies the reason why European states and Canada take on the sacrifice of continuing to send troops to Afghanistan. And the world is irritated that they don’t see Japan involved in these operations. The Party of European Socialists insisted to me on a recent visit to Japan that we should revise our constitution and



allow the Self-Defense Forces to contribute to peace proactively.

The idea of a proactive pacifist nation can offer a direct answer to the global trend concerning peace and the roles of military power, as well as to the demands and expectations placed on Japan by those countries that have already responded to this trend.

The Global Span of National Interests

To gain public support for this national image of a proactive pacifist nation, it is important to show the Japanese citizens that this national ideal would help to promote broader national interests that are important parts of their happiness.

What we need to understand from this viewpoint is that Japan's national interests span the global, and are facing diverse threats. For example, maintenance of the liberal global economic system and securing of sources of import of natural resources are indispensable for an island nation like Japan to prosper. And the sea lanes of communication that run from the Middle East via the Indian Ocean and South China Sea to Japan are Japan's lifelines, but they are close to unstable, conflict regions such as the Persian Gulf, Pakistan and the Spratly Islands, while the Arabian Sea and the coast of Indonesia see frequent acts of piracy. The world also sees the global environment as an immediate issue. Japan, with its own experience in environmental pollution issues, maintains the potential to lead the world in this field.

Japan's national strategy must take these realistic circumstances into consideration. Some Japanese have recently taken the view that Japan should maintain a quiet presence that doesn't stand out but is a country of abundance. But as long as Japan's national interest has global implications, our national strategy must naturally take a global perspective if the Japanese people want to maintain their current level of prosperity. However, as I will mention later, Japan cannot run its global strategy on its own. It must gain international cooperation, and to do this, Japan must continue to be recognized by other nations as a nation deserving of cooperation. In this sense, the reputation of insufficient contributions to international peace efforts is to our great disadvantage. Orienting the nation towards a proactive pacifist nation will directly improve Japan's reputation in this respect.

Traditional Threats that Remain

While new threats have risen in our twenty-first century world, the threats of traditional military power have not disappeared. Particularly around Japan, countries like North Korea and China continue to focus on military power. Defense and deterrence against these nations remain important issues for Japan.

From this perspective, orienting the nation towards proactive pacifism is preferred in two respects. One is that the promotion, without any sense of taboo, of capacity necessary to defend our own nation and of cooperation with other nations directly strengthens Japan's security against military threats from other countries. And secondly, the act of an economic power like Japan to involve itself actively in international peace operations serve to



strengthen the international norm of illegalization of war, which will indirectly reduce the possibility of other countries targeting Japan militarily.

The Unclear Future of China

Japan faces the rise of China, its close neighbor with the world's largest population. While we cannot neglect to remain alert to China's rapid military buildup, that alone is insufficient as a national strategy. This is because what China does will have significant implications for the stability of the future world order.

Japan is among the largest beneficiaries of the postwar "open" order that has centered primarily on the United States. But it is still unclear whether China will seek to support this order or change it. Historically, the rise of a new power tends to cause conflict between status quo and revolutionary forces. The United States aims to prevent this conflict by advocating the idea of China as a "responsible stakeholder." While we need to be careful of this type of debate in the United States, since it has the tendency to overstate economic opportunities in China and understate the risks of its military enhancement, the idea of creating in China the awareness that it benefits from the existing international order and to encourage it to sustain the current order is of vital importance to Japan as well.

As G. John Ikenberry of Princeton University states, in order to have China realize that it is better off entering the existing order rather than resisting it, the West must unite and display its stand to support the order and make China understand the peril of attempting to change the status quo. If Japan, as the second largest economic power in the West after the United States, declares a strategy of proactive pacifism and indicates its intent to act to sustain the international order, it would have great significance in showing China this unity.

A Weakening Economy, an Aging Society and a Declining Birthrate

As seen above, the national image of proactive pacifism is compatible with the international grand situation that surrounds Japan in the twenty-first century. But there is another, domestic grand situation that we cannot overlook when we consider Japan's national strategy. That is the issue of Japan's national power base. The so-called new Maekawa Report ("Living with the Globalized Economy: Re-creation of the Japanese Economic System") issued in July 2008 [by the Expert Committee on Structural Changes and the Japanese Economy] stated that Japan's share of world GDP may drop from 17.9% in 1994 to 6–7% in 2020. And we will not be able to stop the aging of society and the decline in childbirth for the next several decades.

This is a serious issue. For Japan to execute its national strategy globally as a proactive pacifist, it needs the foundations of national power. Japan's national power is, of course, its economic strength. But the report's views that the Japanese economy is "generally slow in adjusting to structural changes in the global economy," conspicuously "slow in globalization" and "not taking advantages of expanding growth opportunities and losing presence" are hard to deny given various data.



Unless we deal with these issues rapidly and solidify our fundamental economic strength, we have no chance of becoming a proactive pacifist nation. To bolster Japan's fundamental economic strength, we must establish a society where women can have children and still work, taking maximum advantage of women's skills and labor.

This issue of Japan's economic strength as the foundation of its national strategy has become even more important given the recent global financial crisis. Foreign affairs/national security experts and economic experts must come together and strengthen their cooperation.

Using Japan's "Soft Power" to Its Advantage

This severe outlook for its economy, however, does not relieve Japan from its international role. Even if Japan's GDP share does drop to 6%, that is about the current level of Germany (around 6% in 2006) and still is higher than that of the United Kingdom or France (around 4%, same year). The international society will not accept a nation with this much economic strength not fulfilling its obligations to contribute to world peace in a manner that reflects its power.

The world, in fact, is critical of Japan for not offering the contributions to peace that its national strength suggests it could. Japan today rarely sends its Self-Defense Forces to international peace operations. Particularly with ground forces, the G8 member states, China and Korea all send hundreds or thousands of troops, while Japan only dispatches several dozen to areas like the Golan Heights. Even in non-military fields, its ODA has fallen from a world-leading 1 trillion yen annually to 780 billion yen in 2007, which ranked it fifth after the United States, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, and it continues to drop. Likely owing to these facts and more, Japan is rapidly losing its presence in international society, as in the mocking phrase "Japan Missing."

As Joseph Nye of Harvard University has written, the importance of a nation's "soft power" (the ability to attract others through appeal) is growing in today's world as a form of national power. But criticisms on the lack of contribution to peace and a decline in international presence hinder Japan's power to attract other nations. With the economy contracting, soft power offers Japan new opportunities to expand on its national strength, but to use this situation to its benefit, the nation needs to respond to the criticism quickly. The minimal requisite to doing this is to win the world's recognition that the nation is fulfilling its international obligations commensurate with its power. From this perspective, too, the national image of a proactive pacifist nation matches the global grand situation. The Japanese people should understand the major shift in the notion of military power — from a force that fights to a force that creates peace — to consider how the nation should use its Self-Defense Forces. And ODA is a field where Japan has a comparative advantage, owing to its years of experience. Japan should, once again, set the goal of being the world leader in ODA. The amount needed to do that is hardly large — several hundred billion yen a year (a mere 1% of the government budget). Even under a tight budget, it is unwise to uniformly cut what is of so much necessity in terms of the national interest.



Cooperating with the Liberal Nations

As we have discussed, the idea of proactive pacifism serves the root ideals of the national strategy Japan needs today. So how should Japan execute its national strategy of proactive pacifism?

A nation executes a national strategy basically by proceeding on its own. Japan should not consider conventional policies and regulations concerning national security as absolute and should endeavor to develop the measures and skills necessary to deal with practical threats and issues on its own as much as possible. For example, it needs to work on ways to prepare a missile defense and hi-tech conventional weapons against threats from North Korea or to set up defense systems for the Nansei Islands (Southwestern Islands) and other island areas in the face of Chinese military expansion within the ideals of proactive pacifism.

Japan must urgently shift its Self-Defense Forces' troop formations in a way tailored to international peace operations. To create a new system at a time of declining childbirth and severe economic and financial circumstances, the Self-Defense Forces must cut from its system what remains from the Cold War era, which assumed enemy landings and invasions primarily from the north. With its comparative advantage in science and technologies for unmanned aircraft and robots, Japan could also consider focusing on developing and deploying equipment that would appropriately suit troop operations in this age of population decline. To do that, it must participate in international joint developments of military technology, and must consider revising the Three Principles on Arms Exports that have hindered it to this dayⁱ. The principles of “exclusively defense-oriented defense” and of not exercising the right of collective self-defense should also be reviewed so that it matches reality, provided it does not violate the ideals of proactive pacifism.

But even with these measures, Japan has limits to its national strength and cannot achieve all of its goals merely on its own efforts. The Japanese national strategy requires cooperation with the international society. With the international society as diverse as it is, the countries that Japan must prioritize for collaboration are the liberal nations such as the United States, European Union, Canada and Australia, which share the basic ideals and values and similarly want to sustain the existing world order. These are nations that play leadership roles in international peace efforts and, in that sense, are partners that a proactive pacifist Japan should further cooperate with in terms of military aspects as well. Ever since the end of World War II, Japan has maintained an alliance with the United States, the strongest power among the liberal nations. Developing this relationship further and strengthening global cooperation in national security and in economics is advisable for both Japan's national interest and global stability. We cannot sustain the alliance on inertia, nor are we inclined to follow the United States in whatever it does. We need to strengthen our relationship with the United States from the standpoint of Japan's national interest and within Japan's subjective national strategy.

It is from this perspective that we need to diligently implement the agreements made between Japan and the United States at the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) meetings in 2005 and 2006 with regard to the common strategic goals and roles,



missions, and the capabilities of the two allies to achieve them. The common strategic goals include objectives for Japanese defense and regional security as well as global strategic goals including strengthening partnerships in international peace efforts and development assistance for peace. A national image as a proactive pacifist would be closely correlated with the new roles of Japan and the United States.

Cooperation with the international community is vital not only on the global level but in the Asia-Pacific and Northeast Asia as well. In reality, though, the effectiveness of international collaboration in these regions is largely determined by what China intends to do. China shows distaste for regional frameworks that would effectively manage conflicts, so developing such frameworks will be difficult for the time being. Japan should not expect too much from the functions of regional frameworks but should rather sustain its conventional attitude of working from the U.S.-Japan alliance. At the same time, however, Japan should extend cooperation with China in various frameworks and functional fields, such as disaster relief and environmental issues, and integrate China into the region as a constructive member.

In the twenty-first century world, “war or peace” is no longer an appropriate question in terms of national security. Joint international actions against illegal military action and joint international management of civil war-type conflicts have emerged as new tasks, and countries are expected to contribute to an extent that reflects their national strength. If international society cannot deal with these new issues, there is no guarantee that the current world order that Japan hopes to preserve will survive.

Unless Japan fulfills its international obligations in a way that justifies the prosperity it enjoys, it will isolate itself from the world. Unless it urgently develops a national strategy for the sake of its nation and the survival and prosperity of its people, and strengthens the foundations of its foreign policy to supersede domestic political conflicts, Japan’s presence in the world will only further decline. The ideals of proactive pacifism possess huge significance that will avoid such consequences while fulfilling the Japanese people’s desire to remain a nation of peace. In this current day and age, when politicians and the public tend to become inward-looking when faced with economic decline and political confusion, I want to stress this point to conclude this paper.

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Footnote:

ⁱ Considerable revisions were made to these principles by the Noda and Abe administrations in 2012 and 2013.