



Synergy effects of a stronger Japan-U.S. alliance

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Even before the ink dried on the announcement of the Japan-U.S. agreement to revise the bilateral Defense Cooperation Guidelines on April 27 – the day before the summit meeting between President Barack Obama and Prime Minister Abe Shinzo at the White House – certain Japanese and foreign critics had begun to clamor that Japan has deviated from upholding the pacifist constitution and limiting its defense capability to the minimum required and that it is heading in the dangerous direction of enacting bills to go to war.

Such criticism could not be more wrong. The same criticism was voiced when the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed in 1960. Yet the treaty has made Japan's security possible, rather than endangered Japan, in the past 55 years.



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Basis for increasingly important alliance

The times have changed since 1960. North Korea is now ruled by an unpredictable dictatorial regime possessing dangerous military capabilities. It is becoming a country with the potential of making nuclear threats. The Middle East is extremely unstable but strategically important.

China's military spending continues to grow on various pretexts, to say the least. Its provocative actions in the East and South China Seas threaten Japan's security and freedom of passage and may seriously affect the economy of Japan and a much broader area in the world.

For this reason, the theoretical basis for the existence of the Japan-U.S. alliance is, in a sense, even more important than before. While both Japan and the U.S. need the security alliance, they are not fully satisfied with each other's response to the reality of the 21st century.



In the face of unreasonable demands and provocations by China, Japan was anxious about whether the U.S. government would support it on the issue of sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands (in Ishigaki City, Okinawa) because the U.S. had not clarified which side it would take. On its part, while the U.S. had high regard for the ability of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, it was impossible, or at least difficult, to draw up plans to respond to chance conflicts, except for a very unlikely direct attack on Japanese territory, because the Japanese government was reluctant to change its policy on the right to collective self-defense.

Under Japanese legal provisions, Maritime Self-Defense Force Aegis ships engaged in joint exercises with U.S. naval vessels in the Sea of Japan would not be able to assist U.S. forces if North Korean missiles attacked only the U.S. ships.

Enhanced deterrence

The Abe administration first passed a cabinet decision to authorize the limited exercise of the collective defense right on July 1, 2014. This was followed by the two governments' agreement on April 27 to revise the Defense Cooperation Guidelines. Furthermore, President Obama guaranteed at the news conference on April 28 that "there is no doubt" that the Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku Islands. The Japan-U.S. alliance is now much more flexible. Both friends and foes can see that gradual steps are being taken to consolidate the alliance whose deterrence has been enhanced tremendously.

After Japan enacts new security laws to implement the cabinet decision on the collective defense right and the new Guidelines, if North Korea fires missiles at U.S. ships on patrol missions in the Sea of Japan, Iran lays mines in the Strait of Hormuz, or China launches cyberattacks on U.S. missile defense systems in the Pacific, Japan will be able to respond to these situations with the U.S. if it judges that one or all of these developments threaten Japan's security.

1+1 = more than 2

With the new security laws, Japan will have the right to consider legal and realistic actions. North Korea, Iran, and China might be emboldened if they knew that Japan couldn't take joint action with the U.S.

The most important thing is that these countries will probably not launch the above-mentioned attacks if they know that the two countries with the most advanced defense capability in West Pacific are able to take countermeasures legally and that the two governments are determined to respond jointly if Japan's security is threatened.



In a press interview before his arrival in Washington Prime Minister Abe indicated his thinking that 1 (the U.S.) + 1 (Japan) used to = 1, but the Japan-U.S. relationship is now $1+1 = 2$. In terms of deterrence, it is more accurate to say that actually, $1+1 = \text{more than } 2$.

Prime Minister Abe's visit to Washington achieved a major step toward strengthening the alliance. In a contingency in the future, the governments of both countries will do what they have previously agreed upon. Both countries are not bound to do certain things. However, like the U.S., Japan is now able to think about what it should do.

The new laws that will enable Japan to take action legally whenever and wherever its security is threatened and the determination on both sides to act together to produce potential synergy effects of $1+1 = \text{more than } 2$ will ensure much greater relevance of the 1960 Security Treaty to the real world in the remaining years of the 21st Century.

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