

JAPAN'S TRADITIONAL SECURITY CONCERNS

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Abstract

In the post-Cold War period, while most of the world worries about new and non-traditional threats to their national security, many countries in the world are still facing the same old traditional threats. In the Asia-Pacific region, even after the end of the Cold War, many countries are trying to modernize their national defense capabilities. The tension on Korean Peninsula, China's military buildup and other unsettled issues constitute uncertain factors. Taking these factors into account, this paper examines whether, despite the end of the Cold War and demise of the Soviet threat, traditional security issues for Japan are still alive today.

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Security Threats to Japan

China

Before dwelling in detail over the Japanese perception of China as a threat, a brief look at the historical overview of their relations would be in order. The neighbouring countries of North East and South East Asia have always ranked high in the eyes of Japanese policy makers, who considered them to be extremely important for Japanese security and prosperity. The 1930s witnessed an upsurge in Japanese militarism¹. With the trumpeted ideal of elimination of Western influence in the region, along with spreading its antennae in different directions, Japan consolidated its position in Manchuria in 1932, creating a puppet state there. Going a step further Japan initiated a full fledged war against China in 1937. This war prompted the unification of communist and nationalist forces against the Japanese invasion, which finally defeated Japan, in the war of resistance.

Following the period of its occupation (1945-1952) various Japanese governments adopted the policy of semi isolation, followed by a period of passive diplomacy, during which economic relations remained the focal point of the national policy. Japan finally ended its self imposed isolation in 1969 through the Nixon doctrine and started playing an affirmative role in promoting trade relations with the neighbouring countries, as well as establishing diplomatic relations with the countries in the region. The U.S.-China rapprochement of 1971 also instigated Japan to take interest in East Asian affairs and the establishment of diplomatic relations with China was also one of its manifestations.

In June 1989, Japan imposed economic sanctions against China in the wake of events of Tienamen Square, where the pro democracy demonstrators were oppressed by the Chinese army and linked its resumption with the domestic political changes in China. But the fact remained that Japanese policy-makers did not want to offend China on one hand, nor did they want to see it isolated in the international community. For the same reason Japan wanted the other members of G-7 meeting held in July 1990, to understand Japan's special relations with China².

Ideological differences between Japan and China have been overshadowed by economic considerations. Japan is China's biggest trading partner and a big source of foreign investment. The general review of the Japanese comparative soft attitude towards China seems aimed at increasing bilateral trade and cooperation, to ensure that China remains an important source of Japan's energy supplies, and also an important market for Japanese goods. It also aims at to avoid Chinese isolation and preserve and maintain peace in North East Asia³.

Although Japan harboured some concerns about the increasing military buildup in China, the relations between the two countries continued growing but all that got a serious set back when China, despite its assurances tested a nuclear device in May 1995. Japan was naturally shocked, because China had signed the extension agreement of non-proliferation treaty. There was also an outrage from the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to stop loans to China. This was taken by China as an intervention in its internal affairs⁴. August 1995 saw an imposition of ban of Japanese grant to China. Finally in July

1996, China declared moratorium on nuclear testing and signed Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). Japanese aid to China was thus restored in September, the same year.

The approval of the new defense guidelines by Japan in 1997, further soared the relations between Japan and China, because this allowed Japan to project power beyond its shores. It further indicated that Japan and the United States will cooperate, even if a military confrontation occurs, that does not involve Japan directly. China took these assertions as the policy of containment. In April 2005 Beijing and Tokyo sparred over Japan's approval of little used nationalist history text books, which Beijing said gloss over wartime atrocities.

Chinese Activities in Waters Around Japan

The activities of Chinese marine research vessels in Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) without prior approval by the Japanese government and intelligence collecting activities by Chinese naval vessels have become more frequent in recent years⁵. In July 2000, the four tank landing ships and two patrol crafts conducted activities in waters, 470km North West of the main island of Okinawa⁶. It was the first time that activities by Chinese tank landing ships in this area of sea were confirmed. China is thought to have conducted training activities for marine transport to remote areas. The deployment of tank landing ships in the high seas may also be regarded as an activity aimed at power projection to the main island of Taiwan and Sparty Islands. By deploying tank landing ships in the high sea in addition to warships, China can be said to be repeatedly projecting its military capability vis-à-vis remote

places and sea areas.

According to a report published by Taiwan's *United Daily News*, "more than 300 instances of sovereignty infringements by China were observed in the Spratly Islands region in the year 2000, including illegal fishing and oil exploration"⁷. These activities indicate China's strong interest in securing its maritime interests.

The availability of secure sea-lanes in Asia-Pacific waters is important for countries that are heavily depended on international trade. Japan imports most of its crude oil from Persian Gulf region through the Malacca strait and bulk of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) consumed in Japan is produced in the countries comprising Insular South East Asia. Therefore the deterioration of sea lane security in and around the Malacca Strait is a matter of grave concern for Japan.

According to a report published by the *Washington Times*, "China is building strategic relationships along the sea lanes from the Middle East to the South China sea in ways that suggest defensive and offensive positioning to protect China's energy interests, but also to serve broad security objectives"⁸. The 'string of pearls' strategy, as the report calls China's move, includes a new naval base under construction at the Pakistani port of Gawadar, naval bases in Myanmar, a military agreement with Cambodia, strengthening ties with Bangladesh and an ambitious plan under consideration to build a 20 billion-dollars canal in Thailand to bypass the strait of Malacca⁹. The report said, "China by militarily controlling oil shipping sea lanes, could threaten ships, thereby creating a

climate of uncertainty about the safety of all ships on the high seas¹⁰. As regards the navy, China is believed to have signed a contract with Russia to purchase two additional destroyers of the same type, equipped with cutting edge weapon system¹¹. It is also reported that China has launched two destroyers of a new type that are equipped with a phased-array radar system¹². China's Sovremenny class destroyers are equipped with 9K-90 Uragan surface-to-air missile system (SAM-7) and two 130 mm rapid-gun systems, in addition to eight 3M-80 Mosquito anti-ship missiles (SS-N22) that fly at Mach 2 or over¹³.

During the past few years, China's air power has grown with the rapid deployment of Su-27 and Su-30 mkk fighters. In addition, China in September 2003, conducted test flight of a fighter aircraft conamed "Super 7/fc-1" This is an all weather, single seater fighter aircraft capable not only of air-to-air combat but also of air-to-ground mission¹⁴. It also appears that a newer fighter aircraft J-10 is under development¹⁵.

Chinese Missiles

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, including ballistic missiles, has become one of the main global issues of the post-Cold War era. The strengthening of China's nuclear and ballistic missile capability is continuing if at a slow pace. China test launched in August 1999 an ICBM (Inter Continental Ballistic Missile) Called Dong Feng-31 (DF-31) that has a maximum range of about 8,000 Kilometers. It is a mobile ICBM that uses solid fuel to enhance its rapid-launch capability. China is developing another ICBM called the Deng Feng-41 (DF-41), which is believed to have a rang of about 12,000

kilometers¹⁶. China is alleged to have several types of short and medium range ballistic missiles currently under development.

The dangers of Chinese ballistic missiles for Japan are closely linked to China's seemingly expansionist tendencies. Regardless of China's actual intentions, whenever Japan-China territorial issues surrounding Senkaku Islands receive attention or China-Taiwan relations become strained, the mere existence of such missiles can exert significant psychological pressure on Japan. Such capability is one of the factors on which China makes high-profile assertions on territorial issues involving Japan. Backed by growing military might, China has been expanding its sphere of influence in the Ocean waters off its shores. China's activities in the South China Sea and East China Sea have grown increasingly bold, as evidenced by its strengthened effective control over the Spratly islands and expanded development of oil resources in the East China sea¹⁷.

While the world watches China's rapid rise towards super power status with awe. Japan, China's old enemy, watches with foreboding. Japan's latest defense review for the first time named China, along with North Korea, as a potential threat. The defense review in form of a set of guidelines, approved by the cabinet in December 2004, said "China, which has a great impact on security in this region, is pushing ahead with enhancing its nuclear and missile capabilities in modernizing its navy and air force while expanding marine activities"¹⁸.

When asked whether China will translate its growing economic power into political power and use it against Japanese interests in the region, Professor Zhangli Lee of China's Sichuan University said, "The upward trend of

economic development in China would, no doubt, bolster its defense capability and security arrangements, and in that perspective it would be hard to really avoid an increasing likelihood of a large-scale fierce conflict, if not a military one. Moreover, an assured Japan-U.S. security relationship will provoke the firm response from Beijing, he added¹⁹.

The fact is that China's rapid rise towards superpower status is a matter of quite concern for Japan. While it is almost inconceivable that Japan and China would ever fight again, reason being their economic interdependence, but their relations are deteriorating. Political tensions, territorial rivalries, competition over energy resources and China's military buildup provide the ingredients for a 21st century Cold War.

Russia

According to Blair Ruble of Woodrow Wilson center, Washington D.C. the post-Cold War Japan-Russia relations are one of the most complex and least understood major issues²⁰. Actually the claims, counter claims and refutation of claims of propriety by the two countries over the Northern Territories of four islands off Hokkaido has not brought about any improvement in relations between Russia and Japan in the post-Cold War era.

The issue of Northern Territories has prevented the two countries to sign a peace treaty for World War II, to end the hostilities and has proved a small bone in the throat of Japan-Russia relations²¹. The border between Japan and Russia was established in 1855 with the signing of Shimoda treaty. Under

the treaty the issue of ownership of Sakhalin was left undecided. Another treaty was signed between the two countries in 1875 in St. Petersburg, by which Russia surrendered to Japan the Russian part of Kuril Islands, in exchange for Japan giving up its claim to Sakhalin²².

In September 1945, the Soviet Union declared war on Japan and occupied the Kuril Islands and Northern Territories. The Northern Territories are actually part of Kuril Islands, which stretch from the north of Hokkaido to the southern tip of Kamohatka Peninsula. When negotiations were held in 1956 to restore diplomatic relations between Japan and the Soviet-Union the issue of Northern Territories was also raised²³. During the negotiations the Soviet Union promised to return Shikotan and Habomai islands to Japan. Japan also agreed to this two-island solution²⁴. At that stage U.S. warned Japan that if it did not persist its claim to two other islands i.e. Itorufa and Kunashiri, the U.S. would not see any reason to return Okinawa to Japan²⁵. Thus the deadlock remained. The relations between Japan and Russia further deteriorated when in 1960 Japan and the United States revised the Security Treaty of 1951.

During the Cold War period, attempting to discourage Tokyo from closer trilateral alignment with Beijing and Washington, the Soviet issued numerous threats to Japan and deployed amphibious troops to the Kurile Islands. After Japan signed the Friendship Treaty with China in 1978, the Soviets stepped up pressure in a variety of ways²⁶. They boosted amphibious troop strength in the Kuriles, extending the buildup to another island (Shikotan). The Soviets increased the number of SS-20 tactical nuclear missile launchers deployed in Siberia²⁷. They enhanced

the visibility of their fleet by doubling the number of transits through Sea of Japan straits over the 1976-88 period. In 1985 the Soviets held an amphibious landing exercise that stimulated an attack on Japan's Hokkaido Island²⁸.

The situation has changed significantly in the post-Cold War period in which Russia does not have the military capabilities to directly challenge the military power of U.S.-Japan alliance. However, the issue of Northern Territories remains a major problem between Japan and Russia, even in the post-Cold War era. Although there have been quite a few efforts during this period for normalization of relations between the two countries, they have not been able to break the impasse on this issue. In fact the domestic public concerns are a great hurdle in its solution. In public circles the threat perception and historical mistrust still dominate the debate in Japan towards Russia. The mode of tactics adopted by the Russian President Vladimir Putin has also not been encouraging towards the solution of the problem²⁹.

Compared to Russia's relations with other North East Asian countries like China and North Korea, no outstanding development has recently taken place vis-à-vis Japan. This is also due to the perception that as a U.S. ally, Japan is fully behind the United States with regards to the missiles defense issue. It was only recently that a Russian Defense Ministry news paper, strongly criticized Japan's participation in the U.S. Theater Missile Defense (TMD) plan. It states that Japan's involvement in the TMD plan lends a hand to U.S. hegemony and will trigger a global arms race³⁰.

Strengthening economic ties with North East Asian countries, especially Japan is crucial for Russian economy, particularly the economic development of Siberia and Russian Far East. The reality, however, is that the Northern Territories issue. Stands in the way of negotiations and the prospect for expansion of the economic relationship remains weak.

North Korea

North Korea's declaration of withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non Proliferation Weapons (NPT) in January 2003, reignited the nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, posing a Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) threat to Japan. A solution is being sought through multilateral, six party talks, which is different from what happened during the crises of 1993-94, when a solution was sought through bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea.

For North Korea, the current situation is different from that of 1993-94. There are two areas in which the situation has grown more favorable to North Korea since 1994. First, it had made progress in the development of nuclear weapons. Under Agreed Framework, central components of its nuclear program, the production, extraction, and accumulation of plutonium were frozen. However, as the freeze did not cover the development of a detonator, the miniaturization of war heads (or nuclear devices), and the development of delivery means, it is believed that North Korea has continued work on these projects even after 1994³¹. Were North Korea to make progress on the miniaturization of warheads, in particular, this would have serious ramifications because it means these could

be mounted on ballistic missiles.

In addition to already undertaken Plutonium-based nuclear development, North Korea is pressing ahead with development of enriched uranium based nuclear weapons. If North Korea proceeds with a Uranium enrichment program at its current pace, the plant could become fully operational as early as the middle of the decade, and it could produce two or more nuclear weapons a year there after³².

Second, North Korea has made progress in developing long-range ballistic missiles that can be used as a delivery vehicle. In the second half of the 1990s, it began deploying No Dong missiles with a range of 1,300 Kilometers. At present, it has deployed about 175 to 200 No Dong missiles capable of covering almost the entire territory of Japan³³. It is believed that No Dong missiles are designed to accommodate nuclear warheads, conventional warheads, cluster bombs, and chemical war heads³⁴. North Korea is thought to have several facilities capable of producing agents for chemical weapons and to be in possession of a considerable amount of them. It appears that there are also some production bases for biological weapons³⁵.

North Korea has also made and deployed ballistic missiles such as scud-B and scud-C. In addition to this, research and development is probably being conducted towards developing missiles with longer ranges. The Taepo Dong-I, which is considered to be the base of the ballistic missile launched in August 1998, has a range of more than 1,500 kilometers. The Taepo Dong-II reportedly has a range of between 3,500 and

6,000 kilometers³⁶.

Japanese policy makers have long identified North Korea's military capabilities as a potential cause of instability in North East Asia, and the perceived threat from North Korea was highlighted by its withdrawal from Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1993. Despite their consensus over North Korea being a potential threat to the security, the Japanese policy makers have not reached a consensus amongst them over the exact type of threat posed or the extent to which the threat is a nuclear one.

The greatest fear of the Japanese defense planners is North Korean acquisition of a credible nuclear strike force, by combining its Taepodong-I missile with a nuclear warhead. As it is difficult to spot No Dong missiles mounted on mobile launchers before they are launched, a preemptive strike cannot be effective. Because Japan and the United States are not capable of defending against No Dong missiles deployed by North Korea, Tokyo, like Seoul is being held hostage militarily, heightening Japan's vulnerability.

The Japanese policy makers also seriously evaluate the possibility of North Korea attacking Japan with high-explosive or chemically-armed missiles. As of November 9, 2003, 157 countries had signed and ratified the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) that aims to eliminate chemical weapons. North Korea is the only country in East Asia that is not party to the CWC. On the contrary, North Korea has developed and possesses chemical weapons³⁷.

The physical and psychological vulnerability of Japan to chemical attacks, has been shown by the sarin gas attack incidence in Tokyo subway in March 1995 and the threat of launch of chemical and conventional warheads would be likely to produce far greater panic amongst the population of Japanese cities. Hence, Japan's strongest perception of the North Korean military threat is that of a chemical missile attack and the subsequent domestic chaos that it would produce.

South Korea

The existence of acrimonious relations between Japan and its immediate neighbour South Korea is a familiar theme in the literature on mutual relations of both the countries. Kenneth Pyle notes the lingering South Korean wariness of Japan's domination of the region³⁸. William Nester, notes the history of anti-Japanese feelings in South Korea, starting with the former President Rhee Syng-man in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Nester states that bilateral relations are characterized by 'deep mutual antipathy' where by Koreans are intensely anti-Japanese and well remember Japan's brutal colonization efforts to destroy the national identity³⁹.

This 'difficult' relationship defined through lack of mutual trust towards one another, took shape in 1965, when diplomatic relations between Japan and South Korea were established. In the absence of diplomatic relations, trade ties continued between Tokyo and Seoul between 1945 and 1965. While economic relations between both countries continued to flourish throughout the Cold War period, political relations between them continued to remain strained most of the time.

Bilateral relations between Japan and South Korea became strained in 2001. The South Korean people were critical about the Japanese history textbook issue and the visit to Yasukuni Shrine by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, claiming that they indicated Japan's lack of repentance about past "militarism"⁴⁰. In response to the history textbook issue, South Korea suspended defense exchanges. Although President Kim and Prime Minister Koizumi met in October and reaffirmed their policy to address the issues in cooperative manner, a sense of dissatisfaction remained among the South Korean people with regard to Japan and a shift was seen from the friendly atmosphere that had been built during the previous summit meetings.

As far Takeshima/Dokdo, the disputed island is already under defacto South Korean control, while Japan has consistently held the position that, in light of the historical facts, as well as the rules and principles of international law, Takeshima is an integral part of Japan, and will take a course of continued and persistent dialogue with South Korea on this issue⁴¹.

Though the mutual skepticism remains between Japan and South Korea, one must not surrender the hopes for a better relationship between them, nor are the bilateral relations as solely acrimonious.

Conclusion

There are various unresolved issues, remnants of the Cold War, that remain in the neighbouring areas of Japan, including the issues of Korean Peninsula and Taiwan. North Korea and

China continue to increase the number of ballistic missiles, with Japan within their ranges. Along with their possession of weapons of mass destruction, these states are considerable security threats for Japan. Russia's military capabilities, although waning, are still formidable and Japan has made no substantial rapprochement with that country. The continuing dispute over four small islands known in Japan as the Northern Territories has been a stumbling block to closer relations. All this suggests that in post Cold-War world, Japan still faces serious threats from North-Korea and potentially from China and at the same time an important threat, the risk of attack of ballistic missiles possibly armed with weapons of mass destruction has come to the fore.

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