

# **JAPAN IN 2015: CROSSING THE RUBICON**

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*EAI Background brief No. 1099*

Date of Publication: 6 January 2016

## **Executive Summary**

1. In September 2015, Japan underwent a sea change in its security policy and crossed the Rubicon when it passed an unprecedented set of security bills in parliament.
2. Tokyo could now engage in collective security by aiding allies against third parties, while the tight restrictions on the Self Defence Force in United Nations Peace Keeping Operations, its rules of engagement and other multilateral deployment abroad have also been considerably lifted.
3. The two key drivers in recent years in the transformation of Japanese security policy are the rise of China and the fear this puts in Japan, and the political dominance of hawkish Prime Minister Abe Shinzo over the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), both houses of parliament and the bureaucracy.
4. If not for Abe's strong leadership and ideological values, Japan would not have crossed the Rubicon in 2015.
5. That Abe has become the most powerful prime minister of Japan since the tenure of Koizumi Junichiro (2001-2016) is evidenced by the fact that Abe got his way with the controversial security bills despite widespread opposition.
6. Abe also won his LDP presidential re-election in September 2015 unopposed; he is also likely to remain as prime minister until 2018. This will give Abe time to pursue two major agendas in his domestic politics: Abenomics and constitutional revision.
7. Japan's success in finalising its difficult Trans Pacific Partnership negotiations with the United States in 2015 was another demonstration of Abe's strong leadership despite considerable domestic opposition from the agriculture sector, other interest groups and concerned consumers.

8. Although Abe is known for being a right wing ideologue and historical revisionist, his pragmatic side was evident when he reached a landmark agreement with South Korea to resolve the “comfort women” issue in December 2015.
9. The immediate challenge for Prime Minister Abe after passing his security bills is to reignite the engines of Abenomics. The Abe administration hopes that the public backlash against the security bills will subside and that the economy will rebound in time for the forthcoming July 2016 upper house election.
10. In 2015, while Abe had made much headway in seeking a balance of power with an ascending China through the reinforcement of the US-Japan Alliance, his administration had made little progress in arresting demographic decline through new policies to encourage population growth.