

**JAPAN'S NEW DEFENCE WHITE PAPER
2020: PERCEPTIONS, KEY ISSUES
AND CHALLENGES**

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Executive Summary

1. On 14 July 2020, Japan released its annual “Defence of Japan 2020” white paper which offers an overview of the security environment surrounding Japan, outlines Japan’s defence and security policy, and explains the three pillars of Japan’s defence: Japan’s own architecture for national defence, Japan-US alliance and security cooperation.
2. The white paper does not represent Japan’s new defence policy document. Japan’s current defence and security policy is based on key policy documents found in the National Security Strategy adopted in 2013, the National Defence Programme Guidelines updated in 2018 and the Mid-term Defence Programme (FY2019-FY2023).
3. The defence white paper is to provide up-to-date information necessary for gaining public understanding of Japan’s defence and security policy, and to send political messages to certain countries and the broader international audience. The nature of this document therefore is essentially political.
4. The white paper highlights that North Korea’s missile-related technologies have become even more advanced and could break through Japan’s missile defence networks. This has triggered a long-drawn-out debate on Japan’s acquisition of strike capabilities against missile bases in other countries.
5. Recent white papers have also consistently highlighted China’s growing military power and assertive activities. This year’s white paper in particular has expressed a growing sense of alarm that “China has *relentlessly* continued unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion in the sea area around the Senkaku Islands, leading to a grave matter of concern [emphasis added]”.
6. Yet Tokyo’s attitude towards Beijing remains deeply cautious, nuanced and pragmatic. Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide told Chinese President Xi Jinping that “stable relations with China are extremely important not only for both countries but

for the region and for the international community”, agreeing that the two leaders should “work closely together at a high level”.

7. For the first time, this year’s white paper has referred to a pandemic (COVID-19) as a security concern. It asserts that “the spread of the COVID-19 infection has not only significantly affected global socioeconomic activities, but has also had influences on the military activities of respective countries”.
8. Japan will likely remain a cautious security policy player while becoming a robust military power with growing deterrence and defence capabilities. It is likely that Prime Minister Suga will continue with Abe’s foreign and defence policy line, though his capacity as Japan’s top political leader and commander-in-chief of the Self-Defence Forces remains to be seen.
9. One of the biggest challenges confronting Japan and the world at large would be how best to manage the intensifying great-power competition and regional rivalries. It would be in Japan’s interest to strive to mitigate tensions and rivalries in not only Japan’s relations with China and South Korea, but also more consequentially US-China relations.

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“No, that is the great fallacy: the wisdom of old men.
They do not grow wise. They grow careful”.

Ernest Hemingway,
A Farewell to Arms (1929)

Japan’s Defence White Paper: A Political Document

- 1.1 On 14 July 2020, the Japanese Ministry of Defence released the “Defence of Japan 2020” annual white paper. The defence white paper was first published in 1970, initiated by then Defence Agency Director-General Nakasone Yasuhiro who was firmly convinced that “more than anything else, it is the understanding, active support, and cooperation of the people that is essential to the defence of the nation”.¹
- 1.2 Since 1976, the defence white paper has been published annually, and its entire document both in Japanese and English is available online from Japan’s Ministry of Defence website.² The white paper provides voluminous material that shed light on the security environment surrounding Japan and the numerous issues concerning Tokyo’s defence and security policy.
- 1.3 More specifically, the white paper offers an overview of the security environment surrounding Japan, outlines Japan’s defence and security policy and explains the three pillars of Japan’s defence (or means to achieve the objectives of defence):

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¹ Japanese Ministry of Defence, *Defense of Japan 2020*. Available online at https://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/wp2020/pdf/index.html (accessed 3 October 2020).

² In this year’s white paper, the MOD provides more than 50 videos related to the contents of the main text and placed QR codes linked to them in the main text.

Japan's own architecture for national defence, Japan-US alliance and security cooperation. The document also details core elements of the defence policy comprising Japan's defence capability, including human resource, equipment, technology, industry, intelligence, training and interaction with citizens and local communities.

- 1.4 Notably, the white paper does not represent Japan's new defence policy document; key policy documents on which Japan's current defence and security policy is based can be found in the National Security Strategy adopted in 2013, the National Defence Programme Guidelines updated in 2018 and the Mid-term Defence Programme (FY2019-FY2023).³ The objective of the defence white paper is not only to provide up-to-date information necessary for gaining public understanding of Japan's defence and security policy, but also for sending political messages to certain countries and the broader international audience. Hence the nature of this document is essentially political, and its scope is necessarily confined to the existing legal and policy frameworks, including the constitution, the Japan-US alliance and the exclusively defence-oriented policy.

What Is New about Japan's Perceptions of Its Security Environment?

- 2.1 Defence white papers of the past few years have noted the deterioration of Japan's security environment: North Korea's increasing nuclear and missile capabilities, China's growing sea and air power, and its assertive activities especially in the East China Sea including the area around Senkaku (Diaoyu in Chinese) islands and Russia's military activities in areas including the Northern Territories (especially Etorof and Kunashiri islands).
- 2.2 Five trends as outlined in recent white papers are indicative of Tokyo's threat perception of North Korea's missile capabilities: "(i) increase the firing range of ballistic missiles; (ii) enhance the accuracy of continuous firing capability and operational capabilities necessary for saturation attacks; (iii) improve the ability to

³ Part II, Chapter 3, *Defense of Japan 2020*. See also, Katahara Eiichi, "Tokyo's Defense and Security Policy: Continuity and Change", in Lam Peng Er and Purnendra Jain (eds), *Japan's Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century: Continuity and Change*, (London: Lexington Books, 2020).

conduct surprise attacks; (iv) develop ballistic missiles that fly at low altitudes on irregular trajectories; and (v) diversify the forms of launches”.⁴ This year’s white paper discerns that North Korea’s missile-related technologies have been even more advanced, indicating that new types of short-range ballistic missiles that have been launched since May 2019 were “distinctive in that they use solid fuel and fly at lower altitudes than conventional ballistic missiles”, thereby further aggravating Tokyo’s concern that Pyongyang intends to “breach missile defense networks”.⁵ This assessment has important implications for the Japanese debate on defence posture in general and missile defence and strike capabilities in particular.

2.3 China’s growing military power and assertive activities have consistently been highlighted in recent white papers. The white paper typically asserts that “Chinese military trends, combined with insufficient transparency about China’s defense policies and military affairs, have become a matter of grave concern to the region including Japan and the international community and should continue to be closely monitored in the future”.⁶ This year’s white paper expresses a growing sense of alarm that “China has *relentlessly* continued unilateral attempts to change the status quo by coercion in the sea area around the Senkaku Islands, leading to a grave matter of concern [emphasis added]”.⁷

2.4 Furthermore, this year’s white paper highlights four particular developments that increasingly concern Japanese defence planners. First, it indicates that since the 2000s, the military balance between the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and the Taiwanese military forces has been increasingly in favour of the PLA in terms of not only naval and air powers but also a missile arsenal “including 750 to 1,500 short-range missiles, whose range is presumed to cover all or parts of Taiwan”.⁸

⁴ *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 19.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17 and pp. 72-75.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

- 2.5 Second, it updates trends of China's activities in the South China Sea, including waters around the Spratly Islands and Paracel Islands. It expresses that Japan's deep concern that "China seeks to expand its military and other forms of presence and enhance war-sustaining and other joint operational capabilities in the South China Sea", thus unilaterally changing the status quo and further creating a *fait accompli*.⁹ Then Defence Minister Kono remarked that "[a]nyone who is trying to change the status quo by force needs to be forced to pay a high cost", describing China's actions in the South China Sea as destabilising.¹⁰ Kono, however, was reticent about what "high cost" constitutes.¹¹
- 2.6 Third, it pays close attention to China's initiative of pursuing "civil-military fusion" by developing "two-way links between military and civilian resources in technology development and various other fields", including development of "game changing", cutting-edge technologies that can be used for military purposes. It particularly notes that China refers to "initiatives in seas, outer space, cyberspace, artificial intelligence (AI)" as "emerging areas" for China's pursuit of civil-military fusion.¹²
- 2.7 Fourth, it views current trends in military cooperation between Russia and China with increasing concern. It points out that Russia has exported its latest weapons such as new-model Su-35 fighters and surface-to-air Missile System S-400s to China and that joint military exercises have been expanding between the two countries, including the yearly "Joint Sea" exercise since 2012 and the first joint air patrol in July 2019 when two Russian Tu-95 long-range bombers flew with two Chinese H-6 bombers across the Sea of Japan to the East China Sea. The white paper also highlights the signing of a new document between Russia and China on military

⁹ Ibid, pp. 76-77.

¹⁰ Kaori Enjoji and Brad Lendon, "China risks paying 'high cost' for South China Sea intimidation, Japan defense chief says", CNN, 7 August 2020. Available online at <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/08/07/asia/japan-defense-minister-interview-south-china-sea-intl-hnk/index.html> (accessed 14 October 2020).

¹¹ Tokyo has been helping several ASEAN countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, to build up their maritime capabilities and taking part in training and exercises in the South China Sea. It seems unlikely, however, that Japan will conduct freedom of navigation activities jointly with the United States, in part because of Tokyo's limited maritime assets and perceived risks involved in such operations.

¹² Ibid, p. 57.

and military technology cooperation in September 2019 as a notable example of deepening military cooperation between the two countries.¹³

- 2.8 Yet Tokyo's perceptions of China are multi-faceted and influenced by its geographical proximity, cultural and historical ties, economic interdependence and strategic common interests. Notably, Tokyo's perceptions of China and North Korea differ significantly. Tokyo clearly views North Korea as posing "grave and imminent threats to Japan's security",¹⁴ whereas it perceives China not to be a "threat" but to be "a grave matter of concern".
- 2.9 Then Defence Minister Kono Taro mentioned online on 9 September 2020 for an event by US-based Centre for Strategic and International Studies that "[w]hen I was foreign minister, I was very careful not to say that China is a threat although I repeatedly said 'grave concern' at news conferences. But as defense minister, I must say China has become a security threat to Japan".¹⁵ Although the outspoken Kono clearly went beyond the government's official stance presumably for an American audience, he nevertheless refrained from referring to China as a "threat" in an interview by Japan's newspaper *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* published on 8 August 2020.¹⁶ It is unclear how the newly appointed Defence Minister Kishi Nobuo, a noted conservative with close contacts with Taiwan, would officially present his views on China.¹⁷

¹³ Ibid, pp. 123-124.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 19, p. 94.

¹⁵ Teramoto Daizo, "Kono: China not a 'concern' for Japan. It is now a 'security threat'", *Asahi Shimbun*, 11 September 2020. Available online at <http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13717925> (accessed 14 October 2020).

¹⁶ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 15 August 2020. When the new Prime Minister Suga unveiled his cabinet line-up on 16 September 2020, Kono was moved from defence to administrative reform minister.

¹⁷ Kishi Nobuo is former Prime Minister Abe's younger brother and a grandson of former Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke. He is known as a conservative with strong ties with Taiwan. In the special issue of the Japanese conservative journal *Seiron* published in January 2020, Kishi in his personal capacity as a politician argued for close partnership with Taiwan through official visits at the vice-minister level between Tokyo and Taipei and through establishing Japan-Taiwan bilateral security dialogue, Japan-US-Taiwan trilateral security dialogue and dispatching middle-level SDF officers to Taiwan. Kishi's pro-Taiwan views clearly deviate from the official stance of the Japanese government. It remains to be seen if and to what extent Defence Minister Kishi will be able to take concrete measures to develop security ties with Taipei. Kishi Nobuo, "*Nichibeitai no annzen hoshou taiwao* (Proposing Japan-US-Taiwan Security Dialogue)", *Seiron*, Special Issue, January, 2020, pp. 41-47.

- 2.10 Japan largely shares US perceptions of China. However, Tokyo's attitude remains deeply cautious, nuanced and pragmatic. In his telephone conversation with Chinese President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Suga Yoshihide said that "stable relations with China are extremely important not only for both countries but for the region and for the international community", agreeing that the two leaders should "work closely together at a high level".¹⁸
- 2.11 As the 2013 National Security Strategy put it: "Japan will strive to construct and enhance a Mutually Beneficial Relationship Based on Common Strategic Interests with China in all areas, including politics, economy, finance, security, culture and personal exchanges".¹⁹ In the view of the US administration, however, China is clearly regarded as America's "true" national security threat militarily, economically and in ideological terms.²⁰
- 2.12 On Tokyo's perceptions of the United States, the white paper is largely reticent about President Trump's disruptive, unpredictable and isolationist tendencies. It focuses on detached descriptions of the elements of US national security policy. While briefly noting a view that the President Trump administration "has significantly changed the patterns of U.S. involvement in the world under the 'America First' policy", the white paper asserts that:

... the United States has been continuing to play a role for world peace and stability with its comprehensive national power, the largest in the world, based on its belief that the values and influence of the United States, bolstered by its power, would make the world freer, safer, and more prosperous.²¹

¹⁸ *Japan Times*, 26 September 2020. Available online at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/09/26/national/yoshihide-suga-xi-jinping-japan-china-t+alks-2/> (accessed 14 October 2020).

¹⁹ Government of Japan, *National Security Strategy*, 17 December 2013, p. 25. Available online at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2013/_icsFiles/afieldfile/2013/12/17/NSS.pdf (accessed 14 October 2020).

²⁰ Michael R Pompeo, Secretary of State, "Communist China and the Free World's Future", speech at the Richard Nixon Presidential Library and Museum, Yorba Linda, California, 23 July 2020; and Robert C O'Brien, National Security Adviser, "The Chinese Communist Party's Ideology and Global Ambitions", *Foreign Policy*, 26 June 2020. Available online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/chinese-communist-partys-ideology-global-ambitions/> (accessed 14 October 2020); and "Remarks by Vice President Pence at the Frederic V Malek Memorial Lecture", 24 October 2019. Available online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-frederic-v-malek-memorial-lecture/> (accessed 14 October 2020).

²¹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 45.

- 2.13 In reality, however, Tokyo has considerable concerns pertaining to the United States. First, despite Washington's stated commitment to prioritise the allocation of military forces to the Indo-Pacific, such transition in the US force posture appears to be lagging and difficult due to America's continued involvement in the Middle East and Africa.²²
- 2.14 Second, Tokyo is concerned that Washington has demanded for Japan's greater burden-sharing by increasing its defence spending substantially. Although Japan's defence spending has been steadily increasing in recent years, it still remains less than one per cent of gross domestic product, way below the two per cent target recommended for NATO member states.²³
- 2.15 Third, the intensifying US-China rivalry is of great concern to Tokyo in the not only military arena, but also broader areas including trade, investment, technology and human talent. Although there is no mention of these issues in the defence white paper, Tokyo has been caught in the dilemma of a US-China decoupling especially in the supply chains of advanced technologies such as telecommunications and semiconductors.²⁴ Yet the nuts and bolts of US-China decoupling remains far from clear. Perhaps the bottom line is reflected in US Vice President Pence's words:
- And people sometimes ask whether the Trump administration seeks to “de-couple” from China. The answer is a resounding “no.” The United States seeks engagement with China and China's engagement with the wider world, but engagement in a manner consistent with fairness, mutual respect, and the international rules of commerce.²⁵
- 2.16 What is entirely new about Tokyo's perceptions of the security environment discussed in this year's white paper is its reference to the COVID-19 pandemic. It

²² Ibid, p. 46.

²³ In comparison with FY 2019, Japan's defence-related expenditures for FY2020 increased by 61.8 billion yen to 5.0688 trillion yen, up for the eighth consecutive year. Ibid, p. 47 and pp. 226-229.

²⁴ *Nikkei Asia*, 10 October 2020. Available online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Japan-Inc.-caught-in-dilemma-in-US-decoupling-campaign> (accessed 14 October 2020); *Nikkei Asia*, 20 May 2020. Available online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/US-China-decoupling-is-much-harder-than-Donald-Trump-thinks> (accessed 14 October 2020).

²⁵ US White House, Remarks by Vice President Pence at the Frederic V Malek Memorial Lecture, *Foreign Policy*, 24 October 2019. Available online at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-frederic-v-malek-memorial-lecture/> (accessed 9 October 2020).

asserts that COVID-19 “has been posing serious challenges that the international community has to address in close collaboration”. It observes that “the spread of the COVID-19 infection has not only significantly affected global socioeconomic activities, but has also had influences on the military activities of respective countries. If the spread of infection is further prolonged, this may exert various impacts on countries’ military capability”. The white paper then went so far as to mention the potentially negative impact of China’s actions on international order. The white paper put it:

... it is said that while actively dispatching medical experts and providing medical goods to countries where the infection is spreading, China has been making propaganda efforts in various manners, including the spread of false information, amid growing social uncertainties and confusion due to the spread of infection. The COVID-19 pandemic may expose and intensify strategic competition among countries intending to create international and regional orders more preferable to themselves and to expand their influence. We need to closely watch such moves with great concern as security issues.²⁶

- 2.17 How this perspective will be reflected in the substance of Japan’s defence and security policy in the future is still unclear, but it is the first time in the post-war years that Tokyo considers the implications of a pandemic like COVID-19 as “security issues” and that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) and the Self-Defence Force (SDF) had taken various measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷

Key Issues for Policy Change

- 3.1 Given that Japan’s defence and security policy is still based on the post-war constitution and the Japan-US Security Treaty, policy continuity has been far more salient than policy change. Yet a careful scrutiny of Japan’s defence and security policy during the last decade reveals that there have been significant changes within the continuity of the postwar security policy framework.²⁸

²⁶ Ibid, p. 185.

²⁷ The 2013 *National Security Strategy* has a reference to infectious diseases as one of human security challenges, but it apparently does not assume a pandemic like COVID-19. *National Security Strategy*, p.10. Available online at <http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/131217anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf> (accessed 5 October 2020).

²⁸ Lam Peng Er and Purnendra Jain, “Introduction: More Changes; More Continuity”; and Katahara Eiichi, “Tokyo’s Defense and Security Policy: Continuity and Change”, in Lam Peng Er and Purnendra Jain (eds.), *Japan’s Foreign Policy in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Lexington Books, 2020).

- 3.2 Japan's defence and security policy in recent years has expanded and its defence capabilities strengthened and alliance with the United States invigorated. This transformation, actively promoted by then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo in his eight-year-long second term, has taken place within the framework of both the exclusively defence-oriented policy and the post-war constitution.
- 3.3 Japan will likely remain a cautious security policy player while emerging as a robust military power with growing deterrence and defence capabilities.²⁹ It is likely that Japan's new Prime Minister Suga who served as chief cabinet secretary under then Prime Minister Abe will continue Abe's foreign and defence policy line, though his capacity as Japan's top political leader and commander-in-chief of the SDF remains to be seen.
- 3.4 Among a wide range of issues discussed in the white paper, four issues loom large: 1) missile defence and strike capabilities; 2) acquisition of capabilities in new domains for cross-domain operations; 3) Tokyo's vision of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)"; and 4) the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these issues has been the subject of debate that could lead to significant policy changes in the future.
- 3.5 On the first issue, the white paper, released on 14 July, barely managed to include several paragraphs that explain Tokyo's abrupt announcement made on 15 June that Japan would suspend a plan to deploy Aegis Ashore, a land-based missile defence system, in Yamaguchi and Akita prefectures. In December 2017, Tokyo decided on the introduction of two Aegis Ashore units that would supplement the Maritime Self-Defence Force's Aegis-equipped ships.³⁰ The MOD justified the introduction of the Aegis Ashore system thus:

The introduction of two units of Aegis Ashore would enable seamless defense of the entire territory of Japan 24 hours a day and 365 days a year, and the burden on personnel is anticipated to be lifted significantly. Under the system of eight Aegis-equipped destroyers, about two of them had to focus on ballistic missile defense (BMD) mission only in the sea in order to protect the entire territory of Japan. Once

²⁹ Katahara, *ibid.*

³⁰ In light of North Korea's missile threats, Japan maintains its two-layered ballistic missile defence system. The Maritime Self-Defence Force deploys the sea-based tier from its Aegis-equipped destroyers fitted with Standard Missile-3 Block 1A that targets incoming ballistic missiles in their mid-course phase. Another tier consists of ground-based fire units maintained by the Air Self-Defence Force that use the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 interceptor.

Aegis Ashore is deployed, however, the Aegis-equipped destroyers can be used for missions ensuring maritime security, conducting training to maintain these skills, and ensuring sufficient rotation of crewmembers, which will be connected to further strengthen Japan's deterrence capability as a whole. The radar units to be mounted on the Aegis Ashore are state-of-the-art high-performance radar units called SPY-7. This radar will drastically enhance Japan's capabilities to respond to ballistic missiles, including enhancement of the capability against lofted trajectory launches and response to simultaneous majority attacks compared with Aegis-equipped destroyer of the MSDF.³¹

- 3.6 Despite the prospect of reaping significant benefits from the introduction of the Aegis Ashore system, Tokyo's reasons for the cancellation sound less than compelling. The 2020 white paper put it:

... as a result of continued discussions with the U.S. side and proceeding with the study after that, it was found out in late May 2020 that not only the software but also the entire system, including the hardware, were required to be refurbished in order to control the fly-out trajectories of SM-3 to surely drop the booster within the Mutsumi maneuver area (in Yamaguchi prefecture) or at sea, which would require a considerable amount of cost and time. In light of this finding of additional cost and time, the MOD decided to suspend the process related to the deployment of Aegis Ashore.³²

- 3.7 Subsequently, it turned out that this issue has important ramifications for Japan's defence and security policy. First, the cancellation of the Aegis Ashore land-based missile defence system means that the MOD will have to look at alternative options to meet the growing missile threats from North Korea, fully utilising the 178.7 billion yen contract that has already been concluded for the deployment of the Aegis Ashore system.³³

- 3.8 One way is to operate the Aegis Ashore system, including Lockheed Martin Corporation's SPY-7 radar system, on specialised vessels, yet the costs and technical and operational feasibility are uncertain. Another way is to deploy the Aegis Ashore system aboard a mega-float similar to an oil rig that can be used as an offshore base

³¹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 260 and *Defense of Japan 2019*, p. 284.

³² *Defense of Japan 2020*, pp. 260-261.

³³ "Japan to Negotiate with U.S. on 178-B.-Yen Aegis Ashore Contracts", 19 June 2020, *Jiji Press News*. Available online at <https://sp.m.jiji.com/english/show/5590> (accessed 3 October 2020).

or a large-scale private vessel like a tanker, though this would make the system extremely vulnerable to weather conditions and attacks by torpedoes or terrorists.

- 3.9 In view of the technical, financial and operational uncertainty associated with the alternatives, some policymakers propose deploying two additional Aegis destroyers as an alternative to the land-based system. According to the current plan, Japan will have eight Aegis destroyers by March 2021. Deploying two more Aegis ships would enable Japan's missile defence system to cover the Japanese archipelago at all times. The major obstacle to this proposal appears to be a shortage of manpower with the Maritime Self-Defence Force.³⁴
- 3.10 Second, the cancellation of the Aegis Ashore system has yet again triggered a long-drawn-out debate on Japan's acquisition of strike capabilities against missile bases in other countries. This debate on Japan's strike capabilities is not new. In the context of an official interpretation of Article 9 of the constitution, then Prime Minister Hatoyama Ichiro justified in legal terms the possession and possible use of such capability in 1956.³⁵ A crucial driving force at this time, however, comes from Japanese policymakers' recognition that it would be technically too difficult and financially too costly for the existing missile defence system to neutralise both North Korea's ballistic missiles and new types of missiles with irregular trajectories, and China's numerous ballistic and cruise missiles and development of hypersonic glide vehicles.
- 3.11 However, Tokyo arguably is in the process of acquiring limited but robust power-projection capabilities such as stand-off missiles, including the Long Range Anti-Ship Missile with a range of about 900 kilometres, and the AGM-158B Joint Air-to-

³⁴ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 25 September 2020 and *Japan Times*, 6 July 2020.

³⁵ Then Prime Minister Hatoyama stated in the Japanese Diet on 29 February 1956 that "[i]f Japan were in imminent danger of an illegal invasion, and the method of invasion were a missile attack against Japan's national territory, I simply cannot believe that the spirit of the Constitution requires that we merely sit and wait to die. In such a case, I believe that we should take the absolute minimum measures that are unavoidably necessary to defend against such an attack, so that in defending against a missile attack, for example, if no other suitable means are available, striking the missile base should be legally acceptable and fall within the range of self-defense". Quoted in Takahashi Sugio, "Dealing with the Ballistic Missile Threat: Whether Japan Should Have a Strike Capability under its Exclusively Defense-Oriented Policy", *NIDS Security Reports*, No. 7, September 2006, p. 81. Available online at http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2006_4_takahashi.pdf (accessed 10 October 2020).

Surface Standoff Missile – Extended Range with a range of about 900 kilometres, and Lockheed Martin F-35 Lightning II Joint Strike Fighters with the precision-guided Joint Strike Missile that covers a range of about 500 kilometres.³⁶

- 3.12 However, the confusion was in what “strike capabilities” mean both in conceptual and material terms. Some Japanese policymakers propose that Japan should seek to acquire Tomahawk long-range cruise missiles capable of targeting not only North Korea but also China. Others argue that Japan would require nuclear-powered attack submarines and nuclear-powered guided missile submarines.³⁷
- 3.13 When it comes to the nuts and bolts of strike capabilities, such as long-range missiles of various kinds and their supporting infrastructure including intelligence, targeting, cyber, space, electromagnetic capabilities, training and exercises, and coordination with US forces, Japan’s thinking remains substantially opaque, if not confused.
- 3.14 It is unclear how Japan’s acquisition of strike capabilities could impact on the time-honoured division of labour between the Japanese SDF and US forces where the SDF assume defensive roles and the US force takes care of offensive roles.³⁸ Furthermore, the implications of Japan’s acquisition of de facto offensive power-projection capabilities for the balance of power in the region and regional perceptions of offensively rearmed Japan would be profound and far-reaching with unforeseen consequences.
- 3.15 Third, the cancellation of the Aegis Ashore system has made it imperative for Tokyo to review and revise key defence policy documents, namely, the 2013 National Security Strategy, the 2018 National Defence Programme Guidelines and the Mid-

³⁶ Franz-Stefan Gady, “Japan’s Ministry of Defense Confirms Plans to Procure New Stand-off Missiles”, *The Diplomat*, 4 February 2020. Available online at <https://thediplomat.com/2020/02/japans-ministry-of-defense-confirms-plans-to-procure-new-stand-off-missiles/> (accessed 10 October 2020) and *The Mainichi*, 22 December 2017. Available online at <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20171222/p2a/00m/0na/021000c> (accessed 10 October 2020).

³⁷ Yano Kazuki, “‘Kogekigata genshiryokusennsuikan’ hoyuu no susume (Recommending acquisition of the nuclear-powered attack submarine)”, *Gunji Kenkyu* (Japan Military Review), November 2020, pp. 38-53; Akimoto Daisuke, “Japan’s policy debate on strike capability explained”, *Japan Times*, 13 August 2020.

³⁸ Jeffrey W Hornung, “Is Japan’s Interest in Strike Capabilities a Good Idea?” *War on the Rocks*, Commentary, 17 July 2020. Available online at <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/is-japans-interest-in-strike-capabilities-a-good-idea/> (accessed 10 October 2020).

term Defence Programme (FY2019-FY2023) stipulating the procurement of land-based Aegis Ashore.³⁹ Tokyo may have to clarify what it considers as “strike capabilities” and justify it in the context of the exclusively defence-oriented policy in the forthcoming defence and security policy documents.

- 3.16 The second issue concerns the SDF’s acquisition and build-up of capabilities in new domains for cross-domain operations. As stipulated in the National Defence Programme Guidelines and the Mid-Term Defence Programme (FY2019-FY2023), in the light of “rapid expansion in the use of new domains, which are space, cyberspace and electromagnetic spectrum is poised to fundamentally change the existing paradigm of national security”,⁴⁰ Japan has embarked upon building what it calls a “multi-domain defence force”. It can execute cross-domain operations, which organically fuse capabilities in all domains, including not only traditional domains—land, sea and air—but also new domains—space, cyberspace and electromagnetic spectrum—to generate synergy and amplify the overall strength.
- 3.17 It is also capable of conducting flexible and strategic activities during all phases from peacetime to armed contingencies, and bolstering the ability of the Japan-US Alliance to deter and counter threats and promoting multi-faceted and multi-layered security cooperation.⁴¹
- 3.18 In particular, the white paper highlights the acquisition of capabilities in new domains, namely, space, cyberspace and electromagnetic spectrum as priorities in strengthening defence capabilities.
- 3.19 Capabilities in the space domain include developing systems for the Space Operations Squadron in the Air Self-Defence Force (ASDF); establishing the Space Domain Planning Group (tentative name) in the Joint Staff; building the Space

³⁹ Japanese Ministry of Defence, “Medium Term Defense Program (FY 2019 - FY 2023)”, 18 December 2018, p. 13. Available online at https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/chuki_seibi31-35_e.pdf (accessed 3 October 2020).

⁴⁰ Japanese Ministry of Defence, National Defense Program Guidelines for FY 2019 and beyond, 18 December 2018, p. 1. Available online at https://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/agenda/guideline/2019/pdf/20181218_e.pdf (accessed 4 October 2020).

⁴¹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 215.

Situation Awareness (SSA) system and SSA satellites (space-based optical telescopes); and strengthening information-gathering capability using outer space and so on.

- 3.20 Capabilities in the cyber domain comprise enhancing the system of Cyber Defence Group from about 220 personnel to about 290 personnel; establishing the Cyber Protection Group (tentative name) in the Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF); expanding and strengthening the system and network; securing and nurturing cyber talents; and utilising cutting-edge cyber technologies and so on.
- 3.21 In the electromagnetic domain, capabilities cover research and development of devices to neutralise the radar of opponents who intend to invade Japan such as stand-off electronic warfare aircraft and research on anti-air electronic war devices; minimising electromagnetic jamming from invasive opponents and procuring fighters (F-35A/B) with superior electronic protection capability; improving electronic warfare capabilities of F-15 fighters; enhancing systems of Electronic Warfare Unit in the GSDF, electromagnetic information gathering and analysis capabilities, and capability of electromagnetic management and so on.⁴²
- 3.22 Accordingly in May 2020, Tokyo launched its new Space Operations Squadron as part of the ASDF, located at Tokyo's Fuchu Air Base, with 20 members, which will be expanded to 100 when it becomes operational in 2023. It is expected that it will collaborate and share expertise with the US Space Command, the US Department of Defence and the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency.⁴³ In August 2020, Japan and the United States were reportedly planning to deploy a network of small satellites in low-earth orbit to detect and track next-generation missiles capable of evading current missile defence system.⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid, pp. 224-225.

⁴³ Eric Johnston, "Japan's new space squadron takes a giant leap forward", *Japan Times*, 2 June 2020. Available online at <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2020/06/02/national/japan-space-force-self-defense-forces/> (accessed 3 October 2020).

⁴⁴ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 19 August 2020.

- 3.23 On the cybersecurity front, Japan's MOD will expand its Cyber Defence Unit, currently staffed by 220 members, to around 290 members by the spring of 2021.⁴⁵ Tokyo will also establish its Electronic Warfare Unit within the GSDF in 2021 to strengthen capabilities for jamming opponents' radar and telecommunication assets.⁴⁶ On balance, however, Japan's efforts in developing these capabilities in new domains remain rudimentary, under-staffed and presumably lacking readiness, resilience and sustainability, which require further strengthening.⁴⁷
- 3.24 The third issue which is prominently featured in this year's white paper concerns Tokyo's vision of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP)". In August 2016, then Prime Minister Abe Shinzo strongly proposed the FOIP concept in his address at the sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development in Kenya. The FOIP aims to promote and establish the rule of law, freedom of navigation and free trade, pursuit of economic prosperity by improving connectivity between Asia and Africa through the Pacific and Indian Oceans, and commitment to peace and stability.
- 3.25 Under the FOIP vision, the MOD identifies three aims: first, securing the stable use of major sea lanes by way of defence cooperation and exchange activities, second, preventing contingencies through confidence building and mutual understanding, and third, contributing to peace and stability through active engagement in the region, in cooperation with partner countries. Specifically, the MOD has been pursuing the FOIP vision in collaboration with the United States, Australia, India, the United Kingdom, France and other European countries, Canada, New Zealand, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Pacific Island countries, the Middle East and Africa where Japan will enhance cooperation for the realisation of FOIP; and with China and Russia to promote mutual understanding and confidence building.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *Nikkei Asia*, 20 June 2020. Available online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Lagging-China-and-the-US-Japan-to-beef-up-cyberdefense> (accessed 14 October 2020).

⁴⁶ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 29 June 2020.

⁴⁷ The United States currently has 6,000 members in its Cyber Command, whereas China has 100,000 cybersecurity soldiers who operate under the Strategic Support Force. *Nikkei Asia*, 20 June 2020. Available online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Lagging-China-and-the-US-Japan-to-beef-up-cyberdefense> (accessed 10 October 2020).

⁴⁸ *Defense of Japan 2020*, pp. 342-435.

- 3.26 The FOIP vision has often been interpreted as Tokyo's strategic response to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by encircling China and/or containing China's rise. There was, for instance, considerable ambivalence on the part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) on the potentially negative implications of FOIP vis-à-vis China⁴⁹ as up until 2018, FOIP had officially been described as a "strategy". It has now been reframed as a "vision" so that it is an inclusive concept that can be shared by any country including ASEAN countries.⁵⁰ Countries such as China and Russia are included as "countries with which Japan will promote mutual understanding and confidence building" in the hope that these countries will share the FOIP vision. Conspicuously missing from Tokyo's FOIP vision are South Korea and North Korea, reflecting Japan's politically strained relations with Seoul and its perception of "grave and imminent threats" emanating from Pyongyang.
- 3.27 Interestingly, there is no reference to the "Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad)", an informal strategic forum of Japanese, American, Indian and Australian foreign ministers to discuss a variety of security issues, in the defence white paper⁵¹ as the Quad is a gathering of not defence but foreign ministers and is therefore under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, Tokyo clearly considers Quad as a policy tool to promote the FOIP vision. On 6 October 2020 when Tokyo hosted the second Quad meeting, the four countries "affirmed the importance of broadening cooperation with more countries for the realization of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' as the vision serves for the peace and prosperity of the region".⁵² Defence Minister Kishi in his telephone conversation with US Secretary

⁴⁹ Shoji Tomotaka, "'Belt and Road' vs. 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific': Competition Over Regional Order and ASEAN", *NIDS Commentary*, National Institute for Defence Studies, No. 88, 9 January 2019. Available online at <http://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/commentary/pdf/commentary088e.pdf> (accessed 10 October 2020).

⁵⁰ J Berkshire Miller, "Japan's Changing Vision of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific", *Global Asia*, March 2019, Vol.14, No.1. Available online at https://www.globalasia.org/v14no1/feature/japans-changing-vision-of-a-free-and-open-indo-pacific_j-berkshire-miller (accessed 10 October 2020).

⁵¹ There is only a reference to "quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and India and develop a strong defense networks with its allies and partners" in Section 1: The United States, Chapter 2, *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 48.

⁵² Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Release, 6 October 2020. Available online at https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press6e_000244.html (accessed 12 October 2020).

of Defence Mark Esper reportedly indicated his willingness to hold a meeting similar involving defence chiefs from the four Quad countries.⁵³

- 3.28 The prospect of substantive defence and security cooperation among Quad countries remains uncertain, yet there are some signs of evolving institutionalisation. A case in point is the Malabar naval exercise which has involved India, the United States and Japan since 2007, and with the inclusion of Australia in November 2020.⁵⁴ Australia took part in the 2007 Malabar exercise, yet it had not been invited due to Beijing's objection for almost a decade.⁵⁵ Indeed, there seems to be a discernable disparity between Washington's intention to use the Quad as a vehicle for pushing ahead with its Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at Beijing and other Quad countries' concerns about Beijing's possible backlash.
- 3.29 US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, for example, remarked that "it is more critical now than ever" that the four countries "collaborate to protect our people and partners from the (Chinese Communist Party's) exploitation, corruption and coercion". He elaborated on his thinking in an interview with *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* that "[o]nce we've institutionalized what we're doing -- the four of us together -- we can begin to build out a true security framework" which he called as a "fabric" that could "counter the challenge that the Chinese Communist Party presents to all of us".⁵⁶
- 3.30 Pompeo's views were however not shared by the rest of the Quad members. Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne observed that "[w]e believe in a region governed by rules, not power. We believe in the fundamental importance of

⁵³ *Japan Times*, 8 October 2020.

⁵⁴ Minister for Foreign Affairs Marise Payne, Australia to participate in Exercise Malabar 2020, 19 October 2020, Australian Department of Defence, Available online at <https://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/lreynolds/media-releases/australia-participate-exercise-malabar-2020> (accessed 12 October 2020).

⁵⁵ The Malabar, initially a bilateral maritime exercise between the United States and India, now includes India, the United States and Japan. See Jagannath Panda, "Australia in Malabar would strengthen the Indo-Pacific Narrative", *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative*, 13 July 2020. Available online at <https://amti.csis.org/australia-in-malabar-would-strengthen-the-indo-pacific-narrative/>.

⁵⁶ *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 7 October 2020.

individual rights and in a region in which disputes are resolved according to international law”,⁵⁷ without naming China.

- 3.31 India’s External Affairs Minister Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar also was reticent about China and stated that “[a]s vibrant and pluralistic democracies with shared values, our nations have collectively affirmed the importance of maintaining a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific” and that India remains “committed to upholding the rules-based international order, underpinned by the rule of law, transparency, freedom of navigation in the international seas, respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty and peaceful resolution of disputes”.⁵⁸ In India’s view, the Quad is “the landscape ahead” but it is “a very natural evolution outcome of a more multipolar world” implying that it would not be a US-led quasi-alliance framework.⁵⁹
- 3.32 No doubt that these developments are carefully monitored by Beijing. Secretary Pompeo’s remarks, for example, subsequently prompted a severe response from Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, rebuking the United States for aiming at “building a so-called Indo-Pacific ‘new NATO’ underpinned by the quadrilateral mechanism involving the United States, Japan, India and Australia”. Wang Yi pointed out that the US Indo-Pacific strategy itself is “a big underlying security risk. If being forced forward, it would not only wind back the clock of history, but also mark the beginning of danger”.⁶⁰
- 3.33 The fourth issue discussed for the first time in this year’s white paper concerns the MOD and SDF’s various activities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted earlier, the spread of the COVID-19 is officially deemed a “grave threat to the

⁵⁷ Marise Payne, “QUAD Opening remarks”, 6 October 2020. Available online at: <https://www.foreignminister.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/speech/quad-opening-remarks> (accessed 14 October 2020).

⁵⁸ “India Committed to Free, Open Indo-Pacific: EAM S Jaishankar at Quad Meet in Tokyo”, 6 October 2020. *India. Com*. Available online at <https://www.india.com/news/india/india-committed-to-free-open-indo-pacific-eam-s-jaishankar-at-quad-meet-in-tokyo-4164366/> (accessed 14 October 2020).

⁵⁹ A crucial factor behind India’s decision to highlight the Quad was the border standoff with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army in Eastern Ladakh in June 2020 that led to the death of 20 Indians. Moriyasu Ken, *Nikkei Asia*, 17 October 2020, “Quad is the landscape ahead, India’s foreign minister says,” Available online at <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/Quad-is-the-landscape-ahead-India-s-foreign-minister-says> (accessed 14 October 2020).

⁶⁰ *Xinhua*, 13 October 2020. Available online at <http://en.people.cn/n3/2020/1014/c90000-9768791.html> (accessed 14 October 2020).

security of the international community, including Japan”.⁶¹ To prevent the spread of COVID-19, the MOD/SDF dispatched nursing officers to the ANA airplane chartered by the Japanese government to leave Wuhan in January 2020, conducted disaster relief operations for Japanese returnees from overseas, provided “life and medical support at the temporary accommodation facilities where Japanese returnees and others stayed and the cruise ship Diamond Princess (approximately 3,700 passengers and crews) where a number of infected persons were identified as well as transportation of people leaving the ship”, and held conference calls with the defence ministers of 15 countries to exchange opinions and share information.

- 3.34 The MOD/SDF also helped reinforce border control for entrants and returnees, and in response to requests from the governors of 29 prefectures, the SDF conducted air transportation of patients, and provided life support in accommodation facilities, education on infection protection for employees of the local governments and other activities.⁶²

Challenges Facing Japan’s Defence and Security Policy Today

- 4.1 Tokyo’s perceptions of its security environment have been changing in varied and nuanced ways as evidenced by the defence white paper 2020. Tokyo’s concerns about China, for instance, have been substantially growing, but its attitude towards Beijing remains cautious and pragmatic and far from adversarial, unlike those of Washington. The four key issues suggest that there is much complexity, sensitivity and lack of informed debate required for policy change. Among multifarious challenges facing Tokyo’s defence and security policy today, Japan could first rethink its defence and security policy in fundamental ways. In particular, Tokyo needs to articulate what it considers to be “strike capabilities” in concrete terms and how they can be justified, developed and deployed within the current framework of the exclusively defence-oriented policy.

⁶¹ *Defense of Japan 2020*, p. 275.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 275-281.

- 4.2 Second, the Japan-US alliance has been said to be and still remains as the foundation of Japan's defence and security policy. Notwithstanding, it behoves Tokyo to evaluate how and why the Japan-US alliance will continue to be reliable, sustainable, effective at a time when the US-led liberal international order seems to be faltering, if not yet ended. Now is perhaps the time for Japan to explore a plan B or an alternative strategic policy for Japan hopefully in close collaboration with the United States and Japan's Asian neighbours, including China and ASEAN countries.
- 4.3 Third, one of the biggest challenges confronting Japan and the world at large would be how best to manage the intensifying great-power competition and regional rivalries. It would be in Japan's interest to strive to mitigate tensions and rivalries in not only Japan's relations with China and South Korea, but also more consequentially US-China relations.