

What Role for Japan's Defense Forces?

By Hisao Iwashima

On December 20, 1990, the National Defense Council and the Cabinet met to decide on a new Mid-term Defense Program outlining defense planning for the five years beginning in fiscal 1991, including equipment to be procured and capabilities to be acquired or maintained.

As explained by the government, this new program holds down front-line deployment and concentrates on support capabilities, but there is a clear effort being made to acquire state-of-the-art equipment and to upgrade Japanese forces. Over the half-decade, the program envisions spending a total of ¥22,750 billion. This is a sharp 24% increase over the old five-year program and will make Japan the world's third-largest military power—at least in terms of spending—after the United States and the Soviet Union.

In the past, Japan has been referred to as an economic giant and a military pygmy. No more is this the case.

While the SDF may have the latest equipment, that does not mean that they are one of the world's most effective fighting forces—as seen in the dispute over possible deployment in support of the multilateral force marshaled in response to Iraq's August 2 invasion of Kuwait. The Diet debate and public outcry over the proposed United Nations Peace Cooperation Bill were clear indications that the Japanese people are not at all anxious to have the SDF be a strong military force.

Yet the world is changing with a rush, and it is important to take a cold look at the SDF, their role and their capabilities. To give the most obvious example, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty has lost its main *raison d'être* (that of meeting the Soviet threat) as the United States and the Soviet Union have joined hands in partnership. Little wonder that people are beginning to question anew what the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is for, and this is another question that will nec-

essarily impinge on the SDF's future.

Before looking ahead to a new role for the SDF in a new world order, it is instructive to look at current realities, including the mixed feelings that many Japanese have about the SDF, so that everyone can be working with the same information and assumptions and any debate over the SDF can be meaningfully engaged.

Shocking history

Born in times of trauma, the SDF's history parallels the history of the many external shocks that have buffeted Japan over the last half-century. The first shock was that of the two atomic bombs dropped on Japan in the summer of 1945—a shock that resulted in Japan's unconditional surrender, demilitarization and reemergence as one of the very few countries anywhere to be totally without its own military forces.

Yet this was not to last. Soon afterward (in June 1950), the outbreak of the Korean War created a "vacuum shock" as U.S. forces in Japan were quickly deployed to the Korean Peninsula and no one was left to defend Japan. Filling the vacuum was the 75,000-strong emergency Police Reserve Force. In October 1952, this was transformed into a Safety Force, and in July 1954 to the Self-Defense Forces.

During this same period, the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty were signed in September 1951 (both to go into effect in April 1952) and Japan rejoined the international community as a sovereign nation. In October 1953, the joint statement issued by Hayato Ikeda—then acting as personal representative of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida and later to become prime minister in his own right—and Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs Walter S. Robertson committed independent Japan to beefing up the SDF's defense capabilities to fill the vacuum as the U.S. forces gradually withdrew from

Japan. Indeed, this is the pattern that has persisted to this very day.

A number of further shocks were needed, however, before the Japanese people given a peace-oriented education under the postwar peace Constitution would have the will to defend Japanese territory. The most dramatic shock took place in September 1976—little over a year after America's long involvement in Vietnam resulted in ignominious withdrawal in April 1975—when a Soviet MiG-25 landed at Hakodate Airport. The surprise of this MiG landing shocked the Japanese people into realizing that their much-vaunted defense capability was actually a Potemkin shield. This shocked both government leaders and the general public.

At the time, the world looked on in laughter as the defecting pilot, Lt. Viktor Belenko, was tried only for violating immigration regulations and air traffic control regulations, and was not punished at all for his act of aggression. This was compounded in September 1983 when Korean Airlines flight 007 was shot down by Soviet forces over Sakhalin, which brought home to the Japanese how tense and cold-blooded the international situation was.

This was also the era of the Ron-Yasu honeymoon (between President Ronald Reagan and Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone) when U.S.-Japan relations appeared to be very good and problem-free but when things were not nearly as congenial as they appeared. Toshiba Machine Co.'s violation of COCOM regulations that surfaced in the spring of 1987 was both symbolic of and exacerbated the already-high tensions between the two countries. It was around this same time that talk began to be heard of a Structural Impediments Initiative—an initiative that is still boiling.

In all of this, the Japanese received what might be called a "partner shock" as the United States called on Japan to be a full partner and to bear its full security responsibilities. This might also be called

an external-pressure (*gaiatsu*) shock.

Seeking to respond to the widespread demands for globalization—demands that were heard both within Japan and from other countries—Japan began to realize that it had to contribute to the international community commensurate with its economic position. It was at this juncture that the Gulf crisis erupted with its seeming calls for the SDF to evolve an international role. Calls were heard that Japan should contribute not only money and materials but also men—that Japan should not only contribute to support other people's efforts but should take part in the effort.

This demand that Japan be willing to stand and sweat alongside its allies, of course, was seen as implying the demand that Japan be willing to bleed for the common cause. This then thrust constitutional revision to the forefront and created the public furor. This Gulf shock is bound to have continuing reverberations for the SDF and the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

How will the seemingly conflicting demands of detente and Japan's international role come together to shape Japanese defense policy?

A Fighting Force?

Spurred on by world events, the SDF has slowly but steadily grown to be one of the three largest military spenders in the world. This process was started in the first Mid-term Defense Program (FY1958–60), the second Mid-term Defense Program (FY1962–66), the third Mid-term Defense Program (FY1967–71), the fourth Mid-term Defense Program (FY1972–76), the National Defense Program Outline (adopted by the National Defense Council and approved by the Cabinet on October 29, 1976) leading to the so-called 1981 Mid-term Defense Program Estimate covering the years FY1983–87, and then the 1989 Mid-term Defense Program Estimate (following up on the 1981 Mid-term Defense Program Estimate by moving its final year up one year and then estimating the spending required in FY1986–90).

As former U.S. Defense Secretary Car-

lucci and Under-secretary of State (now Ambassador) Michael Armacost said in testimony before Congress in 1988, Japanese spending on defense comes to about \$40 billion if calculated according to the NATO definition (including retirement pensions and other auxiliary costs), which is more than Britain's \$35.7 billion, France's \$32.4 billion and West Germany's \$31.7 billion to make Japan the third-largest military power in the world. This is, I believe, typical of the way the world looks at the Japanese SDF.

When Japan's defense posture is stated in quantitative terms, the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) has 56 destroyers. This is about as many as Britain and twice as many destroyers as the U.S. 7th Fleet. The MSDF also has four times as many P-3C anti-submarine warfare (ASW) patrol aircraft as the U.S. 7th Fleet.

The Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) has about the same number and the same level of F-15 fighters and other combat

aircraft as the U.S. has stationed at home.

Likewise, the Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) has about the same forces stationed in Hokkaido as Britain has in west Germany (although the NATO forces in Germany are expected to be scaled down sharply with German unification and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact forces).

Burden-sharing is a concept frequently referred to in discussing Japan's defense effort, and this reference is often made in terms of what percentage Japan pays of the costs of stationing U.S. forces in Japan. At present, U.S. defense spending is of the order of \$300 billion. Of this, 43% goes to NATO-related purposes and 13% (\$40 billion) to Japan and the rest of Asia. The present cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan is about \$6 billion. Japan currently pays 42% of that (about \$2.5 billion) and is moving to up this figure with "special considerations."

Thus Japan is bearing a much larger share of the burden than Germany

Table 1 Changes in Defense Expenditures

FY	Item	GNP (initial forecast) (¥ billion)	General account (original) (¥ billion)	Growth from previous year (%)	Defense budget (original) (¥ billion)	Growth from previous year (%)	Ratio of defense budget to GNP (%)	Ratio of defense budget to general account (%)
1955		7,559	991.5	-0.8	134.9	-3.3	1.78	13.61
1965		28,160	3,658.1	12.4	301.4	9.6	1.07	8.24
1975		158,500	21,288.8	24.5	1,327.3	21.4	0.84	6.23
1976		168,100	24,296.0	14.1	1,512.4	13.9	0.90	6.22
1977		192,850	28,514.3	17.4	1,690.6	11.8	0.88	5.93
1978		210,600	34,295.0	20.3	1,901.0	12.4	0.90	5.54
1979		232,000	38,600.1	12.6	2,094.5	10.2	0.90	5.43
1980		247,800	42,588.8	10.3	2,230.2	6.5	0.90	5.24
1981		264,800	46,788.1	9.9	2,400.0	7.6	0.91	5.13
1982		277,200	49,680.8	6.2	2,586.1	7.8	0.93	5.21
1983		281,700	50,379.6	1.4	2,754.2	6.5	0.98	5.47
1984		296,000	50,627.2	0.5	2,934.6	6.55	0.99	5.80
1985		314,600	52,499.6	3.7	3,137.1	6.9	0.997	5.98
1986		336,700	54,088.6	3.0	3,343.5	6.58	0.993	6.18
1987		350,400	54,101.0	0.0	3,617.4	5.2	1.004	6.50
1988		365,200	56,699.7	4.8	3,700.3	5.2	1.013	6.53
1989		389,700	60,414.2	6.6	3,919.8	5.9	1.006	6.49

Table 2 Classification and Numbers of Personnel of the Defense Agency

Defense Agency personnel	Special positions	Director General		Members of SDF	Authorized in manning table	Administrative Vice Minister	Non-fixed-term personnel	Officers 39,543 (643)		
		Parliamentary Vice Minister				Counselors, etc 229		Warrant officers 4,687		
						Administrative officials, etc. 25,919		Enlisted (upper) 123,492 (854)		
						SDF personnel 273,801		Enlisted (lower) 4,498 (408)		
						Reserve personnel 47,900		Fixed-term personnel	Enlisted (lower) 74,971 (3,019)	
						National Defense Academy students				
						National Defense Medical College students				
						Part-time officials				
		General positions				Authorized in manning table		(omitted)		
						Not authorized in manning table				

Notes: 1. Figures in left-hand diagram show the number of authorized manning table as of the end of 1988.
2. Figures in right-hand diagram show actual numbers as of the end of 1988.
3. Figures in parentheses show SDF women personnel.

(which has the largest contingent of U.S. forces on its soil). With the U.S. seeing a sharp deterioration in its budgetary capability as a result of the Gulf crisis and thus asking Japan to pick up the tab for all of the yen-denominated expenses, Japan has indicated its agreement and, without waiting to revise the Status of Forces Agreement in 1992, has moved to accommodate this request over the half-decade starting in 1991.

This does not square at all with the "free rider" label that used to be attached to Japan. In fact, retired Brig. Gen. Kenneth Hunt of the world-famous International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) in London has recently published an article entitled "Japanese National Se-

curity" in the Institute's *Survival* in which he clearly refutes the perception that Japan is not doing anything and ought to do more and concludes that the current Japanese stance is quite adequate.

There have already been repeated expressions of anxiety from Japan's neighbors that Japan may be turning into a military power, indicating that Japan's SDF buildup has already made considerable progress.

Yet although Japan already possesses a well-balanced military force with some of the most advanced weaponry in the U.S. arsenal—including the F-15 interceptor, the Patriot surface-to-air missile, the P-3C ASW aircraft, the E-2C early warning aircraft and the Aegis-equipped

destroyer—made in Japan under co-production licensing agreements, this is no guarantee that the SDF would be a smoothly functioning fighting force on the battlefield. In fact, not having any wartime experience since 1945, Japan has yet to test its men and equipment under actual combat conditions and there is thus considerable doubt about how well they would perform.

Would things actually go as well in real life as they go in the simulations? Japanese forces may be effective in a short, limited conflict, but they are much less likely to be as effective in a prolonged battle or in meeting unexpected developments. Japan has considerable static defenses, but its performance under dynamic battlefield conditions is still an unknown.

Basic concept

What does Japan intend to do with this muscle? What is the basic thinking behind Japanese defense policy?

To briefly summarize the defense policy section of the *White Paper on Defense* released in September 1990, the four basic tenets of Japanese defense policy are:

- (1) To have the capability needed to deter and repel aggression, this capability to be commensurate with Japan's circumstances.
- (2) To make the diplomatic efforts for friendship and cooperation befitting a free democracy.
- (3) To observe the Constitution and to firmly maintain the basic defense policy, the three non-nuclear principles and the security arrangements with the United States.
- (4) To work carefully to achieve a popular consensus on the legal measures for dealing with an emergency and for creating a civil defense structure.

In addition, the Gulf crisis has seemed to many people to add the following two tenets:

- (5) To put a crisis management capability in place.
- (6) To develop the capability to cooperate with peacekeeping operations.

Given these basic premises, there are a

great many specific policies being implemented to achieve these ends. Nevertheless, the question still remains of whether or not Japan actually possesses a realistic defense strategy. To many, it appears that Japan has a defense policy but no defense strategy. Put more bluntly, there is a limit to what the SDF can do on their own and it is impossible to even consider defending Japan except in cooperation with U.S. forces. Japanese defense policy is founded on the assumption that America will always be there to help, and this is the reality behind the pieties of Japanese defense policy.

In keeping with this expectation, Japan's strategic posture changes depending on what particular scenario happens to be playing in Washington at the time. When the U.S. emphasis is on the Korean Peninsula, the SDF quickly shifts in that direction. When the U.S. is looking North, the SDF quickly looks North. Seen from SDF headquarters, the importance of the security arrangements with the United States means that the SDF must always be ready to run alongside the United States.

What, then, would happen if the U.S. decided to opt out of this relationship and told the SDF that they were on their own? Only half in jest, the standard answer to this question is that thrown on their own and forced to pursue cold military effectiveness, the SDF would ultimately decide they needed nuclear weapons. The U.S.-Japan security arrangements are thus very important not only for the two principals but for the entire world, not least because they moot the nuclear issue for Japan.

Likewise, since the bilateral agreement on the sharing of military technology is considered basic to the maintenance of the security arrangements with the United States and hence to Japanese defense policy, it is instructive here to look at how well this cooperation is working. This is clearly demonstrated by the furor over the FSX fighter. Because this involves cooperation between two sovereign nations and thus entails a degree of compromise, the degree of cooperation on this FSX issue is widely perceived as indicative of the closeness of the two countries' security

cooperation. Yet the reality of the FSX would indicate that Japan's rudderless defense policy and the bilateral security arrangements are at a very perilous stage.

What next?

The first question facing Japanese defense policy is what to do now that the Soviet threat has seemingly evaporated. What are the shared objectives of the security cooperation with the United States to be? This is, of course, the question of the SDF's *raison d'être* and will have a profound impact on the SDF's structure and strategic alignment.

The second question is how to restructure Japanese defense and the security arrangements with the United States more flexibly in the world of chaos that prevails until the new world order takes hold. Military muscle alone is an inadequate defense, as proved by the frequency of conflict worldwide. It is essential that Japanese defense policy be linked with the strategy for peace, with economic strategy, and with crisis management in a comprehensive security policy.

Third is the question of how the SDF can legally cooperate with United Nations and other peacekeeping operations. This question was raised most vividly by the situation in the Gulf, but it is certainly not limited to that area. The question is not whether the SDF can legally take part or not but rather what can be done so that this is possible. There is no way out of this responsibility.

Fourth is the issue of civilian control. It is impossible for the bureaucrats at the Defense Agency to have a meaningful impact so long as the main political influence on defense policy is exercised by Diet members ignorant of defense policy and conservative old hawks who refuse to recognize that the world has changed. Although the SDF now has three times as many people under arms as it did before, the civilian apparatus has actually been cut back as part of a drive to streamline the government. It is clearly impossible to hope for strong civilian control (from defense bureaucrats assisting political leaders) under these circumstances.

Fifth is the question of whether Japan

and the world can really afford to have the Defense Agency and the SDF paralyzed while unprecedented change sweeps the rest of the world. It is clearly necessary to create the structures for a more rational, more flexible Japanese defense posture. This means revising the institutional structures by which the Cabinet formulates comprehensive security policy, and a good first step in this direction would be to move the National Institute for Defense Study out from under the Defense Agency and to put it under the Cabinet, charged with comprehensive defense studies. It would also help if arrangements could be made for Diet members, high-level bureaucrats, media personnel and even people from private business to study at the institute from time to time.

Sixth is the question of whether the time has not come to abandon the U.S.-Japan security arrangements with their implicit assumption that bilateral guarantees alone are adequate security in the modern world. It is time for Japan to move beyond this bilateral framework into a broader multilateral framework which would still allow the U.S.-Japan partnership to function and would be in both countries' better interests, as well as the best interests of the region and ultimately the international community as a whole. For example, a Pacific Security and Cooperation Initiative could well be formulated to institute confidence and security-building measures, to provide crisis management, to assess country-risk in economic terms, and even to ameliorate the friction that arises between partners.

Even if the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is not phased out, putting it within this kind of a framework would enable it to function better in times of need and would enable the SDF to play a global role in international peacekeeping operations. Not only would everyone else feel more comfortable with the SDF, even the SDF would feel better about themselves. ■

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