

Impact of Strengthened Japan-U.S. Alliance on China's Peripheral Security

By Huang Dahui and Zhao Luoxi
International Studies, Renmin University

Formed in the early 1950s, the Japan-U.S. alliance is a product of the cold war and its military alliance nature is further highlighted by the revised Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. After the end of the cold war, Japan-U.S. alliance is not deceased because of the dissolution of Soviet Union, on the contrary, it is further strengthened and consolidated in the new situation. Especially, the New Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation revised in April 2015 has further clarified the cooperation mechanism, expanded the cooperation scope and enriched the cooperation contents between the two countries. It is also expected that the strengthened Japan-U.S. alliance will have greater negative impact on China's peripheral security.

First, Japan and the United States will transform their traditional security cooperation into all-round cooperation. In connection with new changes in the global strategic situation, newly revised Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation still lays emphasis on traditional security cooperation, including increasing island off-shore defense and highlighting marine security. U.S. Secretary of State John Forbes Kerry publicly states that the U.S. treaty commitments to Japan remains ironclad and covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu Islands).

In addition to traditional security cooperation, new Guideline contains cooperation in new domains like space and cyberspace, including space surveillance, cyber

attack intelligence and information sharing, because these domains will play decisive roles in modern warfare. It is not hard to notice that the Japan-U.S. alliance's cooperation scope is further extended.

This newly revised Guideline has expanded the cooperation scope and enriched the cooperation contents between the two countries, and Japan-U.S. alliance transforms their traditional security cooperation into all-round cooperation.

Second, the two sides extend their regional focus to global reach. The Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation in 1997 set security services paradigms into three levels: normal, peripheral events and Japan in emergency. But in Japan and U.S. views, actual operations may be faced with two problems: the degree judgment and geographical judgment. As for degree judgment, it often encounters problems in the gray area between daily routine security work and Japan in emergencies.

The New Guideline replaces "Japan's peripheral events" with "important conditions affecting Japan's peace and security", which actually frees Japan from the leash of 1997 Guideline, and geographically no longer limits the Self-Defense Forces activities to the peripheral areas. So, there won't be any restrictions in Japan-U.S. cooperation contents. In name of "seamless" cooperation, the New Guideline enables Japanese Self-Defense Forces to provide support for the U.S. military under any circumstances worldwide, and the integration of the Self-Defense Forces with U.S.

military will be further accelerated. The security cooperation of Japan-U.S. alliance has developed from seam to seamless and from inflexibility to flexibility. The revision of the Guideline further weakens alliance's original intention on "regional military arrangements", and "maintaining Japan's security" is downgraded from the past major original intention to a part of the current essentials, and is replaced or additionally expanded by the "global security interventions".

Thus, the Japan-U.S. alliance has changed from a regional alliance to a global alliance and Japan aims to fulfill its obligations as U.S. ally globally.

Third, the two sides transform their previous asymmetric alliance into a more mutually beneficial alliance. After the defeat in World War II, Japan tilted to U.S. side and became an important part of the U.S. Asia-Pacific alliance system. In decades of postwar, Japan-U.S. military alliance had a high degree of inequality due to U.S. economic and military strength. The U.S. forcibly tied Japan to its "Chariot" in confrontation pattern of the cold war and Japan was always in a passive position on the security matters. We can say that Japan-U.S. alliance is an asymmetric alliance in which the United States leads and Japan follows.

However, since the new century, Japan exhibits a positive attitude on security issues as never before, especially puts a great deal of energy into the new revision of the Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation. The revised Guideline further clarifies division of responsibilities in different operations, one significant change is to strengthen the Japanese decision-making in combat operations. For example, if Japan is attacked, the new Guideline clearly provides the Self-Defense Forces combat mission with principles of autonomous implementation in different operations such as air control, missile defense, sea control, ground combat and interdisciplinary cooperation. The U.S. troops only give support to Self-Defense Forces in combat operation and make up for the lack of military strength by the Self-Defense Forces.

This revision of the Guideline made Japan

more agile and proactive in the alliance, and Japan-U.S. relationship has become more equal and mutually assistant. The alliance transforms its previous asymmetric alliance into a more mutual beneficial one.

Fourth, Japan-U.S. alliance has transformed from a mainly defensive alliance into a more offensive alliance. This revision of the Guideline has enriched the connotation of Japan-U.S. bilateral mutual defense. The new Guideline stipulates that the two sides will set up a permanent Japan-U.S. joint coordinating military institution to strengthen the close cooperation between the Self-Defense Forces and U.S. military stationed in Japan, and improve interoperability in commanding the troops. In cyber domain, the Guideline strengthens intelligence gathering and sharing ability between the two military. In addition, the new Guideline also enriches the connotation of the Japan and U.S. participation in the defense of a third party. The new Guideline stipulates that when Japan's friend is under attack and threatens the survival of the Japanese people and their right to pursue freedom and happiness, in order to ensure the survival and protection of the Japanese people, Japan could adopt means including the use of force in responding to the situation. These changes mean that Japan armed forces by the competent authority is allowed to launch an armed attack on other countries.

In August 2012, Japan and the United States began exploring revision of the Guideline related matters in the later ruling period of Democratic Party of Japan, but the work was delayed due to the shuffle of government. After Abe returns to power, he accelerates the process of revision work. In October 2014, Japan and the United States issued the Interim Report on the revision. This revision of the Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation has further consolidated and strengthened the Japan-U.S. relationship, which not only conforms to U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy, but is also consistent with the Japan's efforts to become a major political and military power, and the two countries' strategic intention to jointly cope with the rising of China is revealed completely.

From the U.S. perspective, with background that China's comprehensive national strength is continuously improving, President Obama actively implements the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy to consolidate U.S. presence and maintain U.S. superiority in the Asia-Pacific region.

In security area, the United States is now further strengthening its dual-role in the Asia-Pacific regional affairs: the protector for its allies and partners and the leader of the regional affairs. Japan must be the U.S. primary partner as Japan is the unsinkable aircraft carrier in the Pacific Ocean. On the one hand, the United States openly encourages Japan to actively develop defense forces. On the other hand, it consolidates Japan-U.S. alliance by the newly passed Guideline and emphasizes security commitment to Japan in order to form a deterrent force to China together.

Economically, one of the important supports in the economic field of the Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy is ensuring the attainment of Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP). The agreement currently has pulled in a dozen countries, including Japan, many of which are keen to counterbalance Beijing with growing centripetal force. In order to acquire Japan's further compromise on economic issues and contribute to reach TPP as soon as possible, the United States will naturally express support or acquiescence to Abe's various outrageous actions on security policy. Therefore, strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance is the inevitable U.S. policy support.

Trying to consolidate security relationship with the United States, Japan vigorously expands Japan-U.S. bilateral cooperation to "Japan-U.S. +" multilateral cooperation model. With intimate relationship of Japan-U.S. alliance as the fundamentals, and so-called freedom and democracy values as the foundation, Japan has been actively strengthening security relationships with other friendly countries and thereby also expanding both diplomatic and security cooperation in the peripheral region and across the globe. Japan stresses its active pacifism, and claims to have made international contributions. Taking peacekeeping operations, maritime security and

international terrorism as the breakthrough points, Japan on the one hand deepens relevant cooperation with the United States, on the other hand strengthens exchanges with Southeast Asian countries, Australia, India and even NATO. However, those mentioned above are actually camouflage of Japanese diplomacy and security. The essence is to find excuses and opportunities for Japan's military "normalization".

Strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance conforms to meet the essence of Japan's China policy, and strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance also meets Japan's domestic political needs.

The 2014 interim report on revising the Guideline mentioned China only exactly once, while the 2015 revised Guideline - official document - is extremely deft in its wording on China. In contrast to Japan's previous white papers and National Defense Program Outline, blaming China for one of the reasons of "increasingly complex security environment" is avoided, and China isn't named as a source of insecurity nor is even obliquely referred to nor linked to any other emergency.

However, the remaining virtually unspoken language is that the United States and Japan stress unity on maintaining deterrence and strategy over how to deal with a more assertive and growing China. Although the two countries try to be restraint when releasing the Guideline, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry stressed that the Guideline commitment to Japan security remains ironclad and covers all territories under Japan's administration, including the Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. Those remarks clearly indicate that the strategic goal of strengthening Japan-U.S. alliance is to cope with rising China.

After revision of the Guideline for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation, Japan-U.S. alliance is further consolidated and upgraded, which makes security situation in the Asia-Pacific region more complex and brings about more negative impacts on China's peripheral security inevitably.

Firstly, the United States and Japan will promote security cooperation network together in the Asia-Pacific. With the background of China's sustained and rapid

economic growth and continuous improvement of the level of military modernization, the U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy will further emphasize its role in regional alliance system. Japan will play a “leadership” role in certain extent as the U.S. most important ally in the Asia-Pacific region and the most important pillar in Asia-Pacific strategy. At the same time, Japan also strengthens security relationships with Australia, Vietnam, the Philippines, India and other countries. In addition to U.S. strengthening the existing bilateral alliance, there are three specific ways for Japan and the United States to promote security cooperation practices in a network pattern: “U.S.-Japan +1”, “Japan +1” and “Japan + X”.

On the “U.S.-Japan+1” model, U.S.-Japan-India and U.S.-Japan-Australia security cooperation are further deepened. On the “Japan+1” model, Japan-Australia, Japan-Vietnam, Japan-Philippines, Japan-India security relationships are all significantly strengthened. On the “Japan+X” model, Japan-India-Australia trilateral relationship has become new breakthrough in security cooperation. The Japanese Government hopes to establish dialogue mechanism with Australia which is regarded as Japan’s para-ally, and India who has profound strategic relationship with Japan.

The above three security cooperation models are important complement to, reinforcement of and expansion for the traditional bilateral U.S.-led hub-and-spoke system. Japan’s position and role are further highlighted. To some extent, Japan has become chief actor to balance China in the U.S. Asia-Pacific Rebalancing strategy.

Secondly, Japan will accelerate the steps towards “a normal country”. In 2009 Japan International Forum, Japanese think tank submitted a strategy report titled Active Pacifism and Proper State of Japan-U.S. alliance, and explicitly recommended that Japan should cooperate with U.S. strategic adjustment, and lift the ban of collective self-defense, modify the three principles of arms exports and re-examine the three non-nuclear principles and so on. After the short-term ruling of Democratic Party, Abe’s Liberal Democratic Party returns to power and shows unprecedented enthusiasm to the so-called “active pacifism”. This new revision of the Guideline is consistent with the recommendations in 2009 strategy report. We can say that the “active pacifism” Japan envisions and Japan-U.S. alliance expects is significantly satisfied through revision of the Guideline. A strengthened Japan-U.S. alliance will further boost Japan’s acceleration towards a “normal

On the one hand, Japan’s economic and science and technology development are at the world’s top level. Consolidating and strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance will boost further breakthroughs, whether in conventional domain of arms manufacturing, or in the emerging domains of space, cyber technology. The new Guideline deletes the wording on “surrounding situation” and is replaced by “significantly influential events”, which substantially expands the scope of Japan’s containment on China.

On the other hand, Japan, whose domestic security system is still subject to much legal bondage, will use the new Guideline as a guiding thought to seek further legal breakthrough.

Thirdly, the negative effects on China’s peripheral security, especially maritime safety will become more prominent. The Report to the 18th CPC National Congress proposes a goal of building China a maritime strong power, which attracts high attention of Japan and the United States. As traditional “maritime strong powers”, Japan and the United States intervene in Chinese maritime affairs by strengthening the alliance, clearly demonstrating the intentions to encircle and blockade China in the seas. This will severely compress strategic buffer for Chinese maritime territory, and make Chinese peripheral security situation even more complicated and grim.

In the revised Guideline, Japan and the United States put emphasis on maritime security maintenance, although the text just mentions the two countries would share the general maritime surveillance information, and strengthen joint training and exercises, etc. However, just as Associated Press points out, the new Guideline will strengthen Japan’s ability of missile defense, naval patrols and mine clearance in order to deal with China’s growing strength and confidence in the disputed South China Sea region.

In summary, against the dual backdrops of the United States promoting Asia-Pacific rebalancing strategy and Japan actively stepping toward a “normal country”, the two countries will rely on each other and further deepen the alliance to respond to China’s rise. A strengthened Japan-U.S. alliance is bound to bring greater negative impacts on China’s periphery security. How to avoid loss and mitigate the negative impact will be an important long-term task to China’s diplomacy.

(Abridged translation of the Article from <http://www.csstoday.net>)