

# South Asia Analysis Group

Published on *South Asia Analysis Group* (<http://www.southasiaanalysis.org>)

[Home](#) > Japan's Security Challenges and its Deterrent Military Posture:

---

## Japan's Security Challenges and its Deterrent Military Posture:

Submitted by asiaadmin2 on Sat, 12/15/2018 - 23:58

**Paper No. 6471 .      Dated 16-Dec-2018**

By Dr Subhash Kapila

Japan facing comprehensive threats from a militaristic China and its nuclear proxy North Korea has finally woken up from its Peace Constitution Article 9 slumber realising that the 'China Threat' to Japan's National Security is real and embarked on review of reinforcing its deterrent capabilities both in terms of military hardware and operational doctrines.

Japan's security environment as Japanese PM Shinzo Abe recently remarked "Has become more tough in the last five years". Analytically interpreted this five year span is coincident with ascension to power in China of incumbent Chinese President Xi Jinping and China's switch-over from use of 'Soft Power' strategies to adopting 'Hard Power' muscular strategies incorporating aggressive military brinkmanship and political/military coercion.

Japan's main Threat Perceptions focus on China, North Korea and the maritime threats that could threaten her National Security and economic survival. The latter has acquired pronounced and threatening contours with China's disruptive activities in the South China Sea and China's increasing intrusiveness in the Indian Ocean posing potential threats not only to Japan but also Indo Pacific security as a whole.

China strategically recognises that what stands between China establishing hegemony over Western Pacific and East Asia is Japan with impressive Major Power credentials historically and existent in 2018 also. Japan's Mutual Security Treaty with United States and Japan's hosting of US Forward Military Presence in Japan has been a strong deterrent against Soviet Union earlier and more significantly against China's military assertiveness manifested in last five years.

Japan under leadership of incumbent PM Shinzo Abe has in view of the unsettled security environment that surrounds Japan has set in

motion reinforcement of Japanese deterrent capabilities and formulation of new National Defense Program Guidelines to replace the earlier 2008 version. This will also incorporate Mid Term Defense Program Acquisitions for the next five years for the Japanese Armed Forces for the next five years.

Japan has in the preceding five years been engaged in an incremental gradual military buildup of its military capabilities but with Japan perceiving that its security environment having become more complicated with a downslide in US-China relations seems to be putting into place a faster pace in military buildup.

China's propensity and temptations to use aggressive military brinkmanship stands reflected in China's actions in South China Sea which included forcible military occupation of Vietnamese and Philippines islands in South China Sea and construction of artificial islands to facilitate China's 'Full Spectrum Dominance' of the South China Sea maritime expanse.

China attempted the above strategy against Japan claiming sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands until stopped in its tracks by Japan standing firm against China's military and political coercion and forcing the United States that the United States was obliged to assist Japan in event of aggression against its Senkaku Islands.

China's establishment of full control over the South China Sea is a direct military threat to Japan's National Security and its economic survival as Japan's sea-lanes of energy supplies and trade and commerce traverses the South China Sea. China is in a position to choke Japan's life lines.

China's actions in the East China Sea against Japanese Senkaku Islands and China's continuance of aggressive naval activities and aerial combat air patrols in vicinity of East China Sea besides declaring a Chinese ADIZ was and is highly provocative bordering on it being a potential flashpoint. Chinese Navy submarines prowl around the seas of Japan.

Both of China's actions outlined above are manifestations of the 'China Threat' to Japan and by implication to the United States Forward Military Presence in Western Pacific centred in Japan and South Korea. The China Threat existent in Western Pacific is a crucial component of the overall 'China Threat' to Indo Pacific security.

The North Korea threat to Japan's National Security is not a direct military threat to Japan by North Korean military forces but a more potent threat manifested by North Korean provocative missile tests overflying Japan's mainland. China proxy use of North Korea's long range missiles arsenal facilitated by Chinese assistance become s a provocative tool to be used by China without initially getting actively involved in aggression against Japan.

China's main military threat against Japan is essentially a naval one either in terms of interdiction of Japanese seaplanes in the South China

Sea or forcibly occupying outlying Japanese Islands by amphibious operations. To the potency of the 'China Threat' against Japan must be added significant advances China has made in Cyber space and Outer Space Warfare.

Japan now fully alive to its potential military threats and the nature of challenging threats posed to Japan's security. Japan in its new military preparedness is thinking of switching over from an overall reinforcement of its conventional deterrent capabilities to buildup of multi-dimensional military capabilities aimed to cater for specific nature of threats that are emerging. It is also taking into account China's increasing focus and buildup of Cyber Warfare and Space Warfare capabilities.

In terms of discernible shifts of Japan's military postures there is now a greater weightage in increased South-centric military deployments catering for possible China threats as opposed to the earlier North-centric deployments focussed on the Soviet threats.

In terms of operational doctrines, Japan has exhibited its readiness to increase the frequency and reach of its naval deployments right upto the farthest end of the Indian Ocean, namely the Gulf of Aden and opposite the Chinese new base at Djibouti. Japanese Navy has conducted joint exercises with the navies of Indo Pacific and more significantly with Indian Navy both in the Indian Ocean and the Western Pacific.

Japan is also engaged in creation of Rapid Deployment Forces and also an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade. Both are said to be for operations to regain control over forcible occupation of outlying Japanese islands by hostile forces. While said to be for defensive purposes these formations also provide Japan with force projection capabilities. This is a welcome departure from long held Japanese defensive mindsets.

With Japan's pronounced threat being naval and maritime in content, Japan has focussed on a significant increase of Japanese Navy capabilities both in terms of acquisitions of naval combat destroyer ships and submarines. Japan had already in service two Helicopter Carriers which with the acquisition of Stealth vertical take-off F-35 fighter planes can be converted into full-fledged Aircraft Carriers. As I have always maintained that the Japanese Navy qualitatively can outmatch the Chinese Navy. Japan has a second Navy in the form of the Japanese Coast Guard whose larger ships match the tonnage of Japanese Navy destroyers and with fitting in of advanced weapon systems could be speedily converted into full-fledged destroyers.

The Japanese Air Force is in the process of replacing its combat fighter planes with the Fifth Generation US advanced Stealth Fighters F-35s. Israel is the only other country to which the United States has supplied these Stealth Fighter Aircraft. This would add a significant punch to the Japanese Air Force. Japan has major indigenous defence production capability of combat aircraft and other Air Force requirements.

The Japanese Army will see acquisition of advanced ant-tank missiles and other weapon with advanced surveillance sensors systems. The focus is likely be weapon systems which can inflict heavy damage on any attempts by hostile forces amphibious landings on Japanese

territory.

In terms of weapons systems acquisitions and other military equipment no problems exist for Japan for two reasons. First, Japan has advanced capabilities in indigenous defence production of naval ships, fighter aircraft and submarines beside requirement of the Japanese Army. Second, Japan feels obliged to acquire advanced weapons systems from the United States which provide increased inter-operability with weapon systems of US Forces in Japan. Taken together both these avenues give Japan the option of a fast-track military buildup should the security environment so dictate.

Seldom publicised is Japan's advanced capabilities in terms of indigenous production of long range missiles and spacecraft. One can expect a major increase in effort in these two fields ostensibly under the excuse of defensive operations like ballistic missile shields and surveillance satellites. Japan has the capability I believe of advanced anti-ballistic missiles which could destroy incoming hostile missile launches against Japanese targets far away from Japan over maritime spaces.

Japan exists in a hostile nuclear weapons security environment with China, Russia and North Korea having nuclear weapons and long-range missiles capabilities. Japan at some stage has to face the challenge of going-in for its own nuclear weaponisation however distasteful the choice is presently. This has been advocated by me right from 2002 onwards in my writings. Besides nuclear weapons being the currency of power, Japan cannot shy away from the nuclear option to maintain and sustain her rightful place as a global Major Power.

Financial resources for Japan's defence buildup to meet increased threats are not a problem but there is a problem of manpower. Japan's population base is small and so is the rate of population growth. In that eventuality Japan may have no options but to go in for highly advanced weapons systems with limited manning yet greater lethality. Robotics in which Japan has a lead of decades over other countries may provide the options.

Even with present military capabilities Japan is ranked fifth in terms of the world's most powerful Armed Forces and that speaks volumes for a small island nation. Japan has a long history of martial traditions which may be latent presently because of Peace Constitution mindset fostered in the minds of the Japanese public for over decades. But when Japan's survival assumes criticality, I firmly believe that Japan would not be found wanting in terms of political will to use all the instruments of power at its disposal to great effect.

Since China figures high in Japan's threat perceptions it may be worth pointing out that in recent surveys it was found that 72% of Japanese citizens do not trust China. It is also worth pointing that unlike India which abounds in China-apologists despite a more pronounced China threat to India, no China-apologists are noticeable in Japan. That is a critical additive for Japan's political leadership.

Concluding, it needs to be reiterated that Japan along with India is a critical pillar of Asian security and Indo Pacific stability. Conscious of that responsibility Japan has embarked on reformulation of its National Defense Guidelines and buildup of its military capabilities with

particular reference to the nature and dimensions of emergent threats to Japan's security. That Japan is making headway in this direction is well indicated that China thought it prudent to invite Japanese PM Shinzo Abe to Beijing recently---seven years after the last Japanese Prime Ministerial visit to Beijing. This was also accompanied by a lessening of anti-Japanese rhetoric in China.

**Tags:**

[japan](#) [1]

[china](#) [2]

[Maritime Security](#) [3]

**Category:**

[Papers](#) [4]

**Countries:**

[East Asia](#) [5]

[China](#) [6]

[Japan](#) [7]

**Topics:**

[Strategic Affairs & Security](#) [8]

**Source URL:** <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/node/2394>

**Links**

- [1] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/11>
- [2] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/6>
- [3] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/taxonomy/term/1383>
- [4] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/papers>
- [5] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/east-asia>
- [6] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/china>
- [7] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/japan>
- [8] <http://www.southasiaanalysis.org/strategic-affairs-and-security>