

## *Don't Expect Much from Japan in the Indian Ocean*

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### **Japan, an Indian Ocean Power**

Japan is an Indian Ocean power of long standing. Ten years ago, in a post-9/11 show of solidarity with the United States and to exercise a more muscular foreign policy, Tokyo committed vessels of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF, or MSDF) to the coalition naval contingent supporting combat operations in Afghanistan. JMSDF tankers resupplied coalition warships, while Aegis destroyers guarded against air and surface threats in the Arabian Sea. Japanese seamen posted impressive statistics for this naval enterprise. The Japan Ministry of Defense reported that JMSDF vessels supplied about 137 million gallons of fuel oil and some 2.8 gallons of water to customers from about a dozen countries, including the United States, Pakistan, France, Britain, and Germany. Tokyo spent over \$110 million on the logistics mission in its final two years according to Defense Ministry spokesmen, even as demand for such support dwindled.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Mari Yamaguchi, "Japanese Refueling Mission in Indian Ocean Ends," Associated Press, January 15, 2010.

The refueling mission lapsed in January 2010 when a new ruling coalition headed by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) allowed the law authorizing it to expire. Tokyo substituted some \$5 billion in civilian aid to Afghanistan for an outright JMSDF deployment. In so doing the Japanese government seemingly reverted to its longstanding pattern of supplying nonmilitary aid but not military forces to expeditions far from Japanese shores.<sup>3</sup> But Japan remained an Indian Ocean power even as its endeavors metamorphosed. It was a founding participant in the Proliferation Security Initiative in 2003 and has remained one of the initiative's foremost proponents.<sup>4</sup> A modest-sized Ground Self-Defense Force contingent deployed to Iraq in January 2004 for noncombat duty. And Japanese forces distinguished themselves later that year in rendering assistance to stricken nations following the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Tokyo joined the fight against Indian Ocean piracy in July 2009. Japanese mariners ply the anarchic Gulf of Aden and Arabian Sea alongside US, NATO, and European Union naval forces, as well as flotillas from individual nations such as India, Russia, and China. This open-ended out-of-area deployment marks the latest step toward fulfilling the global responsibilities Japan assumed following the Cold War. Tokyo negotiated port access at Djibouti to support forward-deployed JMSDF units and, presumably, to signal its steadfastness. By no means has Japan withdrawn from west of Malacca.

Now back up another decade. The George H. W. Bush administration went to extraordinary lengths to assemble a broad coalition for the first Gulf War, eliciting force contributions from powers as disparate as Syria and Denmark. Yet Japan—arguably the United States' closest ally, alongside the United Kingdom—demurred. Instead Tokyo offered generous financial support to underwrite coalition operations—and found itself ridiculed for “checkbook diplomacy.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>“Japan Ends Indian Ocean Refueling Mission,” UPI, January 15, 2010, <[http://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/US/2010/01/15/Japan-ends-Indian-Ocean-refueling-mission/UPI-48561263561569/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/US/2010/01/15/Japan-ends-Indian-Ocean-refueling-mission/UPI-48561263561569/)>.

<sup>4</sup> “Background on the Secretary of Defense Trip to China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea, January 9–January 14, 2011,” *Travels with Gates*, January 2011, US Defense Department Website, <[http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111\\_gates1/japan.asp](http://www.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111_gates1/japan.asp)>.

<sup>5</sup> Yukio Okamoto, “Japan and the United States: The Essential Alliance,” *Washington Quarterly* 25, no. 2 (spring 2002): pp. 59–72.

Such scorn had its effect. The Japanese government ordered JMSDF minesweepers to the Persian Gulf following the war. They cleared regional waters of Iraqi sea mines, a lingering menace to shipping. Strikingly, Japan's first overseas naval venture since 1945 took place in an expanse geopolitical thinker K. M. Panikkar describes as one of the "bays and bights" in the Indian Ocean. Only by traversing the Indian Ocean sea lanes and multiple narrow seas, notably at Hormuz and Malacca, can East Asian naval and merchant shipping reach this body of water.<sup>6</sup> Over the past twenty years, Japanese leaders grew accustomed to regarding the Indian Ocean as important to their national interest.

Now flash back another five decades from the onset of Desert Storm, to the opening phases of World War II at sea. Japan struck at the US Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor in December 1941 while demolishing Allied defenses along the South China Sea rim. Historian Samuel Eliot Morison reports that the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) command opted to consolidate a forward defense west of the South China Sea while giving the British Eastern Fleet based on Ceylon "a taste of Pearl Harbor."<sup>7</sup> Japanese forces swiftly occupied the Andaman and Nicobar islands, shielding the western approaches to the "Southern Resource Area" from attack from the Indian Ocean.<sup>8</sup>

Adm. Chuichi Nagumo's Striking Force—essentially the same fleet of carriers and escorts that had pummeled Pearl Harbor—bombarded the British seaport of Colombo on April 5, 1942. The Eastern Fleet had sortied upon learning of the impending Japanese strike. Japanese naval aviators nevertheless found and sank the Royal Navy heavy cruisers *Dorsetshire* and *Cornwall* at sea.<sup>9</sup> Nagumo's task force assaulted the British base at Trincomalee on April 9. Again the Japanese did most of their damage at sea, sinking Royal Navy carrier *Hermes* and destroyer *Vampire*, the flattop's escort.

A second IJN fleet commanded by Vice Adm. Jisaburo Ozawa was "raising havoc with merchant shipping in the Bay of Bengal" during Nagumo's rampage, while

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<sup>6</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Geographical Factors in Indian History* (Bombay: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, 1955), pp. 58-59.

<sup>7</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1947-1962), vol. 3, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 382.

<sup>8</sup> Morison, *Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 381.

<sup>9</sup> Morison, *Rising Sun in the Pacific*, p. 383.

Japanese submarines raided shipping off the Indian west coast. IJN forces sank some 23 merchantmen and crippled the Eastern Fleet before retiring to Kure via the Strait of Malacca. The Japanese Navy had operated across 120 degrees of latitude since December 7, exacting a heavy toll in Allied naval and merchant shipping while suffering no losses or damage to the surface fleet and only light casualties among naval aviators.<sup>10</sup>

This foray into Japan's nautical past illuminates three enduring factors in Japanese strategy toward the Indian Ocean. First, defensive aims may beckon Tokyo's attention toward the Indian Ocean and toward geostrategic features like the Malacca, Sunda, and Lombok straits that provide access to maritime South Asia. The notion that the SDF must mount a defense of the sea lanes as far from Japanese shores as possible resonates with many Japanese. As early as 1977, for example, Japan expanded its maritime defense perimeter to 1,000 nautical miles, encompassing seas near Taiwan and Saipan. Security threats can range from direct military challenges, as manifest in the British Eastern Fleet, to more amorphous menaces to the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and energy supplies, as in the case of Desert Storm, to the need to be a upstanding international citizen, as in the cases of counterpiracy and tsunami relief. Many Japanese, unsurprisingly, consider the Indian Ocean integral to the nation's well-being and good name.

Second, different rules govern Japanese operations in the Indian Ocean. The disjuncture between Japanese strategy in East and South Asia was especially striking during World War II. IJN commanders proved indifferent—at best—toward raiding logistics vessels supporting the US Navy's remorseless advance across the Pacific, whereas Japanese submarines and surface fleets ran wild against Allied shipping in South Asia. If Japanese naval officials ever took note of this disparity in operating practices, they gave little sign of it. Whether Japanese planners today treat the Indo-Pacific theater as a seamless operating area or as two distinct bodies of water is unclear. But understanding Tokyo's geospatial perceptions surely opens a window into Japanese strategic thought.

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<sup>10</sup> Morison, *Rising Sun in the Pacific*, pp. 384-386.

And third, there appears to be a self-limiting character to such operations. Expeditionary operations were a luxury Tokyo could easily afford in 1991 and after 2001. The chief threat to Japanese security—the Soviet Union and its navy—had evanesced, while no new, immediate threat had yet taken form. In other words, Japanese activism in the Indian Ocean is attributable in part to the decade-long “peace dividend” the West reaped from the Soviet Union’s demise. Tokyo acted boldly because it could afford to do so.

As the security environment deteriorates closer to home, Japanese willingness to spend political and military capital on extraregional missions will diminish commensurately. An economically dynamic, militarily strong China now eyes assets like the Senkaku [Diaoyutai] and Ryukyu islands—assets Tokyo holds dear. Any Japanese government will place greater weight on managing direct threats to sovereignty and material prosperity than on meeting abstract, diffuse challenges in regions where Japan remains a marginal player.

### **Multiple Theaters, Finite Resources**

Japan expects much from its armed forces for a pacifist country that is constitutionally barred from possessing the means to resolve disputes by military means. Tokyo has defined increasingly ambitious political and strategic aims over the past decade while fixing the resources available to fulfill these aims at low levels typical of the post-World War II era. A chasm has opened among ends, ways, and means as a result. Japanese policymakers appear unenthusiastic about tapping additional national resources to realign strategy with policy. Nor is it clear that they grasp the implications of this mismatch, considering the deficit in strategic thought that bedevils postwar Japan.<sup>11</sup>

Barring some powerful outside stimulus that shifts the body politic toward greater military preparedness and more generous defense budgets, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF, or SDF) will either tacitly set priorities among the myriad tasks

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<sup>11</sup> For a lengthy treatment of this phenomenon, see Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, “Japanese Maritime Thought: If Not Mahan, Who?” *Naval War College Review* 59, no. 3 (summer 2006): pp. 23-51.

assigned to them or stretch themselves thin trying to accomplish all missions, in all theaters, with static or declining numbers of ships and aircraft. The record of Japanese strategic thought during the interwar years points toward the latter. During the years leading up to World War II, Japanese leaders could not bring themselves to set priorities among adversaries. Instead Tokyo chose to confront them all and egregiously overextended itself. Japan might again consciously elect to overreach, or it might do so through policy drift.

We undertake a purely military and naval strategic analysis to explain why this is so. Writes strategic theorist Carl von Clausewitz, policymakers and commanders should concentrate resources on the “center of gravity”—the “hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends”—unless secondary theaters or operations hold such promise that it appears worthwhile to risk setbacks to the principal effort.<sup>12</sup> Conserving materiel and manpower is his chief concern. Clausewitz sets forth a simple test to help commanders determine when it is prudent to undertake such operations:

The principle of aiming everything at the enemy’s center of gravity admits of only one exception—that is, when secondary operations look *exceptionally rewarding*. But we must repeat that only decisive superiority can justify diverting strength without risking too much in the principal theater.<sup>13</sup>

The Prussian theorist clearly has hot war in mind rather than uneasy peace. Even so, his metrics for secondary efforts—exceptionally rewarding, decisive superiority in the principal theater, and thus sufficient capacity to spare resources for secondary objects—can help outsiders peer dimly into Japan’s maritime future, discerning Tokyo’s hierarchy of needs and how it may apportion military resources to meet these needs.

Sir Julian Corbett, an avowedly Clausewitzian maritime thinker, lends credence to this analysis. Corbett writes that a dominant sea power can use its navy to isolate the geographic object, focusing its resources on faraway security threats. More importantly for our analysis of Japan, the sea power must possess the wherewithal to shield the

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<sup>12</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed., trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 595-596.

<sup>13</sup> Clausewitz, *On War*, p. 618.

homeland against an unlimited counterstroke.<sup>14</sup> Implicit is that only foolhardy political and strategic leaders would risk the homeland for the sake of limited objectives far from home.

In this spirit, Alfred Thayer Mahan took British leaders to task for their handling of maritime operations in the War of American Independence. To Mahan it seemed nonsensical to leave the bulk of the Royal Navy on station in North America, a lesser object, when a strong Franco-Spanish fleet posed a clear and present danger to the British Isles.<sup>15</sup> And indeed, the British Empire of Mahan's and Corbett's day drew down its commitments in the Far East and the Americas. Royal Navy squadrons came home to defend the homeland from Germany's burgeoning High Seas Fleet, an immediate danger to British naval mastery. By no means is Japan exempt from Corbett's and Mahan's inexorable logic. Japanese interests in the Indian Ocean are far less compelling than were British interests in North America, then a cornerstone of the British Empire. Looking homeward is a natural impulse for Tokyo. This is especially true now, in the aftermath of the March 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami and the ensuing Fukushima nuclear disaster.

Plainly, then, thorny strategic questions lie before Tokyo. Already inferior in numbers, the SDF is losing its edge in quality over adversaries in the main theater, East Asia, even as threats to Japanese interests in South Asia remain remote, ill-defined, and of indefinite duration. Japan still boasts a world-class military, but its combat effectiveness is limited primarily to defending airspace and sea areas around the home islands. And the SDF arguably falls short even by such narrow standards. It could not have defeated an invasion during the Cold War without major US intervention. Doubts linger today about Japan's ability to defend outlying islands independently against concerted Chinese efforts to seize them. Tokyo never expected to act alone. It continues to plan on the assumption that the United States will step in during Japan's hour of need.

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<sup>14</sup> Julian S. Corbett, *Some Principles of Maritime Strategy* (1911; reprint, Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1988), pp. xxvii, 57-59.

<sup>15</sup> Alfred Thayer Mahan, *The Influence of Sea Power upon History, 1660-1783* (1890; repr., New York: Dover, 1987), pp. 529-532.

China's nautical rise, then, will likely ratify Tokyo's instinct for self-preservation. Strategic logic will keep the bulk of SDF forces closer to home than South Asia despite US preferences. The 2007 US Maritime Strategy, the authoritative statement of US aims in the nautical realm, pronounces the Indian Ocean one of two vital theaters for the US sea services, the other being the Western Pacific. The strategy also makes finding allies and partners to share the burden in these two theaters an overriding priority. Yet Washington should not bank on Tokyo's mounting an effort in the Indian Ocean serious enough to advance American goals in the region.<sup>16</sup>

This is not to say Japanese seafarers have nothing to contribute. The JSDF may prove capable of shouldering enough of the load in East Asia to release US assets for service in Southeast and South Asia. China too must think about affairs in home waters and skies. As it girds itself to, say, defend the Ryukyu Islands from amphibious assault, the SDF keeps the People's Liberation Army (PLA) from turning its undivided attention to the Indian Ocean. Japan helps its allies indirectly by helping itself, forcing Beijing to comply with the same Clausewitzian logic that bounds Tokyo's wider aspirations.

### **A More "Normal" Power**

No longer is Japan the political shrinking violet of the immediate postwar years. History will look back on the first decade of the twenty-first century as a turning point for Japanese strategy, both in East Asia and beyond. As noted before, Japanese contributions to international security following the 9/11 terrorist attacks were spectacular by past standards. Tokyo's endeavors showcased its political willingness and military capacity to bear responsibilities commensurate with its economic prowess. Change has been afoot for some time.

This strategic turnaround elicited praise from some quarters, condemnation from others. But few seemed to grasp its implications, or even that there *were* any implications. The discussion took place on too high a plane, far removed from everyday concerns such as whether Tokyo possessed enough—or the right—physical implements to put a more assertive policy into effect. Even the most cogent analyses assumed Tokyo

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<sup>16</sup> US Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, *A Cooperative Strategy for 21st Century Seapower*, October 2007, US Navy Website, <<http://www.navy.mil/maritime/Maritimestrategy.pdf>>.



would muster adequate financial resources and the right mix of material capabilities to fulfill its self-appointed destiny. In other words, discourse about political and grand-strategic ends obscured the more workmanlike question of whether, and how, Japan could generate sufficient means to attain newly ambitious ends.

This disregard of means was particularly worrisome with regard to the JMSDF, which bore the vast majority of the responsibilities arising from the nation's strategic transition. It is hard to imagine how Japan could have prosecuted any post-9/11 operations absent robust, well-balanced seagoing forces. It became clear early in the new century that emerging Japanese policy and security objectives could outpace the MSDF fleet's capacity. It was also unclear whether Japanese mariners could cope with the bewildering array of contingencies entrusted to them. A thoroughgoing effort to recalibrate means with ends appeared overdue.

### **Interests and Policy Today: The View from Tokyo**

Now consider current-day Japanese policy. The August 2009 elections brought an end to a half-century of Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) rule, ushering in a Democratic Party of Japan government determined to recenter Japanese foreign policy on Asia. Putting some distance between Tokyo and Washington was a corollary to an Asia-centric policy. Reopening negotiations over realignment of Futenma Marine Corps Air Station constituted part of the DPJ bid for greater autonomy, as did the concept of an "East Asian Community." Debate over Japan's becoming a more normal great power subsided, as did talk of dispensing with the nuclear-weapons taboo.

The DPJ quickly reconsidered its new foreign-policy direction in 2010. China and North Korea prompted DPJ officials' about-face. North Korea sank the South Korean corvette *Cheonan*, revealed a new uranium-enrichment facility, and shelled an island along the inter-Korean frontier. China sent warships through straits separating Japanese islands, raised a ruckus over allied naval exercises in the Yellow Sea, and—most provocatively from Tokyo's standpoint—reacted vociferously after Japanese law enforcement arrested a Chinese fishing-boat skipper filmed ramming Japan Coast Guard vessels in the waters off the Senkakus. Beijing deployed economic coercion,

cutting off Japan's only supply of "rare earth" minerals critical to electronic manufactures.

In short, events seemingly discredited the premises underlying DPJ foreign policy. East Asia suddenly looked like a tough neighborhood, inhospitable for an East Asian Community. Last year thus represented a watershed in Japanese foreign policy. DPJ policy came to resemble that of the LDP more than it differed from it. Chinese and North Korean actions transfixed the attentions of officialdom on nearby waters and skies. Tokyo already considered the Indian Ocean a secondary theater before 2010. Immediate challenges reaffirmed Japanese leaders' hierarchy of strategic priorities.

The surest guides to Japanese interests, policy, and grand strategy are official statements such as the annual *Defense of Japan* white papers published by the Ministry of Defense; the periodic National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), updated most recently by the Security Council and the Cabinet in December 2010; and the Mid-Term Defense Program, in essence a five-year plan for realizing new defense capabilities specified in the NDPG. We survey such documents to glimpse how the ruling DPJ government appraises the strategic setting and the proper ways to manage it.

*Defense of Japan 2010* takes note of the "complex and uncertain" international-security environment, ascribing the turbulence to the return of powers like China, India, and Russia to economic prominence, the relative decline of leading powers like the United States, and maladies ranging from the proliferation of mass-destruction weaponry to "the danger of fragile nations becoming hotbeds for international terrorism."<sup>17</sup> Minister of Defense Toshimi Kitazawa vows to pursue "an exclusively defense oriented policy" and "refrain from becoming a military power that threatens other countries." At the same time he pledges that Tokyo will "continue to adhere to the Japan-U.S. Security Arrangements," and to "the basic parameters of our defense policy of independently building a moderate defense capability while ensuring civilian control and abiding by the Three Non-Nuclear Principles." Because Japan remains dependent

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<sup>17</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2010*, <[http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w\\_paper/2010.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/2010.html)>, p. 2.

on overseas resource shipments, observes Kitazawa, JMSDF destroyers and P-3C aircraft routinely patrol the western Indian Ocean.<sup>18</sup>

While the defense white paper pays tribute to the time-honored mission of repelling full-scale territorial invasion, it also instructs the SDF to prepare for “new threats and diverse contingencies” such as ballistic-missile attacks, guerrilla and special-operations incursions into Japanese territory, the use of nuclear, biological, or chemical arms against military or urban areas, aggression against offshore islands, and natural disasters.<sup>19</sup> Over and above missions relating directly to defense of Japanese interests, *Defense of Japan 2010* restates the LDP government’s commitment—spelled out in the 2004 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG)—to making “international peace cooperation activities” one of the SDF’s “primary missions.” Such activities encompass UN-sanctioned efforts and humanitarian and disaster relief.<sup>20</sup>

In short, Tokyo has assigned the SDF an exceedingly full slate of missions—especially for armed forces whose budget remains capped at its postwar level of 1 percent of gross domestic product, far beneath figures typical of great powers like China and the United States. Whether the DPJ government can allocate resources deftly enough to balance traditional against nontraditional maritime functions remains to be seen. In our judgment this will prove troublesome, particularly for the JMSDF, the first line of defense against most threats and contingencies envisaged in the defense white paper.

As missile threats gather in East Asia, for instance, JMSDF Aegis destroyers equipped with ballistic-missile defenses—in effect Tokyo’s capital ships, the core of its fleet—will likely find themselves tethered to home waters. Irregular forces and amphibious assault troops must travel by sea to do harm on Japanese territory. Terrorists intent on mass-destruction attacks would probably come oversea as well. Interdicting or defeating such scourges relies overwhelmingly on sea power. Tokyo’s resolve to grapple with distant problems appears doubtful in light of immediate

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<sup>18</sup> Toshimi Kitazawa, Foreword to *Defense of Japan 2010*.

<sup>19</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2010*, pp. 205-235.

<sup>20</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan 2010*, pp. 322-348.

concerns. Only grudgingly will the leadership order more than token forces to remote theaters like South Asia.

### **Japanese Strategy in the Indian Ocean: Inextricable from the Western Pacific**

It is entirely possible, then, that Japanese political ends will outstrip ways and means. In August 2010, the DPJ Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era, a blue-ribbon commission entrusted with furnishing input for the National Defense Program Guidelines, published a report titled *Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era*. The council, a body which typically helps mold public and elite consensus toward security challenges confronting Tokyo, espoused closer ties with the United States. It also sought to refocus Japan's strategic gaze on Okinawa and the other southwestern islands. The report recommended jettisoning the "Basic Defense Force Concept," or BDF, which is predicated on "static," largely passive deterrence. Declare the commissioners:

In sum, the BDF has become outdated. The NDPG 2004 states that we should "maintain those elements of the BDF Concept that remain valid," but it is time now for Japan to make a clean break with the Concept and depart from the passive thinking and customs embedded therein in order for Japan to achieve necessary and in-depth reform of its defense posture.<sup>21</sup>

Replacing static deterrence—a Cold War legacy premised on strong yet relatively immobile defenses designed to repel assault—would be the concept of "dynamic deterrence." Dynamic deterrence would involve procuring and training mobile forces to conduct "timely and appropriate operations" as ordered by the political leadership. Agility would be its watchword. Such forces could deploy swiftly to remote islands for a variety of contingencies, meeting challenges as they arose. To implement dynamic deterrence, the JSDF would concurrently revivify aerial, surface, and underwater surveillance operations while tightening up joint and combined interoperability with the US military. Recent developments, contended the council, have "increased the

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<sup>21</sup> Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era, *Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era: Toward a Peace-Creating Nation*, August 2010, p. 24, <[http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/shin-ampobouei2010/houkokusyo\\_e.pdf](http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/shin-ampobouei2010/houkokusyo_e.pdf)>.

importance of ‘dynamic deterrence’ with enhanced operational capabilities. The idea of static deterrence is no longer sufficient.”<sup>22</sup>

True to the spirit of *Defense of Japan 2010, Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities* lists contingencies such as warding off ballistic- or cruise-missile strikes; guarding against cyberattacks or terrorist or special-forces assaults; upholding security in Japanese territorial waters and airspace, on largely or wholly undefended outlying islands, and in exclusive economic zones; executing noncombatant evacuations; and responding to “contingencies in areas surrounding Japan.” The latter amounts to a catch-all for managing crises on the Korean Peninsula or adjacent waters, blunting attempts to deny Japanese maritime claims by force, and coping with regime change or collapse in Asian countries.<sup>23</sup> In short, the council evidently expects the SDF to perform virtually any mission at any place at any time, all while reinventing itself as a nimble force radiating flexible deterrence.

The framers of the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines seemingly drew inspiration from the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era. Under the NDPG, the government pledges to streamline interservice and interagency coordination, allowing for more cohesive effort in times of crisis or war. The document echoes *Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities* by proclaiming that Tokyo will construct a “Dynamic Defense Force” to replace the Basic Defense Force. Not only will the Dynamic Defense Force bolster deterrence through “timely and active ‘operations,’” but this revitalized SDF will “enable Japan to play active roles in various occasions such as international peace cooperation activities.” The NDPG undertakes to “further enhance and develop” the transpacific alliance while expanding US-Japanese ventures into new areas such as cyberspace security. And the document declares in general terms that Japan will seek “multilayered security cooperation” with actors ranging from

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<sup>22</sup> Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era, *Japan’s Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>23</sup> Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in the New Era, *Japan’s Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities*, pp. 25-29.

individual Asian states to multinational bodies such as NATO and the European Union.<sup>24</sup>

We can distill the main elements of Japanese strategy from these documents, factoring in the changeover of leadership from LDP to DPJ along with the major intervening variable, namely a mercurial, brawny, seafaring China. First, DPJ officials will play down one of their banner issues, realignment of Futenma and other US military facilities, for the sake of allied amity. Second, Tokyo intends to rededicate itself to the US-Japanese alliance rather than trying to found an East Asian Community that now appears farfetched. Third, nuclear weapons remain unequivocally off the table. Fourth, the SDF will preserve a modicum of preparedness for territorial invasion while shifting the bulk of its resources and energies to dynamic deterrence and the nontraditional missions cataloged above. But fifth, the 1 percent ceiling on SDF budgets will remain in place.

In practical terms, the JMSDF will continue policing waters off Somalia, a function that reinforces allied solidarity while fulfilling the DPJ leadership's stated commitments to international peace cooperation activities and preventive action against nascent threats. Tokyo will remain at the forefront of counterproliferation, moreover, prosecuting efforts under the Proliferation Security Initiative and like ventures. The SDF can spare too few assets to make a genuinely significant contribution to PSI operations in the Indian Ocean, but an operation could take place during the transit of MSDF units to or from the Gulf of Aden or while on station there. Such coincidences are by no means unheard-of. US Navy warships were transiting the Indian Ocean following the 2004 tsunami. They could pause to render humanitarian assistance simply because they happened to be near the stricken zone. SDF forces will doubtless avail themselves of similar opportunities should they arise.

Meaningful and sustainable Japanese presence in the Indian Ocean, defined here as the capacity to assert local control of important waters for discrete periods of time, nonetheless remains an elusive prospect for the MSDF. Limits to what Japan can or is

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<sup>24</sup> Japan Ministry of Defense, "Summary of National Defense Program Guidelines, FY 2011-," <<http://www.uk.emb-japan.go.jp/en/news/NDPG.pdf>>. For helpful commentary on the NDPG, see Adam P. Liff, "Japan's 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines—Reading the Tea Leaves," *Asia Pacific Bulletin* 89 (December 22, 2010), <[http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/apb089\\_1.pdf](http://www.eastwestcenter.org/fileadmin/stored/pdfs/apb089_1.pdf)>.

willing to do in the Indian Ocean became evident as early as 2002, when Washington had to cajole a reluctant Tokyo into dispatching an Aegis destroyer to support Operation Enduring Freedom. At the time the JMSDF possessed only four of these vessels. Among the four escort fleets centered on Aegis-equipped ships, two were under repair or holding training exercises overseas. The Indian Ocean mission thus left only one major flotilla in homeport—a bare margin of security for the home islands.<sup>25</sup>

Indeed, former MSDF chief of staff Adm. Koichi Furusho fretted that Japan lacked the maritime capacity to monitor North Korean missile launches following Pyongyang's 2002 admission that it possessed a covert nuclear program.<sup>26</sup> Similar concerns were raised after the North launched a series of ballistic missiles in July 2006. Observers questioned whether enough MSDF destroyers were available to protect Japan.<sup>27</sup> The extent to which commissioning two *Atago*-class Aegis destroyers—essentially improved *Kongo*-class vessels—relieved such anxieties is unclear. With only six Aegis ships in the inventory (and roughly two of those being overhauled at any given time), the strain on the JMSDF fleet remains palpable.

Basic force-structure constraints are not the only problem. Manpower shortages plague the sea service owing to Japan's demographic decline and resultant recruitment and retention shortfalls. New missions proliferate while manpower remains fixed, forcing the MSDF into stopgap measures such as siphoning off servicemen from frontline destroyers and training and support units to fulfill the additional obligations. Some ships are shorthanded by as much as 30 percent. If personnel needs go unmet, warns Adm. Furusho, "a collapse involving insufficient manpower resources for recruitment, education and training (schools), and rear-area support" could result. If so, "the combat capabilities of the MSDF as a whole will be weakened."<sup>28</sup> Ministry of Defense plans to transfer sailors from four destroyers retired ahead of schedule to

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<sup>25</sup> "Japan's Marine Defense in Abnormal Situation With 1 Escort Flotilla at Home," *Tokyo Shimbun*, July 20, 2002 and Shigeru Handa, "Is There a Need for Escort Ships to Protect Fueling Operations?" *Tokyo Shimbun*, February 23, 2003.

<sup>26</sup> "Laws Stretch Resources of MSDF to the Limit," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, September 22, 2004.

<sup>27</sup> "The Self-Defense Forces Have No Means To Take Necessary Action," *Shukan Bunshun*, July 20, 2006, pp. 32-35.

<sup>28</sup> Koichi Furusho, "Present and Future of JMSDF," *Sekai no Kansen*, July 2009, p. 147.

replenish undermanned ships testify to the corrosive effect of manpower shortages.<sup>29</sup> Furusho fears the JMSDF will reach a breaking point if resources remain stagnant.<sup>30</sup>

### **AirSea Battle Locks Japanese Gaze on East Asia**

In the final analysis, Japanese leaders appear to be finding it difficult to set priorities and allocate resources. Dispersing asserts everywhere tends to weaken the SDF everywhere, including at sea. Tokyo may find itself compelled to postpone or triage missions at some point, assuming China continues its military growth trajectory or conditions worsen elsewhere in East Asia.

Apparent momentum within the US-Japan alliance toward implementing the “AirSea Battle” concept pioneered by the US Navy and Air Force, moreover, holds direct implications for Japan. As a much-discussed report from the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments (CSBA) makes clear, any major conflict with China will likely open with a ballistic-missile barrage from the PLA Second Artillery Corps. The report’s authors predict that such a blitzkrieg would foreclose US and SDF use of bases in the home islands for some time. If so, the conflagration would reach a critical juncture when combined US-Japanese air and naval forces attempted to regain command of the waters and skies adjoining the archipelago. The tone of the CSBA report suggests that US forces would rely heavily on Japanese help in the mutual effort to wrest command from the PLA. The success of AirSea Battle, then, hinges in part on how vigorously Japanese airmen and seamen combat Chinese aggression.<sup>31</sup>

Yet sanitizing sea areas and airspace of Chinese threats while intercepting PLA theater-range missiles would doubtless tax MSDF resources to their limit. Japan’s Aegis capital ships would be fully committed. The surface fleet would likely struggle to overcome casualties, losses of combat units in battle, and depletion of supplies and ammunition—not to mention extraordinary operating tempos and the stress imposed

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<sup>29</sup> “Major Items of the 2010 Defense Budget Request,” *Asagumo*, September 3, 2009.

<sup>30</sup> Furusho, “Present and Future of JMSDF,” p. 147.

<sup>31</sup> Jan van Tol, Mark Gunzinger, Andrew Krepinevich, and Jim Thomas, *AirSea Battle: A Point-of-Departure Operational Concept* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2010), <[http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20100518.Air\\_Sea\\_Battle\\_\\_A\\_/R.20100518.Air\\_Sea\\_Battle\\_\\_A\\_.pdf](http://www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/PubLibrary/R.20100518.Air_Sea_Battle__A_/R.20100518.Air_Sea_Battle__A_.pdf)>.



by prolonged combat operations. In all likelihood, Tokyo would recall military assets operating in extraregional theaters such as the Indian Ocean to defend the homeland. Sufficient advance warning of a Chinese attack might alert Tokyo to recall forces from overseas, or Japanese leaders might hedge against the unknown by keeping all except token SDF forces close to home in the first place.

Unless Japan plans a naval buildup far more ambitious than the modest effort inaugurated by the NDPG, the SDF will have little to spare for ventures outside the AirSea Battle concept. It appears the JMSDF submarine fleet's numbers will soon be augmented from sixteen to twenty-two boats through new construction and extending service lives for existing platforms. Submarine operations harking back to the IJN Indian Ocean offensive of 1942 are one possibility.

Even so, Tokyo will execute Indian Ocean operations on a not-to-interfere basis with higher-priority missions like defense of the Japanese archipelago and sea areas, despite official promises to place nontraditional functions at the core of national strategy. Should an adversary close the Malacca, Sunda, or Lombok straits, the Japanese fleet could find itself cut off far from home. It would wither on the vine, unable to perform its chief missions. Much has been made of the "Malacca dilemma" facing Beijing as China's dependence on imported energy mounts. Tokyo would face a Malacca dilemma all its own should it dispatch an expeditionary fleet to South Asia. This would be quite a risk to run.

Japan can help with the Western Pacific theater of US maritime strategy, then, but Clausewitzian, Corbettian, and Mahanian logic works against JSDF efforts beyond the Strait of Malacca. If anything, the Japanese commitment will contract in the Indian Ocean as Chinese military might builds, summoning Tokyo's attention toward home waters and skies. Washington must look elsewhere for help in South Asia.