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Next Step for Japan's Defense Planning: Enhancing Joint Readiness

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Japan is currently working to revise the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) to deal with the continuously growing security challenges in the region.

While the exact details of the NSS and NDPG are not yet known, the upcoming defense budget request due in the coming days will provide a set of hints. Some aspects have already been [revealed](#), including: standoff missiles; integrated air and missile defense; unmanned systems; cross-domain operation capabilities; improved command and control; information warfare capabilities; rapid mobilization; utilization of new and emerging technologies, and so forth. Such capabilities, along with ones already pursued under the current NDPG would undoubtedly enhance the readiness of the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) in the ground, maritime, air, cyber, outer space, and electromagnetic domains, but also against hybrid warfare.

Yet despite the importance of the abovementioned capabilities, much will come down to how Japan converts them into readiness to effectively and efficiently deal with the threats. The key would be to not only defend and deter against enemy attacks and invasions, but also exploitive actions and movements. For instance, to attain readiness for sea control and denial, Japan will need to expand the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force's destroyer and submarine fleet; enhance naval aviation and sealift capabilities; fully utilize unmanned air, surface, and underwater vehicles; establish an offshore naval base, and rotationally deploy vessels to parts of the Indo-Pacific region to better deal with the threats and enhance Japan's role in ensuring stability and rules-based order; as well as employ new operational and tactical doctrines that mix firepower and power projection with asymmetric warfare.

Reforming the JSDF's operational command and control structure is also vital. Currently, the Joint Staff Office is over-stretched handling both command and managerial duties that undermine the seamless execution of

missions. To ensure greater effectiveness and efficiency, Japan must create joint theater and mission commands so that the three JSDF branches can organically execute joint operations.

The hurdles in attaining the above along with other critical security agendas are by no means small, especially when one considers the [domestic political sensitivities](#) that still exist despite the growing alertness to national security risks. But there are also other problems, particularly relating to resources and capacity for defense reform and other robust measures. Indeed, a larger defense budget will be a significant enabler, and there is some level of assurance with the government vowing to devote a significant amount of more resources to defense. That said, Japan must fix some of the inefficiencies in its defense planning to ensure that the resources are properly used to attain optimal readiness for the most vital national defense missions.

Human resource constraints also need to be addressed. The problem is not simply about the shortage of personnel in the JSDF overall, but the major deficits in the maritime and air branches that face the biggest operational demands. Solutions to the problem would involve adjusting recruitment quotas, increasing salaries and welfare benefits, as well as ensuring better distribution of personnel and roles among the three branches. Moreover, Japan will also need to reform the reservist regime of the three JSDF branches by expanding recruitment to both general enlists and technical experts, and properly integrating them with the active component.

Enhancing cooperation with the United States (US) and its allies, as well as other like-minded states in the Indo-Pacific including Taiwan is also vital. Moreover, it would be critical for Japan to adopt an information security regime that is equivalent to or at least acceptable to those of the US and its allies. Doing so would be vital not only for strategic, operational, and tactical information sharing and [inclusion to the “Five Eyes”](#) (US, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) but also for [joint technological cooperation](#).

While the details of Japan’s upcoming NSS and NDPG are still being worked out, the future of the nation’s defense pivots on joint readiness for cross-domain operations to immediately mobilize and deal with the threats and contingencies – “*sokuji genchaku, sokkou taiji*” (immediate mobilization and rapid engagement). To effectively defend and deter the threats from China, North Korea, and Russia that have upped the security risks in the Indo-Pacific region, the time has come for Japan to take new and bold steps.

Note: This article is based on the author’s contributions to the forthcoming ROLES’ policy recommendations for the upcoming National Security Strategy of Japan.

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