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Proactive Stabilizer

JAPAN'S ROLE IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY ORDER

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Since the early 1950s, the postwar Asia-Pacific security order and system of bilateral alliances centered on the United States have been a core determinant of Japan's security and foreign policy trajectory. Though the region has seen its share of conflict, the relative absence of direct great power war since 1945 facilitated Japan's rapid development and remarkably self-restrained security posture as it rebuilt from the ashes of World War II. Japan transformed from a militarist, imperialist power to a mature, peaceful democracy and economic superpower that, owing in significant part to U.S. security guarantees, chose to shun traditional great power politics, an indigenous nuclear deterrent, robust offensive weapons or power projection capabilities, and an international security role remotely close to its potential. In addition to mitigating regional military competition, the U.S. alliance-centered security order that took shape in those early years also facilitated newly democratized Japan's eventual enmeshment in international institutions and an open international trading system defined primarily by close economic and political ties with the United States and its allies.

Yet today, more than seventy years after Japan's postwar rebirth and a quarter-century after the Cold War's end, major geopolitical and geo-

economic shifts challenge the regional and global status quo. Concerns abound about the rapidly shifting balance of power and the sustainability of what many policymakers and commentators now refer to as the “rules-based liberal international order” so fundamental to Japan’s development, prosperity, security, and foreign policy. Such concerns transcend threats to the more conspicuously liberal elements of the postwar international order—especially the free and open trade system (see chapter 2 by Mireya Solís) and global governance and international institutions (see chapter 3 by Phillip Lipsky). In the security domain, the focus of this chapter, many observers see an array of challenges in China’s rapidly growing power, influence, and coercive rhetoric and policies vis-à-vis its neighbors, all of which threaten to undermine key pillars of the regional order and pose larger threats to international law and rules-based norms and principles.

Beyond China, nuclear-armed North Korea’s open affront to the nuclear nonproliferation regime and development of a nascent ICBM capability with a range that potentially includes Washington further exacerbates fears about the sustainability of the U.S.-centered alliance system (see chapter 5 by Nobumasa Akiyama). Add the Trump administration’s apparent ambivalence about America’s traditional leadership role and skepticism—if not transactionalism—with respect to alliances, free trade, international organizations, and democratic values, to the changing regional power balance and it becomes clear why many fear that the existing order faces an existential crisis. Exacerbating these concerns, major thought leaders, as well as current and former officials in the United States and its major treaty allies, have even identified Washington itself as a threat to the liberal international order’s sustainability, either through passive “abdication” of leadership of an order it played an essential role in creating or active efforts to undermine it.¹ Some particularly heated rhetoric emanates from traditional U.S.–Asia-Pacific allies, where some experts are openly discussing the need for a “Plan B” if Donald Trump’s America First posture and “mistrustful neglect” of alliances are not a temporary aberration, calling for deeper partnerships among U.S. allies to offset “U.S. withdrawal from some parts of the world stage,” or even explicitly suggesting “get[ting] rid of” an alliance with the United States.² Further afield, European leaders have suggested they cannot depend on the United States, and advocated for the formation of a European army.³

In this context, many have called on other advanced liberal democracies and benefactors of the liberal international order to “step up” to sustain it, especially Japan—the world’s third largest economy and a leading liberal democracy with significant existing influence and still greater potential.⁴ Tokyo would also seem to have a clear national interest in doing so. All the aforementioned challenges threaten foundational pillars of Japan’s economy and national security. Indeed, if the order were to collapse or the United States to “withdraw” or “abdicate” in the manner already suggested by some and feared by many, defining assumptions of Japan’s foreign policy would be fundamentally undermined.

Though there are numerous calls for Japan to do more to champion the Asia-Pacific security components of the liberal order (see box 1-1), the associated discourse is often characterized by vague diagnosis and policy prescriptions. This chapter aims to begin addressing this gap by engaging with the following questions: What is the traditional logic of the postwar Asia-Pacific security order, how does it relate to the liberal international order and Japan’s national security, and how has it evolved over time? What is the scope and nature of the contemporary challenges to it, especially from China and, to a lesser extent, the United States?⁵ How has Japan’s security policy evolved in response to associated challenges heretofore? And what more could it do?

By bolstering and rationalizing its own defense posture, strengthening ties with the United States, and deepening and expanding security and diplomatic links to other order-supporting countries within and beyond its immediate region, Japan has already developed and implemented a coherent and proactive national security strategy to mitigate risk. Given the rapid and seemingly fundamental shifts unfolding across the region and beyond, whether current strategy will be sufficient remains to be seen. The answer will undoubtedly depend significantly on developments beyond Tokyo’s control—in particular, China’s policies and the United States’s own evolving strategy (or lack thereof). However, one thing is clear: during a period of rapid and potentially disruptive change, Japan has essential roles to play as a *proactive stabilizer* in the Asia-Pacific security order and constructive contributor to shaping its future evolution. By more actively and flexibly leveraging its considerable capabilities and strengthening ties with the United States and other regional partners, thereby further en-

BOX 1-1. Defining the security components of the liberal international order^a

Though most academic commentary on the post-1945 liberal international order focuses on international organizations and free trade, in the security domain one can identify at least three security suborders:

- the UN Charter–based nonaggression order rooted in law with powerful normative features, which includes commitments to territorial status quos, nonaggression, and the peaceful resolution of international disputes
- a multilateral security order focused on areas of common interest such as security of the global commons, freedom of navigation and overflight (e.g., United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, UNCLOS), nonproliferation (e.g., Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, NPT), and antipiracy
- the more traditional deterrence-focused aspects of U.S. security alliances and U.S. military power

a. A recent RAND study generates a similar list. Michael J. Mazarr, Timothy R. Heath, and Astrid Stuth Cevallos, *China and the International Order* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), 8. (www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2423.html).

couraging the continued engagement of the United States, Japan can help reinvigorate the liberal order—not only in terms of security—in the face of existing challenges and facilitate its necessary evolution as it inevitably must adapt to meet future ones.

The Logic and Evolution of the Postwar Asia-Pacific Security Order

Though often overlooked, central to any discussion about Japan's role in the rules-based liberal international order are security affairs—especially the U.S.-centered global alliance system that has underpinned it, albeit im-

perfectly, for nearly seventy years. In the Asia-Pacific, that system has been fundamentally baked into Japan's postwar national security, political, and economic DNA. The 1951 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (revised in 1960) was effectively a quid pro quo, making termination of the U.S. occupation conditional on Tokyo agreeing to a security relationship with Washington. Motivated significantly by worsening anti-Communist sentiment during the Korean War, the treaty with Japan, as well as U.S. bilateral defense pacts with Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines—and, incidentally, the reason no NATO-like collective security arrangement was possible—was also driven by American wartime allies' lingering mistrust of Japan.⁶ In other words, from its inception, the alliance system's intent was in part to ameliorate regional security competition—even among nations aligned with the United States.

Given transparently exclusionary conditions for membership in the U.S.-centered “hub-and-spokes” system of bilateral alliances during the Cold War, the extent to which it was inherently “liberal” is debatable. At a minimum, however, its advocates have generally regarded it as *sine qua non* for achieving the more unambiguously liberal objectives of America's post-World War II grand strategy: facilitating Japan's and (Western) Germany's reemergence as peaceful, democratic powers, economically and politically integrated with North America and Western Europe; the expansion of a free and open trading system; nuclear nonproliferation; preventing war on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait; peacefully resolving disputes in a rules-based manner, with an emphasis on legitimate process rather than particular outcomes; making the world safe for democracy; and deterring, and ultimately defeating, the illiberal Soviet bloc. Furthermore, fundamental to the alliance-centered order within the Western bloc was the liberal and “open character of American hegemony . . . despite huge asymmetries of power,” especially in the early postwar years, which meant that:

America's partners were less fearful of domination or abandonment because they were reciprocally integrated into security alliances and multilateral economic institutions that limited the unaccountable exercise of power and created transgovernmental political processes for ensuring ongoing commitments and resolving conflict. . . . The open American polity provided points of access and “voice

opportunities,” which in turn provided opportunities for the allies to become directly involved in making alliance policy. The array of binding institutions connected to democratic states provided the basis for both commitment and restraint.⁷

Indeed, U.S. alliances were part of a larger package of institutions designed to facilitate political and economic relations among wartime allies and erstwhile adversaries alike by providing a security guarantee where trust was lacking and, in key instances, antagonism remained powerful. In the words of John Foster Dulles, U.S. secretary of state (1953–59), the alliance system, especially in Europe, was about “cooperation *for* something rather than merely *against* something.”⁸ It was designed to make American power, according to scholar John Ikenberry, “more predictable, accessible, and usable,” as well as “more certain and less arbitrary.”⁹ Though U.S. power and credibility are generally seen as essential to the functioning of the international order, the order’s most conspicuously “liberal” institutions mutually reinforce other aspects, buttressing peace and prosperity.¹⁰ Neither the security order itself nor the larger liberal international order is merely “a euphemism for U.S. hegemony.”¹¹ Today, many states—large and small, of various political systems—have clear stakes in the order’s preservation and fear the deleterious implications for their own security and prosperity if it were to collapse. This is why doubts about the U.S. ability and, more recently, willingness to actively champion it have raised such deep concerns.

Herein lies another important point. Though often treated as such, the liberal international order in practice has never been static, as discussed in the introductory chapter. Neither has the security order, whose characteristics, objectives, bounds, and membership have evolved and become significantly more inclusive, even arguably liberal, over time. During the early stages of the Cold War, U.S. allies in Asia shared more of a commitment to fighting Communism than championing liberal democracy, but this began to change in the late 1970s and 1980s, as key U.S. allies and partners democratized. The logic of the alliance system has also evolved significantly. Today, both Tokyo and Washington regularly refer to the U.S.-Japan alliance as the “cornerstone” of regional security and enabler of more liberal economic elements—which, in turn, has helped lift hundreds of millions across Asia out of poverty in recent decades. In the mid-1990s,

even as they pursued “deep engagement” with China and other nonallies, U.S. leaders simultaneously reaffirmed the alliance system as a kind of insurance against geopolitical instability amid prescient concerns about looming power shifts and uncertainty. As Joseph Nye, then assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, wrote in 1995, expected variables in the region’s post–Cold War evolution included the “rise of Chinese power”; “eventual rejuvenation of Russia”; “evolving role of Japan”; and “tensions on Korean Peninsula.” From this perspective, reaffirming the United States military’s forward presence, alliances, and regional institutions served to “reduce the need for arms buildups and deter the rise of hegemonic forces.” It was also seen not as a means to contain a rising China but as a necessary instrument to engage an illiberal regime; in particular, to make smaller and weaker regional states feel secure and confident in their interactions with China and less concerned about relative gains.¹² For many smaller regional countries, U.S. contributions to regional security were integral to facilitating their own engagement with China.¹³

This basic logic persisted across multiple U.S. administrations, as has a conviction that China is one of the U.S.-led order’s greatest benefactors, “prospering as part of the open and rules-based system.”¹⁴ Concomitant with efforts to reaffirm and strengthen security alliances and partnerships in response to the region’s strategic vicissitudes, the United States and its allies have simultaneously brought China and other formerly excluded countries into the more transparently liberal elements of the order: the free trading system—for example, the World Trade Organization (WTO), which China joined in 2001—and international institutions and treaties. By the 2000s, optimism was widespread and voices across the region called for the consolidation of a complementary regional security architecture focused on functional, action-oriented, and inclusive multilateralism,¹⁵ aimed at tackling shared challenges and centered on regional institutions, which included the Six-Party Talks concerning North Korea’s nuclear program, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus. Thus, for many advocates of liberal order, whether inherently liberal itself or not, the U.S.-led Asia-Pacific security order has been a prerequisite for more unambiguously liberal developments in other policy domains.

In short, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, what was originally

an exclusionary system of anti-Communist bilateral alliances has itself evolved significantly—becoming more open and inclusive in the process—as it was complemented by nascent institutions and regimes aimed at expanding cooperation even further, especially on nontraditional security issues. By the 2000s, U.S. (and Japanese) leaders were actively seeking new security partners outside the traditional core of U.S. treaty allies, in key instances without regard for political system. Though not in all cases liberal or democratic internally, such as Singapore or Vietnam, these partners nevertheless appear committed externally to a more “principled and inclusive security network” focused on upholding liberal, rules-based principles grounded in international law, such as freedom of navigation and overflight, and peaceful resolutions of disputes.¹⁶ Although there is no question that these deepening security ties are aimed partly at traditional balancing, it is important to stress that a major driver of both regional threat perceptions vis-à-vis Beijing and the resulting tightening of security ties has been specific Chinese *rhetoric and actions* in the East and South China Seas seen as illiberal and inimical to a rules-based order, rather than opposition to China’s illiberal regime itself. This is an important distinction between the Cold War era and now. As a case in point, even a former Cold War adversary and domestically illiberal and Communist state like Vietnam now finds itself aligned with the United States. Further indicative of deepening complexity, even China itself has occasionally emerged as an important security partner for the United States in specific areas—such as antipiracy and counterproliferation.

Thus, there is no—nor has there ever been—*one* security order in the contemporary Asia-Pacific, much less a static one. Today, a conservative, sovereignty-centric and power-based order with the traditional deterrence effects of the U.S. alliance system at its core exists alongside (and, indeed, often overlaps and supports) a more liberal version of order based on shared interests, norms, laws, and principles. U.S. and allied military power has combined with the postwar order to contribute significantly to regional and global stability during periods of change, enabling many of the more liberal elements in this and other policy domains.¹⁷ The post-Cold War surge of interest in nontraditional security issues exemplifies liberal strands, while more traditional balancing in response to security concerns—especially vis-à-vis China and North Korea—represent the conservative side.

Nevertheless, and regardless of its Cold War origins, the Asia-Pacific security order today can be said to have liberal characteristics in at least the following ways:

- it discourages aggression, while encouraging peaceful settlements of disputes based not on power (“might makes right”) but on mutually acceptable processes, in accordance with the UN Charter;
- its rules and norms are not inherently biased against any particular country and are grounded in international law;
- the conditions for participation relate to foreign policy behavior, not regime type;
- those shared expectations are transparent, if contested;
- it contributes to the geopolitical stability that is *sine qua non* for the international order’s more unambiguously liberal elements, including the open trading system and international institutions, to function effectively.

The “China Challenge” to Japan’s National Security and the Asia-Pacific Security Order

Today, the Asia-Pacific security order faces manifold and deepening challenges, especially from North Korea (see chapter 5 for analysis) and China (the focus of this chapter).

Fifteen years ago, besides a possible Taiwan-related contingency, to most foreign observers China’s military modernization and its rapidly increasing and relatively nontransparent defense budget were fairly abstract, prospective security concerns. Few paid much heed to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) development of large and capable arsenals of conventionally tipped ballistic missiles ranging across every U.S. military or Self-Defense Force (SDF) base in Japan, or other “anti-access/area-denial” capabilities intended to make the United States reconsider intervening in a regional conflict. Also generally overlooked were Beijing’s controversial

sovereignty claims in the East and South China Seas. Furthermore, concerns about China's subthreshold (not overtly military) coercion and "gray zone" operations in support of those claims were not a front-burner issue.

Yet much has changed, especially since 2010. Captured symbolically in China's supplanting of Japan that year as the world's second largest economy, the region's balance of power has been shifting rapidly. Between 2007 and 2018, Beijing's official military spending—widely considered to be underreported—increased from roughly US\$45 billion to an expected US\$175 billion. In other words, over a ten-year period, China and Japan went from having roughly the same official defense budget to the former spending four times as much. This largesse has accelerated the PLA's rapid modernization across the board, including the long-neglected PLA navy, which is now the world's largest, enjoys rapidly improving capabilities and operates with increasing frequency and intensity in the South and East China Seas, as well as farther afield.

Coupled with the illiberal nature of the Chinese Communist Party's rule, it is against this shifting geopolitical regional landscape and balance of power that Beijing's recent actions are seen as threats to the liberal international order and its security suborders in the Asia-Pacific. Particularly prominent has been Beijing's coercive gray zone operations in the East and South China Seas and its responses to widespread criticism that its activities undermine, if not flagrantly violate, international law—especially the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which Beijing has ratified. More generally, China's rhetoric openly criticizing the U.S. alliance system as an anachronism and threat to regional stability, coupled with championing of alternatives, also raise concerns among those who see these alliances as public goods, security guarantors, and stabilizing forces during a period of rapid and unpredictable change.

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE CHINA CHALLENGE

Increasingly, the United States, Japan, and their security partners link the China challenge directly to concerns about the larger Asia-Pacific security order and advocate deepening ties with like-minded countries as a counterbalance. In October 2017, then secretary of state Rex Tillerson championed working with India to promote a "free and open Indo-Pacific" led

by advanced democracies, stating that China's leaders were "undermining the international, rules-based order."¹⁸ Beyond calling China and Russia "revisionist," the Trump administration's 2017 National Security Strategy expressed concerns about "adversaries and competitors . . . becoming adept at operating below the threshold of open military conflict and at the edges of international law"—a thinly veiled reference to their activities in the East and South China Seas and in Ukraine, respectively.¹⁹ Its 2018 Nuclear Posture Review notes, "Since 2010 we have seen the return of Great Power competition. To varying degrees, Russia and China have made clear they seek to substantially revise the post-Cold War international order and norms of behavior"—a sentiment emphasized in a major, widely discussed speech on U.S.-China policy by Vice President Mike Pence that October.²⁰

Such high-profile statements demonstrate that concerns about China as a "revisionist" threat to the liberal international order are now mainstream. Viewed holistically, however, China's posture toward the order—including free trade, international institutions, and some components of the security order—is complex and its record is mixed (as, it should be noted, is that of the United States). As a 2018 RAND report notes, "It is not entirely accurate to speak of China's interaction with 'the' international order." Beijing has been generally supportive of the global economic order while far more circumspect in political, such as human rights conventions and liberal democracy, and security elements. It has also been more supportive of the UN-centric order than more liberal aspects centered on the United States.²¹ Indeed, one of the major challenges for policymakers is to recognize the seriousness of China's challenges, without falling victim to zero-sum, Manichean interpretations. The goal is to deter regional coercion and aggression while encouraging Beijing to more positively, proactively support a liberal order that has not only enabled but actively encouraged its peaceful rise.²²

That China is not an unabashed, across-the-board revisionist makes it a particularly complicated challenge. To many, it has been far more supportive of the liberal international order at the global level, while at the regional level it is already seeking changes, sometimes through coercive and destabilizing means. Whether the latter is merely a prologue to greater revisionism on a global level remains an open question. But that also may not be the most important question to ask. As Thomas Wright cautions, "The most important piece of the liberal order is not the UN or international

financial institutions, important as they are. It is healthy regional orders. . . . If those regional orders fall apart, so, too, will the global order.”²³

FROM “RESPONSIBLE STAKEHOLDER” TO “REVISIONIST POWER”?

Those important caveats aside, China is widely seen as posing longer-term, more significant challenges today than many Japanese and U.S. policymakers anticipated hopefully ten or twenty years ago.²⁴ In the 1990s and mid-2000s, calls for a transformed Asia-Pacific order based on more inclusive, regional multilateralism, institutions, confidence-building, and functional cooperation were accompanied by growing optimism about China’s own domestic and international transformation—what we might call the “Peaceful Rise” era. Beijing gradually opened its economy, pursued (relative) liberalization of its society, signed on to dozens of international treaties, expanded its participation in international organizations and UN Peacekeeping Operations, joined the WTO, and ratified major treaties, such as UNCLOS. In the United States, policies based on cautious optimism about China’s evolution tempered by realism were reflected in the Clinton administration’s “engage and balance” approach and, more famously, the George W. Bush administration’s 2005 call for China to emerge as a “responsible stakeholder.”²⁵

Yet the 2008–12 period precipitated a major shift in Japanese and U.S. perceptions about China’s trajectory and intent, prompting calls for a policy course correction. It was first in the security suborder where China’s approach became most conspicuously competitive and, from the allies’ perspective, revisionist. By 2017, the United States National Security Strategy openly identified China and Russia as “revisionist powers . . . that use technology, propaganda, and coercion to shape a world antithetic to our interests and values,” warning that a “geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region.”²⁶

THE CORROSIVE EFFECT OF CHINA’S GRAY ZONE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Over the past decade, and with apparent impunity, China’s coercive rhetorical and physical assertion of its vast and controversial sovereignty claims in the South and East China Seas has had an indirect but deeply corrosive effect on the rules-based security order, not to mention openly

threatening the national security of affected countries. Beijing has relied heavily on so-called gray zone operations, which are subthreshold aggressive activities that are difficult to deter without significant escalation risks, since they constitute neither a pure peacetime nor a traditional, armed attack situation.

For Japan, most provocative are the regular operations of the increasingly robust (and militarized) China Coast Guard (CCG) near the Senkaku Islands (Diaoyu in Chinese; below, the Senkakus).²⁷ Since September 2012, larger and more capable CCG vessels frequently enter the Senkakus' contiguous zone and conduct regular "presence" missions in the islands' territorial sea to coercively challenge Japan's decades-old effective administrative control.²⁸ Beyond the gray zone, China's "maritime advance" and increasing scope of its naval and air force operations place further pressure on Japan. For example, Japan's annual scrambles of Japan Air SDF fighters against approaching Chinese planes nearly tripled between 2012 and 2017, when the frequency reached a record high of 851.²⁹ Accordingly, nearly three dozen pages of Japan's 2017 defense white paper discuss concerns about Beijing's capabilities and operations, such as its "attempts to change the status quo by coercion."³⁰

Beijing's East China Sea maritime gray zone operations appear intended to probe, or take advantage of, a perceived "seam" in Article V of the 1960 U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty, which refers only to an "armed attack" situation. In addition to asserting its sovereignty claim, China's actions also seem aimed at undermining Washington's obligations by trying to establish a perception of "shared administrative control." They also may be intending to exploit political and legal constraints on Japan's Coast Guard (JCG) and Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF), as well as a general and longstanding reluctance on Japan's part to use kinetic force in situations outside of an armed attack against Japan.³¹

As these operations have been ongoing since late 2012, China appears to have concluded it can assert its claim coercively through these subthreshold operations with relative impunity.³² Beijing's decision to limit its conspicuous coercion vis-à-vis the Senkakus to gray zone operations reveals how its activities are corrosive to the security order: not directly challenging it, but simultaneously undermining it in a manner that is also difficult to deter—by staying below the level of armed attack (*buryoku kōshi*, use of

force) prohibited by the UN Charter. It further highlights the severity of the challenge that these activities take place while the PLA operates over the horizon, occasionally engages in provocative maneuvers and actions in international waters and Japan's contiguous zone, and is set to grow increasingly capable and active in the years ahead.

Further afield, the gray zone operations of the CCG and China's maritime militia in the South China Sea are additionally corrosive to rules in the maritime domain.³³ CCG vessels harass other countries' fishing boats operating in their exclusive economic zones.³⁴ The destabilizing activities of China's maritime militia have also gained increasing attention in Tokyo and Washington.³⁵ And, especially since 2013, Beijing's large-scale land reclamation and construction of civilian and military outposts are also widely judged as provocative and destabilizing.³⁶

The contrast between Japan's self-restraint and China's—as well as, in all fairness, some other claimants'—activities in the South China Sea is stark. Although it does not officially acknowledge a dispute, since the 1970s Tokyo's policy toward the Senkakus has focused on *heion katsu anteiteki na iji oyobi kanri* (peaceful, stable management) characterized by three prohibitions: “No people, no development, no militarization.”³⁷

INTERNATIONAL LAW AND THE 2016 PERMANENT COURT OF ARBITRATION RULING

Following a tense 2012 standoff with China at Scarborough Shoal—a rock in the Philippines' exclusive economic zone about 120 miles west of Luzon—Manila filed a landmark case at the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) in the Hague to challenge key aspects of China's claims in the South China Sea. The unanimous 2016 judgment was almost entirely in the Philippines' favor. It invalidated key tenets of Beijing's UNCLOS interpretation, criticized China's unlawful behavior, declared its island reclamation activities illegal, and stated that Beijing's claims to historic rights carried no validity under international law. China's Foreign Ministry dismissed the award “as null and void” and asserted that the judgment “has no binding force” and that “China neither accepts nor recognizes it” and “will never accept any claim or action based on those awards.”³⁸ Coupled with China's various destabilizing activities in the South China Sea, including unilateral construction and militarization of artificial islands since

2014, such an unabashed and categorical rejection of the unanimous judgment of an international court has further deepened concerns in Tokyo, Washington, and across the region about Beijing's commitment to key pillars of the Asia-Pacific security order, especially concerning international law, freedom of navigation and overflight, and peaceful and noncoercive settlement of disputes. Provocative rhetoric from Beijing often suggests to many observers a "might makes right" mentality. Perhaps most notorious is the 2010 assertion of China's foreign minister, who, in response to criticism at the ASEAN Regional Forum of Beijing's policies, angrily declared that "China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that's just a fact."³⁹

China's rejection of the 2016 PCA ruling suggests not wholesale contempt of UNCLOS per se but an effort to seek carve-out exceptions and, in the words of scholar Isaac Kardon, to deter future legal "infringement on what China considers to be its sovereign prerogatives." Kardon sums up the implications thus, "If [arbitral] awards can be easily sloughed off, and further, denigrated as unlawful themselves, there may be a chilling effect on other attempts to launch arbitral processes . . . If fewer states believe that legal dispute resolution mechanisms can be used effectively, they will wither." He continues,

The Chinese response to the South China Sea arbitration has set an important, if still uncertain, precedent for future practice. Backed up by impressive capacity and enabled by a less robust international legal environment *that lacks energetic American enforcement of key norms*, China is primed to externalize its distinctive approach.⁴⁰
[emphasis added]

As a testament to the post-Cold War Asia-Pacific security order being about much more than an exclusive grouping of U.S. allies and/or particular countries' narrow interests, concerns about China's actions and response to the ruling extend beyond Japan, U.S. allies, or other territorial disputants. As India's prime minister Narendra Modi noted at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, "We should all have equal access, as a right under the international law, to the use of common spaces on the sea and in the air that would require freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce, and

peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law.”⁴¹ Then U.S. defense secretary James Mattis was more direct: “China’s policy in the South China Sea stands in stark contrast to the openness of our strategy. . . . China’s militarization of artificial features in the South China Sea includes the deployment of anti-ship missiles, surface-to-air missiles, electronic jammers, and more recently, the landing of bomber aircraft at Woody Island. Despite China’s claims to the contrary, the placement of these weapons systems is tied directly to military use for the purposes of intimidation and coercion. China’s militarization of the Spratlys is also in direct contradiction to President Xi’s 2015 public assurances in the White House Rose Garden.”⁴²

CHINA'S OPPOSITION TO U.S. ALLIANCES AND THE DECEPTIVE ALLURE OF PRC-PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES

As Beijing’s behaviors appear to corrode key elements of the order in pursuit of narrow self-interest, it also appears—at least rhetorically—keen to undermine the U.S. alliance system, which it regularly disparages as “exclusive,” “zero-sum,” and reflecting a “Cold War mentality.”⁴³ Even if one concedes that the alliance system is imperfect and may, *inter alia*, contribute to a security dilemma with China,⁴⁴ it is generally welcomed by regional states—especially those who feel insecure vis-à-vis Beijing—and has important stabilizing effects.

Some scholars identify the lofty rhetoric of Hu Jintao’s “harmonious world” in 2005 or Xi Jinping’s call for a “new type of international relations” and “a community with a shared future for mankind” based on “win-win” cooperation as China’s “vision of the Asian political security order” and as “an alternative . . . to the U.S. vision.”⁴⁵ Yet to refer to the status quo as “the U.S. vision” is misleading. A wide array of regional players publicly advocate for it, including both U.S. treaty allies and others who see it as fundamentally stabilizing—for example, Singapore. Furthermore, beyond lofty rhetoric and abstract, superficially attractive principles, China has offered no clear alternative to the U.S.-centered alliance system as a regional security guarantor. To be sure, Beijing has promoted its 1997 “New Security Concept” and 2014 “Asian Security Concept” as explicit foils to the U.S. alliance system and allegedly superior, enlightened pathways to “universal”

security. Yet neither offers a clear plan for implementation or seems to acknowledge other states' legitimate traditional security concerns—especially with respect to Beijing. In contrast, major functions of the U.S. alliance system are “to ensure diplomacy is always the first line of resort and as a hedge if diplomacy should fail.”⁴⁶ In short, it is not clear what an alternative, China-led security order would even look like. In fact, when it comes to Chinese discussions of “order,” security often appears to be an afterthought. For example, a recent analysis of Chinese discourse on future international order barely mentions security affairs; instead, it focuses almost exclusively on international finance and economic integration.⁴⁷

The U.S. Factor: The “Trump Effect” and Beyond

Despite the fact that much of the discourse on the modern-day crisis of the liberal international order focuses on post-2016 developments, the Trump administration is best understood as both a symptom and a cause, or catalyst, of a longer-term crisis.

In the 2016 primary campaign to be the Democratic presidential candidate, Bernie Sanders was vehemently opposed to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and skeptical of free trade; and even Democratic nominee and former Obama administration's secretary of state Hillary Clinton also came out against TPP.⁴⁸ More specific to security, key drivers of concerns before Trump included the shifting power balance; the corrosive effect of China's irredentism, rhetoric, and policies in the East and South China Seas; and perceptions that Washington was unable or unwilling to confront China more directly. According to two American analysts at the U.S. Naval War College, the United States has “failed to halt China's bullying behavior,” which “devalues Washington's commitments to its friends and shakes the foundations of the U.S. alliance system.”⁴⁹ Beijing appears to have effectively exploited Washington's concerns about “reverse entrapment” in the 2012 Scarborough Shoal incident, its post–September 2012 operations around the Senkakus, and in the post-2014 construction and subsequent militarization of massive artificial islands across the South China Sea.⁵⁰ American allies' perceptions of Washington's ambivalence about its treaty commitments further undermine deterrence and reassurance. Examples

include the Obama administration's reported unwillingness to openly declare the U.S.-Philippines defense pact's applicability to the South China Sea dispute and its public flirtation with Beijing's proposal for a "new type of great power relations" G2 model of diplomacy, despite evidence that China's goal was to sideline Japan and other "non-great powers."⁵¹

The United States's selective or incomplete support for certain organizations and regimes also undermines a core premise of a rules-based order: the fundamental principle that "great powers" must play by the same rules. Even if one limits the analysis to the Asia-Pacific, concerns are longstanding. Senate Republicans' refusal to ratify UNCLOS (though the U.S. navy does abide by it) weakens the normative power of the law of the sea, invites claims of U.S. hypocrisy, which China repeatedly exploits, and debones U.S. criticism of China for ignoring the 2016 PCA ruling. (This is not a partisan criticism. U.S. presidents of both parties have called for ratification of UNCLOS.) Even Admiral Harry Harris, then head of U.S. Pacific Command (now the Trump administration's ambassador in Seoul) and the U.S. military's most outspoken critic of China's actions in the South China Sea, stated flatly, "I think that in the twenty-first century our moral standing is affected by the fact that we are not a signatory to UNCLOS."⁵²

Though Washington may be the most important actor in certain areas, of additional concern were factors largely beyond U.S. control, such as democratic backsliding across the region, and decreased emphasis on democracy promotion and human rights, as discussed in depth in chapter 4 by Maiko Ichihara. Philippines president Rodrigo Duterte's apparent decision to set aside the 2016 PCA ruling significantly weakened the impact of calls for China to abide by international law. As one former U.S. official noted, "Our rule was, we cannot want it more than the claimants do."⁵³ Outside of the Asia-Pacific, Russia's actions in Georgia in 2008, as well as its aggression in eastern Ukraine and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, also loom large as events that undermined the rules-based order and which the United States was unable to deter. In short, despite the focused attention the Trump administration receives, the alleged crisis of the security order significantly predates it.

Nevertheless, since Trump's election, related concerns have reached fever pitch. While most of Congress and the U.S. public support strong alliances, free trade, and U.S. active engagement in Asia, the rhetoric and policies

of the current White House have further shaken confidence in American global and regional leadership, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and Washington's commitment to the liberal order. Publics are also responding. In June 2017, Pew found that after Trump's election global confidence in the American president to "do the right thing regarding world affairs" plummeted; in Japan it dropped precipitously, from 78 percent to 24 percent.⁵⁴ A spring 2018 Pew survey measured the median percentage of populations across twenty-five countries and found confidence in President Trump at a mere 27 percent.⁵⁵ This decreased confidence in U.S. leadership risks further undermining the liberal international order if leaders in the region judge that international politics must regress to power-based considerations, such as when smaller states lack confidence to challenge China—even rhetorically. Recent examples include ASEAN's reluctance to call out China's island construction or refer to the PCA ruling in summit declarations, and the Duterte administration's reluctance to raise the ruling with China on the apparent grounds that there is no "international police" to enforce it.⁵⁶

Furthermore, Trump's rhetoric about and approach to allies in the context of America First and his self-proclaimed "nationalism" suggests, at best, a grudging appreciation of the utility of security alliances for deterrence against specific threats. Such narrow interpretation of the postwar security order's purpose and objective is a far cry from those of past leaders, who have seen alliances as the United States's most potent diplomatic and deterrence force multiplier; as a stabilizer during times of rapid change and uncertainty; as a way to make U.S. military power less threatening; as an empowering force for smaller, weaker countries; and as a facilitator of deeper political and economic ties among nations—to repeat the words of Allen Dulles, "cooperation *for* something rather than merely *against* something." These and other institutions are an imperfect but preferable alternative to Hobbesian self-help, and a useful means for ameliorating security dilemmas and/or arms races.

Specific to the U.S.-Japan alliance, qualitatively new threats and the relative decline in U.S. power have exacerbated longstanding Japanese insecurities. Even though this trend significantly predates 2016, the Trump administration's provocative rhetoric toward allies and international institutions, saber-rattling toward Pyongyang, and rhetorical ambivalence regarding U.S. global security commitments, in combination with North

Korea's continually advancing nuclear and missile capabilities despite Trump's shockingly premature claim after the June 2018 Singapore summit that "There is no longer a Nuclear Threat from North Korea" (sic), have exacerbated the uncertainties and tensions inherent in Japan's "alliance dilemma."⁵⁷ Meanwhile, Pyongyang's apparent ability to credibly threaten Los Angeles or Washington, D.C., with a nuclear-armed ICBM has raised new concerns about "decoupling" and the political undermining of U.S. extended deterrence⁵⁸—leading even some moderate Japanese voices to call for a debate about nuclear weapons.⁵⁹ The Trump administration's open contempt for the WTO, its hardball with allies at multilateral summits (for example, the G7 in 2018), its unilateral withdrawal from TPP, its imposition of tariffs on steel and aluminum (and potentially auto) imports against Japan and other treaty allies on "national security" grounds, its willingness to link security guarantees to concessions on trade and accept Chinese and North Korean proposals to unilaterally freeze U.S.-ROK exercises—which the president himself called "provocative"—all deepen concerns about the viability of the United States as a champion of the liberal international order and the security order in the Asia-Pacific.

Even the U.S. intelligence community's own 2018 Worldwide Threat Assessment appears to contend (indirectly) that such developments are weakening the liberal order, playing into China's and Russia's hands, and exacerbating "U.S. allies' and partners' uncertainty about the willingness and capability of the United States to maintain its international commitments, which may drive them to consider reorienting their policies, particularly regarding trade, away from Washington," and that "forces for geopolitical order and stability will continue to fray, as will the rules-based international order."⁶⁰

Nevertheless, there is clear desire among major countries for the United States to continue to play a leadership role in the world, including in the Asia-Pacific. For example, the aforementioned spring 2018 Pew survey found that across twenty-five countries, the median percentage of foreign publics that felt it "would be better for the world to have the United States as the leading power" was 63 percent. Only 19 percent preferred China.⁶¹ Yet it is hardly only for the benefit of other countries that the United States has an interest in continuing its active engagement and global leadership. As Michael Mazarr, a political scientist at an American think tank, argues,

“Allowing the postwar order to melt away would sacrifice perhaps the greatest competitive advantage that a leading power has ever enjoyed.”⁶²

Japan as a Champion of the Asia-Pacific Security Order?

As the liberal international order in the Asia-Pacific confronts deepening challenges, and concerns amount over America’s ability and willingness to champion it, calls for Japan to “step up” and play a more proactive and prominent role have spread.⁶³ During a visit to Japan in July 2018, for example, German foreign minister Heiko Maas highlighted what can go wrong when an order collapses—noting the two countries’ wartime history—and called for Germany and Japan to “stand together” and “close ranks” as leaders of the postwar order; to “offset the U.S. withdrawal”; to “set boundaries against the methods of Trump”; and to form the core of a new “multilateralist alliance.”⁶⁴ As Mireya Solís notes elsewhere in this volume, Japan has already emerged as an unabashed champion of regional and global free trade, reflected in the Trans-Pacific Partnership-11 and the EU-Japan economic partnership agreement, the largest free trade deal in history.

But what about Japan’s role in the security order? Throughout the postwar period and especially since the 1990s, Japan’s leaders have struggled to reconcile a desire to play a positive, constructive international role with constitutional, political, diplomatic, and other constraints on a more assertive posture in international security affairs. Most significant, Article 9 of Japan’s “peace” constitution, which has never been revised, stipulates that it “forever renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes” and commits that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained.”⁶⁵

Though Japan’s actual force structure and posture have shifted significantly in the decades since, Article 9 remains a salient practical and symbolic constraint on the SDF. In the postwar period, Japan’s leaders have chosen to shun traditional great power politics, an indigenous nuclear deterrent, robust offensive weapons or power projection capabilities, and an international security role remotely commensurate with Japan’s mate-

rial potential. Though this remarkable and commendable self-restraint, coupled with Tokyo's alliance with the United States, has arguably helped ameliorate regional security competition, new challenges raise new questions about the continued viability of this posture and a rapid transformation of Japan's strategic environment. Nevertheless, important political, normative, and fiscal constraints still remain on how Japan's leaders are able to develop and employ the SDF and play a more proactive and robust role in regional security.

These factors all beg the following question: in light of the current crisis of order, what has Japan been doing and what more can it do?

BASELINING JAPAN'S REGIONAL DIPLOMACY AND SECURITY TRAJECTORY

Over the past decade, Japan has become unprecedentedly proactive in Asia-Pacific security affairs. Most recently, the Abe cabinet's 2013 national security strategy—Japan's first ever—links Japan's national security interests directly to Japan taking responsibility for “the maintenance and protection of international order based on rules and universal values”:

Japan's national interests are, first of all, to maintain its sovereignty and independence; to defend its territorial integrity; to ensure the safety of life, person, and property of its nationals; and to ensure its survival while maintaining its own peace and security grounded in freedom and democracy and preserving its rich culture and tradition.

In addition, Japan's national interests are to achieve the prosperity of Japan and its nationals through economic development, thereby consolidating its peace and security. To this end, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, it is essential that Japan, as a maritime state, strengthens the free trade regime for accomplishing economic development through free trade and competition, and realizes an international environment that offers stability, transparency, and predictability.

Similarly, the maintenance and protection of international order based on rules and universal values, such as freedom, democracy, respect for fundamental human rights, and the rule of law, are likewise in Japan's national interests.⁶⁶

To achieve these goals in support of the order, the national security strategy calls for “strengthening and expanding Japan’s capabilities and roles”; “strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance”; and deepening security ties with like-minded countries within and beyond the Asia-Pacific.⁶⁷

Strengthening and Expanding Japan’s Capabilities and Roles to Bolster Territorial Defense

For years, Japan’s defense posture has been undergoing a gradual evolution aimed at rationalizing SDF capabilities and deployments to more effectively deter or, if necessary, to rapidly and flexibly confront specific contemporary threats in both traditional and emerging domains, such as cyber, space, and the gray zone.⁶⁸ This shift has accelerated in response to Japan’s rapidly changing security environment, motivated not only by North Korea but also the swiftly expanding capabilities, geographical and operational scope, and assertive—if not outright coercive—behavior of China’s People’s Liberation Army (PLA) and China Coast Guard (CCG).

In response to China’s “maritime advance” toward the Western Pacific and operations in the East China Sea, one of Japan’s priorities has been addressing a security vacuum surrounding its southwestern islands. For example, the SDF has set up surface-to-air and anti-ship missile units and radar sites on remote islands near the Senkakus. At the SDF’s major southwestern bases, it has acquired more rapidly deployable platforms; increased the number of F15s; expanded intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); and in 2018 even formed an Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, recognition that Japan’s Coast Guard (JCG) is the first line of defense in a Senkakus gray zone contingency has prompted budget increases and other reforms. JCG’s aggregate tonnage increased roughly 50 percent between 2010 and 2016. This has facilitated the creation of a dedicated Senkaku Territorial Waters Guard Unit and continuous JCG presence near the islands. JCG has also expanded patrols, improved aerial surveillance, created a direct video link to Kantei—the prime minister’s office—and expanded cooperation with Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF)—albeit from a low base.⁷⁰

Driven largely by perceived threats from China and North Korea, Japan has also carried out major institutional reforms aimed at facilitating more rapid, “seamless,” “whole-of-government” coordination between Japan’s political institutions and with its U.S. ally. Most significant, in 2013 the Abe administration created Japan’s first ever national security council (NSC). The NSC further centralizes national security decisionmaking in the Kantei, bolsters interagency coordination and crisis management, and improves information-sharing across Japan’s bureaucracies and intelligence community.⁷¹ Japan is also acquiring new capabilities to further improve defense and deterrence, one example of which is Aegis Ashore, and considering others, including long-range land-attack cruise missiles and F-35Bs.

Strengthening the U.S.-Japan Alliance

A second core emphasis of Japan’s national security strategy has been strengthening its alliance with Washington as the core pillar of Japan’s defense posture and “cornerstone” of regional peace and stability.

In response to Japan’s rapidly changing security environment, the 2015 U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation emphasize “seamless, robust, flexible, and effective bilateral responses, synergy across the two governments’ national security policies, and a whole-of-government alliance approach.” It also established a standing “alliance coordination mechanism” to “strengthen policy and operational coordination” in all phases of a possible contingency—from peacetime to gray zone to an actual kinetic war.⁷² More popularly known, the Diet passed major legislation that captured the practical consequences of the Abe cabinet’s controversial 2014 reinterpretation of the constitution’s Article 9 “peace clause” to allow exercise of the right of collective self-defense under “limited” conditions.⁷³ In effect, this moderately broadened the circumstances in which Japan’s leaders may deploy the SDF if an armed attack against a third country “that is in a close relationship with Japan” occurs (so-called limited collective self-defense) and to use weapons to protect foreign military forces contributing to Japan’s defense in peacetime—for example, during ISR operations or bilateral exercises. Though significant limitations persist,⁷⁴ it also creates new opportunities for Japan to cooperate with U.S. armed forces in

contingency planning, exercises, and training, and to participate in international peace support activities, including inspections of suspicious ships and logistical support for the U.S. military. In summary, in recent years, Tokyo appears to be signaling its interest in a tighter and more “balanced” alliance, as well as its support for U.S. regional strategy more generally.

Promoting Security Cooperation with Asia-Pacific Partners and Beyond

In support of the U.S. and Japan’s post-2000 emphasis on minilateralism among U.S. allies and expanding security ties with existing and new like-minded partners, a third emphasis of Japan’s national security strategy has been to support an incremental shift from a system of U.S.-centered bilateral alliances to a regional network of mutually beneficial security ties centered on allies but inclusive of new security partners as well.⁷⁵ As well as having inherent utility from Tokyo’s perspective, it is also part of Japan’s efforts to highlight the allies’ common values and vision for a rules-based order, and to encourage Washington to strengthen its commitment to Japan and the region. As Abe remarked in a major 2013 speech in Washington, “Japan must work even more closely with the United States, Korea, Australia, and other like-minded democracies throughout the region. A rules-promoter, a commons’ guardian, and an effective ally and partner to the United States and other democracies, are all roles that Japan MUST fulfill.”⁷⁶

The Abe administration has built on past policies with a renewed emphasis on bolstering ties among maritime democracies as key champions of the liberal international order. It complements Abe’s 2012 call for a “Democratic security diamond” focused on peace, stability, and freedom of navigation across the Pacific and Indian Oceans, which was in part a response to China’s activities in the East and South China Seas.⁷⁷ The rhetoric promoting these initiatives is imbued with references to shared liberal values, peace, stability, and prosperity. In particular, Japan has championed the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” as a “new foreign policy strategy,”⁷⁸ with the aim of “developing an environment for international peace, stability, and prosperity, and for sharing universal values.”⁷⁹ Though the “strategy” has yet to be fleshed out, Japan has emphasized maritime security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and peacekeeping operations,⁸⁰ in addition

to other key tenets of the international order, including openness, security cooperation, and support for liberal democracy. Japan has also emphasized cooperation with the United States, Australia, and India (the so-called Quad).⁸¹ In November 2017, the four democracies announced a plan to establish a coalition to patrol and exert influence on the waters from the Indian Ocean through the East and South China Seas to the Pacific.⁸² The Trump administration has followed Japan's lead, incorporating the "Indo-Pacific" framing championed by Australian and Japanese strategists into its national security strategy and even renaming its Honolulu-based military command as Indo-Pacific Command.⁸³ In December 2015, Abe and Indian prime minister Narendra Modi announced the "Japan and India Vision 2025 Special Strategic and Global Partnership," which welcomed Japan's regular involvement in the prominent India-U.S. Malabar naval exercise to "help create stronger capabilities to deal with maritime challenges in the Indo-Pacific region."⁸⁴ Meanwhile, that same month Abe and Australian prime minister Malcolm Turnbull "reaffirmed the two countries' special strategic partnership . . . based on common values and strategic interests including democracy, human rights, the rule of law, open markets, and free trade."⁸⁵

Japan's more "proactive" regional security cooperation is also reflected in Tokyo's support of partner capacity building and defense technology transfers. For example, in 2016 Japan proposed a framework for ASEAN-wide defense cooperation.⁸⁶ It has also expanded defense technology cooperation with U.S. allies and partners, including agreements with France and the United Kingdom. Security cooperation with South Korea has also deepened, albeit in fits and starts and to a far lesser degree than its many advocates in Washington—and beyond—would prefer.

OUTSTANDING CONSTRAINTS

Relative to free trade, where Tokyo is widely seen as picking up a mantle dropped by Washington, efforts to adopt a more proactive leadership role in international security affairs face more stringent domestic obstacles. Despite significant reforms in recent years, persistent limitations on what Japan can—or is politically willing to—do in the security and military domain persist and must also be acknowledged.

ARTICLE 9 HAS (STILL) NOT BEEN REVISED. Since taking office again in 2012, and for years before that, Abe has repeatedly stated that revision of Article 9 is his government's "historic task." Yet, as of the time of this writing, this goal has proved elusive. Furthermore, his administration's only formal proposal for amendment called merely for adding a third clause asserting that the SDF "existence" is constitutional.⁸⁷ The proposal leaves untouched the existing clauses often pointed to by conservatives as major constraints on Japan's freedom of action, including the explicit renunciation of war, the "threat or use of force," and the maintenance of "war potential." Article 9 is the normative crux of Japan's defense policy, and barring a revision of its first and/or second clauses, significant limitations on SDF force development and employment are likely to persist. Beyond the article itself, the difficulty Japan's leaders face attempting to revise it is symbolic of a deeper resistance to deploying the SDF overseas, especially in operations that may require the use of lethal force.

SDF AUTHORIZATIONS TO USE FORCE OUTSIDE A "DEFENSE OF JAPAN" SCENARIO REMAIN LIMITED.

Despite recent reforms, limitations on SDF involvement in collective self-defense or collective security operations—key concepts associated with the UN Charter and thus fundamental to the security component of the liberal international order—remain significant. As a sovereign state and UN member, Japan's "inherent right" of collective self-defense has been acknowledged for nearly seventy years. Nevertheless, its government has long judged that actual exercise would be unconstitutional. Although in 2014 the Abe cabinet reinterpreted Article 9 to enable the "limited" exercise of collective self-defense, the precondition on use of force is that the armed attack against another state must pose an existential threat *to Japan itself*. This conditionality limits the reinterpretation's practical implications.⁸⁸ It also means that the conditions under which Japan can defend the United States have expanded but remain limited.⁸⁹ Especially in the Trump era, any perceived imbalance of commitment—warranted or not, and regardless of Japan's significant contributions to the alliance, especially in terms of hosting U.S. bases on Japan's territory—may become a political target. Regarding collective security operations, Japan's ability to contribute to international security through nonkinetic means has expanded significantly since the Gulf War. However, it remains constrained in employing actual kinetic force or participating in associated combat operations.

Nevertheless, Japan's 2015 security legislation allows for an expanded set of roles and missions, such as more robust logistical support for U.S. military operations and more extensive bilateral planning and exercises. It also newly authorizes operations that somewhat resemble collective self-defense or collective security in various peacetime contingencies, such as protection of foreign militaries engaged in activities contributing to Japan's defense and use of small arms during UN peacekeeping operations.

While significant constraints on Japan's ability to use kinetic force all but ensure that Japan will not engage in unprovoked aggression—the most fundamental contribution any state can make to international peace, stability, and order—from another perspective, they may limit Japan's ability to deter unprovoked aggression by another state against a third party not clearly affecting Japan's security. To date, no SDF member has ever died in combat, and Japan's political leaders are widely seen as extremely casualty averse.⁹⁰ These factors carry implications for the SDF's role in regional security, such as a possible contingency in international waters in the South China Sea.

BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS FRUSTRATE MORE ROBUST DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE POSTURES. Despite widespread global hype about the Abe government's "record high" defense budgets since 2013, Japan's 2017 defense budget was below 1 percent of GDP, and roughly the same as the 1997 figure in nominal yen terms. Without significantly increased investment, the more fundamental changes to SDF force structure or employment advocated by some face stiff budgetary headwinds. As it concerns gray zone challenges, JCG's budget has been increasing, but so has the severity of the challenge from China's own rapidly expanding and increasingly capable CCG. JCG is spread increasingly thin as the tempo and geographical scope of its patrols expand in response to China's operations. Even if normative and political obstacles to major SDF or JCG budget increases subside, structural factors—especially Japan's massive fiscal deficit and its aging and shrinking population and associated welfare burden—suggest fiscal constraints will worsen.⁹¹

THE GRAY ZONE CHALLENGE IS INTENSIFYING. Despite JCG's expanding budget and capabilities, especially near the Senkakus, the (even more) rapid growth of its Chinese counterpart—in hulls, capabilities, weaponry/armor, and mandate—is sobering.⁹² That JCG remains thinly stretched has direct implica-

tions for its ability to play a more expansive role regionally. Furthermore, various legal and technical hurdles complicate closer coordination between the civilian JCG and the MSDF, such as deepening interoperability, expanding joint training/exercises, and increasing shared maritime domain awareness.⁹³ Japan also appears unsure how to deter less widely reported gray zone challenges, such as a foreign submarine in Japan's territorial waters.⁹⁴ Though Tokyo does not appear to define cybersecurity as a gray zone concern, other experts identify both cyber and space as additional domains in which Tokyo and Washington face major gray zone deterrence challenges, and where significant efforts are needed to deepen cooperation to improve situational awareness, stigmatize adversary operations, harden defenses, and prepare to impose costs.⁹⁵

DIPLOMATIC OBSTACLES TO A MORE ROBUST REGIONAL SECURITY ROLE. Most prominently, historical issues perennially cloud Japan's political relations with China and South Korea, frustrating efforts to reduce tensions (see chapter 8 by Thomas Berger). Most significant, despite a clear and present danger presented by North Korea, efforts to encourage deeper trilateral security cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul have repeatedly been frustrated by political factors, despite the fact that both are close, democratic U.S. allies. When it comes to the prospect of Japan adopting a more robust regional security role, such political and diplomatic factors seem unlikely to disappear as variables anytime soon.⁹⁶ In Southeast Asia, by contrast, major countries, spanning the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam, welcome an expanded role for Japan, such as MSDF port visits and exercises, maritime domain awareness and capacity building, diplomacy, and investment.

It is also worth noting that some of Japan's proposed initiatives, such as bolstering security ties with maritime democracies, especially the Quad, face obstacles elsewhere. For example, India did not invite Australia to the 2018 Malabar naval exercises with the United States and Japan, even as an observer. Many commentators saw this as harming the efficacy of the Quad. To be fair, however, the Indian government noted that it has increased bilateral naval cooperation with Australia.⁹⁷

DOMESTIC POLITICS. Setting aside fiscal and constitutional constraints, there is little unambiguous evidence of robust public support for crucial changes

to Japan's security posture or regional role, such as fundamentally overturning longstanding principles like "exclusive defense" (*senshu boei*), or revising Article 9's first or second clause. Though resistance to change has attenuated somewhat in recent years, normative obstacles remain powerful, and pushing too far, too fast could backfire. The more than twenty-year effort—still unsuccessful—to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma in Okinawa to an offshore location in Henoko is a case in point of the powerful role of local domestic opposition in alliance decisionmaking.

At an elite level, on contentious issues such as Article 9 revision and defense spending, there is also no clear consensus about the best way forward—even within Abe's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). Furthermore, the fact that to get elected many LDP politicians depend on electoral cooperation with Komeito, the LDP's junior coalition partner with a pacifistic support base, gives Komeito significant leverage in intra-coalition debates on security policy, often enabling it to frustrate Abe and the LDP's ambitions.⁹⁸

Nevertheless, a survey experiment of over three thousand Japanese respondents conducted as part of this project (see chapter 11 for further details) suggests that Japanese political leaders may have space to push the envelope—something Abe has already shown a determination to do since returning to office, without significant political headwinds affecting his ability to stay in power. The survey finds that citizens are concerned about Japan's rapidly changing security environment and U.S. commitments to Japan's and regional security. It also uncovered that they view the liberal international order as having been crucial to Japan's prosperity, peace, and stability in Asia-Pacific, and generally support Japan adopting a relatively more proactive leadership role in support of it. Specific to security affairs, the survey reveals strong support for Japan strengthening ties with Washington and other like-minded Asia-Pacific partners to balance China and deter North Korea, pursuing more robust defense capabilities aimed at bolstering deterrence, such as increased defense spending. (Respondents were rather ambivalent about Article 9 revision; see chapter 9 by Kenneth Mori McElwain.) Significantly, based on this survey experiment and generally speaking, the Japanese public's vision for Japan's role appears largely in harmony with U.S. policies.

WHAT MORE COULD JAPAN DO?

Despite these constraints, in recent years and in response to a rapidly changing region and world, Japan has already significantly expanded its ability to proactively contribute to the Asia-Pacific security order, both within and beyond a U.S. alliance context. Japan has major strengths, far beyond its economic wherewithal and capable SDF. It is significant—and in contrast to the United States today—that very few countries, perhaps only China, see Japan as a “threat” to international peace and stability, much less the liberal international order. It is widely popular internationally, enjoys a robust democracy and relatively healthy economy, and has proven remarkably immune to the populism reshaping politics across much of the Western hemisphere and parts of Asia (see chapters 6, 7, and 10). It has also picked up the mantle from the United States and emerged as a champion of free trade (see chapter 2).

Especially when evaluated while acknowledging the significant constraints Japan’s leaders face domestically, the major pillars and direction of Japan’s national security strategy appear sound. Recent policy shifts are aimed at becoming a proactive and stabilizing force, while minimizing disruptions to a regional status quo that has worked well for many countries. The strategy also reflects an explicit recognition that Japan’s own national interests are inextricably linked to the liberal rules-based order. In contrast to an oft-heard critique of U.S. rhetoric and policies, Japan’s approach is not disproportionately focused on military contributions (though the discourse often unhelpfully frames them as such) but comprehensive—including economic, diplomatic, and capacity-building cooperation with like-minded countries within and beyond the Asia-Pacific. Concerning China, the goal appears to be to cooperate where possible, while working together with like-minded countries—regardless of regime type, it should be noted—to discourage and deter destabilizing behavior, while promoting stabilizing, order-sustaining behavior.

To the extent concerns about Japan’s ability to champion the liberal order exist, they primarily relate to disconnects between Japan’s foreign policy objectives and the domestic constraints—budgetary and otherwise—its ambitious leadership faces. If concerns about U.S. leadership and com-

mitment to the order persist and deepen, the urgency of addressing these issues will become only more severe. Alliance management and motivating Washington to stay maximally engaged must remain a top priority—throughout and beyond the Trump administration.

In the realm of traditional security, Japan should aim to ensure stability through a more “balanced” U.S.-Japan security relationship. Especially pressing is the need to strengthen deterrence by maximizing efficiencies and minimizing redundancies, thereby opening space for U.S. forces to focus more on regional security beyond Japan’s territorial defense, and to undercut narrow criticisms from Washington and elsewhere of perceived “cheap-riding.” To maximize its “deterrence bang” for a relatively limited “buck,” Tokyo can exploit Japan’s geography, in particular its vast number of islands, to emphasize asymmetric deterrence, while gradually increasing spending on defense and JCG. The United States and Japan must also coordinate closely if new SDF capabilities currently under consideration—for example, long-range cruise missiles, more robust amphibious capabilities, F-35Bs—come online. Concerning the gray zone challenge, both countries should consider developing declaratory policy on sub-threshold provocations to close the security treaty’s Article V “armed attack” seam, which China’s operations appear designed to exploit, and eliminate ambiguity concerning maritime militia involvement by bolstering ISR and intelligence cooperation and engaging in “naming and shaming” if it occurs.⁹⁹ Recognizing the scope of PLA-CCG cooperation and the reality that the latter is a paramilitary organization now under Central Military Commission control, Japan should bolster cooperation and contingency planning between JCG and the MSDF and enhance interoperability, joint training and exercises, and shared maritime domain awareness. Modifications to existing laws may be necessary, as may clarification of rules of engagement in gray zone scenarios, such as if a submerged submarine appears in Japan’s territorial waters. In all cases, close coordination with Washington as well as anticipating and proactively engaging domestic political concerns will be crucial.

This sort of more traditional balancing and deterrence will better achieve its goals if coupled with a comprehensive regional diplomatic strategy of rhetorical and policy engagement aimed explicitly at supporting the

regional security order in a maximally inclusive manner focused on opposing and deterring destabilizing *behavior*, rather than any particular country or regime type, *per se*. At the most general level, independently and in joint statements at bilateral and multilateral summits and international fora, Tokyo should repeatedly reaffirm commitments to norms and rules, and work to ensure that smaller states' voice and agency are protected. In Southeast Asia, in addition to continuing coast guard and other capacity building and occasional SDF presence missions, Japan should also adopt a more robust diplomatic posture toward multilateral security arrangements, including the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting-Plus, and so forth.

Recognizing that economics and security are interlinked, Japan should continue to champion an expanded and inclusive Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and "leave the light on" for the United States to eventually return. Though the United States is Japan's most important partner, Tokyo should put more meat on the bones of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific," and continue expanding security cooperation with any country that subscribes to the rules.¹⁰⁰ This is a good start. Though U.S. treaty allies and partners in the Asia-Pacific (especially Australia, India, Singapore, Indonesia, and the Philippines) and beyond (especially the United Kingdom, France, and Germany) are the logical place to focus, Japan should repeatedly and publicly emphasize that behavior, not regime type, is the condition for participation and inclusion. Patiently and repeatedly make it clear to Chinese leaders and the region that cooperation is welcome whenever and wherever interests align. The goal is balancing and deterrence of destabilizing behavior, not containment. Measures to bolster security ties with regional partners should be coupled with frequent and consistent diplomacy emphasizing that the target is China's behavior. At present, this signal is often lost. In this spirit, Tokyo should actively pursue economic, diplomatic, and security cooperation with China—especially on North Korea and counterproliferation—where possible, while maintaining realistic expectations, and work to ensure the effective implementation of the long overdue Japan-China air-sea contact mechanism, signed in 2018 after ten years of negotiations.

Japan's Role as a Proactive Stabilizer

Since the early Cold War, the Asia-Pacific security order and system of bilateral alliances centered on Washington have been a core determinant of Japan's security and economic well-being—a link recognized explicitly in Japan's own national security strategy. For years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Cold War—era system appeared capable of evolving to effectively confront a changing regional security environment. By 2019, however, such optimism has declined significantly. Rapid geopolitical and geo-economic shifts are widely seen as undermining key aspects of the regional and global status quo upon which Japan has depended for so long; in particular, the rules-based liberal international order essential to Japan's postwar foreign policy posture. In the security domain, leaders in Tokyo and Washington perceive China's rhetoric and coercive policies toward its neighbors to be corrosive of international law and rules-based norms and principles. Yet North Korea, a changing regional power balance, and doubts about U.S. policies and commitment to leadership—especially under the Trump administration—are also major concerns. They have further exacerbated worries about the liberal international order's sustainability and led to calls for Japan and other advanced liberal democracies and benefactors of the order to “step up.”

As the world's third largest economy and a major diplomatic player in the Asia-Pacific and beyond, Japan has immense potential to shape, and a significant stake in, the future evolution of the Asia-Pacific security order and liberal international order more generally. Though Japan is not in any position to singlehandedly backstop the security order in the face of powerful headwinds, it has already shown itself capable of developing a coherent and proactive national security strategy in response to evolving contemporary challenges. In the midst of the region's rapid and potentially disruptive transformation, Japan has a crucial role to play as a *proactive stabilizer* in Asia-Pacific security affairs. By strengthening its role in regional security through an expansion of its own capabilities, SDF and JCG roles and missions, and deepening cooperation with Washington and other like-minded stakeholders, Japan will help keep the United States actively engaged in regional affairs and contribute directly to efforts to promote the stability

that will be necessary to reinvigorate and reform the liberal international order more generally.

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