

Reviewing the Fundamental Basis of Japan's Defense Policy
- To Establish a Policy to be Honored in the Real World -
(Tentative and Abridged Translation)

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1. Introduction

This paper addresses two issues: first, the excessive legalism in the Japanese defense policy thinking; and second, the reestablishment of the Japan-US Alliance.

The year 2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the end of WWI. The world entered another world war twenty years after the end of WWI. In discussing the interwar period, E.H. Carr stated in *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, "Power is always an essential element of politics," and "Power is a necessary ingredient of every political order."¹ His discussion on military power continues, "The supreme importance of the military instrument lies in the fact that the *ultima ratio* of power in international relations is war."² In addition, he also argues, "If, however, it is utopian to ignore the element of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the element of morality in any world order."³ It is a reminder of Kosaka Masataka, who said that every order is a system of power as well as a system of values.⁴ Carr also stated, "It is sufficient to say that no political society can exist without law, and that law cannot exist except in a political society."⁵ Although Carr is regarded as a realist, he is not a simple realist. He discusses what the international order should be like, looking at reality squarely.

This is what the classic literature of international relations tells us on the question of war and peace. This raises the question, what is the level of debate on the theory and policy particularly among the defense practitioners in Japan? If we borrow the expression of Carr again, down to 1914, "war was still regarded mainly as the business of soldiers," and "the war of 1914-18 made an end of the view that war is a matter which affects only

¹ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939, An Introduction to the Study of International Relations*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001, pp.97, 213.

² Ibid., p. 102.

³ Ibid., p. 216.

⁴ Kosaka Masataka, *Kokusai-seiji Kyohu-to-kibou [International Politics – Fear and Hope]*, Chuo-koronsha, 1966, p. 128.

⁵ Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis*, p. 164.

professional soldiers.” The fact behind this expression is presumably the total warfare of WWI, but even apart from such a historical background, national defense policy of the democracy stands only on the understanding and support of its citizens. In this sense, winning full understanding and support of the public is an element of national defense.

This is particularly important for Japan, which is lacking in a consensus on its national defense. Military officers, civilian officials, politicians, and experts and intellectuals both inside and outside the government – all these groups in addition to the general public must share a common language and logic on defense, to establish a policy which deserves public understanding and support. Theories, which intellectuals treasure, are not everything, but policy must be compatible with the theories if we want the policy to be convincing.

Some people possess unsound arguments in their minds. For example, some do not want to recognize that physical repelling of foreign aggression is a role unique only to the military. A similar argument is a denial of the use of the military for peace based on the assumption that peace and military are incompatible. For another example, there are some who try to push the security discussion into legal arguments. They are complacent with their legal logic, avoiding substantial questions. There are others who try to address all the security issues with military solutions alone, focusing only on the necessity to prepare for the worst. And, there are some whose understanding of the military is too abstract to bear in mind the social foundations to underpin the military. All these arguments are utopian.

Similarly, there are unsound arguments on the alliance relationship. It is partly because the anti-American sentiment lingering in the mind of the Japanese public, who tend to mistake the alliance for subordination to the US and to view the alliance as a sign of lack of policy and strategy. This is an argument which completely ignores the reality of the regional security architecture.

All these arguments are detrimental. In order to help address these issues, this paper discusses, first the excessive legalism in the Japanese defense policy thinking, and second the reestablishment of the Japan-US Alliance.

2. To eliminate excessive legalism – Put an end to “theology.”

One of the major reasons the Japanese tend to initiate their security discussion with legalism is their debate on the Japanese Constitution. The discussion often becomes ossified because of the rigid definition of some basic concepts. In the Cold War era, legalism was the expression of the confrontation between the right and the left in Japanese politics, which was the domestic version of the international Cold War. In some years after the end of the Cold War, the Japanese National Diet passed legislation to deal with contingencies, gaining the approval of about 90 percent of the Diet members, which seemed to put an end to the unproductive legal debate. However, the outdated argument reemerged in the discussion on the reinterpretation of the Constitution with regard to the use of force. If Japan revises the Constitution now, it should do so in a way to eradicate the source of such a futile argument and to be able to establish a truly effective and convincing security policy for which no artificial argument is necessary. If the revision is made just to codify the current interpretation of the Constitution, there remains a fear of lingering "theology."

Japan's national interests are increasingly global. Accordingly, Japan has to think and act more proactively in the global context. If Japan tries to promote its security, leaving the huge gap between the strategic reality surrounding Japan and the world anticipated in the Constitution as it is, the focus of the policy discussion will continue to be on the tactical question of how to slip past the constitutional restrictions. Such an attitude is not what the policy should be.

The new interpretation of the Constitution with regard to the use of force permits the Japanese government to exercise the right of collective self-defense, but only in a very limited circumstance. This interpretation is considered to represent the maximum limit of interpretation of the Constitution. Measures which are not permitted by the new interpretation would be made possible not by another reinterpretation but only by revision of the Constitution. If so, the current debate on the revision of the Constitution should bear this point in mind, and make the revision as the step to remove the constitutional restriction so that Japan can fully exercise the right of collective self-defense and participate in international efforts for collective security.

3. Reestablishment of the Japan-US Alliance – For a symmetric

cooperation

The Japan-US Alliance has been one of the pillars of Japan's national security policy since the Cold War days. One of the bases of this alliance has been the sharing of values, but because of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, this aspect of the alliance has become less significant. In addition, President Trump's departure from long held promoted views of previous US administrations on the liberal internationalism is undermining the very basis of shared values. His words and deeds seriously hurt America's soft power. If it in due course leads to the decline of America's hard power, it will affect the resilience of the Japan-US Alliance seriously. It might easily lead to an illusion of tilting toward China and breaking away from the US. Or, it might easily lead to a prospect of a new order without the US.

However, the Japan-US Alliance and the US-centered alliance network as a whole have been institutionalized through decades of history and have become the firm bedrock of the regional order. The institutionalized network including the Japan-US Alliance will not be shaken by the change of the leadership of one country, even the US, but the adjustment of the system is inevitable because of the power shift. As far as Japan is concerned, it should ensure its own security by assuming much greater roles for the regional security in the alliance. That is the way for Japan to adjust the alliance relationship.

The Japan-US Alliance as the pillar of Japan's national security policy does not mean that Japan's security depends on the US. Article 5 of the Japan-US Security Treaty is not an article for the US to defend Japan. It simply states: "Each party ... would act to meet the common danger" In other words, it is Japan-US mutual cooperation that defends Japan. It is because of the asymmetrical nature of the security treaty that the mutuality is not clearly recognized. Although there is no denying that Japan's hosting US bases on its own soil enhances Japan's strategic value to the US, it will be increasingly important to make the alliance cooperation truly symmetrical by enhancing Japan's roles for regional security.

Japan has enhanced its roles for regional security through a number of steps including the reviews of the bilateral policy document called "The Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation," but all these efforts are based on the present Japan-US Security Treaty. Thus, this fact indicates

that this approach has come to its limit. Japan should revise the Constitution so that Japan may fully exercise its right of collective self-defense and accordingly should talk with the US to revise the Security Treaty to establish a symmetrical relationship of mutual defense. This effort will contribute to make the Japan-US Alliance more relevant to the regional alliance network and make the alliance network more resilient to strengthen the very basis of the regional order. Japan, as a staunch ally of the US, should be responsible for the effort to strengthen the alliance network.

Here, the point should be made much clearer that the Japan-US Alliance is the foundation of Japan's national security strategy. Otherwise, it would end up with simply inviting an easy criticism of subordination to the US. In order to effectively counter such an argument, sharing common values is of utmost importance. Today's world is characterized by the confrontation between democracy and authoritarianism. It is obvious particularly in this region. As the value is directly related to the choice of political system, sharing of common values must be emphasized more than ever before.

4. For the Future of Japan's Defense Policy

The choice of political system, however, does not automatically lead to defense policy. Geography has an eternal relevance to the policy. Japan is an island country located between the Asian continent and the Pacific Ocean. Japan, as a front-line state of the maritime powers, has to squarely face the pressure of the continental powers. As the continental mindset and the maritime mindset take different attitudes in advancing toward the sea, confrontation and friction between the two powers is inevitable. It is in this environment that each power is struggling to establish a new equilibrium in its own advantage. Japan cannot be a bystander.

In addition, dark side of globalization casts a long shadow on this region. One example, there are a number of cyber incidents which originate in this region. Everyone is a neighbor to each other in cyber space. Another example, large-scale natural disasters will continue to linger as an undeterrable threat in this region.

In sum, this region is characterized by the traditional confrontation and competition of sovereign states with the dark side of globalization

intricately entwined. North Korean nuclear and missile threat is a typical example.

Therefore, Japan has to engage in two different efforts simultaneously: first, helping to restore the regional balance of power to its own advantage, and second, promoting cooperation even with adversaries in traditional security to address non-traditional security challenges. In order to restore balance of power, quantitative balancing of military power is not enough. Common rules must be established. The purpose of these efforts is more on how to stabilize and strengthen the international order rather than how to repel aggression on Japan. Japan should take the measures proposed in this article as the basis of Japan's defense policy, in order to be able to pursue such efforts.

There are a number of positive developments in the region today such as North Korea's willingness to talk and China's willingness to improve relations with Japan. However, it is questionable if the North Korean actions for "denuclearization" are irreversible. China continues to be assertive at sea, particularly in the South China Sea. Japan should earnestly express its own strong resolve to address these challenges squarely. If such resolve follows its existing foundations, Japan's effort will very soon hit its limit.

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