

GEOSTRATEGIC INSECURITY, NATIONALISM AND THE DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF THE CHINA-JAPAN SECURITY DILEMMA

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the downward spiral presented by the security dilemma between China and Japan. The paper follows the logic outlined by Booth and Wheeler: The security dilemma is treated as a potential outcome of the parties' interpretation of and response to each other's strategic posture. The article highlights that China has a strong strategic rationale to expand into the maritime realm. However, this maritime space has already been claimed by Japan, among other states. Thus, China's security seeking behaviour is interpreted as threatening and hostile by Japan, which in turn responds with security seeking behaviour of its own to preserve the status quo. The article concludes that China and Japan are engaged in a classical security dilemma dynamic, in which the countries negatively associate each other's security. While this situation would be highly, and increasingly, difficult to resolve, the article offers some suggestions in the conclusion to mitigate these dynamics that are highly damaging to Sino-Japanese relations.

Keywords: China, Japan, security dilemma, Senkaku Islands

INTRODUCTION

The succession of Xi Jinping as President of the People's Republic of China (PRC) since 2012 has been followed by Beijing's increased assertiveness in pressing its maritime territorial claims against its neighbours. In this regard, the pattern of Chinese interactions with Japan in their dispute over the sovereignty of the Diaoyutai/Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea forms an interesting case study that reflects how a combination of geostrategic rivalry, nationalism and a historical narrative based on mutual hostility and antagonism have

caused an already tenuous relationship to escalate into full-blown security dilemma dynamic. This is all the more concerning given that the current trajectory in Sino-Japanese relations offers little optimism for the possibility of a de-escalation of tensions between the two countries; rather, the 'least bad' policy prescription, from the perspective of both Beijing and Tokyo, appears to be one oriented on the affirming the credibility of deterrence against each other.

This analysis in this paper is outlined in four sections, beginning with a brief review of recent academic literature on the security dilemma and the possible policy prescriptions that states can implement in addressing such a situation. The second and third sections examine these dynamics in the context of Chinese and Japanese security policy respectively vis-à-vis each other in the East China Sea. The convergent impact of these trends are brought together in the fourth section of the article, which examines how the diametrically opposing policy postures of the Chinese and the Japanese Governments have led to a vicious circle of escalating mutual hostility.

THE SECURITY DILEMMA REVISITED

In the mainstream academic literature, the concept of the security dilemma has been heavily dominated by the neorealist assumption that under the conditions of anarchy in international politics, states' attempts to strengthen their security in an uncertain world, for example through the acquisition of more armaments, may have the inadvertent effect of arousing the security fears of their equally defensively-minded neighbours.

In more recent scholarship, however, Nicholas Wheeler and Ken Booth highlight that there is 'no dilemma' in the neorealist approach to defining the security dilemma. Instead, they argue that a situation wherein the security of one state requires the undermining of its rival's security is better described as a 'security paradox', given that such attempts to increase their security have the paradoxical effect of undermining their own security over the long run.¹ Booth and Wheeler instead define the security dilemma as a 'two-level strategic predicament', consisting of the dilemmas of interpretation and response. The dilemma of response reflects the difficult situation

faced by policymakers in attempting to determine if a rival is driven by defensive intentions in seeking to enhance its security, or offensive ones where the rival has ambitions of conquest.² When policymakers resolve their dilemma of response in the belief that they are facing a security threat (what Booth and Wheeler refer to as a ‘strategic challenge’), this leads to the second dilemma, that of response – should a defensive state adopt a posture of restraint to reassure the other side, or one of firmness to reinforce the credibility of deterrence? Both courses of action carry an element of risk – the adoption of restraint runs the risk of unilateral vulnerability should the rival state be driven by hostile intent; conversely, a posture of assertiveness may have the inadvertent impact of arousing the other side’s fears and causing it to lash out in desperation.

Yet, in spite of the difficulties faced in eliciting cooperation between rival states under the condition of anarchy, Booth and Wheeler introduce the term ‘security dilemma sensibility’ to reflect the ability of policymakers to appreciate the complexities of the security dilemma, in particular the ability to recognise that a rival state’s apparently hostile posture may not be driven by ambition, but by fear.³ Herein, the ability to exercise security dilemma sensibility is composed of several elements, namely: 1) that policymakers appreciate the mutually constitutive nature of the security dilemma and the probability that their own actions may have contributed to their rival fears; 2) that policymakers have the resolve and political will necessary to assuage their rival’s fears and hence break the vicious circle of mutual hostility; 3) bearing in mind that policymakers have to respond to the security dilemma without the benefit of hindsight, security dilemma sensibility also requires a fall-back position, in the event that a given strategic challenge has to be deterred or defended against.

Yet, the fact that few periods in history have been marked by successful mitigation of security dilemma dynamics is illustrative of the difficulty faced in efforts to exercise security dilemma sensibility; apart from the instance of Gorbachev and Reagan in bringing about the end of the Cold War, few statesmen have been able to exercise security dilemma sensibility under the condition of anarchy. Such challenges are reflected in the increasingly acrimonious nature of Sino-Japanese rivalry since 2012.

CHINA'S EVOLVING STRATEGIC POSTURE TOWARDS JAPAN

In examining the Sino-Japanese security dilemma, a good starting point would be the changing orientation of China's geostrategic posture that has accompanied its re-emergence as a great power. The bulk of the academic literature on post-1945 Sino-Japanese relations have been dominated by two trends: studies reasserting the stopping power of economic interdependence, and in examining the effects of Chinese nationalism on China's foreign policy. During the second half of the 20th century, Japan was generally considered a security outlier, a major power without a strong military or an active defence posture that was heavily dependent on its alliance with the United States (U.S.). Under the Yoshida Doctrine, named after Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida, Japan functioned as a 'mercantile nation' during this period, seeking to accomplish its interests through Official Developmental Assistance (ODA) as a means of increasing Tokyo's influence. The notion of Japan as a pacifist nation was reinforced by the Fukuda Doctrine, announced by Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda in 1977, which envisaged Japan as a nation committed to peace and one that would never again become a military power.⁴

This orientation of Japanese foreign policy during the Cold War years was convenient for China as well. During the transition from Mao Zedong to Deng Xiaoping, China was content to put the matter of Japan's historical legacy on the backburner, as Japan's provision of ODA met the Chinese Communist Party (CCP's) interest in importing foreign investment and capital infrastructure to facilitate economic modernisation. Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, China's rising power has brought with it two new core assumptions in Chinese geostrategic calculations: first, that it is necessary for China to engage in assertive expansion into the maritime realm to strengthen its territorial and economic security; and second, that latent anti-Japanese sentiments, reinforced by state media and the patriotic education system, is a convenient instrument through which the CCP can channel internal dissent away from Beijing and towards Japan as an external lightning rod.

China's Search for Security and the Importance of the Maritime Realm

During Imperial times, China was a primarily continental power. With the exception of Admiral Zheng He's expeditions, Chinese power focused on the maintenance of a continental empire. From a strategic perspective the seas beyond the Chinese coast were of no significance. China's focus on a land-oriented strategy continued to dominate the early years of the PRC. The coastal provinces were considered expendable as the inward-looking economic and political structure of China under Mao meant that maritime security was a low priority.

However, since Deng Xiaoping's launching of widespread economic reforms during the 1980s, China has experienced significant political and economic shifts that resulted in the re-evaluation of its defence posture. Deng's reforms focused on the creation of Special Economic Zones in China's coastal cities, and shifting the country towards an export-oriented economy. The direct consequence of this policy has been the increasing concentration of industrial and infrastructural development in China's coastal cities. This has led to two further implications that underline the importance of maritime security for China. The first of these has been reflected in the internal migration of Chinese workers to the coastal cities in search of jobs. China's economic and demographic centre of gravity has shifted from interior rural provinces to the coastal cities.⁵ The second consequence is the growing dependence of the Chinese economy on external trade – in 2013, 24 percent of the Chinese GDP was derived from exports.⁶ This means that China is dependent on the Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs) connecting its ports with overseas markets. China also needs to secure raw materials it lacks at home – China imports more than 60 percent of its oil⁷ - and other vital goods using the same SLOCs. As the engines of Chinese economic growth (and hence regime stability), the coastal provinces and their maritime approaches are no longer expendable.

Such circumstances pose China with a major policy conundrum – having focussed on land power in previous decades at the expense of maritime security, China has limited control over the adjacent seas that have become critical for its future geopolitical interests. Beyond its

immediate littoral waters, China's control diminishes rapidly, leaving critical SLOCs vulnerable. It is thus hardly surprising that China's emerging defense posture places increased emphasis on affirming its claims of sovereignty over the East China Sea as a core national interest, over which Beijing does not intend compromise. Repeated Chinese threats to use force in defence of its claims to sovereignty in the East China Sea should not be underestimated, in light of past Chinese clashes with its neighbours over disputed territories.

The Influence of Nationalism on China's Sense of Security: The Japanese Connection

At the same time, China's economic liberalisation and the resulting shift to a guided capitalist system have had the concurrent effect of weakening the Leninist / Maoist ideology that provided legitimacy for CCP's rule in China, as reflected in the demands for political liberalisation during the 1989 Tiananmen Square Incident. Moreover, China's economic reforms introduced new social problems, in particular the growing divides among urban rich and rural poor and perceptions of corruption within the government. The CCP has sought to address this conundrum by promoting a nationalist ideology through the introduction of a 'Patriotic Education' curriculum that emphasizes the achievements of China as a basis for governance and the need for Chinese national unity.⁸ The Patriotic Education campaign is based on reinforcing seemingly contradictory feelings among ordinary Chinese. On the one hand, the system instilled pride by emphasising the historical greatness of the Middle Kingdom. On the other hand, it invokes shame, with particular emphasis on the 'Century of Humiliation' that encompassed the roughly hundred years prior to 1949 (from the First Opium War, to the founding of the PRC), during which time China was invaded and subjugated by Western imperial powers and Japan.⁹ This in turn stands in contrast with portrayals of the Chinese involvement in the Korean War as a 'victory' against the U.S.-led coalition and China's more recent economic successes. The underlying message is clear: China fell due to disunity, and it was the CCP that lifted it up again; the people of China are therefore expected to unify behind the policies of the CCP.

The extent to which nationalism has taken root as the CCP's instrument of regime legitimacy has a dual impact on China's relations with Japan. First, repeated invocations of the Century of Humiliation within China's Patriotic Education curriculum have resulted in a generation of young Chinese with a siege mentality insofar as the PRC's relations with Japan are concerned. Given the extent to which Chinese nationalism is concerned about external threats and promotes mistrust and vigilance, the underlying emphasis in ensuring that China will no longer be humiliated promotes a focal point in entrusting the CCP with doing whatever is necessary to ensure the security of China. For many Chinese, there is no security dilemma in their relations with their neighbours, but only external strategic challenges that have emerged in response to the re-emergence of China. Under such circumstances, and buoyed by the jingoism of the Patriotic Education curriculum, the majority of policy elites as well as ordinary Chinese are affixed to the importance of a militarily strong China that will defend the nation's territorial integrity (including disputed territories).

Such sentiments find particular resonance within the context of Sino-Japanese relations due to the Chinese state media's repeated invocation of Japan as an existential threat to Chinese security. Japan occupies a special position as the foremost strategic challenge to China in the CCP's nationalistic narrative. Although a former tributary of the Middle Kingdom, Japan's military victories over China during the Sino-Japanese War of 1895 and the Boxer Rebellion underscored the extent of China's decline during the early 20th century. Worse was to come with the Second Sino-Japanese War that broke out in 1937, with China sustaining an estimated 15 to 20 million casualties. The PRC's Patriotic Education curriculum has paid particular emphasis on such painful memories as the Nanking Massacre of December 1937 and the biological warfare activities of the Japanese Army's Unit 731. Furthermore, the recentness of Japan's wartime legacy means that the aforementioned historical episodes are memories that have been passed down from generation to generation in China, in so doing imprinting themselves onto the collective psyche of many young Chinese. Concurrently, successive Japanese Prime Ministers have been ambivalent in addressing Japan's wartime role, as reflected in continued visits to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine and history

textbooks that downplay Japanese war crimes. In so doing, the Chinese Government has been able to invoke the image of Japan as having failed to sufficiently atone for its wartime role as part of the CCP's Patriotic Education campaign.

It is thus not surprising that Japan plays the role of the main antagonist of the PRC's contemporary nationalist narrative. This makes China especially sensitive to any acts from Japan, and incentivizes the PRC to adopt an often uncompromising tone towards Japan. Whilst most Chinese are at best ambivalent over the prospect of a clash of interests with unification with Taiwan or the US, the notion of contested territorial claims with Japan is a different matter, one wherein patriotism and militant jingoism are inseparable. Thus, as Susan Shirk described one Chinese netizen's patriotic sentiment, "I would like to donate one month's salary if our army fought against Taiwan. I would like to donate one year's salary if our army fought against America. I would like to donate my life if our army fought against Japan."¹⁰

If China's Patriotic Education curriculum has created a groundswell of support for an increasingly nationalistic foreign and security policy, it has also had the concurrent effect of reducing Chinese sensitivity to the implications of the security dilemma. The former has offered many Chinese an interpretation of history that is decidedly one-sided, in which less-than-savoury periods of China's relations with its neighbours are downplayed. Thus, for instance, the 15th century voyages of Admiral Zheng He are described by Chinese history textbooks as an exercise in diplomatic friendship – conveniently overlooking the fact that Zheng He commanded an armada of several hundred warships and some 27,000 military personnel.¹¹ Rather, the dominant discourse in Chinese history textbooks is one that has portrayed China as a benign power that has never initiated war against its neighbours will never seek hegemony or domination over its neighbours.¹²

Such a portrayal of China as a benign power, when juxtaposed against the Chinese public's perception of Japan as unrepentant, further bolsters China's benign self-image. The extent of state control of the media and the comparative lack of alternative sources of information

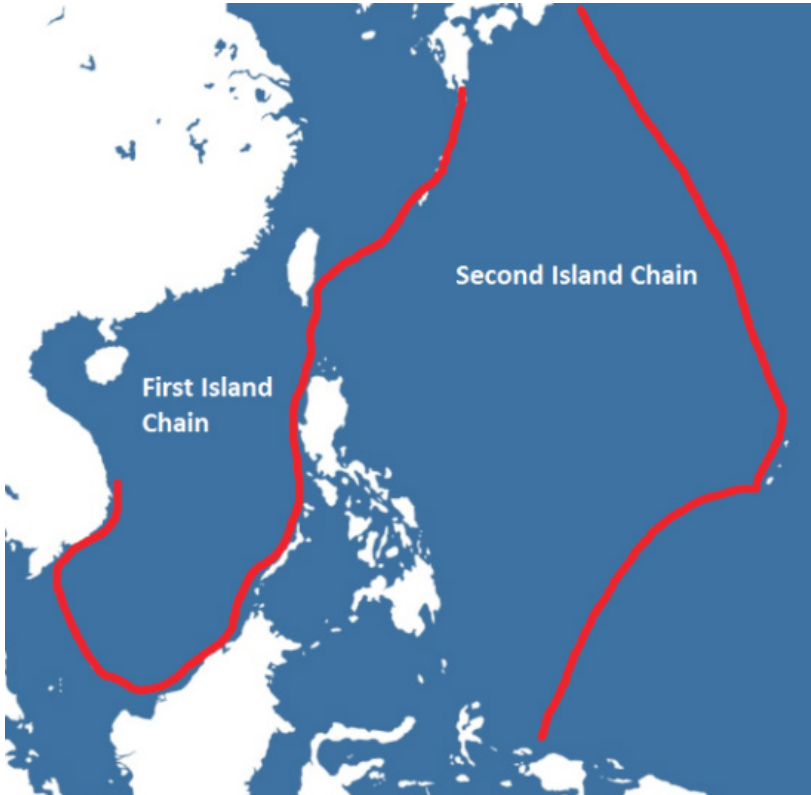
to the Chinese public, means that mainstream PRC opinion on the state of Sino-Japanese relations is biased and one-sided. As Shirk noted, in an October 2005 opinion poll on Sino-Japanese relations, “90 percent of Chinese blamed Japan for the poor relations between the two countries, while more than half the Japanese respondents said it was hard to tell which side was to blame.”¹³ Thus, the state media’s portrayal of China as the legitimate sovereign over the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands means that China’s growing air and naval capabilities are accepted by most Chinese as being consistent with the necessity of safeguarding national security and territorial integrity, whilst in the same breath casting Japan’s own air and naval military upgrading as a sign of an unrepentant, aggressive Japan, and hence vindication of China’s more assertive posture in the East China Sea.

The fact that China’s period of past imperial history is being highlighted at the same time that the present-day PRC enjoys growing political, economic and military clout means that the majority of PRC elites and citizens see themselves as entitled to step up to the position of regional dominance that had been lost during the Century of Humiliation. In this regard, the perception of China as the emerging hegemonic power of the Asia Pacific region based on its sheer size means that the bulk of its population see the PRC as being entitled to a larger share of territory and resources; as then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Yang Jiechi declared in 2010, “China is a big country and other countries are small countries, and that’s just a fact.”¹⁴ Similarly, Shirk recalled a conversation in which a Chinese Foreign Ministry official rejected three-way talks between China, Japan and the U.S. to address Sino-Japanese tensions on the grounds that “Japan isn’t a real power like China and the U.S.”¹⁵

China’s First and Second Island Chains

China’s sense of geostrategic insecurity emphasises the need to expand into the maritime realm to create a strategic buffer zone, as reflected in the concepts of the First and Second Island Chains, shown on Map 1.

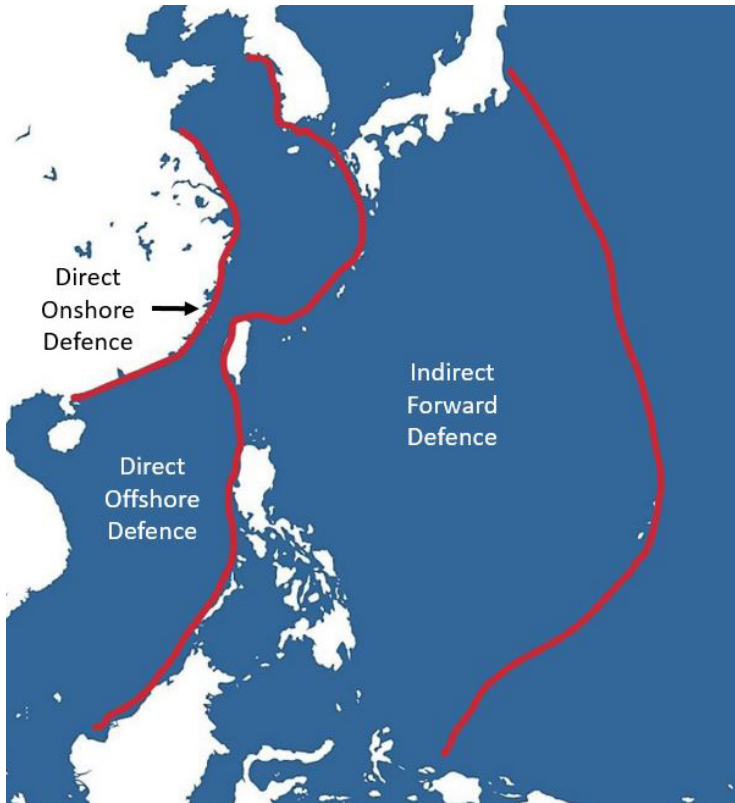
The First Island Chain refers to the line drawn from the Japanese home islands, through the Ryukyu Islands, Taiwan, the Philippines and Borneo to the southern part of the South China Sea. The Second Island Chain is drawn from the Japanese home islands through the

Map 1: The First and Second Island Chains¹⁶

Northern Marianna Islands, Guam and Palau to the eastern part of Indonesia. These zones correspond with key naval defence zones, as derived from Geoffrey Till's conceptualisation of maritime strategy¹⁷, illustrated on Map 2.

The waters leading up to the First Island Chain would be where the PLA-N engages in direct offshore defence of the waters most critical to the defence of the critical urban and industrial centers of China's coast. Once security of the First Island Chain is achieved, the PLA-N would be able to break through and secure the waters leading to the Second Island Chain, thereby providing the PRC with a level of maritime strategic depth. From here, the PLA-N would be one step away from breaking through to the open oceans, allowing China to

Map 2: Key Naval Defence Zones overlaid on the First and Second Island Chains¹⁸



join the exclusive club of blue-water naval powers and thus achieve a status commensurate with China’s self-identification as a great power.¹⁹

Such an evolution in the direction of Chinese strategic thinking is reflected in two areas: first, the PRC’s naval expansion, and second, in the adoption of an increasingly assertive posture in pressing its maritime territorial claims against its neighbours. First, China’s naval expansionism marks a distinct shift from its previous focus on land security. The PRC has the world’s second largest military budget, standing at US\$171 billion in 2013, with an average growth rate of 11.65 percent between 2003 and 2013. In contrast, Japan’s total military budget was US\$59 billion, with a negative growth rate of

-0.33 percent. The Chinese military budget achieved parity with Japan in 2004, and doubled in 2009.²⁰

China's most notable acquisition has been the unveiling of its first aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning* (a former Soviet-era vessel inherited by Ukraine after the end of the Cold War). Whilst the capabilities of the latter are constrained by numerous design limitations such as the small size of its air wing, Beijing's purchase of the *Liaoning*'s blueprints from the Ukrainian Government and plans production of similar vessels are indicative of Beijing's blue water ambitions. Related developments include China's retiring of its older Cold War-era vessels, in favour of newer *Luyang III* class destroyers and *Jiangkai II* class frigates, both of which are designs that emphasise low-radar visibility as well as Joint Service Integrated Data Link System (JSIDLS) to facilitate faster 'sensor to shooter' sharing of target information.

Second, China has also been increasingly assertive in pursuing its extensive territorial claims in both the South and East China Seas. In seeking to secure the SLOCs that run to China's south, the PRC has undertaken extensive land reclamation and the construction of extensive military infrastructure in the South China Sea. A similar pattern of maritime brinkmanship has increasingly characterised the PRC's challenge to Japanese sovereignty over the Senkaku / Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. In November 2013, China unilaterally declared a new Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) over the disputed islands.²¹ In both the East and South China Seas, China has relied heavily on 'grey zone' challenges, particularly fisherman and the Chinese Coast Guard, which allows Beijing to assert its claims whilst enabling it to deny that it is seeking an outright military confrontation.

JAPAN'S RESPONSE TO CHINA'S STRATEGIC POSTURE

Japan's Interpretation of China's Rise

China's adoption of an increasingly assertive posture in East Asia has in turn been interpreted by Japan as a strategic challenge. During the Cold War, Japan adopted a foreign and security policy based on its self-identification as a pacifist mercantile state that relied on economic influence to achieve national interests. Yet, the post-Cold War period saw a tentative shift that aligned Japan more closely to

the U.S. alliance. Japan was ridiculed by the U.S. for its ‘chequebook diplomacy’ during the 1991 Gulf War (under which Japan made a financial contribution to the U.S. war effort, but no involvement of the JSDF). More ominously, the 1990s saw the emergence of new security threats close to the Japanese heartland. The 1993-1994 North Korean nuclear crisis underscored the extent to which Japan remained reliant on the US security alliance against would-be nuclear proliferators, whilst the PRC’s use of missile tests and amphibious military exercises to intimidate Taiwan in 1995-1996 highlighted that a strictly territorial interpretation of the self-defensive role of the JSDF would place Japan in an awkward situation in the event of regional crises in East Asia beyond Japanese territory that involved the U.S. Pacific Command. The 1997 Revision of U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines accordingly saw the affirmation of a ‘general framework and policy direction’ to facilitate enhanced U.S.-Japanese security cooperation, both under ‘normal circumstances and during contingencies’.²² Yet, Japanese security hedging during this period remained tentative and cautious; the 1997 Revision made no direct reference to China, presumably reflecting Japanese wariness of any fallout in its relations with China.

More recently, however, China’s growing assertiveness in the region and the rapid expansion of the PLA-N’s assets have led to a significant rethink amongst Japanese defence planners. From its inception in 2007 to 2012, the Japanese Ministry of Defence Annual White Papers reflected general consistency in referring to North Korea as the most direct threat to Japan’s security. Since 2012, however, the Japanese Defence White Papers have taken a progressively more hard-line position against China. The trend since 2012 has been for Japanese Ministry of Defense White Papers to directly reference China as a threat. Thus, for instance, the 2012 White Paper warned that China ‘has been expanding and intensifying its activities *in waters close to Japan*’.²³

Seen in retrospect, the 2012 White Paper had begun the trend of openly acknowledging China as a threat to the security of Japan, and increasingly calling for Japan’s own defence build-up as a response. The 2013 White Paper noted that ‘*China has attempted to change the status quo by force* based on its own assertion which is incompatible with the existing order of international law’.²⁴ The 2014 White Paper was even more explicit, warning of China’s:²⁵

...attempts to alter the status quo by coercive measures ... to weaken the control of other countries over the islands to which China claims territorial sovereignty ... through various surveillance activities and use of force in the seas and airspace.

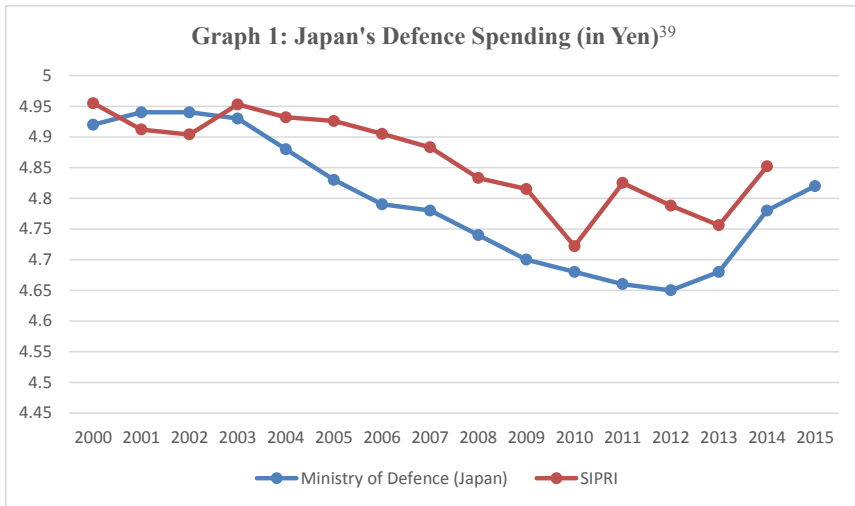
The most recent Japanese Ministry of Defense White Paper, released in 2015, goes even further, noting that: “Since October 2013, the operations of government vessels intended to intrude into territorial waters have become *routinized*. In this light, an *operations manual* or other codes may have been developed.”²⁶ In so ascribing a clear and consistent pattern of Chinese maritime incursions in the East China Seas as part of a concerted strategy approved by Beijing, the Japanese Ministry of Defense has subtly moved towards casting China’s conduct in the East China Sea as presenting a strategic challenge to Japanese interests.

Japan’s Response to China’s Strategic Posture

Since coming into office in 2012, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has adopted a strategic posture based on two key avenues. First, Abe has initiated a military build-up to match China, with particular emphasis on upgrading Japan’s air and naval capabilities. Second, this has been accompanied by Tokyo’s undertaking key initiatives that seek a more robust role for the JSDF in Japan’s foreign policy.

After a decade of decline, the Abe administration has begun to steadily increase Japan’s defence budget. The trend can be traced on Graph 1.²⁷

Whilst Japanese defence spending shrunk a total by 5.9 percent from 2002 and 2012, between 2012 and 2015 it grew a total of 7 percent.²⁸ Japan’s increase in defence spending is significant for several reasons. The first concerns the timing of these measures, coming at a time of heightened tensions in Sino-Japanese relations. In previous years, the necessity of responding to Pyongyang’s nuclear and missile proliferation threat meant that modest levels of JSDF modernisation could be undertaken without controversy. In contrast, the growing strength of the PRC’s air and maritime assets cannot be countered with such modest increases in defence spending. Rather, the extent of JSDF modernisation has clearly been undertaken with East China Sea contingency scenarios against the PRC in mind. This is evident



from the clear focus on modernisation of the JSDF’s air, maritime and amphibious military assets:²⁹

- The yearly acquisition of one new destroyer and modernization of older vessels, to maintain a sufficient gap in naval power over China;
- The yearly acquisition of one new submarine, and the modernization of older ones, to maintain Japan’s qualitative superiority over China;
- The acquisition of F-35A fighter aircraft and undertaking of the Mitsubishi X-2 *Shinshin* stealth fighter project, in a bid to counter China’s production of J-11 fighters and development of the J-20 and J-31 stealth fighters;
- Acquisition of amphibious vehicles, V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft and the modernization of *Osumi*-class landing ships to provide Japan with an amphibious capability to regain control of the Senkakus in the event of a clash with China;

Yet, amidst this list of newly acquired JSDF assets, the Ground component of the JSDF has received comparatively, with a handful of new Type 10 Main Battle Tanks and no new artillery. Rather, the orientation of Japanese defence policy to affirm the credibility of

deterrence in an air-naval scenario in the East China Sea is clear, and further reflected in the build-up of forces and capabilities on the East China Sea. In response to China's increasing assertiveness in its maritime neighbourhood, the JSDF has shifted towards an increased concentration of air and naval assets in the East China Sea, with the establishment of new bases and a Coastal Observation Unit in the Yonaguni Islands (80 nautical miles southeast from the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands).

The shift towards a more assertive deployment of the JSDF has also been accompanied by efforts to loosen hitherto strict restrictions on the deployment of the JSDF. For much of its post-1945 history, Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution has long been held up as a key pillar of Japan's identity as a pacifist nation, and confined the role of the JSDF to a strict interpretation of the territorial defence of the Japanese home islands. In 2013, however, Prime Minister Abe unveiled Japan's new National Security Strategy (NSS), calling for a more proactive Japanese defence policy.³⁰ Abe has since advocated a number of key legislative changes that highlight Japanese intentions to bandwagon with other states in East Asia against Chinese maritime activities in the region:

- In 2014 the *Three Principles of Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology* was accepted, revising Japan's ban on the export of military equipment and allowing Japan to provide military aid overseas.³¹ Both the Philippines and Vietnam are expected to receive Japanese-made patrol boats, thereby enabling the Vietnamese and Filipino Coast Guards to better secure their respective EEZs.³²
- In 2014, Abe bypassed Article 96 of the Japanese Constitution to circumvent Diet debate, instead unilaterally reinterpreting Article 9. Under the 2014 reinterpretation, Tokyo is no longer required to wait until Japanese territory has been attacked before authorising deployment of the JSDF; rather, the expanded role for the JSDF allows for its deployment overseas in support of other countries.³³

Nor have these measures been mere rhetoric; in response to China's assertiveness in the East China Sea, Japan has adopted a

significantly more hard-line approach by deliberately ignoring the Chinese ADIZ³⁴ and increasing JSDF air and maritime intercepts of PRC aircraft and vessels in the area.³⁵ More recently, the highly influential Science Council of Japan has, with Abe's support, called for lifting the ban on defense-related scientific and technical research.³⁶

THE VICIOUS CIRCLE OF THE CHINA-JAPAN SECURITY DILEMMA

It is thus apparent that Beijing and Tokyo stand diametrically opposite from each other insofar as their own vision of regional security is concerned; China's drive to strengthen the security to its maritime approaches has been interpreted by Tokyo as evidence of the PRC's militarism. Conversely, Japan's security-seeking behaviour is consistent with the dominant Chinese historical narrative that has cast Japan as unrepentant over its wartime past. Such developments pose significant difficulties for either side in exercising security dilemma sensibility in their interaction. As Booth and Wheeler note, mitigation of security dilemma dynamics requires that one or both sides acknowledge how their own military postures may have contributed to the fears of the other.

Such sensitivity to the dynamics of the security dilemma are not apparent on either side. In China, contemporary nationalism is central to the legitimacy and political survival of the CCP. In the face of increasing internal pressures, the CCP has to continue to encourage nationalism to redirect domestic dissent. However, the CCP's control over nationalist sentiments is arduous at best and it restricts its foreign policy options.³⁷ Acting to restrain the nationalist rhetoric would invite criticism and erode the CCP's legitimacy. Herein, the strong anti-Japanese sentiments embedded into Chinese nationalism means that Beijing cannot afford the appearance of weakness towards Japan as such an act will be seized on by domestic critics as a sign of political weakness, thereby risking the CCP's legitimacy in the eyes of the Chinese people.

Herein, the ambivalence of Japan over its wartime legacy has been cited by Chinese hawks as evidence of an unrepentant Japan that seeks to deny China its rightful place as a rising power in international relations. At the same time, in creating a one-sided

historical narrative that casts China's history and position in the world in an overwhelmingly positive light, few PRC citizens appreciate that their country's adoption of a more assertive foreign and security posture have contributed to Japan's fears. Instead, China's security seeking behaviour has created the enemy it always feared: a militarily strong and assertive Japan that departs from its economic orientation in favour of a more assertive foreign and security policy.

Japan is increasingly embarking on a similar path. One key element of Abe's agenda is to restore a sense of purpose and pride to Japan through a more active foreign and security policy. Standing up to China is an important element to this. Abe's predecessors had sought to avoid direct confrontation with China. Junichiro Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, for instance, came with the caveat that:³⁸

It is erroneous to view that Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine are an attempt to glorify Japan's past militarism ... The Prime Minister has repeatedly declared that Japan should squarely face "these facts of history in a spirit of humility, and with feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology always engraved in mind.

Such nuances have been lost on the Chinese public, for whom the Patriotic Education campaign has adopted the status of Japan as unreservedly unrepentant. Nor did the premierships of Yukio Hatoyama (September 2009–2010) and Naoto Kan (June 2010–September 2011) – both of whom sought reconciliation with China – achieve any substantive progress in enabling the Chinese citizenry to look past the image of Japan as the perpetrator of China's darkest hours, as illustrated in 2010 when the Chinese trawler *Minjinyu 5179* collided with Japanese Coast Guard boats near the Senkaku Islands, and China's subsequent blocking of exports of rare earth minerals to Japan.

Set against the perception that his predecessors have been too weak in defending Japanese national interests, Abe has unveiled a more nationalistic foreign and security posture that seeks to replace Japan's 'Lost Decade' with a more prominent place of pride for Japan. In so doing, Tokyo's justification of its arming on the grounds of self-defence is, in Chinese eyes, vindication of the PRC's discourse that has

emphasised the need for a strong military to prevent foreign powers from ever again imposing a new 'Century of Humiliation' on China.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY

While the aforementioned tensions between China and Japan are increasing and likely to continue along this trajectory for the foreseeable future, the two countries are unlikely to engage in a major war in the short to medium term, for three reasons.

Regional Balancing against China

China's increasingly assertive conduct in the East Asian region has aroused regional concerns not only in Japan, but also the wider East Asian region. This has been reflected in the general support for the Obama Administration's Pivot to Asia and increased security cooperation and weapons transfers between regional status quo states such as the U.S., Japan, India, Australia, Singapore, Vietnam and the Philippines. Such security cooperation portends the possibility of a coalition capable of geostrategically surrounding China. Faced with such developments, it is clear to Beijing that its pattern of expansionist behaviour risks backfiring on its maritime security by provoking a U.S.-led regional coalition against China.

Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) through Nuclear Deterrence

Growing U.S.-Japanese security cooperation further reinforces the prospect of some level of stability in Sino-Japanese relations for the foreseeable future. China has a sizeable First-Strike nuclear capability in the form of land-based missiles, and only a limited Second-Strike capability in the form of submarine-launched nuclear missiles. Set against this, the U.S., as Japan's primary security partner, maintains an overwhelming advantage over China in terms of both First and Second Strike capabilities, along with an emerging Missile Defense System that would counter China's smaller nuclear arsenal. Such a nuclear balance of power is more than likely to induce caution on the part of Beijing in its security calculations over its disputes with Japan over the East China Sea.

Mutual Economic Vulnerability

In addition to the prospect of mutually assured destruction in the event of a clash of arms between China and the U.S., Beijing is also aware that unnecessarily reckless posturing over a handful of islands on its maritime periphery will do even more harm than good to China's economic interests. The Senkaku Islands have little intrinsic economic value apart from fisheries. Moreover, given that our analysis points to securing the PRC's maritime peripheries and SLOCs as the underlying motive for Beijing's increasing intransigence in the East China Sea, this would still be outweighed by the range of counter options available to Japan and its partners that would continue to challenge China's maritime economic security.

Japan's alliance relationship with the U.S. is further bolstered by the actions of Australia and Singapore that have also further cemented their own security cooperation with Washington D.C. It should be noted that all of the aforementioned states have a key interest in maintaining freedom of navigation on the SLOCs that run from the East China Sea, through the South China Sea and the Straits of Malacca and on to the Indian Ocean. Given that China does not possess any effective power projection capabilities beyond its artificially built islands in the South China Sea, it is easy for Japan, in conjunction with the aforementioned regional states, to counter the PRC's moves by stepping up their own military cooperation with the U.S. to block Chinese access to the SLOCs that the PRC's economic interests are so dependent on, thus negating whatever geostrategic advantage China may derive in attempting to establish its First and Second Island Chains of defence.

Long-term Prospects

The long-term prognosis of Sino-Japanese relations is less encouraging. China and Japan are clearly increasingly entangled in the downward spiral of a deeply internalised security paradox. In China, anti-Japanese sentiments are enshrined in its nationalist ideology that provides the legitimacy of the CCP. In Japan, Abe's nationalistic agenda remains popular with a public that seeking to move away from the disillusionment of Japan's 'Lost Decade in seeking a restored sense of pride and purpose. While war between the two countries is far

from preordained, a total negative effect on Asian regional security is expected from their mutual animosity.

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