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# Japan's strategic re-posture: Prime Minister Abe and the implications for the Japan-US alliance and regional security

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores Prime Minister Abe's new international agenda, examining how it is changing Japan's strategic posture within the Japan-US alliance, and assessing its implications for regional security. The paper looks at Abe the individual, his political ideas and how his vision for Japan is driving the change. It also examines the Japan-US alliance, primarily in the context of framing a broader discussion on Japan's approach to the security challenges posed by North Korea, China and non-traditional threats.

The paper argues that Abe is the primary driver of Japan's change in strategic posture. It also contends, however, that while Abe's vision for peace and prosperity constitutes a worthy ideal, the implementation of his vision has significant implications for the Japan-US alliance and Japan's relationships with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region. It concludes that in order to realise the vision, Japan will need to nurture key relations, particularly with the US, China, the Republic of Korea and ASEAN.

# Japan's strategic re-posture: Prime Minister Abe and the implications for the Japan-US alliance and regional security

You have enemies? Good. That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life.

Winston Churchill<sup>1</sup>

## Overview

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's keynote address at the 2014 Shangri-La Dialogue defined his vision for Japan.<sup>2</sup> Articulating his desire for 'peace and prosperity in Asia, for evermore', Abe broadcast to the world his intent for Japan to play an active role through his 'proactive contribution to peace' initiative.<sup>3</sup> Abe also framed his initiative in the broader context of a united mission for the Asia-Pacific region when he stated:

I think all of us in the room here share a common mission. The mission is one of pursuing better living standards and economic prosperity. It's a mission of bringing into full bloom the latent potential of this great growth centre and the people living there, stretching from Asia and the Pacific to the Indian Ocean. We must build and then hand over to the next generation a stage on which each and every individual can prosper still more and certainly benefit from the fruits of growth.<sup>4</sup>

There seems little doubt that Abe is a leader with a sense of vision that he is prepared to act on. While his success or otherwise will be critically reviewed with the benefit of hindsight, history will also judge his performance in the context of a series of complex geopolitical and geostrategic circumstances, with both domestic and international implications, which have impacted Japan's interests in recent years.

Domestically, Abe is faced with a legacy of poor economic and fiscal reform that has perpetuated Japan's economic stagnation. Abe summarised the situation in July 2013 when he asserted that 'over the last few years, an anaemic economy in Japan has engendered feeble politics, which in turn weakens the economy further'.<sup>5</sup> Contributing to this problem has been the steady decline in the size of Japan's labour force, compounded by the burden of an ageing population.

These prevailing economic and work force dynamics have all contributed to a weakened domestic market. Balanced against a broader social agenda, Abe has also been driving the debate on the role and tasks of Japan's Self Defense Forces (JSDF)—a significant contributing factor in the implementation of his 'proactive contribution to peace' initiative—much of which is centred on Japan's lawful right to undertake collective self-defence.<sup>6</sup>

Internationally, Japan's ongoing alliance arrangement with the US is critical for a number of reasons. First, this relationship facilitates US engagement in the region, guaranteeing a level of security that Japan cannot provide unilaterally. Second, it shapes Japan's stance against an unpredictable and potentially nuclear-armed North Korea. Third, the Japan-US alliance influences Japan's approach to broader engagement with regional countries.

In particular, Japan's relationship with China and the Republic of Korea (ROK) could be viewed as a barometer of the regional security environment. Japan currently has territorial disputes with both these countries and a divergent perspective of their recent history that is the subject of much debate. These factors create two trilateral dynamics of tension within Japan's immediate neighbourhood; Japan-China-US and Japan-ROK-US, with the Japan-US alliance central to both.

Japan also continues to pursue a multilateral agenda, primarily through a comprehensive engagement strategy with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to develop and contribute to broader peace and security initiatives throughout the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>7</sup> However, for the purposes of this paper, only those forums specifically dealing with security-

related matters will be discussed further, notably the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, and the East Asia Summit.



**Figure 1. Japan's location relative to the Asia-Pacific region<sup>8</sup>**

Japan's economic and JSDF reform objectives have implications for neighbouring countries, particularly as Japan's strategic posture shifts. This context of change is underpinned by the evolving Japan-US relationship, itself nested within a range of security challenges involving relations with China, the ROK and North Korea, as well as extending further south into the ASEAN region.<sup>9</sup> Further, and ironically, Abe's efforts to re-energise debate about Japan's standing within the global community and his desire for peace and prosperity for Asia serve to compound the security challenges.

Therefore, understanding how Abe intends to propel Japan forward is important because the impact domestically and internationally is different. Domestically, the impact is changing Japan's strategic posture, which has been characterised as defensive and passive since World War 2. Internationally, there is some unease about Abe's narrative and what he seeks to achieve. Therefore, any shift in Japan's strategic posture, particularly involving the JSDF actively contributing to peace and security, requires a balanced diplomatic and messaging strategy in order to promote good relations with its neighbours, particularly China and the ROK.

Against that background, this paper explores Prime Minister Abe's new international agenda, examining how it is changing Japan's strategic posture within the Japan-US alliance and assessing its implications for regional security. It will argue that Abe is the primary driver of Japan's change in strategic posture. It will also contend, however, that while Abe's vision for peace and prosperity constitutes a worthy ideal, the implementation of his vision has significant implications for the Japan-US alliance and Japan's relationships with other countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

In order to realise Abe's vision, the paper will argue that there is a requirement for Japan to nurture key relations, particularly with the US, China, the ROK and ASEAN. Otherwise, the implementation of the vision could leave Japan isolated. To illustrate how Japan's defensive



strategic posture is changing, the paper will look at Abe the individual, his political ideas and how his vision for Japan is driving the change. This will be followed by an examination of the Japan-US alliance, which will be used to frame a broader discussion on Japan's approach to the security challenges posed by North Korea, China and non-traditional threats.

## **Abe: The driver of change**

This section of the paper focuses on Abe and his vision for Japan. To appreciate the context of Abe's vision, it is necessary to better understand the individual and how his experiences have shaped his political views over two terms in office. Following this insight, Abe's vision for a greater Japan will be explored through a review of his economic agenda, framed by a broader discussion on his approach to regional security. These overviews serve to highlight Abe's personal investment in the reform process and Japan's proposed trajectory for peace and prosperity. It will be argued that, ultimately, the driver behind Japan's changing strategic posture is Abe himself.

### *Abe: The man and politician*

Shinzo Abe has created many firsts in Japanese politics. He is the youngest post-war prime minister, with one commentator referring to him as the 'prince' of Japanese politics.<sup>10</sup> He is also the first to win the office twice as leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP); initially in 2006 and then again in December 2012. Abe is also the first grandson of a former prime minister to be elected prime minister.<sup>11</sup> Political influence has also come from his father, Abe Shintaro, who was the longest serving post-war foreign minister and regarded as one of the 'political heavyweights' in Japanese politics.<sup>12</sup>

With these credentials, Abe entered politics as the private secretary to his father before his eventual election to the Diet in 1993.<sup>13</sup> However, it took almost ten years before Abe came to political prominence, notably while accompanying then Prime Minister Koizumi to North Korea in 2002.<sup>14</sup> Abe's advice was highly regarded by both Koizumi and the Japanese public, so much so that Koizumi appointed him Secretary General of the LDP. In 2005, Abe was promoted to Chief Cabinet Secretary, the number two job in government.<sup>15</sup> His political pedigree and key appointments underpinned his choice as leader of the party and successor to Koizumi at the 2006 general elections.

Following Koizumi into office, Abe had the benefit of leadership at a time when there was significant goodwill and public support for the LDP.<sup>16</sup> This contributed to Abe's high profile, complete with 'stratospheric like approval ratings'.<sup>17</sup> At this time, Abe 'boldly declared his political ambition to revise the Constitution, including Article 9 ... and [outlined] a second objective ... to revise the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education, to enable patriotism to be acknowledged'.<sup>18</sup> The reference to Article 9 related to Abe's intent to address the issue of collective self-defence and how the JSDF might be used more broadly than traditionally interpreted by Japan's post-war 'pacifist' constitution.

However, Abe's post-election success was short-lived, with public opinion and support within his own party quickly spiralling downwards. This 'weakened his leadership and, in the face of ongoing battles with opposition parties, he collapsed—politically and physically—before abruptly resigning' in September 2007.<sup>19</sup>

Abe's declared early ambition to revise the Constitution and the 1947 Fundamental Law of Education demonstrated his determination to chart a new course for Japan. This ambition has been reflected in literature in different ways, including one interpretation whereby Abe was described as 'a study in contradiction ... misperceived as an ultranationalist'.<sup>20</sup>

This portrayal was tempered against his diplomatic focus, where he 'worked hard to repair frayed ties with China and South Korea, making concessions that his less nationalist predecessor had refused to make';<sup>21</sup> a reference to Koizumi and his perceived lack of appetite to advance foreign and defence policies.<sup>22</sup> There is some irony in this, as Koizumi had taken full advantage of Japan's situation and relationship with the US in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks,

particularly in 'identifying the elements that underpin long-term transformations in Japan's security policy formation and practice'.<sup>23</sup>

While this foreign policy contrast between Abe and Koizumi occurred early in Abe's first tenure as Prime Minister, a comparison provides some insight into Abe's political thinking. The security and foreign policy areas, in particular, separated Abe from the Koizumi period, which contributed to creating Abe's reputation as a strong nationalist.<sup>24</sup> Essentially, Abe was focused on ensuring he was recognised as a strong leader, capable of creating policy with a significant reform agenda and pushing his agenda through the Diet.

Two key themes can be evidenced from Abe's experience with Koizumi. First, Abe took a strong stance alongside Koizumi's belief that 'Japan's increasingly urban and educated population needs and expects ongoing economic reform'.<sup>25</sup> Second, Abe and Koizumi both understood that they needed to adjust their relationship with the US, given the prevailing geopolitical and geostrategic conditions, 'by becoming a more active partner ... and that close ties with Washington are critical to dealing with the North Korea nuclear threat'.<sup>26</sup> Importantly, however, the two men differed in their political priorities. Koizumi was about 'political and economic reform', whereas Abe was 'emphasising foreign policy and conservative domestic social issues such as giving Japanese youth a more "patriotic" education'.<sup>27</sup>

While Abe took the argument forward on these controversial policy issues, they were nested among a broader list of ideas he had for Japan. Abe's vision going into the 2006 election was broad and centred on four national goals underpinned by six policy agendas.<sup>28</sup> Abe wanted to create a Japan:

[That valued] culture, traditions, nature and history; a country of freedom and discipline; a country proceeding along the way towards new growth and welfare by promoting innovations; and an open country that is trusted, respected, and loved by the world and exerts leadership.<sup>29</sup>

Abe's demise in 2007 indicates that his vision, based on these rather idealistic goals, did not resonate at the time with the Japanese public. Further, when these goals were mixed with Abe's policy initiatives 'to end the ban on collective self-defence and consolidate Japan's military alliance with the US and their influence within it',<sup>30</sup> the public revolted.<sup>31</sup> History now records that Abe's fall from power was swift and that 'Abe contributed to his political demise by constructing a leadership strategy that failed to connect with public expectations'.<sup>32</sup>

His return to office in 2012 provided an opportunity for Abe to demonstrate that he had learned from his demise and that he could distance himself from his earlier failure. Similar to Churchill's re-election in 1951, Abe was given a second opportunity to govern, the difference being Abe won in a 'landslide election victory'.<sup>33</sup> Contributing to this turnaround in party and public support was Abe's adoption of Koizumi's previous priority and focus on economic reform.

### *Abe's vision for Japan*

By his own admission, Abe's political views were 'inspired by his grandfather's [Kishi] "fighting" spirit and devotion to the national interest', and by his own assessment that 'he had more than others of the same generation, an awareness of the nation and the state'.<sup>34</sup> One observation of Abe suggests that 'many of his hawkish and conservative views resemble Kishi's'.<sup>35</sup> Another questioned whether 'Abe [is] moving Japan toward Moderation or Nationalism'.<sup>36</sup> While Abe's strongly-held nationalistic views, centred on constitutional and historical revisionism,<sup>37</sup> were on display in his first term in government, more recent discussion on Japan's progress during his subsequent term in office provides better linkages to Abe's new vision for Japan.

Abe's vision for Japan linked prosperity and security, whereby economic success would underpin peace and security in the region. A central theme in the landslide victory of Abe and the LDP in 2012 was the idea that Japan would remain steadfast in dealing with China and rising tensions over the Senkaku Islands dispute.<sup>38</sup> This view was formed after Abe's first administration and the tough security stance he took when raising the issue of revising the Constitution and Article 9.<sup>39</sup>

However, Abe was cautious in this election success, noting that 'this was not a restoration of confidence in the Liberal Democratic Party, but a rejection of three years of incompetent rule by the Democratic Party'.<sup>40</sup> The newly-elected Abe was quick to announce that the economy was his top priority and asserted that he would move swiftly to improve relations with China, Japan's largest trading partner.<sup>41</sup> This announcement was followed by his 'I am back and so is Japan' speech of February 2013, whereby Abe confirmed his 'three arrows' approach to economic reform and prosperity.<sup>42</sup>

Importantly, this shift in priority from security to the economy has provided an opportunity for Abe to argue his case for a change in Japan's strategic posture as he works to realise his proactive contribution to peace idea. In promoting economic reform, Abe wants Japan to deeply embrace and connect to the region, and more broadly the international community, ensuring a better life for all.<sup>43</sup>

In his speech to the World Economic Forum in January 2014, Abe spoke of his successes and determination to reignite Japan's economy.<sup>44</sup> Of particular note was his vision for '[s]ecuring Asian Seas in [p]eace' where, 'trust, not tension is crucial for peace and prosperity ... achieved through dialogue and the rule of law and not through force or coercion'.<sup>45</sup>

Right through this term in office, Abe has identified economic prosperity as the key ingredient to improving the standard of living for all Japanese people. His speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in May 2014 emphasised his aim to link this standard of living to regional security.<sup>46</sup> While arguably Japan has been moving along this peace and prosperity trajectory since the end of World War 2, Abe is re-energising domestic efforts to change Japan's strategic posture.

This strategic posture change is evidenced through Abe's actions to reintroduce into the Diet a revised Bill that supports the raising of domestic legislation that guides interpretation of Article 9 of the Constitution and Japan's rights to collective self-defence.<sup>47</sup> Further, Abe has driven a separate body of work, commencing in 2012, to establish a more comprehensive security framework where issues such as collective self-defence would be nested.<sup>48</sup> A key institutional change has been to establish in November 2013 a National Security Council to serve as 'the control tower ... to implement national security policies in a more strategic and structured manner through a whole-government approach'.<sup>49</sup>

Central to Abe's approach is strong political leadership within this comprehensive security framework, which better aligns Japan's policy approach to that of the US.<sup>50</sup> At the same time, however, a more active contribution to security through the National Security Council, the narrative in Abe's Shangri-La speech<sup>51</sup> and his visit to the Yasukuni shrine<sup>52</sup> are examples of how Abe himself draws reaction and, in some cases, condemnation from elements of the international community, namely China and the ROK, who continue to criticise Japan's broader security agenda and status within the region.

Abe's visit to the Yasukuni shrine in December 2013 certainly generated considerable controversy, proceeding despite strong recommendations from US authorities not to do so. In defence of his visit, Abe said he went 'to pray for the souls of those who had fought for the country and made ultimate sacrifices. I have made a pledge never to wage war again, that we must build a world that is free from the sufferings of the devastation of war'.<sup>53</sup> Following the visit, the US embassy in Tokyo released a statement conveying that the US was 'disappointed and that Mr Abe's actions would exacerbate tensions with Japan's neighbours'.<sup>54</sup>

This particular circumstance highlights US concerns over the tension that exists in the Japan-US-ROK trilateral arrangement and the difficulties faced by the US in ensuring improved bilateral relations between Japan and the ROK. China was equally forthright in its criticism. China's Ambassador to the UN, Liu Jieyi, strongly criticised Abe's visit, citing it as an attempt to 'destabilise regional peace and pose a serious challenge to the peaceful course of mankind'.<sup>55</sup>

Several other actions by Abe, also appealing to nationalistic sentiments, have similarly drawn criticism from China and the ROK. However, elsewhere in the region, Japan has tended to be viewed in a more positive light. For example, in July 2013 when Abe visited Singapore, its Deputy



Prime Minister lauded their ‘warm and comprehensive relationship characterised by deep economic ties and wide-ranging cooperation in areas such as health, the environment and cultural exchanges’.<sup>56</sup> He went on to praise Abe for his personal interest in advancing the relationship on what was his third visit to Southeast Asia,<sup>57</sup> saying it was ‘a clear reflection of the importance he places on building relations with our region’.<sup>58</sup>

Although published prior to Abe’s re-election, the results of a 2010 poll on the question of which countries were viewed more favourably provide another example that contrasts China’s and the ROK’s positions on Japan.<sup>59</sup> The results concluded that Japan was ‘trusted to do the right thing’ by the majority of countries surveyed, placing Japan just behind Germany in the number two ranking globally. Japan’s ranking was particularly impressive given the negative responses that would have come from China and the ROK, who were survey participants. It also reinforces that while a combination of historical events and contemporary issues—such as visits to the Yasukuni shrine—resonate poorly with close neighbours, they have little or no impact on Japan’s reputation globally.

This phenomenon bodes well for Abe’s broader desire for Japan to become a more significant contributor to protecting the global commons. However, Abe’s domestic and international message, underpinned by a comprehensive diplomatic effort, obviously needs to be carefully scripted and managed in order to avoid unintended consequences for Japan’s relationships with both China and ROK. Further, Abe’s message and management of these diplomatic challenges must be nuanced against the Japan-US alliance arrangements, and Abe’s own personal interest in a deeper regional engagement strategy with ASEAN.

Since becoming Prime Minister in December 2012, there has been much written about Abe and his vision for Japan, particularly his ‘bold and risky plan to revive the Japanese economy’.<sup>60</sup> Abe has contributed to the discourse through his own writing and attendance and speeches at a range of public engagements, such as the World Economic Forum and recently at the Shangri-La Dialogue. These opportunities have provided him with a global platform to convey and reinforce his key message of economic reform and vision of peace and prosperity for all.

If Abe is successful in reigniting the Japanese economy, he will have gone a long way to setting the preconditions to further Japan’s strategic posture change, which in turn would have implications for Japan’s relations with the US, China, the ROK and ASEAN, in particular. In the first instance, therefore, it is useful to consider the Japan-US relationship within the context of their alliance relationship, hailed by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton as ‘the cornerstone of peace and stability in the region’.<sup>61</sup>

## The Japan-US security alliance

This section of the paper will commence with an historical account of the key documents and major milestones in the development of the Japan-US alliance, in order to understand the language and context of US foreign policy.<sup>62</sup> Included in this summary are the strategic drivers that have influenced the changing and evolving nature of the relationship. This will be followed by a short summary of the literature on alliances in order to establish the importance of the Japan-US alliance as it relates to security in the Asia-Pacific region.

### *Historical context of Japan-US relations*

The US has been the single greatest determinant in Japan’s strategic posture since World War 2 and a key partner in Japan’s peace and prosperity. Described as ‘the most important relationship in the world, bar none’,<sup>63</sup> the relationship, as it relates to peace and security, is captured in Japan’s White Paper, *Defense of Japan 2013*.<sup>64</sup> In its foreword, Japan’s Minister of Defense, Itsunori Onodera, reinforces the importance of the contemporary Japan-US relationship, which he contends ‘plays significant roles in ensuring the safety of Japan, as well as the stability of the Asia-Pacific region’.<sup>65</sup>

The document does, however, contain some ambiguity in terminology. As an example, the White Paper includes the terms ‘Japan-US Security Treaty’, ‘Japan-US Security Arrangements’, ‘Japan-US

Alliance', 'Japan-US Defense Cooperation', 'Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation', 'Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security' and reference to 'bilateral action'.<sup>66</sup> On the one hand, this language is reflective of the enduring relationship between the two countries. But it is also indicative of the ambiguity and potential for confusion that exists.

At the core of the relationship are the Japan-US Security Treaty and Article 9 of Japan's Constitution. For many years, these documents have driven Japan's uniquely defensive strategic posture, detailing a peaceful orientation which is heavily reliant on the US to protect and defend Japan and Japan's national interests.<sup>67</sup> The unique relationship that exists between the two countries has been described as 'indispensable to maintain not only the peace and security of Japan, but also the entire Asia-Pacific region'.<sup>68</sup>

By definition, Japan and the US have been formally connected in law since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century through treaty arrangements<sup>69</sup> that aimed to secure US interests in the Western Pacific.<sup>70</sup> The first of these was signed in 1854, quickly followed by the second and more significant agreement in 1858, known as the Harris Treaty.<sup>71</sup> The next significant point came when the Japanese leadership in the pre-World War 2 period was 'convinced that their alliance with Nazi Germany ... would deter the United States from opposing their expansion in the Far East'.<sup>72</sup> This decision would ultimately bring Japan and the US together in the post-World War 2 era in a way that had a far greater impact on shaping their relationship and the regional security environment in the Asia-Pacific region than the previous treaties and Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany could have ever imagined.

A key contributing factor to Japan's role within this post-World War 2 security order was Japan's Constitution.<sup>73</sup> While there is ongoing debate among political historians on exactly how Japan's Constitution was crafted,<sup>74</sup> it is probable that the US Administration in occupation under General Douglas MacArthur played a significant role. The Constitution was passed through the Diet with only minor amendments and adopted by the Government of Japan. What is important to the discussion is the anti-war sentiment and detailed language contained in the Preamble and in Article 9, 'The Renunciation of War'.

Article 9, which was as much a political statement as it was a blueprint for Japan's 'passive pacifism' approach to defence, still frames debate about Japan's defence posture and its rights to collective self-defence today.<sup>75</sup> It states:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes ... land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.<sup>76</sup>

Since the 1854 and 1858 treaties were no longer relevant and Japan's Constitution restricted its strategic posture, a third treaty was signed in 1951, effectively cementing Japan-US relations. This third treaty was formally referred to as the 'former Japan-US Security Treaty' after it was amended and released again in 1960 as the 'new Japan-US Security Treaty'.<sup>77</sup> Scholars have argued that the Japan-US Security Treaty of 1951 codified the regional security order in the post-war period<sup>78</sup> and, in doing so, 'has ensured the world's largest and most technologically advanced economies have deterred aggression and provided the bedrock of Asian security'.<sup>79</sup>

By Japan adopting a passive pacifist approach to defence, Osius argues that 'the asymmetrical security arrangement in the post-war era weighed in favour of progressing US national interests', while Japan oscillated between 'fear of entrapment with fear of abandonment on the part of the junior partner'.<sup>80</sup> However, what John Dulles believed was 'that an equitable US-Japan alliance, with a generous economic dimension, was crucial to avoiding the resurgence of Japanese militarism'.<sup>81</sup>

Regardless of their respective interests, by 1960 the new Japan-US Security Treaty was nuanced in the context of the Cold War setting where the US embedded its foreign security policies in both the European and Asia-Pacific regions in a broader Soviet Union containment strategy.<sup>82</sup> Importantly, both the former and new treaties stipulated US action in defence of Japan in the

event of lethal attack against Japan. This US support took into account the constraint of a limited JSDF capability and Japan's narrow interpretation and self-imposed restrictions of Article 9.<sup>83</sup>

Over time, however, the Article 9 restrictions on the JSDF have not explicitly constrained Japan's actions. As Hughes argues, the Constitution provides 'an array of self-imposed limitations that have served to buffer between Japan and demands placed upon Japan by third parties', in this case the US.<sup>84</sup> Kersten reinforces Hughes' argument citing the 'one percent ceiling on defence spending, the Three Non-Nuclear Principles and the ban on weapon exports' as evidence of Japan's self-imposed constraints.<sup>85</sup>

The treaty arrangement served its purpose until the mid-1970s, when broader security cooperation discussions resulted in the 1978 '(former) Guidelines for US-Japan Defence Cooperation'.<sup>86</sup> This was a key milestone in the security relationship between the two countries as it acknowledged the limitations of the 1960 Treaty and the US withdrawal from Vietnam. The guidelines would again be modified and reissued in 1997, driven largely by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the realignment of US foreign policy under the Clinton Administration, which was adjusting to a post-Cold War era.

Not long after the new guidelines took effect and just nine months after President Clinton left office, there was a significant shift in the geostrategic and geopolitical circumstances when al Qaeda claimed responsibility for the September 2001 attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon. This 'black swan' moment brought the then Prime Minister of Japan, Junichiro Koizumi, and the US President, George W. Bush, together into a broader alliance framework nested within the context of the US-led global war on terror.<sup>87</sup>

In terms of the chronology of milestones and formal agreements between the two countries, the Koizumi-Bush communiqué of February 2002 cemented the alliance firmly into their relationship lexicon,<sup>88</sup> although there were deeper issues for Koizumi to address. The circumstance that generated the Koizumi-Bush agreement provides another example of Japan's self-imposed interpretation of the Constitution. Koizumi shaped the circumstances where legal authority was granted for the JSDF to be employed in a broader role, far from Japanese shores.<sup>89</sup>

In contrast to the definitive nature of the Koizumi-Bush statement, the Western scholarly literature has a tendency to use 'treaty' and 'alliance' interchangeably when describing the Japan-US security relationship. This serves to render the legal nature of the Japan-US treaty somewhat diluted while, at the same time, influencing the broader discourse on the nature of the relationship, and its strengths and weaknesses, as well as the alliance viability and challenges posed by Japan-US cooperation.

While the new treaty frames how Japan and the US intend to cooperate to prevent conflict, on questions like how and under what circumstances the US would respond if a threat did emerge,<sup>90</sup> the broader alliance discussion is less detailed. One conclusion might be that a less prescriptive alliance discourse leads to more interpretation of action, or even inaction, from either party, offering a way out if required. Another significant factor to be considered is the interpretation that drifts into the debate from regional neighbours, including China and the ROK, and the onlooking international community. The very nature and understanding of alliances in general could be another source of friction.

### *Overview of the alliance literature*

There is some conjecture as to whether the body of knowledge on alliance theory actually provides reasoned motive behind alliance formation.<sup>91</sup> There is, however, general acceptance in the literature that alliances have traditionally focused on a balance of power shift, a state's security needs, security against direct threats, and actual prosecution of conflict.<sup>92</sup> Liska contends that there are potential second-order benefits to be had in alliance building, such as in the economic, political and trade domains.<sup>93</sup> The complex nature of alliances can be viewed in broad definitions that encompass:

[A] formal agreement between two or more actors—usually states—to collaborate together on perceived mutual security issues. By allying themselves together it is anticipated that security will be increased in one or all of the following dimensions: deterrence will be established or strengthened, ... [the] defence pact will operate in the event of war, ... [and] some or all of the actors will be precluded from joining other alliances.<sup>94</sup>

In *The Origins of Alliances*, Walt narrows the lens to define alliance as ‘a formal or informal relationship of security cooperation between two or more sovereign states’.<sup>95</sup> To argue his case, Walt points to the fact that ‘states ally to balance against threats rather than against power alone’.<sup>96</sup> While there is an acknowledgement that distribution of power is a fundamental factor, he proffers that ‘the threat level, which is affected by geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and perceived intentions’, is also a critical consideration.<sup>97</sup> Walt asserts, therefore, that ‘balance of threat theory [is] a better alternative than balance of power theory’ in determining motive for an alliance.<sup>98</sup>

Focusing on the threat component provides a contemporary context for the US-Japan alliance. This is particularly relevant when viewed in light of Japan’s regional security environment, currently dominated by discussion on China’s re-rise, the balance of power shift and the ongoing territorial disputes.<sup>99</sup> Further, a persistent and potentially nuclear-capable North Korea requires constant attention from both Japan and the US. From Japan’s perspective, these two regional security dynamics require strong bilateral connections with the US to balance against these threats.<sup>100</sup>

The US also stands to benefit from a resurgent and committed Japanese interest in the alliance. The US presence in the Asia-Pacific region is further legitimised as it attempts to deter and defend against North Korea provocation.<sup>101</sup> In a 2011 article, then US National Security Advisor Tom Donilon contended that the US aims more broadly to ‘ensure that international law and norms be respected, that commerce and freedom of navigation are not impeded, that emerging powers build trust with their neighbours and that disagreements are resolved peacefully and without threat’.<sup>102</sup> Japan is also broadening its approach to countering balance of power shifts and to promote Abe’s vision in this complex regional security environment through multilateral engagement with ASEAN.<sup>103</sup>

Abe’s expansive diplomatic agenda throughout ASEAN was aimed at strengthening Japan’s economy while at the same time pursuing security options and policies to deal with regional security issues.<sup>104</sup> His visits to all ten ASEAN member states builds on Japan’s embracement of multilateral engagement,<sup>105</sup> particularly with ASEAN, which itself was built on the mutual desire to avoid confrontation through peaceful cooperation and consensus<sup>106</sup>—an exemplar of the way in which institutionalised, regionally-based practice can exert influence.<sup>107</sup>

Japan has been actively involved in ASEAN’s multilateral forums, notably the ASEAN Plus 3, ASEAN Regional Forum, East Asia Summit and ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus, to address challenges within the regional security environment and arguably to offset and avoid Japan’s significant and complete reliance on the Japan-US alliance. Having just celebrated its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of friendship and cooperation with ASEAN, Japan is well positioned to play a significant supporting role of ASEAN initiatives, particularly ASEAN’s recent work to establish a political and security community.

## Nurturing relationships and regional security

This section will briefly examine the broad strategic drivers that are contributing to Japan’s security environment within the framework of the Japan-US alliance. Three drivers in particular will be addressed; first, the unpredictable behaviour of North Korea and its progression towards a nuclear capability; second, China’s ongoing rise and actions in the East China Sea as they impact the Sino-Japanese relationship; and third, the rise of non-traditional security threats to Japan. For Abe to effectively implement his proactive contribution to peace initiative, the challenges posed by these drivers need to be considered.

### *Strategic drivers of regional security*

Under the Abe Government, Japan is no longer willing to rely on a defensive strategic posture to protect its national interests. The National Security Council's 2013 release of a National Security Strategy heralded a 'policy of "Proactive Contribution to Peace" based on the principle of international cooperation',<sup>108</sup> which was a concept also reflected in Japan's White Paper. The National Security Strategy and White Paper are underpinned by a contemporary view of Japan's security environment, highlighting the interconnected nature of the challenging security landscape playing out in the Asia-Pacific region. While the White Paper reflects Government policy, it remains that Abe and his leadership team are confronting a range of complex issues that are influencing Japan's actions towards regional peace and security.

In describing these concerns, the White Paper summarises the global security situation within the context of 'Japan's security environment [which] is encompassed by various issues and destabilising factors, some of which are becoming tangible, acute and serious'.<sup>109</sup> While these issues and destabilising factors are couched within the international and global community context, Japan's perception is that these concerns are generated by their close neighbours, specifically North Korea, China, and Russia.

In addition to the security challenges Japan has with North Korea, China and the ROK, Japan also has disputed territory claims with Russia.<sup>110</sup> The key difference with the Russian dispute is that, over time, Japanese leaders and diplomats have been able to pursue resolution through diplomatic channels because of Japan's need for Russia's natural resources. Further complicating Japan's security environment is the global pervasiveness and the difficulties of dealing with non-traditional and emerging threats, such as those in the cyberspace domain.

The Japanese Government recognises that the growing disorder and challenge posed by such a complex set of security issues, where geographical boundaries are no longer as relevant, creates a need to work collaboratively with like-minded partners to resolve issues.<sup>111</sup> At the centre of Japan's approach to dealing with these security issues is the Japan-US alliance, which is not only viewed as playing a significant role in ensuring the safety of Japan but also in creating the conditions for stability within the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>112</sup>

Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye also view the US-Japan alliance as 'anchoring stability in Asia' arguing for 'a stronger and more equal alliance ... to adequately address these and other great issues'.<sup>113</sup> In this context, the issues they highlight also include 'the re-rise of China and its attendant uncertainties, North Korea with its nuclear capabilities and hostile intentions, and the promise of Asia's [economic] dynamism'.<sup>114</sup> These issues exist in addition to the many challenges posed by the interconnected nature of a globalised world and an increasingly complex security environment.<sup>115</sup> Armitage's and Nye's global view poses a number of challenges for Japan and serves to reinforce their argument that a more balanced Japan-US alliance is a critical factor in generating a security environment that advances Japan's domestic, regional and international objectives.<sup>116</sup>

### *Japan and North Korea*

The threat and destabilising influence of North Korea challenges many nation states but its impact on Japan, the ROK, China and the US is significant. While this draws the ROK and the US close to Japan over the Korean Peninsula, ongoing contested territorial claims over the Dokdo/Takeshima Islands<sup>117</sup> and the 'comfort women'<sup>118</sup> issue has driven a wedge between Japan and the ROK in recent times.

As the Japan-ROK relationship is checked, China and the US would observe that North Korea continues to advance its ballistic missile program with technology capable of not only threatening Japan and the ROK but also destabilising the entire Asia-Pacific region. As discussions on Japan's right to collective self-defence continue, Japan looks towards the US alliance for deterrence and protection, particularly as the real possibility develops of North Korea combining its ballistic missile capability with the aggressive pursuit of nuclear technology. The



threat becomes more problematic for Japan, as the behaviour of North Korea's leadership under President Kim Jong-un remains unpredictable.

More broadly, Japan's concern with North Korea was highlighted in a 2007 article by Arpita Mathur which not only raised the key issues for Japan but the enduring nature of them.<sup>119</sup> In the article, Mathur opines that 'Japan's quandary *vis-à-vis* Pyongyang has centred on its defiant nuclear and missile development program, the abduction of Japanese citizens ... as well as frequent spy boat incursions in Japanese territorial waters'.<sup>120</sup> Japan along with other countries, including the US and the ROK, are concerned that:

[North Korea] has made clear that its goals are the permanent possession of nuclear weapons, the development of warheads and missiles capable of delivering those weapons to both near and distant targets, and gaining acceptance, if not recognition, of itself as a nuclear-weapon state.<sup>121</sup>

These issues are exacerbated by the geographical proximity of the two states, with Tokyo just over 1200 kilometres from Pyongyang and well inside the ballistic missile threat range. Again, when reviewing the alliance theory from Walt, 'the threat level, which is affected by geographical proximity, offensive capabilities and perceived intentions' suggests that the Japan-US alliance is a critical component in balancing against the threat posed by North Korea.<sup>122</sup>

Japan's White Paper focuses on this threat but further discriminates between the development and deployment aspects of the missile technology, as well as the transfer of this technology and its proliferation.<sup>123</sup> In the short-term, there is a degree of uncertainty as to the exact capability North Korea has developed and, therefore, the threat posed by any nuclear-armed ballistic missiles.

On this issue, time may not be a friend of either Japan or the US, with some unconfirmed intelligence reporting from the US suggesting 'North Korea may already have the capability to deliver nuclear weapons via ballistic missiles'.<sup>124</sup> Whatever time Japan has available will be consumed quickly as contingency plans to deal with this multi-faceted threat and complex array of circumstances involving many other nations are developed and coordinated through the National Security Council with Abe at the helm.

As Abe leads these discussions internally, he will most likely continue broader diplomatic endeavours, particularly within the context of the Japan-US alliance, in order to garner international support to curtail North Korea's actions and intentions. This is not solely aimed at the nuclear and ballistic missile threat. The White Paper provides an insight to the National Security Council's broader thinking in regards to North Korea's posture and the key issues for Abe's consideration. Of particular concern is the rhetoric from Kim Jong-un, who controls the military, including the funding lines for the acquisition of technology to modernise and equip the force with an emphasis on asymmetrical capabilities.<sup>125</sup>

There is also some irony in North Korea's pursuit of adopting 'military-first politics'<sup>126</sup> to achieve a strong socialist state, as it is suggested by one Japanese commentator that 'this kind of brinkmanship from North Korea is going to drive public opinion to be more supporting of a closer alliance with the US'.<sup>127</sup> Japan's decision on how best to strategically posture itself in order to address the nuclear and ballistic missile threat and, consequently, the role that the JSDF plays will be of interest to those countries watching these complex circumstances in North Korea unfold.

In 2006, following North Korea's missile tests, there was talk emanating from Tokyo of 'pre-emptive strike' and the 'use of force' against the missile threat.<sup>128</sup> This sparked an immediate response from the ROK, including the reminder that 'Japanese past justifications for invading Korea, which was to protect Japanese citizens ... put regional peace and stability at risk'.<sup>129</sup> Abe's management of the messaging around the use of the JSDF will be important, as Japan's rights to collective self-defence will more than likely be questioned again by the international community, particularly China and the ROK.

## Japan and China

The Chinese and Japanese have lived as Asian neighbours for nearly two thousand years. Being geographically so close and psychologically quite remote, despite their common cultural roots, the two peoples have developed a sense at once of commonality and disparity, interdependence and autonomy, mutual respect and suspicion, attraction and repulsion, and admiration and condescension toward one another.<sup>130</sup>

The complexities and nuances of the Sino-Japanese relationship have played out for many years, providing scholars with significant material to theorise about the nature and 'the patterns of their association [which] have been among the most enduring features of the history of East Asia'.<sup>131</sup> China and Japan have been described as 'the two great powers of East Asia, who are both rivals and partners ... and will have to find ways to coexist in the East Asian region'.<sup>132</sup>

The Chinese cultural history and teachings of *yin* and *yang* provide a useful metaphor and another perspective of how the Sino-Japanese security relationship might remain in balance and checked before conflict conditions are set.<sup>133</sup> In this example, *yin* and *yang* is considered a holistic, dynamic and dialectical world view or as Li contends, comprises 'three tenets' of duality:

The tenet of 'holistic duality' posits that a phenomenon or entity cannot be complete unless it has two opposite elements.... The tenet of 'dynamic duality' posits that opposite elements will mutually transform into each other in a process of balancing under various conditions.... The tenet of 'dialectical duality' posits that the holistic and dynamic tenets can stand because two contrary (relatively contradictory) yet interdependent (relatively compatible) elements exist as opposites in unity to mutually affirm (for consistency and equilibrium) and mutually negate (for completeness and punctuated shift).... The dialectical tenet is the most salient as the anchor for the other two tenets of duality.<sup>134</sup>

Extrapolating the key cultural theme, *yin* and *yang* are a representation of a dualism: two opposite principles in nature but in balance; *yin* (feminine) or the negative nature of things and *yang* (masculine) the positive side; often characterised as good (*yin*) and bad (*yang*). This balance or equilibrium is not considered to remain static but rather the essence of the nature of this balance lies in the 'interchange and interplay of the two components'.<sup>135</sup>

In this metaphoric example of the Sino-Japanese interplay, the two forces are held in equilibrium through a range of complex circumstances and interactions, such as their political systems, the interconnected nature of their history and their economies. It is considered that both China and Japan perceive themselves to be the *yin* and want the other country to be the *yang*; in some way, representation of good and bad or even right and wrong.

In his most recent book, *Sino-Japanese Relations After the Cold War*, Michael Yahuda asserts that 'the vast scale of the economic relationship between China and Japan ensures that it will greatly influence the evolution of relations between the two countries', further evidence of the deep connectedness in the relationship.<sup>136</sup> While the Sino-Japanese interplay is set to continue, both parties look to strengthen their position, within a language style that promotes peace and security, assessed by a watchful international community.

As Japan continues to develop a narrative on what security, peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific looks like, it does so with a keen interest on China's rise and strategic posture. China figures prominently in Japan's National Security Strategy and White Paper with two key themes emerging. First, there is an expectation that China will abide by and respect international norms and rules. Second, as China assumes global power status commensurate with its economic weight, there is another expectation that China takes on a more 'active and cooperative role' in addressing regional and global challenges.<sup>137</sup>

Along with a number of other regional neighbours, Japan harbours suspicion over China's willingness to meet these expectations. From Japan's perspective, China's approach to dealing with disputed sovereignty claims in both the South China and East China Seas are two examples that highlight how divergent their perspectives and interests can be. From China's viewpoint, and in contrast to Japan, China is seeking to continue to modernise and grow its economy, and

improve the standard of living for its people, depending heavily on regional and global stability to achieve these aims.<sup>138</sup>

As Abe leads Japan's strategy to address complex security challenges, so too does China's President Xi Jinping set China's agenda. Xi was recently quoted as stressing that 'China is preparing to cope with complexities, [and] enhance the nation's capacity in safeguarding maritime rights and interests'.<sup>139</sup> He went on to promote 'the building of its [China's] maritime power through mutually beneficial cooperation with other countries', stating that 'China will use non-violent means and negotiations to settle disputes and strive to safeguard peace and stability'.<sup>140</sup>

At the same time as Xi navigates China's path through these disputes, he will preside over China's continued economic rise and the challenges this presents to China. This includes China's continued commitment to market reform and developing 'specific policy proposals and adjustments to help rebalance the global economy',<sup>141</sup> as China is heavily dependent on and influenced by global trade and the interconnectedness of world markets.

Importantly, Abe recognises the need for Japan to be invested in China's economic growth. In 2007, during Abe's first term in office, he raised this issue with the Chinese on his very first diplomatic visit abroad as Prime Minister when he said that 'Japan and China enjoy an inseparable relationship, especially in terms of economic ties'.<sup>142</sup> More recently, Abe emphasised 'the importance of China as an economic partner and the need to restore the Japan-China mutually beneficial strategic partnership,' referring to an announcement made in his 2007 visit.<sup>143</sup>

In the meantime, the Sino-Japanese relationship is continually tested by ongoing sovereignty disputes over the Senkaku Islands. The potential for conflict in the East China Sea remains as China continues to invest in a more capable maritime capability and presses hard on the dispute. Earlier this year, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi described current Sino-Japanese relations 'as very bad right now; it is at a low point', referring to a range of matters including the content of Prime Minister Abe's speech at the 2014 World Economic Forum.<sup>144</sup>

While Abe remains steadfast in promoting his vision for 'securing Asian seas in peace', their actions over the Senkaku Islands suggest the two parties are at a diplomatic impasse. From Japan's perspective, this includes China's establishment of an air defence identification zone in the East China Sea and constant maritime encroachments, both military and civil, into Japanese territorial waters.<sup>145</sup> From China's perspective, its actions are a reaction to Japan's. Somewhat incongruously, Sino-Japanese trade interests continue to advance while diplomatic relations between the two remain strained, and nationalistic rhetoric continues to fuel their respective agendas.

While it is likely that the circumstances shaping Sino-Japanese relations will remain extant for some period, both Japan and China will search for peace and security, as both Abe and Xi have announced. This search will be supported and underpinned by the US, with the Japan-US alliance growing in importance in the near term. The US commitment to strengthen the Japan-US relationship was reiterated as recently as President Obama's visit to Japan in April 2014,<sup>146</sup> echoing Abe's desire for closer cooperation with the US.

This alliance could provide for China too, as the US presence continues to facilitate regional security at the same time it moderates Japan's strategic re-posture to one that is more tolerable to President Xi and China's ruling elite. As this Japan-China-US trilateral dynamic unfolds, it should be held in tension, thereby avoiding unwarranted and unnecessary escalation of any issue. Ultimately, Japan and China, as two powers of the Asia-Pacific region, will need to learn how to coexist in cooperation and competition.

### *Non-traditional security threats*

I believe that one day, America and the other nations clustered along the shores of the Pacific will be neighbours along a lake, a closely interwoven community sharing common interests and common goals.<sup>147</sup>

The more traditional security challenges presented by countries such as North Korea and China are now nuanced against pervasive threats in the global commons, such as those in the maritime, space and cyberspace domains, with the persistent threat of terrorism and transnational crime completing the mix. A key characteristic of these pervasive threats is the absence of defined boundaries, which challenges many nations, including Japan, to think about security in a different way.

In such a security environment, communities are interwoven and interconnected in different ways and at many levels. The identification of threats and activities aimed at an opponent becomes problematic and, therefore, mustering an appropriate response is difficult. Part of the solution to deal with such complexity is found in Japan's National Security Council and the Council's remit to address the range and types of emerging threats through the guidelines articulated in the National Security Strategy. It states that:

[W]hen implementing policies in other areas, the Government of Japan will give due consideration to national security so that Japan can utilize its strengths, such as its diplomatic ability and defence capability, in a smooth and fully-functional way as a whole, based on the Strategy.<sup>148</sup>

Abe's leadership in this area is an example of his commitment to the Council's authority and to the Japan-US alliance in addressing regional security challenges. Regardless of Abe's motivation behind establishing the Council, the benefits are evident with the National Security Strategy acting as a catalyst for a growing number of companion policies, including Japan's 2013 Defence White Paper. This response to the myriad of emerging security challenges confronting Japan is positive.

Of these emerging threats, cyber is looming as a significant issue for Japan, as it for the international community. As contended by Putra and Punzalan, 'the cyber-attacks on the ROK and the United States, as well as those on Georgia in 2008 and Estonia in 2007, have awakened a certain consciousness in the minds of the international community, particularly the security community'.<sup>149</sup> The securitisation of cyberspace and the challenges it presents has the potential to threaten Abe's desire for peace and prosperity in Asia and his orchestration of Japan's strategic posturing to provide a proactive contribution to peace.

Abe's top-down structured approach creates an opportunity for Japan to mobilise and apply the nation's resources in a more coordinated fashion, a key requirement for tackling cyber security issues. Further, the National Security Strategy also treats cyberspace as a capability in its own right, with recognition that Japan's need for information use and exchange provides the bedrock for social connection, economic growth and innovation, as well as military activities.<sup>150</sup> Addressing security challenges such as those posed by cyberspace in a comprehensive and diplomatically sensitive manner also illustrates to international observers how far Japan has come from its pre-World War 2 past. This broader view of security also conforms to the deeper and broader Japan-US alliance objective outlined in the White Paper.

The alliance objective has at its core three pillars: security, economy, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges. While there is direct correlation in the 'three pillars' definition to addressing traditional security threats posed by the likes of North Korea and China, attention is also given to 'increasing cooperation with respect to the protection of and access to space and cyberspace'.<sup>151</sup> Armitage and Nye have also identified cyber security as requiring 'greater clarification of the US' and Japan's roles and standards'.<sup>152</sup>

The increased awareness in cyber activity, including cyber attack, has been driven by the proliferation of cyber-dependent systems that connect social, economic, military and other networks. This information dependency has created vulnerabilities in the military environment

where cooperation is almost completely reliant on 'credible and capable information assurance measures'.<sup>153</sup>

Underpinning the security pillar and supporting efforts in the cyber domain is the Japan-US agreement to expand activities for advancing joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance efforts. Like non-traditional threats, the conduct of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance activities are not necessarily bounded by geographical restrictions. Further, there remains some conjecture over international rules, regulations standards and norms governing the conduct and output of these activities when employed against non-traditional and pervasive threats in the global commons. This is particularly relevant when addressing threats in cyberspace.

As Japan continues to rely on the electronic exchange of information across communication networks, it will face an array of challenges and increasing threat levels against individuals, groups, institutions and infrastructure, which includes government and military forces.<sup>154</sup> One approach to defining the cyber threat broadly categorises the activities into hacking, cyber-crime, cyber-warfare and cyber-espionage, which assists to frame a whole-of-government response and to delineate responsibilities to counter and interdict the threat.<sup>155</sup>

This is not an easy fix, as the internet security company McAfee points out in its 2008 report, *Cybercrime versus Cyberlaw*.<sup>156</sup> The report highlighted that although governments have not prioritised cyber-crime high enough, there is a lack of transnational law agencies to undertake the necessary cross-border cooperation to deal with the perpetrators, and those national agencies that do exist are not equipped or trained to cope with the increase in cyber-crimes being committed.<sup>157</sup>

Japan's defence contribution to the cyberspace threat is recognised and covered in the White Paper and flagged as a risk to the global commons in the National Security Strategy. To highlight the complexity presented to Japan by the cyber threat, a summary of the key characteristics of cyber attack is presented. These characteristics include diversity of attack, the inability to detect attack, the inherent vulnerability of the software to attack, and the difficulty to deter against attack.<sup>158</sup> Adding to the complexity, the challenge to identify the source of the threat, particularly when indirectly sponsored by a state actor, makes any change to Japan's strategic posture difficult to achieve.

Japan's effort to better guard against a range of non-traditional threats reinforces the importance of the Japan-US alliance. What is new for the alliance, however, is how to best approach non-traditional threats, particularly in the cyberspace domain, given the technology, characteristics and pervasiveness of this threat to both military and non-military targets. Just as the shores of the Pacific connect neighbours and bring communities together, so too does the internet and cyber domain establish connections and communities that increase information flows to create economic wealth and prosperity.

At the same time as these connections expand, each one creates a vulnerability and risk to the information owner, be it an individual, a group (such as a government or military), a network or a system. Given this vulnerability and the characteristics of the threat, any action to mitigate the risk will be extremely complicated.

## Conclusion

This paper has explored Prime Minister Abe's new international agenda and how it is changing Japan's strategic posture. Since the end of World War 2, Japan's posture has been characterised as defensive and passive but Abe's vision is positioning Japan to proactively contribute to peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The central argument underpinning this change to Japan's strategic posture focused on Abe as the primary driver. Abe has developed his vision for Japan over two terms as Prime Minister and, after his early failure in 2006-07, it is apparent that he remains motivated to chart a new course for Japan. This new course was outlined during the 2012 election campaign, with the Japanese economy Abe's priority, which he views as essential to peace and prosperity. On his re-election in



2012, Abe remained cautious about his mandate, given the public discontent with the Democratic Party rule rather than an endorsement of the LDP.

However, Abe was well positioned to argue his case for a change in Japan's strategic posture following a comprehensive economic reform agenda that was broadly applauded. Already, Abe has been able to establish a National Security Council and promulgate a National Security Strategy, which is a capstone document to address Japan's security requirements. A comprehensive Defence White Paper has also been developed. Running in parallel, Abe's vision for peace and prosperity remains a worthy ideal, and a source of motivation for Abe. Together with the LDP, he continues to progress this vision for Japan.

The work to rejuvenate Japan has commenced and Abe is attempting to reignite the Japanese economy through his 'three arrows' approach to economic reform and prosperity. This critical internal reflection and analysis of Japan's situation could be viewed as a positive example of Abe's leadership credibility, genuinely wanting to drive change and reform personally. A contrasting view might vindicate some scholars who conclude that Abe is attempting to legitimise his position as a nationalist reformer, shaping Japanese public opinion in his favour in order to garner support to push his revision of the Constitution through the Diet.

The former will resonate positively, both domestically and internationally, but is in part dependent on Abe delivering economic success. The latter has the potential to be divisive, requiring Abe's deft touch to ensure Japan is not isolated from the international community.

In the meantime, Abe's attendance as the key note speaker at numerous international forums and events since his re-election demonstrates his own leadership commitment towards his vision. Moreover, his determined approach internationally develops and instils confidence domestically. This confidence may turn out to be a key factor in turning around the Japanese labour force, which has been on a steady decline, complicated further by Japan's ageing population.

These weakening domestic market trends will take time to adjust to reform initiatives before any expected economic advantage truly stimulates growth. As this unfolds, Abe is progressing important discussions on the role and tasks of the JSDF and its potential support to his proactive contribution to peace initiative.

Implementing this vision, however, has implications for the Japan-US alliance and Japan's relationships within the Asia-Pacific region. While Abe's approach is receiving broad support from the US and ASEAN, in particular, others—notably China, the ROK and North Korea—continue to be vocal in condemning any change in Japan's strategic posture or desire to undertake broader security roles in the region.

Further, through the National Security Strategy, Abe continues to frame a case to posture Japan to contribute more and fulfil a greater role in providing peace and security options to the international community. This includes investigating options for the JSDF to be employed through new interpretations of Article 9 and self-imposed restrictions. Any decision to employ the JSDF in anything other than a defensive way will have an impact on both the domestic and international discourse on Japan's lawful right to undertake collective self-defence.

The diplomatic messaging behind Abe's approach will require Japan's constant attention as it nurtures key relations, particularly with regards to the US, China, the ROK and ASEAN. The evidence suggests that Abe is willing to have this discussion even if he risks sparking anti-Japanese sentiment at home and abroad.

As this debate unfolds, Abe is also re-energising discussion on Japan's role within the broader context of the US alliance, as both Japan and the US confront a series of complex geopolitical and geostrategic challenges. Japan and the US have developed close ties since the end of World War 2, with the alliance generally accepted as providing a stabilising influence on regional security.

The alliance has evolved from the treaties of 1951 and 1960, and the broader relationship guidelines that steered the partnership through the Vietnam War, the demise of the Cold War and

the current global war on terror. Other global events have also tested the partnership. However, it remains a fundamental component of the security environment in the Asia-Pacific region.

The apparent flexibility in this arrangement has allowed both the US and Japan to adjust their relationship to meet the changing geopolitical and geostrategic circumstances of the time. Therefore, Japan's ongoing alliance arrangement with the US is critical in order to deal with a range of complex relationships and threats that are set to challenge Japan's interests.

There is broad agreement that the threat posed by an unpredictable and potentially nuclear-armed North Korea is a destabilising factor in the region that is set to continue. While there is some thought of Japan amending Article 9 to address some scenarios that could develop through a breakdown in relations with North Korea, Japan will still rely on the US for nuclear deterrence and to counter the ballistic missile threat. Japan is also challenged by China's re-emergence as a significant power within the region.

In many ways, how Japan decides to manage this relationship, as well as their shared history and ongoing territorial disputes, will go a long way to determining stability in the region. While not considered to be on the same threat scale as China, Japan's relationship with the ROK is also viewed as a key indicator of the security environment. These key relationships create two important trilateral dynamics; Japan-China-US and Japan-ROK-US, with the Japan-US alliance central to both.

The US will continue to play an important moderating influence in the trilateral relationships as Japan seeks to undertake more responsibility within the alliance framework. As these trilateral arrangements are likely to remain in tension, Japan continues to pursue a multilateral agenda particularly through a broad engagement strategy with ASEAN. This is a positive indication of Japan's ongoing willingness to remain supportive of and working with a range of nations to address the many challenging circumstances that exist in the Asia-Pacific region.

Abe's ability to manage these important relationships with ASEAN, the US, China and the ROK will provide some indication of just how peace and prosperity is tracking. Importantly, it will also impact Japan's approach to addressing the emergence of non-traditional threats, including those in cyberspace, particularly as the potential damage to Japan's social, economic and cultural wellbeing from malicious cyber activity is real. Like most countries faced with threats from cyberspace, Japan will look closely to the US alliance to assist in mitigating exposure to the risks.

With a political pedigree unrivalled in Japanese politics, Prime Minister Abe has an immense opportunity to deliver on the reform initiatives Japan needs to secure the peace and prosperity he wants for the nation. Abe's personal involvement in establishing the framework for the Government of Japan to address the many demanding and complex security matters that exist in the Asia-Pacific region has been significant. While Abe's success or failure as a leader will be critically reviewed in hindsight, he is confronting a series of complex geopolitical and geostrategic with a sense of vision on which he is prepared to act.

## Notes

- 1 Jamie Frater (ed.), 'Top 25 Quotes of Winston Churchill', available at <http://listverse.com/2007/11/22/top-25-winston-churchill-quotes/> accessed 30 June 2014.
- 2 Shinzo Abe, 'Peace and Prosperity in Asia, for Evermore', Shangri-La Dialogue Keynote Address, Singapore, 30 May 2014, available at <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri%20la%20dialogue/archive/2014-c20c/opening-remarks-and-keynote-address-b0b2/keynote-address-shinzo-abe-a787> accessed 17 June 2014. For the purposes of the paper, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe will be referred to as Abe, unless it is necessary to distinguish his public service, in which case his full name will be used.
- 3 Abe, 'Peace and Prosperity in Asia, for Evermore'.
- 4 Abe, 'Peace and Prosperity in Asia, for Evermore'.
- 5 Shinzo Abe, 'Japan and ASEAN, Always in Tandem: towards a more advantageous win-win relationship through my "three arrows"', 33<sup>rd</sup> Singapore Lecture, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies: Singapore, 26 July 2013, p. 6, available at [http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/25/pdfs/pm\\_ja\\_130726\\_en.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/press/enzetsu/25/pdfs/pm_ja_130726_en.pdf) accessed 17 November 2014.
- 6 The issue of collective self-defence will be expanded on throughout the paper in the context of the revision of Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution.
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