

Smart Q&A
No. 2013-09

Japan's Assertion of the Right of Collective Self-Defense and
Policy Recommendations for South Korea

November 19, 2013

Interviewee

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At the meeting of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee (2+2) on October 3, 2013, the United States welcomed Japan's efforts to strengthen its defense capacities, including its right of collective self-defense. It also agreed to revise the 1997 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation, increase security and defense collaboration in the Asia-Pacific region, and advance the realignment of American troops in Japan. As a result, the issue of Japan's right to exercise collective self-defense has raised the concerns of neighboring countries. On November 13, the East Asia Institute (EAI) invited Young-June Park, professor at the Korea National Defense University, to assess the direction of Japan's security policy advocated by the Abe administration, analyze its impact on the East Asian region, and suggest policy recommendations for South Korea.

Q1: What is the background rationale for the pursuit of right to collective self-defense currently under discussion by the Abe administration?

A1: "Prime Minister Abe believes that Japan not only possesses the right to collective self-defense, but should also exercise that right."

- Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations (UN) provides for the right of countries to engage in self-defense, including collective self-defense, if an armed attack occurs against a UN member country. As a UN member, Japan is entitled to such a right of individual or collective self-defense.
- According to Clause 1 in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution, Japan "forever renounce[s] war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Taking this clause into account, Japan has abided by its position to just hold, and not actually execute, its right to exercise collective self-defense.
- However, Prime Minister Abe believes that Japan not only possesses the right to collective self-defense, but should also be able to exercise it. During his first term as prime minister in 2006, Abe attempted to argue for the implementation of Japan's right of collective self-defense in a limited way based on four potential scenarios: (1) defense of U.S. naval vessels under armed attack on the high seas; (2) interception of a ballistic missile that might be on its way to the United States; (3) use of weapons to guard units of other countries engaged in the same international peacekeeping operations; and (4) logistics support for the operations of other countries participating in the same international peacekeeping operations. However, after Abe stepped down as Japan's prime minister in 2007, his plans did not materialize.

This product presents a
policy-oriented summary
of the Smart Q&A.

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- Beginning his second term in late 2012, Abe resumed the activities of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security in February 2013 to discuss Japan's right to exercise collective self-defense. The contents of the discussion during the meetings were summarized and posted on the official website of the prime minister. According to these reports, the right of collective self-defense, as currently being discussed by the Abe administration, expands its boundary to include the right to exercise collective self-defense with regard to not only the United States as outlined in the previous agreement, but also Southeast Asian countries, Australia, South Korea, and India.

Q2: How has Japan's security policy changed under Abe's leadership?

A2: "Since the national security policy of the Abe administration seeks a comprehensive change in terms of strategy, institution-building, and military power, it is necessary to comprehend the whole picture rather than simply focusing on the issue of collective self-defense."

- Reforms to Japan's security policy advocated by the Abe administration are not just restricted to an individual issue such as collective self-defense, but seek comprehensive changes in strategy, system, and military power. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct a comprehensive evaluation taking all of these factors into account.
- In terms of strategy, first, the Abe administration seeks to adopt its National Security Strategy and revise its National Defense Program Outline. Adoption of the National Security Strategy reflects Japan's attempt to craft a strategic document which corresponds to the National Security Strategy of the U.S. It also means that Japan will construct a new strategy-document system which positions the Defense Plan Outline under the National Security Guideline. Second, the Abe administration suggests "active pacifism based on international cooperation" as a core concept of its national security policy. Third, the Abe administration points at the potential Chinese threat and North Korean nuclear/ballistic missile provocations as the core concerns of Japanese security. Fourth, to cope with these security threats, the Abe administration emphasizes the strengthening of Japanese roles and capability, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and cooperation with international society, as well as countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- In terms of institution-building, first, the Abe administration is preparing an institutional framework by establishing a National Security Council (NSC) like the United States and Korea have done in order to facilitate major cabinet members such as the prime minister, chief cabinet secretary, minister of foreign affairs, minister of defense, and minister of finance in discussing current national security issues and deciding on policies. Second, Japan is pushing for the foundation of a 'Cabinet Intelligence and Investigation Office,' which would be comparable to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) of the U.S. and the National Intelligence Service (NIS) of Korea, in order to consolidate intelligence-gathering and evaluation capabilities. Third, the administration is promoting organizational reform by establishing an equipment procurement agency which corresponds to the Defense Acquisition Program Administration in Korea in order to oversee the procurement and management of equipment and facilities for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces.
- In terms of military power, Japan is trying to strengthen the conventional military capability of its Maritime and Air Self-Defense Forces (ranked second and fourth in the world, respectively) by purchasing next-generation F-35 fighter jets and reinforcing its convoy and submarine capabilities. Moreover, it should be further emphasized that Japan is preparing to establish a Marine Corps, which has been taboo for Japan due to the offensive nature of such a unit. Given that the budget for purchasing amphibian vehicles is already set, careful attention should be paid to what kind of impact the establishment of the Marine Corps will bring to Sino-Japanese disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

- Considering the aspects of transition in the national security policy of Abe's government in a comprehensive way, it is difficult to conclude that Japan is heading toward militarism or becoming a military state. The following characteristics had an impact on the Japanese militarism in the 1930s. At that time, military authorities had seized control of the emperor and adopted an expansionist policy that focused on preemption against imaginary enemies such as the U.S., Russia, and China. Japan accelerated the process to increase its military readiness in order to adopt a preemptive strike strategy. It also showed rogue state-like moves, alienating itself from the Treaty for the Limitation of Naval Armament and the League of Nations. Today, Japan maintains the U.S.-Japan alliance, abides by United Nations' norms, and refrains from possessing long-distance nuclear power projection capabilities, aircraft carriers, and strategic bombers; therefore, it is difficult to conclude that Japanese militarism in the 1930s style is reemerging. It is more appropriate to argue that the Abe administration seeks to transform Japan, a former war-criminal country, into a normal military state similar to Germany or Italy by actively contributing to the resolution of global security issues.

Q3: What are the responses of the United States and China and how are they likely to have an impact on the international order of East Asia?

A3: "While the U.S. generally supports the Abe administration's national defense policy, it is wary of provoking China. China is also concerned about changes in Japan's defense policy in the context of a 'security dilemma.' An arms race between China and Japan could potentially threaten peace and security in East Asia and place a heavy burden on South Korea."

- As outlined in the joint statement following the 2+2 meeting between the U.S. and Japan last October, the national security policy set forth by the Abe administration seems to have received a positive response from the United States. However, given that former Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg stressed during an interview with *Asahi Shimbun* in February that the reinforcement of Japan's national defense power should not make China its target, the U.S. is concerned that the Abe administration's defense policy might provoke China. Currently, the U.S. is pursuing its strategy vis-à-vis China in the direction of a healthy mix of competition and cooperation rather than just containing China. A similar policy line is also practiced from the military perspective. For example, the Chinese naval fleet will participate in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) Exercise in 2014 for the first time – a maritime warfare exercise conducted by Pacific Rim countries that is hosted and administered by the U.S. biennially. The U.S. is adhering to the platform of cooperation in order to maintain a peaceful relationship with rising China. While the U.S. welcomes the reinforcement of Japan's national defense power within the framework of its Pivot to Asia policy, it is concerned about the possibility of Japan becoming overly confrontational with China.
- Since China is in conflict with Japan over disputed islands in the East China Sea, China is vigilant about the changes made in the Abe administration's national defense policy. Following a ratcheting up of tensions surrounding the territorial disputes, China and Japan are facing a 'security dilemma,' in which defensive actions taken by a country intended to heighten its own security can lead other countries to misperceive such actions as threatening to their own security. Although Japan's efforts to improve its military power and seek strategic reforms are made to prepare it against potential security challenges, China will likely misconstrue it as an offensive and expansionist policy. In fact, China is responding to the recent reforms in the Abe administration's national defense policy by taking measures to enhance its naval power, strengthen the capabilities of its national maritime power and air power, improve the capacity of ballistic missiles, and reinforce the secondary artillery units of the People's Liberation Army.
- The security dilemma between China and Japan will exert a considerably negative influence on East Asian regional security as a whole. The recent issues between China and Japan, which have fueled misperceptions of each other as

potential threats and led to higher states of military readiness, also exert a negative influence on the security environment of the Korean peninsula.

Q4: What are some policy recommendations for South Korea?

A4: “South Korea should be careful not to overreact to Japan’s changes in defense policy. Multilateral dialogue channels to decrease uncertainties and establish trust should also be open. Lastly, South Korea should take the lead in initiating multilateral security dialogues and cooperation in the East Asian region.”

- With regard to Japan’s attempt to claim the right of collective self-defense, when the “Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan (SIASJ)” was legislated by Japan in 1998, the South Korean government declared that its permission was necessary for the Japanese Self-Defense Forces to launch a military operation in South Korea’s territorial and maritime area (a rear-area support for the U.S.). The South Korean government still demands that Japan must obtain permission, which it considers an appropriate measure.
- Concerning the future direction of South Korea’s response, the South Korean government must first objectively and dispassionately understand the purpose behind the change in Japan’s national defense policy. As previously emphasized, the Abe administration is moving to become a normal - not militaristic - country. It is not a proper response to overreact against Japan’s exercise of the right of collective self-defense under an assumption that it would soon result in an encroachment of South Korea’s sovereignty.
- Secondly, strategic security dialogue between South Korea and Japan needs to be resumed. As a result of Japanese bureaucrats’ past reckless remarks concerning historical issues and the Japanese government’s unreasonable assertions in the Dokdo island dispute, South Korea-Japan relations have deteriorated to perhaps the lowest point since the two countries normalized relations in 1965. At the present, the South Korean government has not even suggested a South Korea-Japan summit meeting or a minister-level conference. It is important, under such circumstances, to leave open a multilateral dialogue channel to reduce the uncertainties surrounding South Korea-Japan relations and guarantee a minimum level of trust. In order to verify the real intentions of Japan’s National Defense Policy and dispel public doubts among South Korean citizens toward Japan, it is necessary to make continuing efforts to initiate channels of communication between South Korea and Japan and interact with Japan through information exchanges. Furthermore, Japan is currently highlighting the importance of security cooperation with South Korea against the threats from China and North Korea. It is especially advocating the resumption of the South Korea-Japan General Security of Military Information Agreement and the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement, which were nullified last year. These agreements are currently under discussion in the Advisory Panel on National Security and Defense Capabilities at the official residence of Prime Minister Abe. The Abe administration hopes to strengthen security cooperation between South Korea and Japan. Taking into account current public sentiment in South Korea, the South Korean government would have to carefully consider even a basic proposal by the Japanese government to engage in military cooperation at an elementary level. The South Korean government must make efforts to manage South Korea-Japan relations at all times through dialogue in order to prevent further aggravation in the relationship.
- Third, in the mid- to long-term perspective, South Korea should play a leading role in constructing various multilateral security partnerships which include Japan. First of all, South Korea should construct a South Korea-U.S.-Japan security partnership in order to strengthen the level of deterrence against North Korea. Even though the ROK-U.S. alliance will be the pivot in case of an emergency on the Korean peninsula, the role of rear-area support from the

U.S.-Japan alliance will be essential as well. In a situation in which all of the rear bases of the United Nations Command are located in Japan, the security cooperation framework among South Korea, the U.S., and Japan needs to be reinforced in order to effectively utilize the sea and air bases within Japan. Additionally, in a situation where an arms build-up between China and Japan is likely to be overheated and cause regional instability, South Korea should take the initiative in making an effort to build multilateral trust within East Asia. In this context, since existing frameworks such as the South Korea-China-Japan trilateral summit and the South Korea-China-Japan Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS) can be highly useful, it is crucial for South Korea to make an active effort to reinstate the trilateral dialogue channel. South Korea can direct its effort to preventing the intensification of military tension between China and Japan by actively suggesting the policy agenda on a stage like the ASEAN Regional Forum. It is, indeed, a major task for the Park Geun-hye administration's Northeast Asia Peace & Cooperation Initiative to bring China and Japan to reconciliation by means of multilateral security dialogue channels within the region.

About the Interviewee

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Young-June Park received his Ph.D. in international politics from the University of Tokyo and is currently a professor in the Graduate School of Defense Management at Korea National Defense University.