



## **Japan Needs a Real Defense in a Changing World**

**By Doug Bandow**

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Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been edging Japan into global affairs. And his country paid a price: the Islamic State murdered two Japanese hostages. The killers cited Tokyo's provision of \$200 million in humanitarian aid to countries battling ISIS.

The double execution triggered a new debate in Japan over its enhanced international role. Abe was undeterred, justifying an expanding presence "to fulfill our duty of protecting the lives and property of our citizens."

Maybe Tokyo should not have jumped into the Middle East imbroglio. After all, even Washington should have left war with ISIS to those states most threatened by the latter's advance—most everyone in the region.

However the Abe government has more properly begun taking a more active role in East Asia. If there is a security threat to Japan, it is posed by North Korea and China, not the Islamic State.

Last month the Japanese cabinet approved a \$42 billion defense budget, the largest ever. Still, that's a low standard since the total remains below one percent of GDP. Japan has created a quality force, but has skimped on defense since emerging from U.S. occupation after World War II.

Japanese officials cite increasing threats. Defense Minister Gen Nakatani pointed to the "changing situation" which faces Japan. China has engaged in "dangerous actions." North Korea's endless provocations also have exacerbated Tokyo's concerns.

The historical experience of World War II and hostility of Japan's neighbors were important factors in Tokyo's long aversion to mounting a more robust defense. But so too was the opportunity to take a very cheap ride on the American military. As long as Uncle Sam was willing to pay, why should Japanese taxpayers sacrifice to defend themselves?

Having imposed the famous Article 9 of the "Peace Constitution," which formally banned creation of a military—Tokyo instead established a "Self Defense Force"—the U.S. gave

Japanese politicians a ready excuse to rebuff requests for Tokyo to do more. Treating Tokyo as a welfare dependent made sense in the immediate aftermath of World War II.

But as Japan grew economically, becoming the world's second-ranking economic power, such military passivity became counterproductive. America paid the biggest price, being stuck defending Japan. All Tokyo had to do in return was agree to be defended.

However, the deal also cost the Japanese. They saved money, to be sure, but the alliance was never one of equals and Tokyo could not be sure that America would fulfill its obligations if faced with war with a great power.

In fact, Abe's more active stance may in part reflect growing doubt in Japan that America will be forever willing to face down China over peripheral issues such as the control of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. The only certain defense for Japan will come from a robust Japanese military.

Japanese rearmament obviously remains a controversial issue, especially among Tokyo's neighbors. But observed Brad Glosserman of Pacific Forum CSIS and David Kang of USC: "the idea that Tokyo will be able to threaten its neighbors is just not credible. There is no will, or the capability to do so."

There also was little public enthusiasm in Japan for a more robust international role even before the hostage killings. Abe's coalition partner, the Buddhist New Komeito party has resisted changing the constitution. The newspaper Yomiuri Shimbun found that support for constitutional revision fell from 44 percent in 2004 to 30 percent last year.

However, Washington can encourage change by doing less. Washington should indicate that it intends to phase out both the "mutual" defense treaty and troop commitment, and bring home its military personnel, especially from over-burdened Okinawa. The two nations still should cooperate where shared interests are at stake, but no longer would America provide military welfare to Tokyo.

Tokyo's latest military budget increase is merely a start. The Abe government only plans a five percent real increase in military outlays through 2018. More is required to help deter Chinese adventurism, guard against North Korean threats, ensure freedom of navigation, and otherwise encourage a stable, peaceful regional order.

Of course, the decision is up to the Japanese people. If they want to reinforce their (recent) pacifist heritage, so be it. But they should not then expect Washington to protect them. Serious countries defend themselves.

The killing of the two hostages reinforced domestic concerns over Japanese rearmament. If this tragedy encourages Tokyo to do more internationally, then evil will have birthed at least some good. Japan can do much to help promote a stable and peaceful international order.

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