



US-Japan Military Alliance Faces Critical Turning Point

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While China is strengthening its economic and military influence in East Asia, the US-Japan alliance faces a critical turning point, pointed out American author Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute.

Although Japan still remains one of the US' closest allies in the Asia Pacific region, some of the Abe government's actions might worry Washington, the author underscored.

Ted Galen Carpenter pointed to the fact that Tokyo has been recently demonstrating a "belligerent" stance regarding territorial disputes with South Korea and China over the Dokdo/Takeshima and the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands.

Japan's efforts to justify its claims sparked a lot of controversy among the populations of the region: Beijing and Seoul have openly slammed Tokyo for an alleged attempt to "legitimize Japan's imperial era and its many abuses."

Furthermore, Abe's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, the site where 14 of Japan's Class-A war criminals from World War II are commemorated, have added fuel to the fire.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe address the media during a joint press conference as part of a meeting at the chancellery in Berlin.

Abe's unwillingness to atone for Japan's military aggression in World War II and its aggressive stance on territorial disputes alienate not only neighboring states but also Tokyo's supporters in Washington, the author underscored.

But what makes matters even worse is that the Abe cabinet is still demonstrating its "unwillingness to risk adverse domestic political repercussions by raising taxes to pay for the increased military spending needed to support its enhanced foreign policy goals."

Indeed, the US leadership has recently started encouraging Tokyo to take on more security responsibilities in the region. Washington plans to transform the US-Japan military alliance "into the regional crisis management alliance" aimed at dealing with issues that "might not directly threaten the Japanese homeland."

On the other hand, Washington views the Japanese armed forces as a tool to counterbalance China's growing military strength in East Asia, especially in the South China Sea region.

However, the Japanese government still refuses to abolish the longstanding rule that allows spending no more than one percent of the country's GDP on defense.

Such a restriction undermines Japan's armed forces development, the author insisted, adding that the gap between Chinese and Japanese military capabilities is likely to increase in the future.

"Thus, Washington may end up with a more assertive ally that antagonizes China, South Korea, and perhaps other neighboring states but continues to depend on the United States to achieve its enhanced ambitions," Ted Galen Carpenter stressed.