

US-Japan Security Alliance: Standing the Test of Time

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Summary

Convergence of interests and shared values of democracy and rule of law will continue to sustain the US-Japan alliance in the coming years. The revised defence guidelines have added value to this partnership and the fundamental shift in Japanese security policy complements the US call upon Japan to shoulder greater security responsibility as a partner. However, regional stability cannot be solely guaranteed by the US-Japan security alliance. Sustaining the alliance at a time when Chinese President Xi Jinping is promoting the concept of a "New Type of Great Power Relations" with the US, budgetary constraints are impacting the US commitment in the region, and the widely prevalent fear in the US strategic community of possible entrapment vis-à-vis the Senkaku dispute have compelled Japan to reassess its security options. As nationalism runs high, escalation of regional tensions is not in the US interest and certainly not in Japan's. Re-energising the US-Japan security alliance and revising the US-Japan defence guidelines are positive developments for Japan, but unless there is de-escalation of tensions between Japan and China and Japan and the two Koreas, peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific is likely to be a remote possibility.



Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to the United States (US) in late April and early May 2015 and his meeting with President Barack Obama was aimed at demonstrating two things: First, Japan's readiness to shoulder extra responsibilities within the framework of the US-Japan security alliance, which, since its inception, has been an asymmetrical arrangement owing to the constraints imposed by Japan's pacifist constitution. The categorical message that emerged from the Japanese side was that the alliance with the US will continue to be at the core of Japanese security strategy despite unfolding changes in that policy. Second, America's reiteration of its commitment to the rebalancing strategy in the wake of East Asia's geopolitical transition as well as extension of assurance to Japan that it will continue to be the key anchor of American strategy in East Asia. Although the seven decade old alliance has been put to test on several occasions, Obama underlined its essence as being "with and for each other".¹

What are the variables driving America and Japan to further strengthen their security alliance? What challenges confront them as they shape their partnership? And, what do these developments imply for regional stability? These are the questions that this Issue Brief explores.

Abe's visit to the US needs to be seen through the prism of security, economics and the history which has sparked a renewed sense of nationalism in the region against the backdrop of the 70th anniversary of World War II. The biggest take away from his state visit was that the core of the US-Japan security alliance, i.e., the *Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation*, has been revised after 18 years, reflecting a vertical and horizontal deepening of security relations. Moreover, the economic pillar of Obama's rebalancing strategy, namely the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade negotiations, which has tested the depth of the US-Japan partnership in recent times as the two countries fiercely debated rice and automobile tariff barriers, has reportedly reached its penultimate stage. However, it did not translate into an actual agreement during the summit. Furthermore, while addressing the US Congress, Abe adopted a measured approach in articulating Japan's perspective on the critical history issue,² as the region debates the possible content of his upcoming August 15 speech vis-à-vis Japan's 'deep remorse' and 'apology' for its role during World War II.³ This has sparked critical responses from regional actors including China and the Korean Peninsula.

¹ "Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Abe of Japan in Joint Press Conference", *The White House, Office of the Press Secretary*, April 28, 2015, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/04/28/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-confere>

² "Toward an Alliance of Hope", Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to a Joint Meeting of the U.S. Congress, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, April 29, 2015, at http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page4e_000241.html

³ Tessa Morris-Suzuki, "Japanese war apologies lost in translation", *East Asia Forum*, April 26, 2015, at <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/04/26/japanese-war-apologies-lost-in-translation/>

Post-war Japan relied exclusively on the US-Japan security alliance, which has served both nations' interests. The conservative pragmatist school of thought in the Japanese security discourse, led by Yoshida Shigeru, supported the alliance since it enabled Japan to direct post-war resources on economic development while depending on the US to ensure security. At the same time, this alliance allowed the US access to Japanese bases,⁴ thus facilitating the forward deployment of troops and other military assets to bolster its strategic presence in East Asia aimed at containing the Soviet Union and communist China.⁵ Bases in Japan were used by US forces during the Korean and Vietnam wars. Moreover, in 1954, the US transported hydrogen-bomb equipped F-100 fighter-bombers to the *Kadena* air base situated in Okinawa.⁶ Even as Japan is faced with the predicament associated with the stationing of marines in Okinawa, public opposition and HNS (Host Nation Support) burden sharing issues, the Japanese foreign policy discourse suggests that the "US presence in the region is a stabilizing factor for which there is no substitute".⁷ While the alliance has survived several challenges including severe trade frictions and the collapse of the Soviet Union, troop commitments to Japan and South Korea constitute the core of the US presence in Northeast Asia.

The China Variable in the US-Japan Alliance

The alliance is navigating through the post-Cold War challenges originating from the expanding Chinese sphere of influence and the provocative rhetoric and behaviour of nuclear North Korea. The two primary drivers reinforcing the US-Japan commitment to the alliance includes managing China's relative increase of power in the post-Cold War era as well as an unpredictable North Korea. The People's Liberation Army's (PLA) military modernisation and China's expansive territorial claims in the East China Sea have increased

⁴ Article VI of the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America states: "For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan. The use of these facilities and areas as well as the status of United States armed forces in Japan shall be governed by a separate agreement, replacing the Administrative Agreement under Article III of the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States of America, signed at Tokyo on February 28, 1952, as amended, and by such other arrangements as may be agreed upon". See "Japan-US Security Treaty", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/ref/1.html>

⁵ Jon Mitchell, "Battle scars: Okinawa and the Vietnam War", *The Japan Times*, March 7, 2015, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/07/national/history/forgotten-history-okinawa-vietnam-war/#.VWI53tKqqkp>

⁶ Jon Mitchell, "Okinawa's first nuclear missile men break silence", *The Japan Times*, July 8, 2012, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/life/2012/07/08/general/okinawas-first-nuclear-missile-men-break-silence/#.VWI6WNKqqkp>

⁷ "Japan-U.S. Security, Q&A on Japan-US relations", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 2014, at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/q&a/b.html>

Japanese apprehensions. Even as Japan has been articulating its concern about the lack of transparency in China's military budget, the latter's defence expenditure has increased by nearly four times during the last 10 years and by 40 times in the last 26 years.⁸ Numerous incidents, including nuclear powered Chinese submarines entering Japanese territorial waters southwest of Okinawa in 2004, the collision between a Chinese fishing boat and a Japanese Coast Guard vessel in September 2010, a Chinese vessel directing its radar at a Japanese naval destroyer in January 2013, China's establishment of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ) in November 2013 encompassing the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and Xi Jinping's advice to the PLA to strengthen combat responsiveness, maintain military readiness and advance its fighting capability "to win regional wars in the information age",⁹ all have made Japan nervous. During April-September and October-December 2014, there were reportedly 207¹⁰ and 164¹¹ instances, respectively, of Japan's Air Self-Defence Force (ASDF) scrambling fighter jets to deal with intruding Chinese aircraft. Moreover, in 2014, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan reported 88 instances of Chinese vessels being found lurking in the "territorial sea"¹². In addition, China's assertive behaviour regarding the nine-dash line in the South China Sea and its reported reclamation work in various disputed islands have also raised Japanese anxiety.

China's military modernization, largely sustained by a rapidly growing economy, is worrying to the US and its other regional allies as well. Besides, the ongoing debate over power transition altering the post-war regional order depending on whether China in due course will dislodge the US as the principal power in East Asia; Xi Jinping's *New Asian Security Concept* founded on the slogan of Asia for Asians¹³; the Chinese Dream and

⁸ "Report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security", *The Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, May 15, 2014, at http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/singi/anzenhosyou2/dai7/houkoku_en.pdf

⁹ "Xi orders PLA to become ready for 'real combat'", *China Daily*, December 12, 2013, at http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/epaper/2012-12/13/content_16014372.htm

¹⁰ "Japan Defense Focus", No. 58, *Japan Ministry of Defence*, November 2014, at <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/jdf/no58/activities.html>

¹¹ "Japanese scrambles against Chinese planes hit quarterly record high", *Kyodo*, January 20, 2015, at <http://asia.nikkei.com/Japan-Update/Japanese-scrambles-against-Chinese-planes-hit-quarterly-record-high>

¹² "Trends in Chinese Government and Other Vessels in the Waters Surrounding the Senkaku Islands, and Japan's Response: Records of Intrusions of Chinese Government and Other Vessels into Japan's Territorial Sea", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, April 3, 2015, at http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/page23e_000021.html

¹³ "New Asian Security Concept For New Progress in Security Cooperation, 2014/05/21, Remarks at the Fourth Summit of the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia By H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China, Shanghai Expo Center", *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China*, May 21, 2014, at http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1159951.shtml

rejuvenation narrative seeking the centrality it once enjoyed in Asia; China consolidating naval power with sophisticated nuclear attack submarines; China's stationing of nuclear armed "boomers" in Hainan Province aimed at constricting US involvement in regional hotspots and capable of striking Hawaii, Alaska and the continental US from the mid-Pacific; China's robust Anti-Access Area Denial strategy (A2AD) to deal with US power projection in the Western Pacific; Chinese efforts to drive rival militaries including the US from regional conflicts by increasing operational reach through intermediate and medium-range conventional ballistic missiles besides long-range, land-attack, and anti-ship cruise missiles;¹⁴ Sino-US differences over freedom of navigation and military activities within EEZs; all pose a serious challenge to the US. It is in response to all this that the Obama administration crafted the 'pivot' to Asia policy and its attempting to bolster its alliances and partnerships with important stakeholders in the region.

The North Korea factor

The security threat posed by North Korea is also a vital issue determining Japan's alliance with the US.¹⁵ In addition to conducting three nuclear tests and further developing smaller nuclear warheads, North Korea has deployed ballistic missiles that can target the whole of Japan. And as North Korea has placed a satellite in orbit in December 2012, this technology can be employed to deliver nuclear warheads to the west coast of the US. The North Korean regime has categorically asserted that Japan will be "consumed in nuclear flames"¹⁶ if it shoots down any North Korean missile and that Japan will "have to pay a dear price"¹⁷ for supporting US policy. Moreover, North Korea has conveyed its objective of devastating Washington into a "sea of fire"¹⁸ and that it should remember that the Anderson air force base in Guam and US bases in Japan and Okinawa are inside the striking capability of "DPRK's precision strike means".¹⁹

¹⁴ "Annual Report To Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014", *Office of the Secretary of Defense, US Department of Defense*, at http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf

¹⁵ "Defense of Japan 2014", *Japan Ministry of Defence*, pp. 19-22.

¹⁶ Nobuhiro Kubo, "Japan, U.S. considering offensive military capability for Tokyo: officials", *Reuters*, September 10, 2014.

¹⁷ Eric Talmadge, "Japan increasingly nervous about nukes as North Korea warns they will 'pay a dear price' for backing U.S.", *The Associated Press*, April 8, 2013.

¹⁸ Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea Calls Hawaii and U.S. Mainland Targets", *The New York Times*, March 26, 2013, at http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/27/world/asia/north-korea-calls-hawaii-and-us-mainland-targets.html?_r=0

¹⁹ "North Korea Says U.S. Bases in Japan, Guam Could Be Targeted by Nukes", *Mainichi Shimbun*, March 21, 2013.

Besides, North Korea's augmentation of its ballistic missile development as well as their transfer and proliferation also pose serious concerns. In 2013, North Korea resumed its 5 MWe gas-graphite plutonium production reactor, capable of producing six kgs of plutonium annually, at Yongbyon nuclear facility to increase the weapons-grade plutonium supply. Moreover, it reportedly has expanded the size of the facility that hosts the gas centrifuge plant for uranium enrichment at Yongbyon. In 2014, there were indications of a major excavation at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site. In addition, gantry modifications at the Sohae launch site in northwest North Korea could be aimed at supporting the launch of rockets of up to 50 meters in length. In 2013, the building of new facilities was evident at the Tonghae Satellite Launching Ground. A UN report suggests that North Korea has engaged in selling weapons to Iran, Syria and Burma.²⁰

Lately, North Korea has fired a series of short-range ballistic missile into the Sea of Japan, further heightening security concerns. In April 2014, then US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel responded to North Korea's "provocative and destabilizing actions"²¹ with the decision to deploy two additional Aegis-class ballistic missile defence ships by 2017 in Yokosuka naval base. Moreover, to counter the North Korean ballistic missile threat, a second Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance (AN/TPY-2) has been deployed in Kyogamisaki, Japan, in December 2014.²²

Besides, North Korea's spy-boats, espionage operations and abduction incidents constitute a major irritant for Japan. Several instances of North Korean spy vessels, camouflaged as fishing boats, venturing into Japanese territorial waters have been documented including the 2001 incident of spy-boats in the sea southwest of Kyushu, the 1999 incident when suspicious vessels were identified off the coast of the Noto Peninsula and the October 1990 Mihama incident.

Revised defence guidelines adding depth to the alliance

The November 1978 defence guidelines were drawn up by the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee under the guidance of James Schlesinger (the then US Secretary of Defence) and Michita Sakata (the then Director General of the Defence Agency of Japan) during the Cold War keeping in mind the threat of a Soviet invasion. The guidelines outlined the distribution of responsibility between the US military and the Japanese Self-

²⁰ Joe Vaccarello, "U.N. report alleges North Korea exported nuclear technology", *CNN*, November 12, 2010, <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?hl=en&tab=wm#inbox>

²¹ Cheryl Pellerin, "Hagel: U.S. to Send 2 More Aegis Ships to Japan", *American Forces Press Service, US Department of Defense*, April 6 2014, at <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=121992>

²² "Second Missile Defense Radar Deployed to Japan", *US Department of Defense*, Release No: NR-630-14, December 26, 2014, at <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=17089>

Defence Force (SDF). While Japan was expected to have “defence capability...within the scope necessary for self-defense”, the US was supposed to uphold “nuclear deterrent capability and the forward deployments of combat-ready forces”.²³ In case of an armed attack against Japan, the SDF was to mainly conduct defensive operations in Japanese territory, its surrounding waters and airspace. The US military agreed to conduct operations to complement functional areas which surpassed the limits of the SDF. While this arrangement worked during the Cold War, it had to adapt to the drastically transformed environment of the post-Cold War era.

The need for revisiting the defence guidelines surfaced in the wake of the Taiwan Strait crisis and the North Korean challenge. While the 1995 Nye Initiative presented the policy rationale for continued US military commitment in the Asia-Pacific region and redefining the US-Japan alliance, the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis offered both the US and Japan the *raison d'être* to strengthen bilateral security ties. The strategic importance of Taiwan in securing Japan's national interest was underscored during the crisis since most of its oil imports sourced from the Middle East and trade passed through this maritime space. The significance of Okinawa base in the US military strategy was stressed given its geographical proximity to Taiwan.

The September 1997 revised guidelines presented three basic types of security cooperation aimed at crafting a strong foundation for more effective and credible cooperation “under normal circumstances”; “in case of an armed attack against Japan”; and in “situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an important influence on Japan's peace and security”. A noteworthy development here was that the revised guidelines charted an extended role for Japanese SDFs in the defence of not only Japan's own territory, but also in areas surrounding it during any contingency. Consequently, Japan was required to enact new laws to enable the SDF to contribute in a number of activities particularly those connected to situations in areas surrounding Japan as indicated in the revised guidelines. The Diet had established the legal framework by 2000 and this enabled Japan to cooperate with US forces in areas surrounding Japan.

For long, the alliance suffered operational limitations as Japan refused to exercise the right to collective self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter. However, the 2015 revision of the US-Japan defence guidelines go beyond the original post-World War bargain and is founded on the July 2014 reinterpretation of the concept of right to collective self-defence by the Abe administration. Post-war Japan had considered the exercise of the right of collective self-defence as going beyond the limit on self-defence sanctioned under Article 9 of its constitution and therefore not permissible. However, following criticism of

²³ “The Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation (November 27, 1978)”, *Japan Ministry of Defence*, at http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/anpo/19781127.html

'chequebook diplomacy' (Japan contributed \$13 billion) during the 1991 Gulf War, Japan incrementally expanded its role with overseas deployment of SDFs. Following the September 2001 attacks, Japan supported the US-led war on terror. It promptly enacted the *Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law* on October 29, 2001, which permitted the extension of logistical and other support to US forces while at the same time constricting Japanese involvement in direct offensive combat. Three Maritime Self-Defence Force (MSDF) vessels including the fuel supply vessel *Hamana* and the escort vessels *Kurama* and *Kirisame* left Sasebo naval base on November 9, 2001 for the Indian Ocean. Two more ships, the *Sawagiri* and the *Towada*, joined them later.²⁴ MSDF vessels performed refuelling of other nations' ships involved in Operation Enduring Freedom. At the same time, the ASDF was involved in carrying cargo for the US military in Japan and abroad.²⁵

Moreover, Japan enacted the *Law Concerning the Special Measures on the Humanitarian and Reconstruction Assistance in Iraq* in July 2003. The Ground Self-Defence Force (GSDF) was sent off to Samawah for humanitarian and reconstruction work. The ASDF was despatched to Kuwait for transporting supplies. Subsequently, the rapidly changing East Asian security architecture compelled the leadership to initiate a fresh debate on Japan's defence policy. After Abe assumed power in December 2012, he spearheaded the national debate on the right to collective self-defence. The debate culminated in the July 2014 cabinet approval for re-interpreting the constitution. According to this re-interpretation, Japan possessed the right to exercise limited collective self-defence as well as to engage in wider involvement in US military operations. And earlier this month, on May 14, 2015, the Japanese cabinet approved a package of bills that would increase the role of the SDFs. The latest revision to the US-Japan defence guidelines is based on this fundamental shift in Japanese security policy.

The April 2015 US-Japan defence guideline revision agreed on seamless defence cooperation in all phases from peacetime to contingencies. In the Security Consultative Committee 2+2 meeting, the two countries agreed to cooperate in intercepting ballistic missiles and asset protection, real-time information sharing pertaining to ballistic missile threats and airspace infringement, expanding SDF operations beyond areas surrounding Japan, joint operations to protect waters surrounding Japan, enhancing maritime security by way of inspection of vessels, sweeping international sea lanes for mines including in the Hormuz Strait, and SDF operations to counter an armed attack against a foreign nation that has close relations with Japan. While these revised guidelines bring a qualitative depth to the alliance, it needs to be noted that they are not legally binding.

²⁴ Yukio Okamoto, "Japan and the United States: The Essential Alliance", *The Washington Quarterly*, 25 (2), Spring 2002, pp. 59-72.

²⁵ "The Replenishment Support Special Measures Law", *Japan Defense Focus*, No.9, Japan Ministry of Defence, April 2008, at <http://www.mod.go.jp/e/jdf/no09/policy.html>

Predicaments shaping the partnership

The need to sustain the US alliance at a time when Chinese President Xi Jinping is promoting the concept of a “New Type of Great Power Relations” with the US, when China has emerged as America’s biggest creditor, and when fears of entrapment have grown within the US strategic community vis-à-vis the Senkaku dispute, has compelled Japan to think about alternative security frameworks including with Australia and India. Moreover, budgetary constraints remain a major concern regarding future US commitments in the region. While the US has welcomed the changes in Japanese security policy and has revised the US-Japan defence guidelines factoring in the reinterpretation of Article 9, nevertheless, to operationalise the agreement, Abe needs to pass several laws in the Diet to translate the cabinet approval into action.

Moreover, Abe also has to garner public support for these measures. A recent poll conducted by *Kyodo* has brought out that 47.9 per cent were against and only 35.5 per cent for the revised guidelines. Further, an *Asahi Shimbun* poll published on May 19 indicated that 60 per cent of respondents were against the passage of new security laws in the ongoing Diet session. Another critical challenge in the US-Japan alliance is the controversial plan to relocate US Marine Corps Air Station Futenma from Ginowan to Henoko (Nago) in Okinawa prefecture. Strong anti-base sentiments of the Okinawa Governor Takeshi Onaga and the local population’s abhorrence of the US military footprint given a series of crimes committed by US forces as well as noise pollution and additional burden on taxpayers to maintain these bases, are major stumbling blocks for the Abe administration.

Abe is keen to strengthen Japan’s position in the fast changing regional security environment by re-energising the security alliance with the US which has served as the core of the country’s security policy since the end of World War II. Hence, his initiative in advancing the concept of *Active Pacifism* and spearheading the domestic debate on the right to collective self-defence in order to enable Japan to emerge as an equal partner and shoulder greater responsibilities within the framework of the alliance. In addition, the idea is also to build Japan’s own capabilities for dealing with developments in East Asia.

Regional response

The revised defence guidelines have triggered concerns in China. Questioning the value of the US-Japan alliance, the Chinese defence ministry termed it as an “out-dated product” and asserted that it “should not harm the interests of any third party” or “contain the development of other countries”.²⁶ For its part, the Chinese foreign ministry stressed that the alliance should not “undermine” regional peace and stability. China has systematically

²⁶ “Defense Ministry’s regular press conference on April 30, 2015”, *Ministry of National Defence, The People’s Republic of China*, April 30, 2015, at http://eng.mod.gov.cn/Press/2015-04/30/content_4582738.htm

accused the Abe administration of fabricating a China Threat Theory to rationalise Abe's ambition of a 'normal' Japan and strengthened security alliances.

South Korea, a major US ally in the region and with which Japan has deep historical issues, exercised caution while responding to the revised guidelines. Its foreign ministry indicated that it expects the US and Japan to engage in consultations with the South Korean leadership vis-à-vis issues pertaining to security on the Korean Peninsula and South Korea's legitimate national interests. Meanwhile, North Korea has referred to the alliance as a "cancer like entity"²⁷ that poses a serious security threat to the Korean Peninsula.

Way ahead

Japan is at a crossroads. Shinzo Abe's Liberal Democratic Party and coalition partner Komeito have concurred on the new security bills to expand the scope of the SDF's role abroad and the areas in which they can operate. Abe's cabinet approved the draft security bills on May 14. As the bills translate into laws, cooperation between the SDF and US military will deepen in conformity with the freshly revised defence cooperation guidelines. This fundamental shift in Japanese security policy complements the US' decades-old calls upon Japan to share a greater portion of the security burden in the alliance. But given that countries in the region are wary of Abe's 'revisionist' ambitions owing to Japan's aggressive policies in the past, it is Japan's responsibility to make tangible efforts for gaining the confidence of its neighbours and preventing China from exploiting the historical fault lines to its own advantage.

The US-Japan convergence of interests and shared values of democracy and rule of law will sustain the alliance in the coming years. Meanwhile, the US is cultivating relations with other regional actors including China and South Korea. While the US is anxious about the status of relations between Japan and South Korea, Japan is nervous about the evolving relationship between the US and China. Japan needs to realise that the US will not be held captive in the intra-regional historical conflicts. For instance, the State Department expressed its disappointment when Abe visited the Yasukuni Shrine in December 2013.

As nationalism runs high, any escalation of tension in the region, whether it is between China and Japan or between Japan and the Korean Peninsula, is neither in the US nor in Japan's interest. Regional stability cannot be solely guaranteed by reaffirming the US-Japan security alliance. Though re-energising the US-Japan security alliance and revising the US-Japan defence guidelines are positive developments, unless there is de-escalation of tensions between Japan and China and Japan and the two Koreas, peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific are likely to be remote possibilities.

²⁷ "Rodong Sinmun Slams U.S-Japan alliance for aggression and war", *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, May 11, 2015, at <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2015/201505/news11/20150511-08ee.html>