Japan's Diplomatic Strategy toward East Asia: Creation and Evolution of 'Dual-Track Diplomacy' in the Post-Cold War Era

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Abstract: *Japan's diplomatic strategy toward East Asia underwent three main changes in the post-Cold War era. The first change occurred soon after the 1991 Persian Gulf War propelled Japan to consider a potential way to contribute to international security, resulting in the creation of dual-track diplomacy. The second was the consolidation of Japan's dual-track diplomacy by strengthening the US–Japan alliance and supporting the ASEAN's multilateral initiatives in the early 2000s. The third was the enhancement of Japan's own security efforts to maintain regional stability while making the most of the existing political and security mechanisms in East Asia—multilateralizing US alliance networks and enhancing the ASEAN-led multilateral frameworks. In the future, two factors would likely play a critical role in shaping Japan's diplomatic strategy: the degree of the future US commitment to the alliance with Japan and the level of China's assertiveness.*

Keywords: *ASEAN, China, diplomacy, international security, Japan, the balance of power, US–Japan alliance*

1. Introduction

Diplomacy and military power are intrinsically interconnected. As Hans Morgenthau once assured, military power is “the instrument of foreign policy, not its master” (Morgenthau, 1993, p. 386), but the diplomatic credibility of one state is necessarily linked to its “unstated but explicit” military capabilities (Art, 2009, p. 4), because the others would likely consider their statement more seriously when the state has “a threat of punishment for noncompliance” by the use of strong force (George, 2009, p. 70). Given the historical records of international rivalry among great powers, particularly between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, military power has indeed played a significant role in shaping state’s diplomatic posture, position, strategy, and conduct in international relations. If this realist account is correct, states’ strategy will primarily aim to increase military capabilities, so that they can better position themselves in effectively pursuing their national interests.

However, an outlier state exists in East Asia—Japan. Despite being located in the geopolitically contentious Northeast Asia, Japan has limited its military power since the end of World War II, largely due to Article IX of the Japanese constitution, the so-called “peace constitution”. While this does not mean that Japan renounces the right of self-defense to protect itself from military attacks by external actors, its military power is significantly constrained to defensive means. In addition, Japan created a number of self-restraint security policies to limit its military capabilities, including the political ban on exercising the right to collective self-defense, the “exclusively defense-oriented policy”, the Three Non-Nuclear Principles, the Three Arms Export Principles, and 1% military expenditure ceiling.

Why did Japan pursue such policies? On the contrary to the realist account, this is because these policies did not necessarily compromise Japan’s national interests. In fact, they became a part of the postwar national-reconstruction strategy, termed the “Yoshida Doctrine”. The principle of this doctrine was created by Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida in the 1950s. The doctrine focused Japan’s national effort on economic development while not rebuilding its national military capabilities by revising its peace constitution, relying instead on the United States for its security through the US–Japan alliance.¹ This strategy was particularly effective in the bipolar system of the Cold War era because the bilateral security tie with Japan was also indispensable for the US strategy to counter Soviet and communist threats in Asia. Accordingly, Japan achieved

¹ The US–Japan defense pact was first created in 1952 and then revised in 1960.

rapid economic development during the 1960s and 1970s, and by 1980 firmly established its place as the second largest economy (The World Bank, 2014a). Through this strong economic leverage, Japan conducted economic diplomacy in the international arena, increasing its economic influence in the developing countries through the Official Development Assistance (ODA) and creating its regional economic development architecture in East Asia on the basis of the so-called ‘flying geese model’.² In other words, Japanese diplomatic strategy rested on its economic rather than military power while maintaining strong defense ties with the United States to ensure its military security.

Near the end of the Cold War, however, the limitations of this strategy gradually appeared. Japan’s economic growth rate significantly slowed falling from approximately 9% in the 1960s and the mid-1970s to around 4% in the period of 1980s.³ While this illustrates Japan’s achievement in gaining the status of fully-fledged developed economy, the economic slowdown meant that Japan would no longer be able to carry out the same strategy. Indeed, as Japan’s international status rose, some countries, particularly the United States, asserted that Japan should play a larger economic, political, and even security role in the world. Japan was thus compelled to reformulate its diplomatic strategy in conjunction with its security policy in the post-Cold War era.

This article explores past and present political, economic, defense, and diplomatic challenges and opportunities in East Asia that Japan has faced since the end of the Cold War. First, the chapter explores the development of Japan’s diplomacy in the 1990s—the emergence of dual-track diplomacy. Second, it focuses on change and continuity of the international security environment that Japan faced in the early 2000s and illustrates how Japan coped with it. Third, it analyzes how Japan’s diplomatic strategy has evolved in the context of the changing regional security environment.

² The ‘flying geese model’ refers to the pattern of economic development, especially industrial development “transmitted from a lead goose (Japan) to follower geese (Newly Industrializing Economies (NIEs), ASEAN 4, China, etc.)” (Kojima, 2000).

³ The data provided by Japanese Cabinet Office, using the 1968 System of National Accounts (UN, 1968).

2. Background: the emergence of Japan's dual-track diplomacy in the 1990s

With the end of the Cold War and the demise of the Soviet Union, the international security environment changed rapidly. No longer facing the potential military threats to East Asia from the Soviet Union, the US–Japan alliance, the most important pillar of Japan's security policy and diplomacy, began to lose its fundamental *raison d'être*.

Admittedly, the geopolitical flashpoints in East Asia remained, namely the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait, and if conflicts erupted there, they would potentially pose existential threats to Japan's security. Given the fact that North Korea developed its nuclear ambition from the early 1990s and military tension between China and Taiwan rapidly escalated in 1995/1996 due to Taiwan's potential declaration of independence, it became clear that the US military presence was still important in maintaining the regional strategic balance in the region even in the post-Cold War setting. The US–Japan alliance remained the strategic cornerstone for Japan's security and stability in East Asia, just as the 1960 US–Japan Security Treaty stipulated the US role and the use of the US bases in Japan for defense of Japan under Article 5 and for the maintenance of peace and security in the Far East under Article 6 (MOFA, 1960).

However, the real question was the degree to which the strength of the US alliances in East Asia needed to be maintained. With this regard, regional states' perceptions differed from each other. For example, taking advantage of the window of opportunity created by the end of the Cold War, the Philippines took the initiative to negotiate with the United States about a reduction of the US bases, namely the Clark Air Base and the Subic Bay Naval Base, resulting in their closure in 1991. In response, Singapore offered US military access to its military facilities to maintain US presence in the region since it was concerned about further retrenchment of the United States from East Asia. For its part, the United States was eager to share its military burden with its allies. In 1993, the US Department of Defense published the US Bottom-Up Review (BUR) to illustrate its future military posture in the world. While it asserted that the US military commitment to its treaty allies in various regions, including Europe, East Asia, the Near East, and Southwest Asia, was imperative to prevent global instability, the report also called for the reduction of US military forces and possible burden sharing with its allies (Aspin, 1993, p. 3). Since the United States accumulated trade deficit with Japan by absorbing Japan's exports during this period, the United States put strong political pressure on Japan for burden-

sharing. As such, management of the alliance became increasingly difficult without Japan's new security commitment.

In addition, Japan encountered a new international reality during the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War. In this war, the international coalition successfully expelled Iraq's troops from Kuwait. Japan contributed 13 billion US dollars in financial assistance, yet provided no military assistance. The international community criticized this, stating that it expected more from Japan as the world's second largest economy, and although Japan dispatched the Maritime Self-Defense Force (SDF) for the minesweeping operation in 1991, it was said to be “too little, too late” (MOFA, 1991). This gap between Japan's power status and the international community's expectations forced Japan to reconsider its diplomatic strategy on the basis of the Yoshida Doctrine and triggered its policy shift as indicated in new domestic laws, such as the introduction of the International Cooperation Law in 1992, which enabled the SDF to participate in international activities in non-combatant areas (MOFA, 1996b).

With these pressures, Japan attempted to play a larger security and political role in the world by three means: participating in international security cooperation, enhancing the US–Japan alliance, and reformulating its economic diplomacy toward East Asia. First, Japan aimed to strengthen its security cooperation with the United Nations. In addition to the 1992 International Cooperation Law, a private advisory body to the Prime Minister led by Kotaro Higuchi issued the so-called “Higuchi Report” in 1994 (Advisory Group on Defense Issues, 1994). The report assessed the 1991 Gulf War experience and recommended that the Japanese SDF participate in peacekeeping operations and other forms of multilateral cooperation under the UN authorities. Japan's new defense policy based on the 1996 National Defense Program Outline (NDPO) incorporated this suggestion and emphasized its support for the UN activities and Japan's contribution to creating a stable security environment through international organizations, primarily the United Nations. As such, Japan expanded its security role to the international arena, although the constitutional, legal, and political constraints on Japan's use of force remained.

Second, Japan officially decided to enhance the US–Japan security cooperation in the post-Cold War through the landmark document, the *Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security* in 1996 (MOFA, 1996a). This declaration recognized strategic importance of the US–Japan alliance for both Japanese and American security in the post-Cold War context and built political confidence between them, particularly because some experts on the US side were concerned about the 1994 Higuchi Report and perceived that Japan was drifting away from

the US–Japan alliance and concentrating more on the multilateral security arrangements (Cronin & Green, 1994). The process of this joint declaration was set in motion in 1994, when Joseph Nye, Assistant Secretary of Defense, undertook a comprehensive review of the US–Japan alliance, the so-called Nye Initiative. On the basis of this review, the United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, the so-called Nye Report, was issued in 1995. It reaffirmed US security commitment to East Asia as well as the US–Japan alliance by recommending the maintenance of approximately 100,000 troops of US forward-deployed force in the Asia Pacific region and considering multilateral institutions in the region, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), as “complementary” security tools to the US bilateral alliances. This policy resonated with Japan’s security perception and resulted in political momentum for both states to advance policy coordination and issue the joint declaration.

Through this declaration, both the United States and Japan also created policy objectives at the regional and global level. Regionally, there are three main objectives: fostering cooperation with China and Russia as a way to maintaining regional security; aiming to further cooperation with South Korea in order to ensure stability in the Korean Peninsula; and developing multilateral regional security mechanisms, such as ARF. Globally, the United States and Japan declared a commitment to enhance cooperation and coordination on such issues as UN peacekeeping, humanitarian relief operations, and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) negotiations. In order to operationalize these objectives, they decided to review the 1978 *Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation* and broaden the range of cooperation at the regional and global level, resulting in the new guidelines issued in October 1997. With this enhanced security cooperation, Japan and the United States also gave reassurance to East Asian states that the US presence in the Asia Pacific region through the US–Japan alliance would remain the linchpin of the security arrangement in the post-Cold War.

Third, Japan gradually restructured its economic diplomacy toward East Asia in the 1990s. Previously, Japan considered that East Asian regional economy was intrinsically connected with the United States and that it was extremely difficult to separate the United States from the regional economy. In this context, regional trade blocs, such as the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), emerged after the Cold War, and in Asia, the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad responded by proposing the idea of creating a quasi-East Asian trade bloc in 1992, the East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC). Due to US concerns about its exclusivity and some East Asian states’, particularly Japan’s concerns about this US skepticism, EAEC was watered

down to the East Asian Economic Group (EAEG) as a regional consulting group within the APEC framework. However, this idea was revitalized when the 1997 East Asian financial crisis broke out, and the group was institutionalized into the ASEAN+3 (China, Japan, and South Korea) (Koga, 2012, pp. 15–19). In fact, this was the East Asian response to the US unwillingness to bail out East Asian economies. The United States did not do so because it had long criticized East Asia's economic development model as government-driven economy and "crony capitalism", arguing that East Asian states generally tended to quickly intervene in a market economy and they developed its economy through strong personal relationship between leaders, not the laissez-faire principles. ASEAN+3 was, thus, primarily concerned with the creation of a regional economic mechanism that was capable of responding to a future economic crisis without depending solely on the United States or US-led world economic institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund. Later, this cooperative scheme expanded into political, security, and socio-cultural fields, after the creation of the ASEAN+3 joint study groups, namely the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) and the East Asian Study Group (EASG) (East Asia Vision Group, 2001; East Asia Study Group, 2002).

Due to these three changes, Japan altered its diplomatic strategy and gained its diplomatic flexibility in coping with the international environmental change. Emphasizing its willingness to further international cooperation, Japan relaxed its political constraints in its security policy by creating domestic laws such as the 1992 International Cooperation Law. Continuously relying on the US security guarantee, including its nuclear deterrent, Japan enhanced security ties through the 1996 Japan–US Joint Declaration on Security. Aiming at further institutionalizing ASEAN+3, Japan also sought to foster regional cooperation with neighboring states, including China, South Korea, and ASEAN member states. This was still not diplomacy backed by one's own credible military capabilities, but Japan began to deviate from the Yoshida Doctrine. As such, by the end of the 1990s, Japan pursued a different kind of regional diplomacy from the past—dual-track diplomacy—which focused on the enhancement of the US–Japan alliance and the institutionalization of regional cooperation through ASEAN-led frameworks, particularly ASEAN+3.

3. Security strategy based on the dual-track diplomacy in the early 2000s

Japan's dual-track diplomacy functioned as its own security strategy—countering a potential adversary through military, political, and economic means while engaging militarily, politically, and economically with a potential adversary.⁴ On the one hand, the US–Japan relations needed to be well maintained in order to keep the US–Japan alliance credible as a balancing function against potential threats. The United States constantly assured that US commitment to Asia and the US–Japan alliance remained high; however, in reality, its strategic priority would not always be Asia. As a global power, the United States concentrated its political, security, and economic commitments to different regions at different times, and its strategic focus was likely to fluctuate. To hedge against this risk, therefore, Japan supported ASEAN's multilateral initiatives and spent significant diplomatic resources in fostering cooperation with regional states in East Asia through multilateral frameworks, such as ARF and ASEAN+3. On the other hand, these multilateral security and economic frameworks in East Asia, which were generally led by ASEAN, also carried some strategic risks. It is true that these regional frameworks provide forums for states to interact with each other and may be useful for confidence building measures (CBMs) and norm creation. East Asia had long lacked a comprehensive multilateral institution covering both Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, and thus, ASEAN's multilateral institutional-building efforts were invaluable to regional cooperation. Nevertheless, they have yet to be fully institutionalized as concrete regional institutions that provide binding agreements. There is always this risk that these institutions might end up being largely ineffective, and thus, US commitments to the region were still required. In order to cope with these two risks, Japan pursued dual-track diplomacy, although it continued to maintain the US–Japan alliance as a fallback position.

Japan considered this diplomatic strategy could function efficiently because the regional security environment in 2000 remained similar to that in the 1990s. Certainly, there were precarious geopolitical risks: the Korean Peninsula, China's military and economic rise, and existing territorial disputes in Northeast and Southeast Asia. Particularly, China's military expenditure increased exponentially, and its average growth was approximately 15% during the 1990s according to the SIPRI military expenditure database (Fig. 1), while its economic growth was around 10% (The World Bank, 2014b). Yet, for Japan, as

⁴ It is often called a “hedging” strategy; however, this type of behavior is more tactical than strategic. In this paper, I will refrain to use “hedging” in this context (Koga, 2018).

long as the US–Japan alliance remained strong, these risks could be contained relatively easily as Japan and the United States still possessed superior military and economic capabilities at this time. The United States also shared this view, although it recognized that China could be a potential rival in the Asia Pacific region in the long run (e.g., Cohen, 1999; 2000).⁵ Japan alone possessed superior military and economic capabilities compared with China in 2000, and combining with the United States, it was extremely difficult for China to effectively counter US and Japanese forces in the near future. Given this strategic balance among East Asian great powers, the regional balance of power was likely to remain stable, and even if it shifted, it would be a gradual process and would not create an immediate strategic concern to both Japan and the United States.

Figure 1. Military expenditure from 2000 to 2013

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure 2014 (SIPRI, 2014)

In this context, the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001 occurred and disrupted the traditional inter-state strategic thinking. While it had been inconceivable that the United States, the sole superpower in the world, would be physically attacked by another state, it was under attack by non-state actors. Rather than concentrating its political capital on the future management of the global balance of power, the

⁵ This is particularly so after the Hainan Island incident on April 1, 2001, when the US Navy EP-3E collided in the air with People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) J-8 fighter and was forced to land on Hainan Island and was thoroughly inspected by China.

United States decided to concentrate its strategic focus on defeating international terrorist groups, primarily Al Qaeda. Since the nature of international terrorism was transnational, the United States sought international cooperation with other countries, particularly its allies, partners, and those who share similar views on terrorism. Indeed, the United States enhanced cooperation in combatting terrorism even with China because their interests converged to some degree: China was concerned about the separatist groups within China, notably the Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement (ETIM) in the Xinjiang province, which it regarded as domestic terrorist groups that had the potential to build network with global terrorist groups. Consequently, after undertaking the regime change displacing the Taliban in Afghanistan, which had harbored Al Qaeda, the United States expanded areas of cooperation with China, including policy coordination on the future nation-building of Afghanistan (The White House, 2002, pp. 27–28). This cooperative effort also had a spill-over effect on the North Korean issue. In the early 2000s, North Korea's emerging nuclear ambitions propelled China to provide a negotiation table with the United States by using its political and economic leverage, resulting in the creation of the Six-Party Talks. Therefore, 9/11 and its subsequent military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq changed strategic dynamics in East Asia. The United States began to focus its attention more on the Middle East, and the potential Sino-US rivalry was effectively put on hold during this period.

Japan, on the other hand, kept pursuing security strategy by engaging to shape China's behavior while strengthening the US–Japan alliance. Given the superior defense capabilities of the United States and Japan in East Asia, Japan only needed to ensure US commitment to the alliance to retain its credibility despite actual and potential threats from North Korea and China. Enhancing cooperation with the United States thus became imperative, and partly for this reason, Japan provided indirect political, economic, and military support for the US global counter-terrorism strategy by dispatching the SDF to the Indian Ocean and Iraq respectively under the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law in 2001 and the Act on Special Measures concerning Humanitarian Relief and Reconstruction Work and Security Assistance in Iraq in 2003 (PMO, 2001; 2003). As the 1996 Japan–US Joint Declaration indicated, Japan already had a political justification to strengthen the global cooperation with the United States, resulting in the official reaffirmation through the joint statement, *The Japan–US alliance of the new century*, which emphasized further bilateral cooperation in the global, regional, and national security issues (MOFA, 2006a).

At the same time, Japan intensified its interactions with China to search for the areas of cooperation and improve their ties. Economically, Japan and China

significantly increased their trade and the amount of bilateral trade increased over two-fold from 85.7 billion US dollars in 2000 to 211.3 billion US dollars in 2006 (NPRE, 2012). In addition to gaining economic benefits by interacting with China, Japan aimed to deepen bilateral economic interdependence with China and to integrate China into the international economic system in order to shape China's behavior through international rules and norms. Politically, however, Japan–China relations became strained due to China's negative response to Prime Minister Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, often perceived as a “war” shrine that enshrined war dead, including the Class-A war criminals in World War II. To manage this political difficulty, both Japan and China interacted with each other through ASEAN-led multilateral frameworks and avoided a complete diplomatic standoff. ASEAN+3 was a particularly useful framework for CBMs. While being consolidated by furthering regional financial cooperation through the Chiang Mai Initiative (CMI) in 2000, a bilateral currency swap arrangement among the member states to stabilize the foreign exchange in times of economic crisis, ASEAN+3 aimed to foster political cooperation in East Asian regionalism, later called an East Asian community. In addition, the Japan–China–South Korea dialogue, “+3” dialogue, was created as a spin-off of ASEAN+3 and was held to discuss development of potential trilateral cooperation in Northeast Asia. To be sure, there was some political tug-of-war between Japan and China, particularly when the ASEAN member states discussed the establishment of East Asia Summit in 2005 to seize the initiative. But Japanese political will to engage in China remained strong. Japan pursued its engagement policy through ASEAN-led frameworks as well as economic interactions. As such, the backbone of Japan's dual-track diplomacy towards East Asia began to be consolidated.

4. Beyond double-track diplomacy: the late 2000s

Nevertheless, in the late 2000s, Japan began to face new strategic pressure to go beyond its security strategy based on dual-track diplomacy. There are two main reasons for this: the rise of assertive China and the uncertainty of US strategic commitment. First, China was becoming increasingly assertive in the maritime domain. In the South China Sea, political tensions began to rise after a skirmish between a Chinese naval vessel and a Vietnamese fishing boat in 2007. International attention increased significantly after the USNS *Impeccable* incident in 2009, in which the US ocean surveillance ship, the USNS *Impeccable*, was distracted by China's naval ships during the US naval mission

to monitor submarine activity in the South China Sea. In 2012, the military and political tension between the Philippines and China rapidly escalated due to the Scarborough Shoal standoff, in which the Philippines' naval ships attempted to arrest eight Chinese fishery boats close to the shoal. China responded immediately by dispatching two patrol ships from the Bureau of Fisheries Administration and blocked Philippines' naval ships to prevent them from arresting Chinese fishery boats, resulting in a two-month maritime standoff. In 2015, China's land reclamation to build military facilities in the South China Sea, particularly in the Fiery Cross Reef, posed concerns among not only the United States and Japan, but also ASEAN member states (ASEAN, 2015).

In the East China Sea, the Senkaku incident of 2010 occurred when a Chinese fishing boat collided with Japanese coast guard's patrol ships, which created strong nationalistic response in both states. China even conducted economic sanctions against Japan by not exporting rare metal during this period. The tension increased again after Japan's nationalization of control over three islands in the Senkaku Islands in September 2012 and China's creation of the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) in November 2013. China's assertiveness was partly supported by its growing national confidence backed by increased military, particularly naval, capability and enhanced economic strength. Indeed, its economic growth averaged 10.4% from 2000 to 2008 (The World Bank, 2014b) and China already surpassed Japan's military budget in 2004 as indicated in Figure 1 (see p. 48). Additionally, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) acquired a symbolic aircraft carrier and gradually increased Anti-Access/Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities as an asymmetric warfare strategy against technologically superior US and Japanese naval forces (Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2008, pp. 22–24). Because the East China Sea and the South China Sea are geopolitically important in terms of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), China's increasing assertiveness in the maritime domain with the rapid growth of these military capabilities began to pose serious security concerns to Japan.

Second, it became increasingly uncertain in East Asia that Japan's foremost ally, the United States, could sustain its military and economic commitment to Asia including Japan in the long run. By 2008, the United States had been fighting a prolonged war in Afghanistan and Iraq for over five years, which had exponentially increased the US military budget. With the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the situation strained the US economy, and since then there have been intensive discussions over how to reformulate the US global and regional strategy (e.g., Koga, 2011; Posen, 2013; Brooks *et al.*, 2013). The United States sought for the exit strategy from two wars, and in 2009 the newly appointed

US President Barack Obama promised the early US withdrawal from these two conflicts, while attempting to shift the negative American image in the world created by engaging in the Afghanistan and Iraq Wars. Obama emphasized the necessity of a diplomatic approach to resolving the international disputes rather than taking a coercive military approach. China was not the exception. The United States conducted cautious diplomacy to induce China's cooperation through such means as the 2009 elevation of the US–China Strategic Economic Dialogue to the Strategic *and* Economic Dialogue (The White House, 2009; Clinton, 2009) and recognition of China as an indispensable actor to solving global problems (Clinton & Geithner, 2009). However, China did not respond to Obama's renewed diplomacy, as illustrated in the US–China diplomatic row at the 2009 Copenhagen Summit (Johnston, 2013).

The United States then slightly shifted its policy to take a tougher approach to China, particularly in East and South China Sea (Clinton, 2010). As the Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) Report in February 2010 indicated, the United States explicitly showed its concern by stating “China's growing presence and influence in regional and global economic and security affairs” due to a lack of “transparency and the nature of China's [opaque] military development and decision-making processes” (Department of Defense, 2010, pp. 7, 60).⁶ It also pushed forward its new strategy toward East Asia, “pivot” or “rebalancing,” which was partly intended to check China's assertiveness (Clinton, 2011; Department of Defense, 2012).

Still, political, military, and economic pressures on the United States coming from the two wars and economic crisis persisted, and in 2013, the US government eventually undertook budget sequestration on the basis of the Budget Control Act of 2011 for deficit reduction. The core of this budget cut was focused on the US military budget. According to the Department of Defense report, the cut includes 420,000 active duty soldiers in Army, 315,000 in the National Guard, 185,000 in the Army Reserve, while the Marine Corps would drop to 145,000 active duty personnel and the Air Force would eliminate some equipment, such as KC-10 tankers, and shrink the development of unmanned aerial vehicle (*DoD News*, 2014). In the meantime, new security issues and flashpoints in the world, such as ISIL, Syria, and Ukraine, emerged, which would potentially distract the US declared attention on Asia.

In the face of these strategic changes, it has become increasingly uncertain whether Japan can sustain the current form of its dual-track diplomacy toward

⁶ The report also mentioned China's behavior was “one of the most consequential aspects of the evolving strategic landscape in the Asia-Pacific region and globally.”

Asia because such diplomacy requires strong US commitment and assumes moderate China's military and economic strength. Moreover, Japan faced consecutive domestic turmoil. In 2010, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) defeated the long-reigning political coalition party, the Liberal Democratic Party with the New Komeito, but the DPJ created controversy over the issue of the US base in Japan, namely the Futenma air base, and faced a difficulty in smoothly managing the US–Japan alliance despite the alliance's 50th anniversary (Chanlett-Avery & Rinehart, 2014). Moreover, in 2011, the Great East Japan Earthquake affected Japan's social and economic infrastructure materially and psychologically. Thus, Japan's domestic situation also made it difficult for Japan to formulate a new strategy regarding how best to manage these emerging strategic situations.

Nevertheless, by mid-2014, Japan gradually reformulated its strategy on national security policy, regional security policy, and ASEAN diplomacy. First, Japan began to enhance its own efforts more proactively to cope with the changing security environment. This is well illustrated by the 2010 National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG). This new NDPG focused on the management of the “gray zone”, the situation between peacetime and wartime. Particularly, the tension over the Senkaku Islands was characterized as the “gray zone” due to its non-military nature, such as coast-guard ship / fishing boat confrontation, and thus the NDPG aimed at managing this type of situation. Of course, the United States repeatedly reassured Japan that armed attacks on “the territories under the administration of Japan” would invoke US involvement; however, it was still not clear how the United States should become involved where there was no “armed” attack. As the 2010 Senkaku incident illustrated, it would be hard to imagine that a fishing boat's collision would trigger US military involvement. As such, Japan created a strategy of “dynamic defense”, by which it would fully utilize its Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) capability as well as mobilize its existing defense forces for the “show of force” to signal China that any *fait accompli* or probing strategy would immediately be detected and responded to accordingly (MOD, 2010; 2012). Later, taking into account an increase in China's diplomatic and political pressures after Japan's nationalization of control over three Senkaku Islands, which Japan saw as China's attempt to “change the status quo by coercion,” the Japanese government took a further step to adopt the 2013 NDPG and aimed at strengthening its defense capabilities to ensure air and maritime superiority (MOD, 2013).

Second, Japan aimed to strengthen security ties with other US allies in East Asia, such as Australia, the Philippines, and South Korea, to keep China in check. In the post-war era, the United States created the US-centered bilateral

alliance network, the so-called ‘hub-and-spoke’ system. However, the US allies began to create a security network among themselves particularly in the post-9/11 era as defeating the transnational terrorist group required international cooperation. Although not all allies could establish such security ties with each other, some developed quickly. The Japan–US–Australia Trilateral Strategic Dialogue (TSD) is a case in point. In 2002, the senior official level trilateral dialogue was created, and it was elevated to the ministerial level in 2005. At this point, these states kept reassuring China that the framework did not aim to counterbalance it (Department of State, 2004; MOFA, 2006b), yet after China’s assertiveness was perceived, the TSD produced a joint statement raising concerns over China’s behavior in East and South China Sea in 2013 (MOFA, 2013). These developments illustrate Japan’s desire to hedge against the risk of fluctuations in US commitment by opening up strategic options as well as the US desire to further promote security burden-sharing with its allies in East Asia given its economic difficulties.

Third, Japan has developed a two-pronged policy to shape the ASEAN-led frameworks. The first policy is Japan’s continuous support for US participation in the ASEAN-led frameworks, such as EAS. East Asian regionalism gained political traction under the umbrella term of an East Asian community from 1997 to 2005, yet since 2005 its momentum slowed, when the establishment of EAS created conceptual confusion about the community-building efforts. The original concept of EAS stemmed from the EASG’s long-term proposal that ASEAN+3 would be elevated to the East Asian Summit, but inventing a new forum, EAS, which co-existed with ASEAN+3, created confusion over how to determine its membership, modality, and division of labor. This became an obstacle to organizing the overall design of the East Asian regionalism, resulting in regional doubt on the future success of regionalism. As such, some states in the region, including Japan, actively considered bringing the United States back into the East Asian multilateral frameworks. This is because such participation could give the United States an opportunity to directly monitor China’s behavior in East Asia and help provide other regional states, particularly US allies, with reassurance by locking in its political commitment to the region. The United States then became a member of EAS from 2011 and actively participated in other new ASEAN-led frameworks, including the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) in 2010 and the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum (EAMF) in 2012.

The second policy is to separate Japan’s ASEAN diplomacy from its bilateral diplomacy to the member states (Koga, 2013; 2014a; 2014b). Given ASEAN’s preference to gaining consensus in decision-making and maintaining ASEAN

centrality in its multilateral institutions, it becomes extremely difficult or even counterproductive to push the member states to adopt a similar position, particularly on the maritime disputes' issues. Under this condition, Japan consciously began to foster ASEAN's solidarity by respecting its centrality and does not force its own security agenda onto the multilateral base, instead taking a bilateral approach to strengthen security cooperation with each member state at its own pace, similar to a "coalition of the willing" approach. In fact, recognizing the divergence in threat perceptions and security interests, ASEAN has long allowed each member state to pursue its own security policy (ASEAN, 1976). Prime Minister Abe's trips to all the ASEAN states in 2013 illustrate this point. Such trips provided an opportunity for Japan to hold a bilateral dialogue on future cooperation, including the security field, and at the multilateral level, Japan and ASEAN concluded the Joint Statement of ASEAN–Japan Commemorative Summit in 2013, emphasizing shared principles and norms, including the importance of freedom of navigation, resolution of disputes by peaceful means along with the principles of international law, namely the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (ASEAN, 2013).

As such, Japan's strategy based on the dual-track diplomacy changed in the late 2000s largely due to a shift in the regional security environment, namely the rise of assertive China and the increasing uncertainty of US strategic commitment to the region. To be sure, the United States remains at the core of this emerging Japan's security network. Despite Japan's own efforts, such as lifting of the ban on exercising the right to collective self-defense in July 2014, Japan still depends on the US nuclear umbrella and strike capabilities for its security given Japan's still-existing constitutional and legal constraints on use of the SDF in the international realm. Yet, this change illustrates Japan's departure from relatively heavy reliance on the existing regional security system, consisting of the US-led alliance network and the ASEAN-led multilateral security frameworks. Japan now aims to increase its own defense capability and pursue its own diplomacy for regional stability in East Asia while making most of evolving security frameworks to ensure its security.

5. Conclusion and future prospects

Japan's diplomatic strategy toward East Asia underwent three main changes in the post-Cold War era. The first change occurred soon after the 1991 Persian Gulf War propelled Japan to consider a potential way to contribute to

international security, resulting in the creation of dual-track diplomacy. The second was the consolidation of Japan's dual-track diplomacy by strengthening the US–Japan alliance and supporting the ASEAN's multilateral initiatives in the early 2000s. The third was the enhancement of Japan's own security efforts to maintain regional stability while making the most of the existing political and security mechanisms in East Asia—multilateralizing US alliance networks and enhancing the ASEAN-led multilateral frameworks.

Admittedly, a change in Japan's security policy would likely remain incremental as the policy is inherently constrained by Japan's own political and legal provisions. Japan's core strategic thinking is still founded on the US–Japan alliance, and this is well illustrated by the 2015 *Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation* (MOD, 2015). Also, the Japanese public is cautious about expanding Japan's security role in the international setting, and this constrains Japan to smoothly become the so-called “normal state”, by which Japan can exercise its military capabilities without its own constitutional and legal restrictions. However, relaxing these constraints, as illustrated by the Japanese government's lift on a ban of exercising a right to collective self-defense in 2014, is not entirely impossible. Ultimately, for the policy shift, two factors would likely play a critical role: the degree of the future US commitment to the alliance with Japan and the level of China's assertiveness. As illustrated in Japan's policy shift during the late 2000s, Japanese diplomatic strategy is likely to evolve in relation to these factors and in turn play a role in shaping the East Asian strategic environment. This is not the exception of the future direction of Japan's newly created doctrine in 2016, the Free and Open Indo-Pacific vision and strategy.

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