

CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES FOR JAPAN'S INTERNATIONAL POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF SECURITY AND DEFENSE

Dawid Jakimiec

Lublin Academy of Political Science and Engineering
Lublin, Poland

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1310-3944>

Abstract. *This article examines the evolution and contemporary challenges of Japan's external security and defence policy. Setting the discussion in its historical context – from the more than two centuries of isolation under the Tokugawa shogunate, through the modernisation of the Meiji Restoration and the militarism that ended in defeat in the Second World War – the study traces how Japan's post-war security posture was shaped by the 1946 Constitution, the pacifist commitment of its Article 9, and the establishment of the Self-Defense Forces. It analyses the central role of the alliance with the United States, Japan's growing engagement in East and Southeast Asia, and the ongoing debate over constitutional revision in response to a changing regional environment. Particular attention is devoted to the contemporary threats confronting Japan – the rise of China, a nuclear-armed North Korea, and unresolved territorial disputes with Russia, China, and South Korea – and to Japan's efforts to strengthen its defence capabilities while balancing dependence on the United States against aspirations to regional leadership.*

Keywords: Japan; security policy; Self-Defense Forces; Article 9 of the Constitution; Japan–United States alliance; Indo-Pacific; territorial disputes.

1. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this article is the issue of security conditions in the face of a dynamically evolving list of threats and the many serious challenges facing contemporary Japan. Of particular importance in ensuring the level of security expected by Japanese society is the manner and direction of the Japanese government's external security policy and the building of international relations. The author also outlines and illuminates the historical context of the discussed issues, highlighting the most significant events in the history of the Land of the Rising Sun. The chronology of events spans from Japan's isolationist period, which lasted over two hundred years, through the colonial policy of the Meiji Restoration, armed conflicts, including the war with Russia and China, to the events of World War II. The article also provides an in-depth analysis of the fundamental directions of Japan's defense policy in the Land of the Rising Sun after the end of World War II. It also highlights the changes and ongoing evolution in the external security policy pursued by Japanese decision-makers. Considerable attention is paid to Japan's increased involvement in East and Southeast Asia, and existing disagreements and conflicts over disputed territories are outlined. These significantly impact Japan's relations with countries with which it has unresolved disputes. Furthermore, the article also presents the key elements of the Japan Self-Defense Forces' defense capabilities.

2. DIRECTIONS, GOALS, AND ASSUMPTIONS OF JAPAN'S SECURITY POLICY

Analyzing the long and rich history of the Land of the Rising Sun, we encounter a period of isolationism that lasted over 200 years and protected the country not only from the influence of other cultures but also served as a barrier ensuring the external security of the Empire of Japan (Meyer, 2009, pp. 127–129). In 1635, the shogun Tokugawa Iemitsu issued an edict that closed the country's borders to foreigners and

prohibited maritime trade with most countries. Only small trade was possible in the ports of Nagasaki and Kagoshima with a few countries, including China, Korea, the Netherlands, and the Ryukyu Kingdom (Henshall, 2012, pp. 75–107; Tashiro, 1982).

In 1854, the United States forced the opening and modernization of the country after Japan's isolation, which had lasted over 200 years. It must be admitted that the Japanese Empire was not only the first Asian industrial society but also soon began expanding its sphere of influence, primarily in the Pacific region. This expansion, as we know, ended with Japan's defeat in World War II and the American occupation. The creation of legal acts and political documents, ideologies, and doctrines of all kinds almost always contains references to more or less ancient history and the culture shaped by it. One of the researchers in the field of cultural sociology and political science is Ewa Skrabacz, who writes: "the nature of political actions is fundamentally future-oriented, but the construction of programs and the presentation of proposals naturally refers to the past: a summary, a prediction of continuation, a critique, a correction (Skrabacz, 2011, p. 24). It is important to consider the modifications and transformations taking place in the security environment, which result from changing geopolitical conditions. In this sense, taking into account immediate political needs, a sensibly crafted policy in international relations constitutes the binding agent and, at the same time, the material that can be used to justify specific actions expressed in dominance and defense potential, as well as subordination, as well as the legitimization of a specific system of building security and exercising power (Giddens, 2007, p. 49). As a supplement to the issue of Japan's isolation, it is worth emphasizing that it ended with the signing of the Treaty of Kanagawa, in which the Americans forced Japan to open up to trade with the United States and had to open two ports in Shimoda and Hakodate (Ladouce, 2010, pp. 157–184).

Following the overthrow of the last shogun, Tokugawa Yoshinobu, in 1868, a new era began in the Empire of Japan. Emperor Mutsuhito ascended the throne in 1867, and his reign is known as the Meiji Era, which lasted from 1868 to 1912. Japan's imperialist and militaristic ambitions intensified and were evident in its wars not only with China but also with Russia. The policies pursued by the Land of the Rising Sun briefly gave the Empire dominance in Asia. Only defeat in World War II halted the Japanese drive and efforts to subjugate other countries.

Due to Japan's geographical location, in order to prevent the islands from being occupied by a potential enemy attack, it is forced to defend the state in the surrounding waters. Therefore, the foreign policy pursued by the Land of the Rising Sun is largely determined by the desire to expand its geographical reach into deeper territories (Halizak, 1999, pp. 150–166). For decades, Japanese decision-makers have been considering largely geopolitical conditions. The Japanese government remains undecided as to whether the foundation for Japan's development and power should be the resources, conditions, and socioeconomic characteristics of Asian countries, or whether, conversely, the importance and greatness of the Land of the Rising Sun should be built on the paradigms and patterns characteristic of Western civilization (Tow, 1983, pp. 51–83). It is worth noting the views of Fukuzawa Yukichi, who opposed the feudal system and promoted Western concepts of the state. He also opposed Japan's isolationism and criticized its lack of willingness to imitate more developed societies (being stuck in a state of stagnation). He believed that Western civilization was characterized by the intermingling of various social groups, which led to the development of democracy and their rapid economic and technological growth. Fukuzawa also touched on the topic of kokutai. He believed that national character was not solely a feature of Japanese society. According to this theory, each nation possesses a unique character, which is not immutable (unrelated to religion and language). It is subject to transformations that adapt to current social conditions. Fukuzawa also adapted the kokutai theory to his concept of national development and independence, identifying progress and independence with national character.

The strategic alliance with the United States is crucial for Japan in maintaining an appropriate level of external security. Other countries in the region are not interested in strengthening Japan's international position and would gladly form a bloc and form an alliance to block Japan's aspirations to become a regional hegemon (Bedeski, 1984, pp. 277–290).

Japan's devastating losses and defeat in World War II had a significant impact on the values and directions of the Japanese government's policies and international relations. Both the Japanese people and the ruling party advocated for the peaceful coexistence of states and nations and condemned militarism and expansionism (Niedziela, 2005). It is worth recalling the achievements and efforts of Shigeru Yoshida to establish new democratic principles and assumptions. His vision was based on, among other things:

- strategic cooperation with the United States, which was to be the primary guarantor of Japan's external security. Japan concluded a peace treaty with the United States in 1951, and a treaty of mutual cooperation and security was signed in 1960;

- abandoning the development of a military capability in the form of its own army. In return, the Japan Self-Defense Forces were established in 1954. These forces were to consist of naval, land, and air components. Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution imposed by the US stipulated that Japan renounce the use of war and embraced the principle of pacifism. Since the 1970s, Japan has been making efforts to strengthen political and economic cooperation with the countries of the Pacific region. In the history of relations between Japan and China, we can note a situation in which the Chinese government proposed to the Land of the Rising Sun a joint alliance against a possible military aggression by the Soviet Union.

In the area of security and defense, the Japanese government is revising its views, expressing the belief that Japan's external security should not be based solely on the alliance with the US and that it is necessary to expand and strengthen its own defense capabilities. The Japanese are considering the reliability of American allies in the event of a real threat (Yamada, 2010, pp. 137–155). In 1991, the Japanese government developed a concept for expanding Japan's international policy to include security issues in the Southeast Asian region (Haruki, 1999, pp. 222–223). Amendments to the Japanese constitution made in 1992 gave the Japan Self-Defense Forces the right to participate in international peacekeeping missions as part of the UN's statutory tasks. Japanese soldiers participated, among others, in participation in international peacekeeping operations in Mozambique, Cambodia and the Golan Heights.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the polarized world have redefined Japan's security policy. The Land of the Rising Sun is making diplomatic efforts aimed at building a system encompassing all countries in the Southeast Asian region. This arrangement would serve as a counterweight to the existing alliance and agreements with the United States. Recently, Japan has been significantly more active in building positive relations to strengthen and maintain an acceptable level of security both in the Indo-Pacific region and globally. The Japanese parliament passed a special law sanctioning the fight against terrorism, following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States. The Japan Self-Defense Forces have participated in missions in Turkey, Rwanda, Iran, India, Russia, and Indonesia.

It is worth noting that the regulations adopted in the Japanese Constitution of 1946 are not only principles for building a democratic state ruled by law, but also distinguish this supreme legal act from all the constitutions of democratic states. This includes the provision regarding pacifism and the renunciation of war as a means of resolving disputes. Furthermore, it includes a previously unknown concept of national sovereignty and a recognition of human rights. By adopting the Constitution, the Japanese nation not only adopted a democratic direction for its development but also completely renounced war. This resulted in the Land of the Rising Sun losing the right to build its own military force in the form of a classic army, which would safeguard state security and defend its independence and sovereignty. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution contains a provision stating that the goal of the Japanese nation is to sincerely strive for world peace based on order and justice. The aforementioned text further states: The article contains a provision stating that the country must forever renounce war and the use or threat of war, and that this is the sovereign right of the nation (Suzuki & Winczorek, 1990, p. 35).

The constitutional regulations of 1946, imposed by the US, are incompatible with the current, changing international security conditions and the geopolitical and regional situation in the Indo-Pacific region. Shortly after the constitution was adopted, the United States needed Japan as an ally in the armed conflict with Korea, as well as to reinforce the threat posed by the USSR and China. The Japan Self-Defense

Forces, while not very numerous, are equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry. The lack of definition and precise definition of defense leads to endless debates regarding the validity of Article 9 regulations. Following the escalation of terrorist attacks, Japanese politicians are calling for a radicalization of defense regulations and are demanding a constitutional revision. The shifting priorities of the Japanese government in security and defense policy have led the Japan Self-Defense Forces to engage not only in peacekeeping missions conducted under the aegis of the UN but also in military operations conducted by NATO. By imposing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution in 1946, the Americans sought to prevent the Japanese from pursuing any imperialist ideas or ambitions. However, in the current situation of growing threats and tensions in the Pacific region, the lack of an army is increasingly being questioned, not only by the Japanese people, politicians, and government elites, but also by international opinion. Independent military experts and observers believe that, given the current geopolitical security situation, a revision of the Japanese constitution is necessary, including amending Article 9. They believe these proposed changes will contribute to Japan's greater involvement in building stability in the Southeast Asian region and more effectively combating terrorism.

Currently, Japan's self-defense forces constitute the only support and potential adapted and equipped to conduct offensive operations, which is contrary to the current regulations contained in Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution. Japan compensates for the lack of a traditional army with self-defense forces that participate in international operations. The name of these forces in Japanese means "self," "defense," and "regiment." The origins of the Self-Defense Forces date back to World War II. As history records, the United States dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August 1945, and in the post-war period sought to hold Japan accountable for war crimes. Japan is a technologically and economically well-developed country with a strong international position. However, the strengthening competitiveness, not only of China, forces it to constantly seek new markets for its goods. In choosing the direction of contemporary international and security policy, the Land of the Rising Sun faces a choice between two concepts: the first is based on continuing to maintain and celebrate its alliances with the United States, while the second path involves building regional economic power and a leading position in Southeast Asia within ASEAN. Furthermore, Japan is also considering establishing an enclave within the Sea of Japan and the Yellow Sea, whose primary goal would be to strengthen security, expand the sphere of prosperity, and enhance the development potential of the Land of the Rising Sun, where the country would play a key role in this region. The Japanese government is making visible efforts to lessen its external security umbrella's dependence on the United States. The Japanese are increasing their military spending, as such proximity justifies strengthening their military potential (Lorat, 2010). The Japanese security strategy establishes priorities and directions for security policy, with ensuring Japan's own security as its primary goal. However, Japan's ambitions are steadily growing toward building a strong economic, financial, and financial zone, of which it will be the leader and administrator (Niedziela, 2009).

Japan has unresolved territorial disputes with Korea, China, and the Russian Federation, which are a source of ongoing unrest and tension between these countries.

3. CONCLUSION

Japan, defeated in World War II, was forced by the United States to adopt a constitution in 1946 and build a new political system – democracy. We may wonder whether, after the horrors of war, the suffering it endured, and the murders perpetrated by the Japanese on the populations of conquered countries, it would have been able to voluntarily abandon its imperialist ambitions, aspirations, and ambitions without any pressure. It was under pressure from the United States that the process of building a different social and political order began in the Land of the Rising Sun. A new democratic system and security could be built primarily on the basis of agreements, alliances, and understandings with the United States.

Japan currently faces new difficulties and challenges in the context of China's strengthening hegemony, the security threat posed by nuclear-armed North Korea, the unresolved territorial dispute with the Russian Federation over the Kurils and Sakhalin Islands, and the revision of its alliance with the

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United States. Japan strives to play an increasingly important role in building and strengthening security in the Asia-Pacific region.

The Japanese government believes that its importance in the region and internationally must be commensurate with its level of economic and technological development and proportionate to its economic potential. The dynamically evolving catalog of contemporary threats to the Land of the Rising Sun's security poses new requirements and goals for ensuring the country's security, which is a prerequisite for its existence and development.

Serious unrest and tensions in the region, which are the source of many significant threats to Japan's external security, have prompted ongoing internal transformations in the context of its international and security policy. Japan is strengthening, modernizing, and expanding its military capabilities. It is aggressively strengthening and modernizing its naval equipment and resources. It is building modern ships and helicopter destroyers designed to counter ballistic missiles. The alliances and agreements with the United States, in place since the end of World War II, continue to play a fundamental role in ensuring Japan's adequate security, simultaneously serving as an effective deterrent to potential aggressors and adventurous states in the region. Furthermore, existing mutual support and cooperation contribute to regional and supra-regional stability and significantly increase its active role in shaping Japan's foreign policy and international relations.

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