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Japan's Contribution to Military Security in East Asia under the U.S.–Japan Alliance during the Suga Administration

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Abstract

In an era of significant transitions in East Asia's security dynamics, Japan's role in the U.S.–Japan Alliance has become increasingly significant. However, despite the diminishing trend of bilateral military alliances worldwide, the U.S.–Japan Alliance stands as a resilient bulwark of security in East Asia. This resilience was particularly evident under the Suga administration, an era punctuated by unique security challenges and opportunities. This paper examines how Prime Minister Suga's Japan addressed the region's complex geopolitical realities and growing security threats in a comprehensive and strategic manner. It highlights Suga's focus on key areas such as cybersecurity, defense budgeting, regional stability, and contentious issues like Taiwan's security, along with the alignment of Japan's strategies with U.S. interests. The study casts a spotlight on Suga's comprehensive approach to navigating the evolving security landscape of East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region, underlining Japan's position as a pivotal actor in regional security.

Keywords: U.S.–Japan Alliance, Suga Administration, Military Security, East Asia Stability

Abstrak

Di era transisi dalam dinamika keamanan Asia Timur yang signifikan, peran Jepang dalam Aliansi AS–Jepang menjadi semakin penting. Namun, terlepas dari menurunnya kecenderungan aliansi militer bilateral di seluruh dunia, Aliansi AS–Jepang tetap berdiri sebagai benteng keamanan yang tangguh di Asia Timur. Ketangguhan ini terlihat jelas di bawah pemerintahan Suga yang berada di era yang diselingi oleh tantangan dan peluang keamanan yang istimewa. Studi ini mengkaji bagaimana Jepang di bawah Perdana Menteri Suga mengatasi realitas geopolitik yang kompleks di kawasan ini dan peningkatan ancaman keamanan secara komprehensif dan strategis. Studi ini mengedepankan fokus Suga pada bidang-bidang utama seperti keamanan dunia maya, penganggaran pertahanan, stabilitas regional, dan isu-isu kontroversial seperti keamanan Taiwan, serta penyesuaian strategi Jepang

dengan kepentingan AS. Studi ini juga mengedepankan pendekatan komprehensif Suga dalam menavigasi lanskap keamanan yang berkembang di kawasan Asia Timur dan juga yang lebih luas lagi, kawasan Indo-Pasifik, untuk memperlihatkan posisi Jepang sebagai aktor penting dalam keamanan regional.

Kata kunci: Aliansi AS–Jepang, Pemerintahan Suga, Keamanan Militer, Stabilitas Asia Timur

Introduction

Bilateral military alliances have long been an important feature of the international system. Historically, countries formed these alliances to ensure their security in a world characterized by great power rivalries, territorial disputes, and the threat of war. However, bilateral military alliances have become less common in the post-World War II era.

One reason for this shift is the changing global security landscape, which has reduced the relevance of a bilateral military alliance. With the end of the Cold War and the rise of non-state actors such as terrorist organizations, this type of alliance has become reduced even more as the nature of security threats has changed. Many of the challenges facing countries today, such as cyber-attacks and pandemics, require international cooperation rather than bilateral military alliances. As a result, countries have turned to multilateral organizations such as the United Nations or regional security organizations to address these challenges.

Another reason can also be found in increased economic interdependence between countries that have made them more reliant on one another for economic growth and stability. This has led to greater cooperation and diplomatic relations between countries, reducing the need for bilateral military alliances to ensure security. Countries are less likely to view each other as threats if they mutually depend on one another for trade and investment.

Despite all of that, the U.S.-Japan alliance, formally known as the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, has endured and has not even been amended for more than sixty years. The alliance has been a vital feature of the post-World War II security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region. It has proven to be crucial in maintaining peace and stability in the region. The alliance, which was formalized in 1951 with the signing of the Treaty of San Francisco, also marked the end of the U.S. occupation of Japan and established a security treaty between the two countries. In 1960, the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan was signed, expanding the scope of the alliance to cover the Asia-

Pacific region. Under the terms of the treaty, the United States agreed to provide military protection to Japan in exchange for access to military bases in Japan.

In the military security arena of East Asia, the U.S.-Japan bilateral alliance holds a prominent position, especially in light of Japan's considerable contributions. This focus was sharpened under the leadership of the Suga administration, which confronted a rapidly evolving regional context defined by shifts in power dynamics, complex geopolitical realities, and mounting security challenges. The Suga administration's response to these dynamics, through policy initiatives and strategic decisions, shaped Japan's role as a vital contributor to military security in East Asia within the framework of the U.S.-Japan Alliance.

The Suga administration had to navigate complex challenges, such as cyber threats, demographic realities, and diplomatic tensions, while maintaining Japan's commitment to the U.S.-Japan Alliance. These circumstances presented a testing ground for Japan's strategic foresight and adaptability. The administration's approach offers a case study on how a nation can engage in a bilateral military alliance in a modern context to respond to both traditional and non-traditional security threats effectively.

Based upon the previously mentioned historical framework, this paper sets forth a detailed study of Japan's work in augmenting military security in East Asia as it unfolded within the U.S.-Japan Alliance during the Suga administration. The analysis delves into both internal and external policy shifts that characterized this time, further unpacking their ramifications for regional security. In doing so, it sheds light on the unique role Japan carved out under Suga's leadership as a significant contributor to military security amidst the dynamic landscape of East Asia.

Conceptual Framework

1. National Security

The concept of national security has been evolving over time, and experts and policymakers have continually been redefining it. In spite of that, the concept always includes protecting a nation from internal threats, such as political instability, and external threats, such as military incursion, as two of the main components of the concept. Countries use various means to ensure national security, including the deployment of military forces, intelligence gathering, and diplomatic efforts. A comprehensive national security strategy is vital to protect a nation's interests, maintain stability, and prevent conflicts.

Before analyzing the various security challenges that Japan faces in East Asia, including the military ones, it is important first to discuss the fundamentals of the concept of national security. In his book “National Security and Individual Freedom,” Harold Laswell (1950) states that the concept of national security is about the absence of foreign influence or control and suggests that national security policy should include preparedness to use force when needed to protect national independence. Essentially, he sees national security as a way to ensure that a nation is not subjected to external influences that could compromise its ability to make independent decisions and pursue its own interests.

On the other hand, Arnold Wolfers defines that “[National] security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked” (1952). Thus, he suggests that national security can be evaluated both objectively and subjectively. Objectively, national security is determined by the absence of threats that can undermine or damage the values that a nation has already acquired or established, such as its territorial integrity, economic prosperity, or political stability. Subjectively, national security is measured by the level of fear or anxiety that people have about the possibility of such values being attacked or compromised. So, while an objective assessment of national security may indicate that there are no immediate threats to a country’s values, people may still feel insecure and fearful due to potential threats that may arise in the future.

Based on Laswell’s thought, Japan, on the one hand, should protect its national independence and interests from external influences that could compromise its decision-making and actions. On the other hand, based on Wolfers’ idea, Japan should reduce its fear and anxiety about potential threats that could undermine its values, such as territorial integrity, economic prosperity, and political stability. These two dimensions of security, objective and subjective, should guide Japan’s contribution to military security in East Asia under the U.S.–Japan Alliance; this paper will examine how Japan reflects these dimensions in its security strategy.

Given this framework, the U.S.–Japan Alliance is a significant pillar of Japan’s national security strategy. The alliance enables Japan to prepare for potential threats to its territorial integrity and economic prosperity by providing access to advanced military technologies, intelligence sharing, and training opportunities. The alliance also strengthens Japan’s political stability by promoting diplomatic relationships with the United States and other countries in

the region. Under the Suga Administration, Japan continued to maintain its military readiness and commitment to the U.S.–Japan Alliance, contributing to regional security by participating in joint military exercises and operations with the United States and other countries. For instance, in October 2020, Japan and the United States conducted a joint military exercise called Keen Sword, which involved more than 9,000 personnel and simulated scenarios such as island defense and missile attacks (Correll, 2020). This exercise demonstrated Japan’s military readiness and commitment to the U.S.–Japan Alliance, contributing to regional security by deterring potential adversaries and reassuring allies.

Another important aspect of Japan’s security strategy is its citizens’ subjective perceptions of security which can be measured by their level of fear or anxiety about potential threats. Hence, these perceptions are crucial to its military strategy and policy. In order to address these issues, the Ministry of Defense (MOD) and the Japan Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) do various public relations activities. These include public communication campaigns, conducting public events, opening public relations facilities, cooperating with local communities, and providing security-related education to the public (MOD, 2021). Japan’s efforts to address both objective and subjective measures of security demonstrate its commitment to maintaining national security and contributing to regional stability under the U.S.–Japan Alliance.

In summary, the concept of national security is very important to be included in this thesis since it provides a framework for analyzing Japan’s contribution to military security in East Asia. Japan’s national security strategy encompasses both objective and subjective measures of security, which are critical to maintaining its territorial integrity, economic prosperity, and political stability. The U.S.–Japan Alliance plays a vital role in Japan’s military preparedness and regional security efforts by providing access to advanced military technologies, intelligence sharing, and training opportunities. Japan’s commitment to addressing subjective measures of security, such as public communication campaigns and education, demonstrates its dedication to promoting regional stability and maintaining its national security under the U.S.–Japan Alliance.

2. Military Alliances

The U.S.–Japan Alliance stands as a significant and long-standing security partnership globally. However, comprehending its origins, development, and potential requires the utilization of a conceptual framework that facilitates the analysis of its purposes, functions, and

objectives. In line with the need for a suitable framework, this thesis adopts the conceptual framework of a military alliance to provide a comprehensive analysis of the origins, development, and potential of the significant and long-standing U.S.–Japan Alliance.

As a distinct category within the broader concept of alliances, a military alliance represents a form of military cooperation or agreement between two or more parties united by a shared purpose or interest. By applying this framework to the case study of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, this thesis provides a set of concepts, principles, and theoretical perspectives that enable us to examine the underlying motivations and reasons behind the formation and continuity of an alliance, as well as the specific military security arrangements and mechanisms established within an alliance and their effectiveness in achieving the shared strategic goals.

Among the key concepts and principles that are essential for understanding the nature and dynamics of a military alliance is collective self-defense. This concept refers to the right and obligation of an alliance member to defend another member when attacked by an external aggressor. Another important concept and principle is burden-sharing, which refers to the distribution of costs and responsibilities among alliance members according to their capabilities and interests. These concepts and principles offer a theoretical lens to analyze the significance of the U.S.–Japan Alliance in terms of military security.

For the purpose of illustrating the concept of collective self-defense, this thesis examines how it has been applied and interpreted in the U.S.–Japan Alliance over time. Lee (2020) describes the concept of collective self-defense as a situation where a state can resort to armed force against another state that launches or is about to launch an armed attack on one of its allies, provided that the ally asks for its help. This is the case even if the state that offers help is not itself a target of the attack by the aggressor state (Lee, 2020). However, Joffe (1992) argues that collective self-defense is another word for an alliance, which implies a determinate structure and purpose for mutual defense, and it requires a determinate foe. He also suggests that collective self-defense is driven by competition and power rather than cooperation and norms. Despite these different views on collective self-defense, this concept acknowledges the significance of collective strength and cooperation in deterring potential adversaries and upholding regional stability. The U.S.–Japan Alliance itself is based on the core principle of collective self-defense, which means that they agree to protect each other in case of an attack by any state that poses a threat to their security. However, this principle also creates challenges regarding how the allies distribute the defense costs and duties among themselves, which

corresponds to the concept of burden-sharing. Burden-sharing is another key concept that affects the effectiveness and sustainability of military alliances, especially in times of fiscal constraints and changing security environments.

Burden-sharing is a key concept that refers to how the member-states of an alliance share the costs and responsibilities of collective defense. As Thielemann (2013) explains, burden-sharing involves various aspects of defense cooperation, such as resource allocation, force contribution, and intelligence sharing; these aspects affect the effectiveness and sustainability of military alliances, especially in times of fiscal constraints and changing security environments. For instance, in the U.S.–Japan Alliance, burden-sharing has been a contentious issue for decades, as the U.S. has often pressured Japan to increase its defense spending and capabilities while Japan has faced domestic and constitutional constraints on its military role. In order to address this issue, the 2015 revision of the Guidelines for the U.S.–Japan Alliance aimed to enhance burden-sharing by expanding Japan’s scope of action and cooperation with the U.S. in various domains and contingencies (MOD, 2015).

Therefore, the conceptual framework of a military alliance, which include key concepts such as collective self-defense and burden-sharing, plays a crucial role in understanding and analyzing the dynamics of the U.S.–Japan Alliance in terms of military security. This framework provides a theoretical lens to explore the motivations behind alliance formation, the specific defense arrangements and mechanisms within the alliance, and the challenges and opportunities that arise in maintaining a strong and effective alliance. Understanding these concepts allows for a comprehensive analysis of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, including its historical development, its role in regional security, and the factors that shape its contributions and effectiveness.

3. National Sovereignty

The concept of national sovereignty, profoundly embedded in the history of international relations, holds a central position in understanding how states act and interact in the world. One of the key historical events that shaped this concept happened in 1648 when the Peace of Westphalia was made. This agreement not only concluded the Thirty Years’ War but also marked a significant turning point in the birth of the modern state system. Despite still nominally vassals of the Holy Roman Empire, states that were formerly vassals and subjects of the Holy Roman Empire, such as Baden, Bavaria, the Netherlands, Saxony, and Switzerland, received recognition as sovereign states. This was achieved as the Peace of Westphalia

recognized their independence and autonomy from the Holy Roman Empire. Thus, the Peace of Westphalia introduced the principle of national sovereignty. This principle is regarded as a cornerstone of international relations since it made states possess exclusive authority and control over their internal affairs, including governance, laws, and decision-making processes. By recognizing national sovereignty, the Peace of Westphalia contributed to defining the criteria of statehood and laid the groundwork for its enduring significance in global politics. As a result, this modern system is also referred to as the ‘Westphalian system’ (Farr, 2005) (Kampmann, 2021).

Therefore, based on the historical and theoretical importance of national sovereignty, this thesis will use this concept as a lens to examine the U.S.–Japan Alliance, a key strategic partner in the Asia-Pacific region. Through this lens, this study aims to explore how both nations assert their sovereign prerogatives and navigate the challenges that emerge within the context of the partnership of these two nations; while also examining the mechanisms and institutions that shape their implementation of sovereignty, encompassing the realms of international law, diplomacy, and cooperative endeavors on a global scale. Subsequently, through the application of this conceptual framework, the present study endeavors to enhance the comprehension of national sovereignty and its enduring significance within the realm of global politics. Furthermore, this study endeavors to unravel the ramifications of national sovereignty on a range of pressing concerns, encompassing territorial disputes, human rights, the complexities of globalization, and the ever-evolving dynamics inherent to international relations.

The impact of national sovereignty on the dynamics and decision-making of the U.S.–Japan Alliance is a crucial aspect that shapes the relationship between these two nations. National sovereignty refers to the independent authority of a state to govern itself and make decisions without external interference. In the context of the alliance, understanding and respecting the national sovereignty of both the United States and Japan is paramount for maintaining a healthy and cooperative partnership (Maizland & Cheng, 2021).

One of the main factors that influence alliance decision-making is national sovereignty. National sovereignty refers to the right and power of a state to govern itself without external interference. Each country in an alliance has its own national interests, priorities, and policy objectives that shape its approach to the alliance. Therefore, when formulating policies or setting the alliance agenda, both countries need to respect each other’s sovereignty and try to

harmonize their interests and goals. A failure to do so could lead to mistrust, resentment, or conflict within the alliance. An example of how national sovereignty affects alliance decision-making is the relocation of the U.S. Futenma base in Okinawa to Henoko, which is also located in Okinawa. This issue involves Japan's sovereign rights and its security alliance with the U.S., as well as the local autonomy of Okinawa. The relocation plan was unveiled as a way to reduce the burden on the local residents of Ginowan, where the Futenma base is currently located, and to maintain the military function of the U.S. Marine Corps in Okinawa. However, the plan has faced strong opposition from many Okinawans and the local government, who wanted the base removed from the island entirely, citing environmental, social, and historical reasons. The local government of Okinawa has appealed to the Supreme Court of Japan many times but to no avail. The Japanese government has sought to reconcile its domestic security concerns and its obligations to its security alliance by concurrently pursuing the economic development of Okinawa and advancing with the relocation plan, demonstrating its efforts to appease both Okinawa and the U.S. in order to address its security priorities (Siripala, 2022).

Additionally, national sovereignty affects strategic planning and defense cooperation within the alliance. The U.S.–Japan alliance requires the coordination and collaboration of military forces and capabilities. However, as sovereign nations, both the United States and Japan balance their national sovereignty with the need for collective defense capabilities. They do this by negotiating and implementing agreements that respect sovereignty concerns and establish mechanisms for effective cooperation. An example of this is the meeting between President Biden and Prime Minister Suga on April 16, 2021, when both leaders agreed that in an effort to ensure peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region, Japan and the U.S. renewed their commitment to the U.S.–Japan Alliance. Furthermore, they opposed any unilateral actions that sought to change the status quo, specifically addressing territorial disputes in the East China Sea and the South China Sea. The two nations also enhanced their ability to deter and respond to threats, strengthened defense cooperation in areas such as cyber and space, and enhanced their mutual defense capabilities (The White House, 2021). This example shows how the alliance enhances defense cooperation while respecting sovereignty.

Nevertheless, challenges and tensions can arise in decision-making processes due to differing national interests and sovereignty-related concerns. Resolving these differences requires careful navigation and a willingness to find common ground. Balancing competing national interests while upholding national sovereignty can be a complex task. However, the U.S.–Japan alliance had managed to demonstrate its ability to address such challenges through

dialogues, negotiations, and compromises. For instance, the two countries agreed to revise the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation in 2015 (Maizland & Cheng, 2021). In 2021, they also agreed to enhance their trilateral cooperation with South Korea amidst growing challenges from North Korea and China (Sneider & Park, 2021). These examples show how the U.S.–Japan Alliance can overcome sovereignty-related challenges and enhance its defense cooperation in the region by using dialogues, negotiations, and compromises.

Safeguarding national sovereignty is an essential aspect of alliance dynamics. Mutual respect for decision-making autonomy is critical to maintaining a strong and effective partnership. Both the United States and Japan recognize the importance of acknowledging and consulting on significant decisions that may impact sovereignty. Mechanisms for coordination and consensus-building are in place to ensure that both nations have a voice and influence in alliance matters. For example, the revision of the Guidelines for Japan–U.S. Defense Cooperation in 2015 was the outcome of thorough consultations and negotiations between the two nations, demonstrating the recognition and respect given to Japan’s independent decision-making process. Japan’s sovereign choice to reinterpret its constitution and expand its security role within the alliance was duly acknowledged and taken into consideration during these discussions. The revision also established new bilateral coordination mechanisms, such as the Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) and the Bilateral Planning Mechanism (BPM), which facilitate information-sharing and joint decision-making in various security scenarios (MOD, 2015).

Besides safeguarding national sovereignty through mutual respect and coordination, the U.S.–Japan Alliance also upholds this principle by avoiding interference in each other’s internal affairs. The U.S.–Japan Alliance respects the sovereign jurisdiction of each nation, avoiding undue interference or intrusion in their domestic matters. This principle ensures that decisions made within each country’s borders are respected and that the alliance focuses on external threats and shared security challenges (DOS, 2021).

The U.S.–Japan Alliance does not interfere in each other’s internal affairs regarding human rights issues, such as the death penalty, gun control, and immigration. They acknowledge their differences and agree to disagree on these matters while maintaining their cooperation on external threats and shared security challenges. For example, the United States Department of State recommended in its 2021 report that Japan could benefit from enacting a law prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender

identity, as well as establishing a national human rights institution that can monitor and address human rights violations (DOS, 2021). These recommendations are based on the recognition that Japan has some gaps in its legal and institutional framework for protecting human rights and that improving its human rights situation would enhance its credibility and influence in the region and the world.

Ultimately, national sovereignty plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and decision-making processes of the U.S.–Japan Alliance. Based on mutual recognition and respect for each other’s sovereignty, the alliance maintains a strong and cooperative partnership. Decision-making complexities are navigated through careful consideration of national interests, respectful negotiations to address sovereignty concerns, and the pursuit of common ground. Collaborative efforts in defense planning, joint military operations, and crisis management require close coordination and collective decision-making. The alliance is committed to enhancing collective security while upholding the sovereignty of each nation. By adhering to mutual respect, non-interference, and effective coordination principles, the U.S.–Japan Alliance strikes a balance between safeguarding national sovereignty and advancing collective security in a rapidly changing global landscape.

Research Methods

This study employs the use of qualitative methods. In his book “Research Methods in Politics and International Relations,” Lamont (2015) explains that qualitative methods are different from quantitative methods because they do not use numbers to collect and analyze data. Instead, they use other types of data, such as words, images, or sounds, to explore how people make sense of the world. He argues that this is especially important for studying international politics, which involves complex meanings and processes. Thus, qualitative methods allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the perspectives and experiences of the actors involved in the U.S.–Japan Alliance and to capture the nuances and dynamics of their interactions (Lamont, 2015). To apply qualitative methods to the study, a variety of data sources that reflect the views and actions of the relevant actors are used.

These data sources are both primary and secondary, such as historical documents, government documents, and peer-reviewed journal articles. As Rozakis (2007) expresses in her book, many “...effective research papers...” mostly combine these two types of data sources. She also argues that primary sources are not inferior or superior to secondary sources as their value and relevance depend on the context and purpose of the research. She further adds that

both of them have different advantages and disadvantages. For example, primary sources can provide unique and timely insights that other sources may not have, as they are produced by the people who directly witnessed or experienced the events or phenomena being studied. On the other hand, secondary sources can offer a broader perspective than primary sources, as they are produced by people who have analyzed or synthesized primary sources or other secondary sources. However, she acknowledges that both types of sources may possess the author's bias, which means that the author's personal views, beliefs, or prejudices may influence how they present or interpret the information. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the credibility and reliability of any source and to use multiple sources to cross-check and verify the information (Rozakis, 2007).

A primary source is a first-hand account or direct evidence of an event, object, person, or work of art; these sources are created by someone who participated in or witnessed the event, object, and person directly (Ithaca College Library, n.d.) (Rozakis, 2007). In his paper "International Relations in The Archive," Mulich (2021) writes that the primary sources which dominate international relations are official government documents. Drawing from this argument, most of the primary sources that are used for this study are official government documents.

Secondary sources encompass works that rely on primary sources or other secondary sources for their information, as the writers possess indirect knowledge of the events or topics they describe. These works, especially, analyze primary sources and make new connections or discoveries, and they are often published in academic journals or books for other researchers to use (Alderman, 2014). The secondary sources that are employed for this study include peer-reviewed journal articles, respected news sites (such as Asahi Shimbun and the Japan Times), and other literary works.

The study also incorporates an analytical approach that focuses on systematically examining the data to identify patterns, themes, and relationships that answer the research question. Thus, by using qualitative methods and incorporating an analytical approach, the study seeks to draw meaningful conclusions and contribute to the topic of the U.S.–Japan Alliance.

The U.S.–Japan Alliance under the Second Abe Administration

When Shinzo Abe became Prime Minister of Japan for the second time in 2012, Japan's security policy saw significant changes, which impacted the U.S.–Japan Alliance. His

administration, which lasted from 2012 to 2020, took a more assertive stance on Japan's military capabilities, seeking to revise Japan's post-war pacifist constitution to allow for a more robust military presence.

In July 2014, the Abe administration made a Cabinet Decision that reversed the ban on collective self-defense that had been in place for almost 60 years and introduced a somewhat restricted version of it (MOFA, 2014). Unsurprisingly, various groups had differing opinions on the decision, with some supporting it and others criticizing it. Supporters argued that it was essential for Japan's security and that the introduction of a restricted version of collective self-defense has sufficiently addressed the concerns about the constitutionality of the move, as well as prevented Japan from becoming embroiled in foreign conflicts unnecessarily. On the other hand, opponents decried that it violated the country's pacifist constitution as they believed that Japan could become entangled in armed conflicts outside of its territory, which they saw as a potential threat to Japan's security and stability.

Despite facing significant opposition from political opponents and the general public in late 2015, Abe successfully championed a series of security bills through the Japanese parliament. These included the Law on Response to Contingencies, the Law to Ensure Security in Contingencies Significantly Affecting Japan, the International Peace Support Law, and amendments to the International Peace Cooperation Law. The first of these laws allow Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense in certain situations, such as when an attack on a closely related state poses a clear threat to the fundamental rights of the Japanese people and when there are no other suitable means to repel the attack, with the use of force being restricted to the minimum necessary. The second law, which replaces a previous one, is intended to enhance Japanese non-combat logistical support for the U.S. and other states on a regional and global scale. The third law removes the requirement for Japan to pass separate laws for each JSDF dispatch to provide logistical support to multinational forces. In addition, amendments to the International Peace Cooperation Law permit the JSDF to use force during certain United Nations PKOs, extending beyond the defense of JSDF personnel (Hughes, 2018).

The Abe administration claims that the "three new conditions" limit Japan's use of collective self-defense military actions for the U.S. However, these limitations are vague as the administration has not defined specific conditions that would justify a military response or established a threshold for military action. As a result, the government has the flexibility to interpret the need for military action and respond to U.S. requests for assistance. It also signals

that Japan has departed from the Yoshida Doctrine's minimal military commitments by lifting the ban on collective self-defense and outlining military actions to assist the U.S. through the revised Defense Guidelines. Japan under Abe has demonstrated a greater willingness to function as a more capable U.S. ally, even to the extent of fighting alongside the U.S. in certain situations. These steps indicate a departure from the cautious hedging approach of the past and a commitment to becoming a "normal" ally.

Abe also tried to strengthen the US-Japan alliance by demonstrating broader support for the U.S.'s regional strategy in the Asia-Pacific. Since 2003, Japan has forged security ties with Australia, including a Joint Declaration on Security and an Information Security Agreement. In May 2012, Japan and Australia signed an Information Security Agreement, enabling further trilateral cooperation (MOFA, 2012). In April 2014, Japan and Australia concluded a new bilateral economic partnership agreement, pledged further cooperation on cybersecurity and defense technology exchanges, and Japan joined a competitive tender to provide new submarines for Australia (DFAT, 2014). The Abe administration has also sought to upgrade defense cooperation relations with India and South Korea and augment strategic ties in Southeast Asia with the Philippines and Vietnam. In July 2013, Japan agreed to export ten patrol boats to the Philippines through an Official Development Assistance yen loan. In January 2013, Japan investigated providing similar maritime security support to Vietnam. Japan and the Philippines signed a defense ministry-level Memorandum on Defense Cooperation and Exchanges in January 2015 and issued an Action Plan for Strengthening the Strategic Partnership in June 2015. These steps signify Japan's commitment to bolstering the US-Japan alliance and resisting the rise of Chinese influence in the South China Sea.

As with other alliances, some challenges arose before the US-Japan alliance during the Abe administration. These included a rising China, North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, and tensions over U.S. military bases in Okinawa. The Abe administration sought to address these challenges through a range of initiatives. For example, in 2013, Japan and the United States released new defense guidelines emphasizing regional security and defense cooperation (Kantei, 2013). The guidelines also called for increased cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the areas of missile defense, maritime security, and intelligence sharing. Another initiative the Abe administration undertook was strengthening Japan's missile defense capabilities. In 2017, Japan's Ministry of Defense announced plans to acquire two Aegis Ashore missile defense systems designed to intercept ballistic missiles. The deployment

of these systems was seen as a response to North Korea's missile tests, which had increased in frequency and range during the Abe administration (The Japan Times, 2017).

However, Japan's plan to acquire two Aegis Ashore systems faced several difficulties and delays in the following years. The plan encountered opposition from local residents and politicians who were concerned about the environmental impact, safety risks, and legal issues of hosting the systems. The plan also faced technical challenges and cost overruns, as Japan had to modify the systems to ensure that the interceptor missiles would not fall on residential areas in case of a malfunction. Moreover, the plan became controversial in the context of Japan's constitutional constraints on the use of force, as some experts argued that the systems could be used for offensive purposes or collective self-defense, which are prohibited by Article 9 of Japan's constitution.

In 2018, Japan selected two sites for the Aegis Ashore systems: one in Akita Prefecture and one in Yamaguchi Prefecture. However, both sites faced strong local opposition, protests, legal hurdles, and environmental assessments (The Mainichi, 2018). Then, the following year, Japan was faced with another hurdle when it learned that there were additional costs for installing the system, including the cost of missile testing. This issue, in turn, caused more delays in the installment of the systems (Kelly, 2019). More blows affected the project in May 2020, when Japan gave up its plan to install the Aegis system at the Akita GSDF site (Teramoto, 2020). Finally, in June, the Japanese government announced its decision to suspend the Aegis Ashore plan altogether. This decision was announced after it had discovered that it would need to install additional booster rockets to prevent the interceptor missiles from falling into populated areas, which would further increase the costs and complexity of the project (Sato, 2020) (Masuda, 2020).

Regarding the problem of the USMC Air Station in Futenma in Okinawa Prefecture, the Abe administration has tried its hardest to solve the problem by completing the relocation process. The relocation of Futenma has been attempted since 1997 due to the base's central location in Ginowan City, which is highly populated, and widespread protests against the U.S. presence after the 1995 incident where three U.S. servicemen kidnapped and raped a 12-year-old local girl. Relocating Futenma is necessary to reduce the basing burden in Okinawa, which hosts about 70 percent of U.S. exclusive-use military facilities in Japan. Although several attempts were made to relocate Futenma to the Henoko area in Nago City, the two governments decided to create a new landfill site for a Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) at Camp Schwab

off the coast of Henoko in 2005. After delays due to opposition from local civil society and the DPJ administration under Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama, Abe's administration has renewed its determination to complete the project by ordering the JMOD to conduct necessary environmental assessments at the end of 2012, despite opposition from the majority prefectural opinion.

Still, the opposition continues. In June 2014, anti-base relocation mayor Inamine Susumu was re-elected (Ginoza, Hase, & Kirk, 2014), while in December 2014, LDP-supported candidate Hirokazu Nakaima was defeated by Takeshi Onaga, who opposed the relocation of the air station within the prefecture (Holland, 2014). Onaga has used legal challenges to try and block the project. However, the Abe administration has managed to stay the course, winning a Supreme Court ruling in December 2016 to continue construction and resuming construction activities at the end of the year (BBC, 2016). Despite the ruling, the prefectural government's legal challenges and popular protests in Okinawa continue to disrupt the project.

The U.S.–Japan Alliance under the Suga Administration

In August 2020, Abe resigned for the second time. During his resignation speech, he presented a comprehensive assessment of the challenges that remained to be tackled, effectively signaling his expectations for his successor. Among the prominent figures who embraced Abe's revisionist and establishment agenda within the LDP was Yoshihide Suga, a close adviser to Abe since his first premiership and the longest-serving chief cabinet secretary in Japanese history, who played a key role in formulating and implementing the Abe Doctrine. Suga's deep involvement in shaping and promoting Abe's policies, along with his extensive government experience, made him a natural candidate to succeed Abe.

Following Abe's resignation, Suga became the new Prime Minister of Japan. Many observers thought that Suga would keep building on his predecessor's framework. Indeed, after taking office, Suga signaled continuity by retaining many key figures from the Abe administration in his new cabinet, which was announced in September 2020. Eight of the 20 portfolios were reappointments, including Toshimitsu Motegi as foreign minister and Hiroshi Kajiyama as economy, trade, and industry minister. Taro Kono, a key figure in the second Abe administration who had served as both foreign and defense minister, also remained in the cabinet with a new responsibility for the administrative reform portfolio (Kantei, 2020).

Under the Suga administration, many of the initiatives started by the Abe administration were continued, including efforts to enhance Japan's military capabilities and foster closer cooperation on security matters with the United States. The government continued to prioritize the development of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF) and maintain and strengthen its alliance with the United States, coordinating defense and security issues such as missile defense, intelligence sharing, and joint military exercises. The administration also pursued diplomatic efforts to build partnerships with other countries in the Indo-Pacific region, such as hosting the Quad's Foreign Ministers' meeting in Tokyo on October 6 and attending the virtual Mekong-Japan Summit in November.

Suga hosted the Quad's Foreign Ministers' meeting in Tokyo, in which Japan was represented by its Foreign Minister, Toshimitsu Motegi, who chaired the meeting. The other countries' representatives were Marise Payne, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Commonwealth of Australia, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, External Affairs Minister of India, and Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State of the United States. The four representatives discussed and exchanged views on the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed to continue cooperating on health and hygiene issues. They also affirmed the importance of broadening cooperation with more countries for the realization of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision, supporting ASEAN's unity and centrality, and further developing practical cooperation in areas such as infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, humanitarian assistance, and education. The Ministers also discussed regional affairs, including North Korea and the East and South China Seas. They also agreed to regularize this Foreign Ministers' meeting and hold the next one at an appropriate time next year. This meeting was the first ministerial-level international conference held in Japan since the outbreak of COVID-19 (MOFA, 2020a).

The Mekong-Japan Summit in November provided an opportunity for Suga to reiterate significant components of Abe's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) strategy and uphold the rule of law. Suga's initial overseas trips to Vietnam and Indonesia in October were symbolic of the importance of the Abe-era Indo-Pacific concept in Suga's administration, demonstrating Japan's role as an "Indo-Pacific nation." However, during the November 2020 ASEAN summit, Suga altered the Abe-era "free and open" values-based Indo-Pacific concept, calling for a "peaceful and prosperous" Indo-Pacific, raising concerns that the notion might be weakened to ease tensions with China (MOFA, 2020b).

Under both the Abe and Suga administrations, the US-Japan alliance has moved toward closer bilateral cooperation with a willingness to abandon constraints. Suga continued Abe's expansion of the alliance's cooperation, highlighted by his participation in the first-ever Quad summit-level meeting on March 13, 2021, in which leaders from Japan, Australia, India, and the U.S. expressed their shared commitment to promoting a free and open international order based on the rule of law. They agreed to reinforce their quadrilateral cooperation and support principles such as the peaceful settlement of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity. Additionally, the leaders discussed the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision and confirmed their support for the "ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific," agreeing to cooperate with a range of partners to realize this vision. The leaders welcomed the progress made in practical cooperation among the four countries in areas such as quality infrastructure, maritime security, counter-terrorism, cyber security, and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief. They also agreed to launch working groups on the vaccine, critical and emerging technologies, and climate change further to advance their collaboration (MOFA, 2021b).

Under Prime Minister Suga's leadership, the strategic alignment between the U.S. and Japan deepened, underscored by key meetings and shared strategic visions on regional security. Just a few days after the first Quad summit-level meeting, the Japan-U.S. Security Consultative Committee was held on March 16, 2021, where the U.S. reconfirmed its firm commitment to safeguarding the Senkaku Islands, voicing strong opposition to any initiatives disrupting the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea, and supporting the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) concept (MOFA, 2021c). Similarly, in the first meeting between Suga and President Biden on April 16, 2021, also known as the Suga-Biden Summit, the leaders discussed a range of issues, from security in the Indo-Pacific region and North Korea to China's activities in the East and South China Seas. They emphasized the critical role of the U.S.-Japan Alliance in maintaining regional peace and stability, specifically acknowledging the importance of tranquility in the Taiwan Strait (MOFA, 2021d). The decision of Suga's administration to highlight the issue of Taiwan's security, despite its potential to escalate tensions between China and the U.S., signified a notable advancement in the strategic alignment between the two nations.

Changes in Security Policies under the Suga Administration

Japan's security policies under Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga reflected a balance between continuity and change in response to new challenges and opportunities. While

maintaining the legacy of the Abe administration, Suga's government introduced a new digital agency and increased defense spending on key strategic projects. These initiatives aimed to enhance Japan's military capabilities, digital resilience, and regional influence in the face of fiscal constraints and security threats. In 2021, a new digital agency was launched with the aim of modernizing Japan's lagging digital infrastructure and enhancing its cybersecurity framework, illustrating the recognition of digital resilience as a pivotal component of national security (Yanaka, 2021).

Concurrently, defense spending followed its decade-long upward trajectory, reaching a record high in the 2021 budget. This budget dedicated substantial resources to vital strategic initiatives. It included an allocation of approximately \$706 million for the development of a new stealth fighter jet for the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF), which was projected to be completed by the 2030s. An additional \$323 million was assigned for the development of a long-range anti-ship missile to be operated by the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force (JGSDF), enhancing defenses around the southwestern Okinawan island chain. Furthermore, a sum of \$912 million was set aside for the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) to develop two compact warships; these warships were designed to be operated by a smaller crew than conventional destroyers, effectively addressing the personnel shortage driven by an aging population (DW, 2020).

Japan's security policy under Suga was marked by subtle yet significant shifts in strategic focus. These changes were largely in response to the evolving security landscape in East Asia, although they were set against the wider backdrop of the Indo-Pacific region. Key elements of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy, along with the U.S.–Japan Alliance—both legacies of former Prime Minister Abe—continued to underpin Japan's foreign and security policy. However, under Suga's leadership, a heightened emphasis on multilateralism became apparent, particularly in the context of East Asia (Koga, 2021).

The Suga administration marked a strategic shift in Japan's security policy by emphasizing engagement within multilateral security frameworks, particularly the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the Quad. This move away from strictly bilateral alliances symbolized a broader understanding of security as a complex, multidimensional, and interdependent issue. This was apparent in Suga's active participation in the Quad Summit, which saw Japan cooperating closely with the United States, Australia, and India (MOFA, 2020a).

Instead of relying solely on the U.S.–Japan Alliance, Suga aimed to create a robust security web within East Asia and the broader region by leveraging diverse partnerships to manage shared security challenges. Japan’s commitment to adapting its security approach to shifting geopolitical realities was reflected in the increased level of collaboration among Quad members on issues such as maritime security, counter-terrorism, cybersecurity, and critical technology. By actively seeking cooperation with an array of partners, the Suga administration demonstrated its resolve to fortify its defenses and bolster regional security in East Asia (Koga, 2021).

Another aspect of this shift toward a robust and diversified security policy under Suga’s leadership was the more assertive stance on Taiwan’s security. This marked a departure from Japan’s traditionally cautious stance due to the sensitive nature of Japan-China relations. Suga’s government evolved to adopt a more assertive position, openly acknowledging Taiwan’s strategic importance to regional stability in various official dialogues. This signaled a prioritization of Japan’s long-term strategic interests in East Asia, despite potential strains with China (MOFA, 2021d). Taiwan’s strategic location and its alignment with the “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” vision due to its democratic governance made it a critical player in maintaining the regional status quo. The administration’s emphasis on Taiwan’s security served to check China’s growing military influence, contributing to a balanced regional power dynamic. The explicit recognition of Taiwan’s security, a trend indicative of Suga’s broader move toward assertive, multilaterally-oriented security policies, underscored his administration’s commitment to a comprehensive and proactive security approach amidst the changing security environment in East Asia (Liff, 2022a).

Detailed Examination of Key Policies and Strategic Initiatives

The establishment of a new digital agency in 2021, a key policy pledge from the inception of Suga’s administration, marked a significant initiative designed to modernize Japan’s digital infrastructure and bolster its cybersecurity framework. The agency was conceived to overcome what was described as a ‘defeat in the digital war,’ bearing the heavy responsibility of eradicating past failures. Tasked with promoting digital transformation across all sectors, it aimed to integrate a range of governmental services onto digital platforms to enhance the efficiency and accessibility of public services. This move necessitated extensive inter-departmental coordination and challenged entrenched bureaucratic structures, testifying to the administration’s commitment to digital modernization (Mukoyama, 2021).

Additionally, the agency was charged with enhancing Japan's cyber defenses, signifying an acknowledgment of the growing global threat of cyber attacks. By implementing cutting-edge cybersecurity measures and investing in advanced threat detection and response capabilities, the agency aimed to fortify Japan's digital resilience. The establishment of this agency highlighted the Suga administration's forward-thinking approach to national security, acknowledging the critical role of digital resilience in an increasingly digitalized world and positioning Japan at the forefront of cybersecurity (Katagiri, 2021).

The strategic focus of the Suga administration on defense was further brought to the fore with the unveiling of the 2021 defense budget, a record high that signified a robust commitment to bolstering security policy. This substantial financial commitment was not merely a reflection of Japan's defense priorities but also an indication of a proactive policy approach that aimed to address evolving regional threats and maintain Japan's strategic edge. The budget allocation for key projects mirrored the contemporary security concerns that Japan faced and was an implicit acknowledgment of the changing dynamics of the regional security landscape. Particularly, the budgetary commitment was an integral part of Japan's response to the resurgence of debates about whether the country should augment its defenses by acquiring strike capabilities, a controversial move given Japan's post-World War II security posture and its existing pacifist constitution. While Prime Minister Suga did not advocate as strongly for the development of strike capabilities as his predecessor, the record-high defense budget signaled his administration's readiness to potentially explore this and other avenues to enhance Japan's security in the face of escalating regional threats (Klingner, 2021).

With the demonstration of the proactive policy approach referred to earlier, a prime example of the Suga administration's strategic investments was the funding allocated for the development of a new stealth fighter jet. In an era of rapidly advancing military technology, maintaining a modern, well-equipped air force is critical for national defense. Stealth technology, which renders an aircraft nearly invisible to radar, offers a significant tactical advantage in aerial warfare. By investing in a new generation stealth fighter, Japan was not just enhancing its air defense capabilities but also making a strategic move to maintain technological parity with other advanced military powers. This investment served as a clear statement about Japan's commitment to defending its airspace and its willingness to utilize sophisticated technology to ensure its defense capabilities are on par with international standards.

Another considerable portion of the budget was dedicated to the development of a long-range anti-ship missile, reflecting the Suga administration's strategic emphasis on maritime defense. Given the maritime nature of potential security threats in East Asia, particularly with territorial disputes and the potential for naval confrontations, this investment was a targeted response designed to bolster Japan's maritime deterrent capabilities. These missiles, which have the capability to strike hostile ships at significant distances, would serve to deter potential naval aggressions and safeguard Japan's territorial waters. In the broader context, this strategic move also underlined Japan's commitment to maintaining a balance of power in the region and securing its maritime interests against evolving threats.

The 2021 defense budget further highlighted a pragmatic approach to addressing domestic challenges. The Suga administration, recognizing the impending issue of personnel shortage due to an aging population, dedicated funds to the construction of compact warships. These smaller, technologically advanced vessels are designed to be operated by fewer people without compromising on their operational capabilities. This initiative demonstrated the Suga administration's adaptability and foresight as it innovatively reconciled the constraints of domestic demographic realities with the needs of a modern defense strategy. It also accentuated the administration's approach to resource optimization, leveraging technological advancements to maintain effective defense capabilities amidst demographic challenges. This approach further exemplified the holistic nature of Suga's defense policy, taking into account not just external security threats but also internal socio-economic factors.

The record-setting 2021 defense budget emphasized the Suga administration's strategic focus on defense and also reflected a comprehensive understanding of contemporary and potential security challenges. The budget, investing heavily in advanced military technology like stealth fighter jets and long-range anti-ship missiles, not only exhibited a response to current security concerns but also demonstrated foresight into the evolving nature of warfare. The commitment to maintaining technological parity with advanced military powers and enhancing Japan's defense capabilities was evident. Additionally, the allocation for compact warships indicated a pragmatic approach to the domestic demographic challenge of an aging population, showcasing the administration's adaptability in managing internal realities while fortifying national security. This robust commitment to defense policy also communicated a clear message internationally about Japan's resolve to safeguard national security and contribute to regional stability amidst shifting geopolitical dynamics both in East Asia and

across the wider Indo-Pacific. Thus, the prioritized initiatives under Suga served as a testament to Japan's resilience and adaptability in the face of domestic and regional shifts, reinforcing its role as a key player in the security landscape of these regions (Satake, 2021).

In continuing its strategic approach to security challenges, the Suga administration also marked a willingness to tackle potentially contentious issues by taking a more assertive stance on Taiwan's security. This decision reinforced the administration's commitment to regional stability, despite the complexities that it introduced to the international diplomatic landscape. The administration's open acknowledgment of Taiwan's strategic importance for regional security demonstrated a readiness to prioritize long-term strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region over short-term diplomatic convenience. This open acknowledgment meant potentially courting friction with China, a significant regional power with its own stake in Taiwan's future. Nonetheless, the Suga administration appeared resolute in its strategic vision, considering this assertive stance as a necessary component in maintaining a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." This approach further emphasized Japan's determination to play an active and responsible role in shaping the regional security architecture, prioritizing principles of freedom and openness despite challenging geopolitical dynamics (Koga, 2021).

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The Role of Japan in the U.S.–Japan Alliance Under the Suga Administration

The Suga administration's decision to bolster Japan's defense capabilities, reflected in the increase of the 2021 defense budget, was a significant stride that effectively reinforced the U.S.–Japan Alliance. The investment in advanced military technologies and platforms, such as the new stealth fighter jet, served as a potent example. This ambitious project did more than merely enhance Japan's air defense capabilities; it was a strategic maneuver aimed at maintaining technological parity with potential adversaries in a rapidly evolving military landscape. Hence, this enhancement fortified Japan's deterrent posture, thereby amplifying its strategic weight within the U.S.–Japan Alliance and underlining its commitment to preserving regional stability in the face of emergent security challenges (MOD, 2022).

The Suga administration's approach to developing the new stealth fighter jet was also viewed as a crucial facet of a broader strategic agenda. With this advanced platform, Japan's standalone defense capabilities were significantly enhanced. More than that, it harmonized with the existing U.S. military assets in the region, serving to amplify Japan's strategic value within the U.S.–Japan Alliance. This synchronization of military technologies goes beyond mere interoperability; it symbolizes a deeply intertwined defense network, reflecting a high level of trust and coordination between the two nations. The integration of these advanced platforms into a broader regional defense framework strengthened the collective defense system that the alliance relies upon. Such integration provides a cohesive response to adversaries, signaling a united front that is more than the sum of its parts. Additionally, these collective defense efforts underpinned the Suga administration's commitment to maintaining a robust, technologically advanced, and cooperative security architecture, both in East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific. This approach ensured that Japan, in collaboration with the U.S., could present a united and technologically sophisticated deterrent against potential threats. By integrating its assets seamlessly into the alliance's framework, the Suga administration also demonstrated an ability to adapt and innovate in response to evolving security challenges. This progressive approach, which combines domestic defense enhancements with strategic international alliances, helps to create a robust and dynamic defense posture equipped to navigate the complex security landscape of East Asia (Klingner, 2021).

A similar strategic purpose can also be observed in the development of the long-range anti-ship missile within the U.S.–Japan Alliance. Prompted by a discussion in December between Japanese Defense Minister Kishi Nobuo and his Chinese counterpart in which

concerns were raised about Chinese ships encroaching on disputed waters, this strategic move highlighted the maritime nature of potential security threats in East Asia. In response, the Suga administration, under which Kishi served, undertook the development of these missiles as a calculated move to enhance the alliance's capacity to deter potential naval aggressions. These missiles, designed with the capacity to strike hostile ships at significant distances, served dual strategic objectives. They not only greatly bolstered Japan's independent naval deterrent capabilities, thereby strengthening its ability to protect its sovereign waters and maritime interests, but also significantly amplified the combined naval deterrent of the U.S.–Japan Alliance. This strategic extension of the alliance's defensive reach offers a powerful counterbalance to potential maritime adversaries in East Asia, representing a proactive and robust response to the evolving regional security landscape (Dreyer, 2021).

The development of these advanced weapons showcased the Suga administration's nuanced understanding of the complex security challenges in East Asia. By investing in long-range anti-ship missiles, Japan not only bolstered its naval deterrent but also enhanced the alliance's capabilities to deter potential naval aggressions. This decision, marking the first major defense policy under the Suga administration, was a proactive approach toward evolving threats, bearing significant value in an area marked by contested waters and maritime disputes. By integrating these capabilities into the broader strategic framework of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, the Suga administration reinforced the collective security architecture of East Asia. Ultimately, this commitment to enhancing collective deterrence capabilities exemplified Japan's ongoing dedication to the principles of collective defense and regional stability, thereby solidifying the alliance's security posture in the region.

The Suga administration's pursuit of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" policy effectively paralleled the strategic interests of the U.S., thereby strengthening the foundations of the U.S.–Japan Alliance. This synergy of vision, extending beyond mere policy alignment, offered a conducive environment for enhanced bilateral cooperation, thereby fostering an alliance that was unified in action and purpose. Additionally, their shared advocacy for a free and open Indo-Pacific amplified the alliance's credibility, sending a powerful message to other regional actors about their joint commitment to regional peace, stability, and prosperity. Importantly, this strategic alignment streamlined the utilization of resources, coordinating both nations' efforts to drive mutual objectives more effectively, thereby considerably enhancing the

alliance's influence within the complex geopolitical landscape spanning the Indo-Pacific and East Asia regions (Hosoya, 2023).

The Suga administration's proactive engagement in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, also known as the Quad, illustrated Japan's intention to expand its security partnerships beyond the U.S., its traditional ally. By fully participating in this multilateral framework involving the U.S., India, and Australia, Japan effectively broadened its security alliances. This strategic diversification amplified Japan's diplomatic reach and its capacity to shape security dynamics across East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific, positioning it as a critical actor in the evolving geopolitical equation. This deep engagement in the Quad thus marked a strategic expansion of Japan's diplomatic leverage, enhancing its influence over the region's complex and interconnected security challenges.

Furthermore, Japan's strategic investment in the Quad resonated with the U.S.'s regional objectives, which also considered the Quad as a critical platform for security cooperation. This strategic coherence not only reinforced the U.S.–Japan Alliance but also exemplified their shared commitment to the development of robust multilateral security frameworks spanning East Asia and the wider Indo-Pacific. This alignment of strategic priorities under the Suga administration served to solidify the integrative and collaborative potential of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, ensuring it was better equipped to navigate the rapidly evolving security challenges in both East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region.

Japan similarly took a decidedly more assertive stance on Taiwan's security under the Suga administration, marking a significant policy shift and reflecting a closer alignment with U.S. strategic interests. Taiwan, a democratic island state, holds immense strategic importance in East Asia and has been at the heart of many geopolitical discussions. Japan's open acknowledgment of Taiwan's importance, therefore, not only echoed the U.S.'s long-held position but also mirrored a shared understanding of the geopolitical realities in the region. This shared stance further reinforced the unity between the U.S. and Japan in recognizing democratic values and maintaining the rules-based order in the region while simultaneously broadcasting a firm message to other regional players regarding their joint determination to preserve regional stability and security. Such convergence in policy positions over sensitive issues like Taiwan significantly strengthened the bonds of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, reinforcing their common commitment to the promotion of peace and stability in East Asia (Liff, 2022b).

The Suga administration's bold stance on Taiwan not only displayed a level of political wisdom and strategic foresight but also conveyed Japan's readiness to confront sensitive topics. This assertiveness reinforced Japan's credibility within the U.S.–Japan Alliance, emphasizing its willingness to partake in the shared responsibility of ensuring regional stability and security. Therefore, Japan's revised approach to Taiwan's security played a pivotal role in enhancing the U.S.–Japan Alliance, reflecting a shared vision, mutual commitment, and strengthened trust.

Japan's Regional Security Contribution Under the Suga Administration

Under the stewardship of the Suga administration, Japan's role in contributing to regional security underwent a significant transformation characterized by proactive engagements, strategic alignments, and assertive policy shifts. The pivot in Japan's approach wasn't arbitrary but rather a strategic counteraction to the intricate and transitioning security dynamics mainly in East Asia, with a nod to the larger perspective of the Indo-Pacific region. This transformation was manifested in Japan's renewed focus on maritime security, deeper engagements in multilateral security forums, a clear stance on contentious regional issues like Taiwan, and its consistent advocacy for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific."

Japan's maritime security initiatives under the Suga administration pursued a vision of peace and stability in the perilous waters, particularly of East Asia, but extending throughout the broader Indo-Pacific region. This vision was operationalized through strategic investments, proactive defense posturing, and a commitment to uphold international maritime norms, thereby positioning Japan as a steadfast guardian of regional maritime security.

The cornerstone of these initiatives was the development of long-range anti-ship missiles, such as the modification and extension of the range of Type 12 surface-to-ship missiles (SSM), which were manufactured by Mitsubishi Heavy Industries. This strategic decision, made in December 2020, was intended to enhance the missiles' flight capabilities by extending their wing sizes and operational altitude, thereby significantly increasing their range from 200 km to 900 km, with a future target of 1,500 km. The move not only represented a substantial advancement in Japan's naval deterrent capabilities but also provided robust deterrence against potential maritime threats. In addition to these missile upgrades, Japan planned to modernize the Japan Air Self-Defense Force (JASDF) by equipping F-15J fighter jets with long-range missiles. Although higher-than-expected costs led to delays, the intent to replace radar and electronic warfare equipment with the latest versions of the F-15Js

demonstrated Japan's commitment to modernizing naval assets and integrating advanced technologies into its maritime defense system (Inaba, 2021).

In addition to its maritime initiatives, the Suga administration also actively participated in multilateral security arrangements, such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, widely known as the Quad. The administration did so by engaging in both joint exercises and diplomatic meetings with its Quad counterparts. This emphasis on the Quad showcased the Suga administration's understanding of the need for cooperative initiatives in the complex security landscape of the region. Such proactive involvement in the Quad stood as a testament to Japan's recognition of the increasingly multilateral nature of global politics, and the essential role of cooperation and collaboration in addressing shared threats and challenges.

The Suga administration underscored Japan's commitment to East Asian security through its active participation in key regional exercises. This began with the Large Scale Global Exercise (LSGE21), a trilateral naval exercise conducted from August 2 to 8, 2021 in the waters and airspace from the Coral Sea to the east of the Philippines. Involving naval forces from Japan, the U.S., and Australia, the exercise was designed to uphold and reinforce the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" concept in the Pacific Ocean (MOD, 2021). Following this exercise, Japan participated in the Malabar exercise, a vital component of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) engagements. Initiated in 1992 between the Indian and U.S. naval forces, Japan joined the exercise as a permanent partner in 2015, and the significance of the exercise amplified with the inclusion of Australia in 2020, set against the backdrop of escalating hostility from China (Rajagopalan, 2021). Through these commitments and demonstrations of readiness to contribute resources and expertise to collective security efforts, Japan underlined its ongoing dedication to regional stability and security, thereby illustrating the nation's strategic approach to addressing the complex, interconnected security challenges in East Asia and, by extension, the broader Indo-Pacific region.

In the sphere of diplomacy, the Suga administration expanded Japan's diplomatic influence and capacity to contribute to regional stability by asserting its role within the Quad. This was demonstrated through a series of pivotal meetings, beginning with two foreign ministers' meetings. The first of these was the "Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Foreign Ministers' Meeting", held in Tokyo on October 6, 2020 (MOFA, 2020a). This was followed by a virtual conference on February 18, 2021 (MOFA, 2021a). Subsequently, two significant leaders' meetings were organized in that year. The first meeting, known as the "Japan-

Australia-India-U.S. Leaders' Video Conference," transpired on March 13, 2021. Prime Minister Suga, in this meeting, accentuated the pressing need for broadened international collaboration for the attainment of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision, while extending strong endorsement for the "ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific" (MOFA, 2021b). Following the video conference, "The Second Japan-Australia-India-U.S. Summit Meeting" took place in the U.S. capital on September 24, 2021. Both meetings, attended by the respective leaders of the Quad countries including Prime Minister Suga and President Biden, emphasized the common goal of broadening coordination and bolstering concrete cooperation with a range of partners for the realization of a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." They also reiterated their strong support for the "ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific," recognizing ASEAN's proactive efforts as well as its unity and centrality (MOFA, 2021e).

These diplomatic efforts positioned Japan at the heart of the Quad, solidifying its influence over strategic discussions and cooperative endeavors. This shift in Japan's diplomatic stance showcased a newfound resolve in asserting its interests, contributing to the collective defense, and navigating the geopolitical dynamics in the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. Thus, Japan's regional security strategy under the Suga administration saw a decisive shift toward a more proactive and comprehensive approach, especially with regard to East Asia. By prioritizing maritime security and investing in advanced naval capabilities, Japan bolstered its presence and influence in East Asia and, by extension, the wider Indo-Pacific region's contested waters. Further, by actively participating in the Quad, Japan reinforced its commitment to multilateral cooperation and strengthened its diplomatic influence, enhancing its ability to navigate and address complex regional security issues.

Concurrently, the Suga administration's assertive stance on Taiwan and the steadfast pursuit of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" concept was not only indicative of its strategic alignment with the U.S. interests but also a testament to its commitment to uphold democratic values and the rules-based order in the region. This multi-layered approach to regional security, marked by strategic actions and aligned objectives, underscores the Suga administration's significant contributions to East Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region's stability and security.

In its approach to Taiwan, an issue deeply rooted in the East Asian security landscape, the Suga administration demonstrated a noticeable assertiveness, signaling an increased willingness to confront contentious regional issues directly. This approach was a direct

continuation of the administration's assertive foreign policy stance. Specifically, the administration played a pivotal role in rallying international support amidst escalating tensions in the Taiwan Strait. In doing so, it not only emphasized Japan's commitment to regional peace and stability but also asserted itself as an active participant in addressing the complex dynamics of East Asia. On a more overt level, Japan's explicit recognition of the importance of Taiwan's security, as articulated in Suga's public speeches and policy directives, was seen as a significant contribution to maintaining the regional balance of power. This recognition was more than mere rhetoric; it was backed by Japan's diplomatic endeavors and strategic partnerships that stressed its commitment to democratic values and the rules-based order. Such a stance sent an unequivocal message to other regional actors and reassured them of Japan's proactive role in upholding the regional security architecture (Liff, 2022b).

In tackling the wider security concerns of the Indo-Pacific region, the Suga administration's dedication to a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy emerged as a distinctive and significant element in fortifying regional security. The basis of this policy was to ensure that all nations could access and use the seas and airways upon which their economies depended and that disputes were resolved peacefully without resorting to coercion or intimidation.

The "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" vision appealed to nations, such as Vietnam, who shared Japan's concerns about China's assertiveness in the region. Engulfed in ongoing maritime disputes with China in the South China Sea, Vietnam has shown convergence with the vision, affirming that such a mechanism could significantly benefit its national security. The Suga administration's strategy provided a counter-narrative to Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative, offering an alternative vision of regional connectivity based on shared values and rules. Notably, Vietnam's commitment to implementing and requiring parties to strictly comply with international law, especially regarding the South China Sea issue, aligns with the open spirit of the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP). The rising acceptance of this vision across the region underscores its regional applicability and amplifies the importance of Japan's strategy, positioning it as a beacon of democratic values and the rule of law. This further emphasizes the necessity of Japan's strategic approach in maintaining a balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region (Tran & Tran, 2021).

Through the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" initiative, Japan under the Suga administration continued the transition from a reactive to a proactive role in regional security matters. The wide acceptance of this strategy, reflected in regional diplomatic conversations

and official ASEAN statements, reveals its substantial impact (MOFA, 2021a) (MOFA, 2021e). By promoting a common regional security agenda valuing freedom, openness, and adherence to the rule of law, Japan has significantly influenced the narrative surrounding Indo-Pacific security. This illustrates how Japan, under the Suga administration, has made an essential transition to a more assertive role in ensuring regional stability and security.

Conclusion

The tenure of the Suga administration witnessed a notable transformation in Japan's stance towards regional security and strategic partnerships. The implementation of a range of internal as well as external policy adjustments exemplified a comprehensive approach to addressing the evolving security dynamics, particularly in the East Asian region. Japan effectively employed its bilateral alliances and multilateral partnerships, integrating them into a comprehensive strategy aimed at safeguarding its national interests and promoting stability within the region.

In conjunction with these wider transformations, Japan achieved significant progress in its domestic modernization efforts and in effectively addressing external security concerns through a series of influential policy measures and strategic investments. The establishment of the national digital agency and the unveiling of a record-breaking 2021 defense budget displayed Japan's commitment to strengthening its cybersecurity, promoting digital transformation, and maintaining a strategic advantage in the face of changing regional security challenges. This innovative and pragmatic approach was particularly evident in addressing the nation's internal challenges, such as demographic changes.

Concurrently, Japan embraced an assertive posture with regard to contentious matters such as Taiwan's security, which showed its preparedness to uphold principles of freedom and openness within East Asia. The aforementioned stance was resolutely upheld, despite the possibility of diplomatic tensions. The initiatives collectively exemplified the Suga administration's comprehensive approach to managing domestic circumstances, solving current security challenges, and molding regional security structures.

Within the framework of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, the Suga administration represented a pivotal period characterized by strategic convergence with the interests of the United States. The proactive involvement of Japan in the Quad and its assertive approach toward Taiwan's security demonstrated its dedication to collective security objectives. The aforementioned

actions served to enhance Japan's diplomatic leverage and exert its influence in the East Asian region, thereby effectively bolstering the collective security framework.

Additionally, the administration led by Prime Minister Suga made noteworthy contributions to regional security in East Asia. These contributions were characterized by the implementation of strategic maritime initiatives and the establishment of strong multilateral cooperation. Furthermore, the administration demonstrated steadfast dedication to promoting the concept of "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." Japan's comprehensive initiatives demonstrated its commitment to promoting regional peace and stability in East Asia while also addressing the broader security dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. This approach served to strengthen Japan's standing as a significant participant in the interrelated regional security environment.

Thus, the administration led by Suga can be regarded as a representation of strategic foresight and significant adaptability. The comprehensive response of the administration to the shifting regional context was evident in its strategic decisions, such as digital modernization, defense spending, and diplomatic tensions. Under the leadership of Suga, Japan's unwavering dedication to its core principles, its alliances, and its regional obligations has further cemented its position as a crucial participant in the dynamic realm of East Asian security.

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