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Requirements for Crafting Japan's New National Security Strategy

Featuring remarks by LtGen. Koichi Isobe

Abstract

On Thursday, January 27, 2022, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) hosted the virtual event, "Requirements for Crafting Japan's New National Security Strategy," featuring Lieutenant General Koichi Isobe, JGSDF (Ret.), 37th Commander of the Eastern Army (2013-2015). LtGen. Isobe is a member of the National Security Strategy Study Group (国家安全保障戦略研究会, Kokka Anzen Hoshō Senryaku Kenkyūkai), which consists of the following members:

- *Gen. Ryoichi Oriki (JGSDF, Ret.) Former Chief of Staff, Joint Staff of the JSDF [NSS Study Group Chair]*
- *Former Vice-Minister of Defense Tetsuro Kuroe [NSS Study Group Vice Chair]*
- *LtGen. Kazuaki Sumida (JGSDF, Ret.) Former Commanding General of Ground Component Command*
- *Vice Adm. Tokuhiro Ikeda (JMSDF, Ret.) Former Commandant, Kure District*
- *Vice Adm. Tatsuhiko Takashima (JMSDF, Ret.) Former Commander of Fleet Submarine Force*

- *LtGen. Junichi Araki (JASDF, Ret.) Former Commander of Air Training Command*
- *LtGen. Shigeki Muto (JASDF, Ret.) Former Commanding General of Air Defense Command*

LtGen. Isobe spoke on behalf of the group, sharing recommendations from their recent report on what is required to craft a new National Security Strategy for Japan in 2022 (titled, 新たな「国家安全保障戦略」に求められるもの ~激動する国際情勢に立ち向かうために~). The Hon. Randall Schriver, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs at the U.S. Department of Defense and Chairman of the Board at the Project 2049 Institute.

This talk was presented by Sasakawa USA's Policy Briefing Series and was held virtually via Zoom. Attendees included distinguished guests from the Washington, D.C. policy community along with members of academia, think tanks, and media, as well as current and retired members of the U.S. military and Japanese Self Defense Forces. Introductory remarks were provided by Dr. Satohiro Akimoto, Chairman and President at Sasakawa USA, who also facilitated the event and moderated the Q&A discussion.

Context for the Formation of the NSS Study Group

More than eight years have passed since Japan developed its first National Security Strategy (NSS), which was formalized in December 2013 and led by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The document defines Japan's national interests and serves to guide defense and diplomacy policymaking over the proceeding decade. Given the significant evolution of the security landscape in the Indo-Pacific since the creation of the original NSS—as well as Japan's increased emphasis on taking a whole-of-government approach to security, economic, and technology policymaking—the time has come for Japan to consider crafting a new National Security Strategy to keep in step with these developments.

The NSS Study Group was formed with the objective of reviewing the 2013 NSS and making recommendations for Japan to formulate a new NSS in 2022 using practical and realistic perspectives. LtGen. Isobe explained that the group believes the NSS should serve as the supreme strategy of Japan, defining how to secure its existence and ensure continued prosperity. The group founded its discourse in three basic principles:

(1) Develop forthright discussions "without taboos"

(2) Create recommendations with a focus on "improving effectiveness"

(3) Aim to produce recommendations that are "realistic."

The group convened for its first meeting in February of 2021 and held 20 meetings over the course of the year. They completed their report in November and disseminated it to Japanese government officials and the media, which has garnered attention from policymakers, researchers, and the general public. For instance, the Kishida cabinet has demonstrated willingness to revise the existing NSS. In his remarks, LtGen. Isobe spoke on behalf of the NSS Study Group to share the group's assessment of the current security environment in the Indo-Pacific and their policy recommendations for the development of a new NSS for Japan.

Changes in the Strategic Environment Since 2013

LtGen. Isobe outlined several features of the new security environment which the NSS Study Group identified in their report. First, the scope of national security has greatly expanded since then as the boundaries between military and non-military activities, peacetime and war, have become blurred. Examples he cited include hybrid warfare in the 2014 conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which is currently experiencing increasing tensions at their border, and China's unlawful maritime claims, militarization, and coercive activities in the South and East China Seas (including the Senkaku Islands). Malign activities in the cyber, space, and maritime domain have increasingly become the norm, further shifting the status quo towards grey-zone confrontations which fall short of armed conflict.

Secondly, there has been a trend of intensifying great power competition, specifically between the United States and China. Due to its geostrategic location between these two powers, it is increasingly important for Japan to maintain the security of the First Island Chain (stretching from Japan's main islands to Taiwan and then the Philippines). Furthermore, the NSS Study Group advised that Japan should possess its own grand strategy toward China so as to better address China's attempts to shift the status quo in the region.

Additionally, emerging technologies such as AI, 5G, quantum computing, and biotechnology have become game-changers in national security. These technologies will continue to change the security landscape as new applications for them are discovered, thus necessitating a whole-of-government approach which integrates security planning with economic policymaking.

Climate change was another factor the NSS Study Group listed as having an effect on Japan's security. In addition to having a direct influence on military equipment, installations, and missions, climate change will catalyze natural disasters—food shortages, droughts, floods, and extreme weather—which can in turn inflame tensions between

different ethnic groups in neighboring countries. He emphasized that both Japan and the United States now consider the world to be in a "climate crisis," thus formally acknowledging the connection between climate change and security.

The NSS Study Group's Policy Recommendations

Next, LtGen. Isobe introduced eleven policy recommendations created by the NSS Study group:

1) **Position the new NSS as the highest strategy of Japan.** The government of Japan should orchestrate every national policy under the new NSS, which will provide a framework for interagency policymaking.

2) **Review existing defense policies** such as Japan's exclusively defense-oriented policy and identify opportunities for revisions that will be better suited to the new security environment. Other examples include improving Japan's strike capabilities, or what the NSS Study Group refers to as "counter-strike capability," and formulating a comprehensive deterrence strategy, as well as increasing the defense budget to 2% of GDP to keep up with the defense spending of adversaries like China and Russia, as well as partners in the region such as Australia and South Korea. The defense budget could be adjusted incrementally (8 to 9% annually) over the next decade. The government of Japan should also pay closer attention to the allocation of its defense budget, including research and development of key technologies, resiliency, and sustainment of the defense forces.

3) **Energize the whole-of-government approach** to proactively respond to emerging threats such as hybrid warfare or other coercive actions which threaten to overturn the status quo. This could require strengthening the Cabinet Office, particularly the National Security Secretariat, and establishing a permanent Joint Headquarters within Japan's Self-Defense Force to identify and respond to hybrid warfare activities.

4) **Strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and assume a more proactive role.** The U.S.-Japan alliance remains a cornerstone of peace, security, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. Both countries share values and complement each other's geographical gaps. For Japan, it should assume more proactive roles and coordinate with the U.S. to respond to grey-zone threats by expanding the scope of cooperation in outer space, cyberspace, electromagnetic domains, economic and technological development, and law enforcement.

5) **Realign relationships with major players based on the dynamic trend of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific region**. This will involve redefining China as a potential threat and strengthening Japan's relationships with like-minded countries such as Australia, India, and members of ASEAN and the EU. Particular attention should be placed on improving relations with South Korea, which is geopolitically vital for Japan's security. This can be accomplished through increased trilateral cooperation between the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

6) **Take a strategic approach to new domains.** To overcome nontraditional conflicts in new domains, Japan should build an orchestrated decision-making mechanism that can deal with security matters as an entire nation.

7) **Ensure maritime security** by entrenching the values identified in Japan's Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) initiative including rule of law, freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and the promotion of free trade.

8) **Further strengthen intelligence collection and processing.** Japan has existing intelligence-sharing agreements with Australia, France, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and would thus be a logical addition to the "Five Eyes" intelligence alliance by contributing its specialized intelligence gathering and sharing, particularly in signals intelligence (SIGINT). To do so, more must be done to advance security for sensitive information in the private sector in Japan.

9) **Incorporate economic security into the NSS.** Japan should simultaneously pursue strategic autonomy (i.e., its ability to safeguard people's livelihoods and ensure economic activity without overreliance on other countries) and strategic essentiality (i.e., Japan should occupy an indispensable position in the global industrial and economic community).

10) **Develop a security strategy for climate change,** expand efforts to address environmental and energy issues, and demonstrate leadership on the world stage by leveraging Japan's experience as a nation accustomed to preparing for and taking part in international disaster relief and humanitarian and reconstruction assistance programs.

11) **Review the NSS structure and seek alignment with the United States.** The Ministry of Defense and Self Defense Forces should formulate a National Defense Strategy to serve as the basis for development, deterrence, and countermeasures of defense capabilities. The National Defense Strategy could replace the current

National Defense Program Guidelines. Furthermore, the Joint Chiefs of Staff should formulate an integrated military strategy, like their U.S. counterparts.

Commentary from The Hon. Randall Schriver

The Hon. Schriver first congratulated the NSS Study Group for producing this comprehensive report. He noted that from the United States' perspective as well, the creation of strategic document is itself a key component of national security. The Biden administration is currently working on its first NSS, which presents an opportunity for Japan and the United States to seek alignment in their strategic planning. Alignment at the planning stage is important for ensuring desired outcomes. Shared guiding principles such as FOIP greatly contribute to this, as are high-level meetings such as former Prime Minister Suga's joint statement with President Biden in April 2021 and the recent 2+2 meeting between State Department and Defense officials and their Japanese counterparts.

Having clear prioritization of threats is another key component of any strategic document on national security. In Japan's case, a decision will need to be made as to whether 'China as a threat' will be codified as a priority and organizing principle of its security strategy. Even so, flexibility and adaptability must be incorporated into the document to ensure that Japan has the capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to emerging threats.

Q&A Session

There was an engaging Q&A with the audience following The Hon. Schriver's remarks. Questions asked covered topics including: recommendations for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation, particularly in response to Chinese political warfare; bolstering Japan's defense industry through building up its export economy; promoting R&D of defense technologies in Japanese universities; how a Japanese permanent Joint Headquarters might interact with the United States INDOPACOM; public attitudes toward moving from an exclusively defense-oriented to a proactive threat-based defense policy in Japan; and how Japan will proceed with developing and formalizing its NSS.

Sasakawa USA is grateful to LtGen. Koichi Isobe for sharing his insights and policy recommendations on behalf of the National Security Strategy Study Group. Sasakawa

USA also thanks The Hon. Randall Schriver for providing his thoughtful commentary, and the Q&A participants and attendees for joining us in this engaging discussion.

The summarized views of the speakers expressed herein are entirely the work of Sasakawa USA and do not represent the official positions of any of the speakers.

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