



Command Relationships for New Collective Defense Challenges

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It’s customary lately to celebrate the US-Japan alliance as stronger than ever. We have much to celebrate. Despite the strains across more than 70 years, the alliance has proven more than equal to major geopolitical shifts and technology’s effects on economics and military power.

We’re in another period of “big change” driven by technology and geopolitics. Technology is producing the precision strike regime¹ and China’s massive military expansion program continues unabated. China drives to dominate in Asia and beyond. Japan and the US are within range of China’s weapons and outnumbered. This is not the end of the story, but it is the end of “the way we’ve always done things” since 1950. Collective defense of Japan is the foundation of deterrence and defense. Sensors and shooters across the alliance must be linked in a robust network, and act

¹ Mahnken, Thomas G. “Weapons: The Growth & Spread of the Precision-Strike Regime.” *Daedalus* 140, no. 3 (2011): 45–57. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23047347>.

as one force. Building this alliance capability will require careful management of the tenets of Japan’s civil-military relations.

Alliances involve conflicting fears of entanglement and abandonment that must be managed. Compromises of national sovereignty are necessary to balance sovereign responsibility for the control and use of deadly force against the requirements for collective, integrated threat response from the highest political and strategic levels down through the tactical application of force.

The very name of Japan’s Self Defense Force sets one unique fundamental condition. Basing US forces in Japan is another, requiring further compromises of the principles of sovereignty by both nations. Alliance command and control measures to integrate the application of force across the alliance must similarly be carefully built to balance these and other demands. It is much more substantive than merely designing bureaucratic charts and developing electronic connectivity among two military forces.

Fortunately, the Japan-US security alliance may be the most durable and adaptive such alliance in the world. It was born in an unexpected crisis amid security assumptions proven wrong. It was “big change” indeed then. Conventional wisdom in the US security sector in the mid-1940s was that there was nobody left to fight.² The US enjoyed sole ownership of the ultimate weapon. Japan was to be disarmed, and the US would anchor our strategic position on the First Island Chain. Rapid redeployment and precipitous demobilization of American forces followed.

The US was the “occupying power”³ in Japan. It was intended to be an international UN occupation, but it became almost entirely a US operation under General Douglas MacArthur, with light supervision from Washington.

The occupation had many achievements. Among them: Japanese soldiers and civilians were repatriated from abroad, the arms industry was dismantled, a new constitution created a democratic government, women gained the right to vote, the right to wage war was renounced, and defense

² Siegel, Adam B. “Who Will Do What With What: Defining US Navy and Marine Corps Roles, Function, and Missions.” *Center for Naval Analyses*, 0 Sept. 2006, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA593355.pdf>.

³ “The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law.” *Doctors without Borders | The Practical Guide to Humanitarian Law*, <https://tinyurl.com/3tjdbjbm>.

industries were dismantled. There were agricultural and educational reforms. Japan was largely disarmed.

The rise of Communism, complete with forcible expansion as a governing principle, soon disturbed our peaceful vision of enduring peace. The Cold War, emerging into plain view in 1948-49 for its political, economic, and propaganda components in Europe, started changing our policy toward Japan. Asia had its own issues. The Republic of China, our recent ally, was defeated by Mao's Communist revolution in mainland China in 1949 and retreated to Formosa/Taiwan. "Who lost China?"⁴ became a charged US political issue, further complicating our emerging policies. We realized we must ensure Japan's economic success to prevent Soviet inroads there. Our approach to Japanese industry and labor unions changed accordingly.

The crisis that radically changed our defense policies and gave urgency to a security alliance with Japan began on 25 June 1950. North Korea, with Soviet backing, invaded South Korea. As late as January 1950 it was deemed to be outside of our defense perimeter.⁵ But with this naked, Soviet-backed invasion coming on the heels of Soviet subjugation of Eastern Europe, their 1948 blockade of Berlin, and their successful atomic weapons test in 1949, the US felt a response was needed to avoid a terrible precedent for Europe. Very quickly we reversed course on disarmament of Japan and urged the development of defensive capabilities. Reforms were fine, but now the priority was building Japan's ability to resist Communist influence and intimidation, thereby preserving US access and influence in Asia. Thus was our unlikely alliance born in a crisis.

The San Francisco Treaty,⁶ signed in 1951, formally ended our occupation of mainland Japan and had the effect of establishing a long-lasting military alliance. The US occupation continued in Okinawa Prefecture; a condition destined to complicate our alliance for at least the rest of the century. The treaty itself met with vigorous opposition. The Japanese public had a well-developed, hard-earned skepticism over military activity of any kind, and specifically of military influence in government. The fear of entanglement in US hot campaigns within the Cold War was palpable.

⁴ Kurtz-Phelan, Daniel. "The China Mission: George Marshall's Unfinished War, 1945-1947." *Council on Foreign Relations*, Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/book/china-mission>.

⁵ "US Enters the Korean Conflict." *National Archives and Records Administration*, National Archives and Records Administration, <https://tinyurl.com/jkjtexfh>.

⁶ Huang, Chih-yun. "San Francisco Peace Treaty (1951)." *Formosan Association for Public Affairs*, 11 May 2020, <https://fapa.org/san-francisco-peace-treaty-september-8-1951/>.

A new Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan⁷ went into effect in January 1960. It was considered a significant improvement over the original treaty, committing the United States to defend Japan if attacked, requiring prior consultation with the Japanese government before dispatching US forces based in Japan overseas, and specifying an initial 10-year term, after which the treaty could be abrogated by either party with one year's notice. It was unbalanced - the US had an obligation to defend Japan, but Japan had no equivalent obligation. This treaty was also controversial in Japan. And Okinawa Prefecture remained under US occupation. It would remain so, controversially, until 1971.

One lesson of this brief history is the need to ensure public understanding and support for our response to big change.

From the early days of the alliance and through the duration of the Cold War, the alliance settled into familiar patterns. The US would urge Japan to do more, while Japan would remain wary of prevailing political moods in both Japan and neighboring countries that limited what Japan could do. Japan's constitutional restrictions, real and perceived, played a role. We needed Japan's support for our presence in Asia, and Japan needed our help to maintain peace and security in the region. This was formalized in Article VI of the treaty:⁸

“For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan”.

Thus, the United States would contribute directly to the defense of Japan and endeavor to maintain regional peace and security, deploying forces from Japan to do that.

Our alliance relationships during the Cold War suited the strategic and operational conditions confronting Japan and the United States. South Korea faced a major threat along the demilitarized zone or armistice line with North Korea. Japan remained out of range as both China and North

⁷ “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 2 Apr. 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Mutual_Cooperation_and_Security_between_the_United_States_and_Japan.

⁸ “Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America.” *Wikisource, the Free Online Library*, Wikimedia Foundation, Inc., 21 Aug. 2019, https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Mutual_Cooperation_and_Security_between_Japan_and_the_United_States_of_America.

Korea lacked any ability to project force to seaward. Korea developed as the conflict theater, and it remains so today under the armistice. Japan became the sanctuary, the rear area for our support to Korea. It became the home of the UN Command Rear. Seven bases in Japan are affiliated with the UN Command,⁹ flying the UN flag in addition to US and Japanese flags.

Those conditions that shaped our alliance as it formed and developed have profoundly changed. Specifically, Japan is now well within the range of fearsome weapons wielded by North Korea and China, in addition to the continuing Russian threat.

The maturing precision strike regime, with pervasive surveillance coupled with weapons accurate at distance, means that **Japan is in a “fight tonight” situation** just as the Republic of Korea has been since the Korean armistice in 1953. Political warfare attacks, in various forms, and “grey zone” aggression are a feature of the current strategic landscape. Our alliance must develop robust, engaged, standing political and military structures to drive relevant alliance contingency planning and wargaming simulation to develop and strengthen our collective defense capability, and deterrence.

Any changes to alliance C2 structure will garner keen political interest, requiring “all of government” efforts to build public support. Possibilities must be tested through contingency wargaming and simulation to ensure our C2 is **fit for purpose** in conflicts that will be faster, more widely distributed, and more violent than before.

Growth, sustainment, and modification of **defense capabilities in democratic countries** rely on a **strategic concept** recognized by the public that defines the role of the armed forces in national policy, **public support** providing the armed forces with the resources to perform their assigned role, and **organizational structures** to put the resources to best use in support of the strategic concept. For the moment, we have that in the US-Japan alliance. Introducing big change in our alliance C2 will not endure without public understanding and support.

Our timing is fortuitous, but not destined to last or be repeated. The past few years have been extraordinary for Japan and the United States. Prime Minister Abe brought new policy initiatives,

⁹ “United Nations Command–Rear.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 19 Mar. 2023, <https://tinyurl.com/3ezeyvx6>.

including the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, the Quad, and new, energetic political and economic outreach to ASEAN nations. Japan is now “most favored” in ASEAN nations according to polling data. Most significantly for this discussion, Prime Minister Abe **made Collective Self-Defense acceptable** in Japan. Prime Minister Kishida carries on this tradition, doubling the defense budget and acquiring new defense capabilities. Not to be outdone, the Philippines welcomes US and Japanese force presence, and Australia aggressively stakes out its interests and joins with the US and Great Britain, with Japan as a silent partner, in the AUKUS technology sharing initiative.

Different alliances adopt different structures suited to their specific requirements, cultures, and capabilities. Common among successful alliances is political alignment with dedicated organizations responsible for policy and strategy development across the alliance. Other elements of a high-functioning alliance C2 structure could include direction of defense force production, planning, logistics, operations, and tactical doctrine in response to new threats. NATO and EU actions in support of Ukraine are an example. Such direction from the top is needed to break the status quo so influential in our doctrines and our acquisition processes. Without such direction, the status quo is all powerful. And doomed for failure.

Technically, Japan’s right to collective self-defense was always there, as affirmed by a Japanese Supreme Court decision in 1959. As CSIS remarked in a 22 May 2014 document:

*“.... Japan’s Supreme Court ruled there is **nothing in Article IX that denies the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense** as stipulated in the UN Charter, and that it is natural for Japan to take measures of self-defense ...”.*

But political attitudes prevailed and prevented realization of effective collective self-defense. We had some remarkable cooperation, even something that looked like collective defense activities, early in the Korean War. Japanese minesweepers deployed to Wonsan in Korea to clear mines from the port. Japanese sailors helped crew some of the landing vessels in the assault on Inchon in September 1950. Casualties were suffered.

US forces assumed new roles with the Korean War. Naval forces were called “the foundation of all our successes and the salvation of our disasters” in the dynamic first year of the war. While the land battle ebbed and flowed, we enjoyed sea superiority. We realized that, as a nation, we could

sail where we wanted and project power ashore as we wished. Korea and Vietnam showed that. Unchallenged air and sea superiority was a wonderful thing. Was.

The Cold War did not appreciably change the homeland defense role of Japan's forces, but those forces remained relevant to the global conflict. Japan developed very proficient and effective anti-submarine capabilities as part of its self-defense that certainly served US and allied interests. The United States' role became support for regional security and stability, meaning we could deploy forward from Japanese bases, while Japan's Self Defense Force focused on defense of Japan. It was called "sword and shield".

Now Japan is directly threatened by precision fire from the Asian mainland. Sea and air control are tested. As a result, collective self-defense is not only allowed but encouraged. Our task is to make it effective. Given the massive military buildup in China, its continued coercion of Japan and Taiwan, the continuing development of long-range precision missiles in North Korea, and Russia's naked aggression in Ukraine along with continued infringement of Japanese territory, it's certainly not too soon for the alliance to develop a strong collective defense capability.

An initial command and control need is ensuring that each nation's forces remain under the sovereign authority of its government. Note that this is different from operational control. Within that guidance our C2 structure must allow for continuous development of policy and strategy guidance across the alliance. A second foundational requirement is to integrate the maneuver and fires of alliance forces.

Among the different alliance structures detailed in Jeffrey Hornung's excellent paper,¹⁰ one sees "robust political and military structures" of different shapes. Each alliance has its own organization, and our alliance must find a structure that fits the political, cultural, and historical conditions in our two nations. We often celebrate our periodic "2+2 Dialogues" and declare that our alliance is stronger than ever. That may be true, but much work remains to be done. If we're not advancing, we're falling back. Strong and continuous policy integration and direction is necessary. Alliance political and policy guidance must become far more energetic and frequent - even constant - if we

¹⁰ Hornung, Jeffrey W. "Modeling A Stronger US-Japan Alliance: Assessing US Alliance Structures ." *Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)*, <https://www.csis.org/programs/japan-chair/japan-chair-archives/us-japan-commission-future-alliance>.

are to develop the needed collective defense capabilities. Simply put, we do not have the robust alliance security and military structures at the top that we need.

The need for action is not limited to Japan. The National Defense Strategy Commission of 2018,¹¹ chaired by Ambassador Eric Edelman and Admiral Gary Roughead, reported that:

“America’s military superiority ... has eroded to a dangerous degree. The US military could suffer unacceptably high casualties and loss of major capital assets in its next conflict. It might struggle to win, or perhaps lose, a war against China and Russia.”

It’s clear that our warning time regarding a conflict in the western Pacific has expired. We are warned. We must begin vigorous preparations to strengthen deterrence.

Japan’s new joint operational headquarters is very much needed to enable air, ground, and sea self-defense forces to operate effectively as an integrated force. Such development is vitally important to the US so that we may fight as one coherent allied force. A counterpart US joint operational command element in Japan to work with our Japanese counterparts would speed the growth of **Alliance** capability. Such a command, and its counterpart Japanese joint operational headquarters, must have only one task, the development of joint and combined capability through vigorous contingency planning and exercises. Recent House and Senate resolutions urged the creation of such a command element. At a minimum, we need to call on the Japan hands within US services, our Foreign Area Officers, to embed with and work with our allies to aid development. Mentorship – properly done - increases trust and therefore accelerates capability development.

Location will matter. Commanders and staffs develop skills over time based on their daily work. Experience shows that new organizations co-located with existing structures are likely to have difficulty maintaining a singular focus, and even their staffing level. Established bureaucracies do not support “startup” organizations, especially if it costs staff and resources. Look no further than the recent establishment of the US Space Command. It lists seven locations.¹² None are close to the Pentagon.

¹¹ “Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy.” *Department of Defense*, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

¹² “List of United States Space Force Installations.” *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Apr. 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_United_States_Space_Force_installations.

Another challenge is that we must find ways to protect our command-and-control capabilities against hostile fire. A degree of physical protection along with a high degree of **distribution of command post nodes** to defeat enemy targeting efforts, is necessary. These nodes should be movable, preferably mobile. What we learned by operating under early Covid restrictions may come in handy.

A “**fit for purpose**” C2 structure has another aspect: taking advantage of technology’s effect on the **conduct** of conflict. Our alliance has a lot of work to do before we can employ US and Japanese forces in the same battlespace, simultaneously attacking the enemy while protecting our own forces. A dynamic, real-time, common operational picture, with friendly and enemy forces clearly identified, is needed, but is yet unavailable. We must evaluate and incorporate emerging doctrines, such as the US Navy’s Distributed Lethality.¹³ Others include the Air Force’s Agile Combat Employment,¹⁴ and the Marine Corps’ Force Design 2030.¹⁵ Our older doctrines no longer meet the challenge.

We must develop a robust and secure network to connect all sensors and shooters, assisted by network and artificial intelligence technology, with the ability to instantly direct precision fire. “Instantly” means in speed relevant to the defeat of enemy hypersonic weapons. We must integrate sensors with shooters across the alliance, creating and expanding to achieve an **unprecedented, unmatched, operational tempo**. Algorithms and automation are needed to achieve that needed operational tempo. We see early examples of algorithms and automation in anti-missile systems on our ships, and Patriot systems ashore. Now that capability needs to be exponentially expanded and appropriately applied across the battlespace.

These organizations can and must drive a vigorous, comprehensive, bi-lateral contingency planning process aided by sophisticated virtual reality simulation to determine opportunities, needed capabilities, and matters that need attention. The participation of civilian agencies and officials across the alliance in this contingency planning is essential to detect, ahead of need,

¹³ Raymond McConoly, et al. “What Is the ‘Distributed Lethality’ Concept?” *Naval Post- Naval News and Information*, 23 June 2021, <https://navalpost.com/what-is-distributed-lethality-concept/>.

¹⁴ Atlamazoglou, Stavros. “Agile Combat Employment: How the US Air Force Would Fight Russia?” *19FortyFive*, 3 May 2022, <https://www.19fortyfive.com/2022/05/agile-combat-employment-how-the-us-air-force-would-fight-russia/>.

¹⁵ “Force Design 2030 - Home.” *Marines*, <https://www.marines.mil/Force-Design-2030/>.

actions permitted and those prohibited. Counterstrike weapons concepts of employment and targeting bring this home. Through a vigorous, and rigorous, bilateral contingency planning process we will learn how to build and continually adjust our command-and-control structure to best meet requirements. Our security depends on it.

Lt. Gen. Wallace Gregson wrote in his own personal capacity. The views and interpretations expressed by the author are solely his own.

*The **US-Japan NEXT Alliance Initiative** is a forum for bilateral dialogue, networking, and the development of joint recommendations involving a wide range of policy and technical specialists (in and out of government) to stimulate new alliance connections across foreign, security, and technology policy areas. Established by Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA with support from the Nippon Foundation, the goal is to help improve the alliance and how it serves shared interests, preparing it for emerging challenges within an increasingly complex and dynamic geostrategic environment. Launched in 2021, the Initiative includes two overlapping lines of effort: 1) Foreign & Security Policy, and 2) Technology & Innovation Connections. The Initiative is led by Sr. Director Jim Schoff.*
