

Japanese Air and Missile Capabilities: More than just a Self Defense Force

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Asia 163
Professor Wylie
3/24/99

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When the United States and the rest of the allied powers defeated Japan in World War II, it was thought that the best way to handle the Japanese military would be to disarm and disassemble it. By doing this, the U.S. felt that it nullified the chances of another Pearl Harbor type attack on the country. Shortly after this decision, changing situations in Asia caused the U.S. to realize that having a defenseless Japan was not the right path to follow. With the emergence of communist China and the increasing power and influence of the Soviet Union, Japan turned from an enemy to an ally against communism. Maintaining military strength in the area became vital.

Traditionally, the U.S. supplied the brunt of the military power in Japan. Over time, however, the ban on Japanese military has been allowed to slide and Japan has assumed an increasing role in military operations, particularly in the past few years. The following pages will provide an in-depth analysis of the air and missile forces of Japan. Included in the discussion will be Japan's air and missile capabilities, strategic goals, future projections, and foreign attitudes from major countries.

Strategic Goals

Chapter II, Article 9 of Japan's constitution states:

Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other

war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.¹

Following World War II, the foundation of Japan's military strategic goals was its constitution. Japan proclaimed itself to be a peace-loving country instead of the aggressive nation it was during the war. However, it is recognized that the provision in the article does not deny the inherent right of self-defense that Japan is entitled to maintain as a sovereign nation. Historically, the goals of the Japanese military, specifically the Japanese Air Self Defense Force (JASDF), have been focused on ensuring the peace of Japan only. Since Japan is completely surrounded by the sea, those intending to invade the country most likely will come from the sky. The JASDF was set up to carry out the mission to defend Japan in the air against seaborne and/or airborne landing invasions. Additionally, it maintains constant alert status in peacetime, deterring an invasion from happening.² The traditional goal of Japan's air force has been clearly focused solely on defense and keeping the peace at home.

Recently, however, the strategic goals have been changing. Japan now realizes that the military restrictions placed on it are very threatening to the country. In a recent incident involving a North Korean submarine fleeing South Korean warships close to Japanese waters, the inadequacies of Japan's security arrangements became apparent. Since, the JASDF is barred from engaging in the collective use of force to settle international disputes, it would have needed to contact Washington and ask for help from the U.S. Two years ago, the U.S. began to encourage the Japanese to do more for stability in the East Asia region. This followed growing concern about regional dangers. "A starving North Korea, which could be a military threat, or an increasingly assertive

China, which has territorial disputes with other countries and a long struggle with Taiwan, which it considers a renegade province,”³ have Japan truly concerned. Japan would also like to have an increased role in the East Asian region. Recent military guidelines proposed by Japan and America for the first time assign Japan a supporting military role, beside the United States, in dealing with regional hot spots.

The future objectives of the JASDF remain in the dark. As long as Japan retains its current constitution, its military is going to remain insecure. The constitution is a hot topic in Japan right now and has the country split in half. There are the nationalists, who think that the constitution was imposed on Japan by foreigners, and welcome what they see as an opportunity for Japan to gain a wholly new constitution of its own. In another corner are the conservatives who argue mostly that the constitution is fine, but may need tweaking in a few places so that Japan can do its share of the dirty work when help is required. There are also liberals who argue that the American-inspired constitution has given the Japanese people an inalienable set of human rights that officials would never have surrendered had they been left to their own devices. To accommodate the new security guidelines, Japanese liberals may grudgingly allow a slight reinterpretation of the constitution's existing wording.⁴ Only time will tell in which direction the Self Defense Force will head.

Current Military Capabilities of the JASDF

The economics of the situation is an important topic. In 1976, a 1% of GNP cap was placed on the defense budget of Japan. The defense budget remained under 1% every year until it was broken in 1987. An unresolved debate has resulted from this as some

people would like to increase the defense budget to 3% of Japan's GNP. This proposed change has many people alarmed, as Japan is quickly becoming one of the world's top military spenders. Japan spends 40 percent of its defense budget on personnel; the U.S. spends 27 percent. Japan spends only about 21 percent on new front line equipment and weapons systems. In addition, a military career has consistently ranked as among the least desirable professions among Japanese. The armed forces can only fill their personnel needs at an 87 percent level. There are 45,883 personnel working for the Japanese Air Self-Defense Force as of March 31, 1996.⁵

Japan's air force, considered its most modern service, boasts over eight hundred total aircraft as of March 31, 1997, ranking it 15th amongst the world. At that time, Japan had 363 combat aircraft (190 F-15J/DJ, 112 F-4EJ, and 61 F-1), 24 reconnaissance crafts (all RF-4E/EJ), 57 transport crafts (27 C-1, 15 C-130H, and 15 CH-47J), and 13 early warning aircrafts (all E-2C). Unfortunately, pilots for these planes receive only limited training. The Gulf War illustrated the principle that technology is no substitute for a pilot's ability. Conditions have forced Japanese F-15 training exercises to take place hundreds of miles off the main island. With a fighting radius of about 500 miles, Japanese pilots must return after just a few combat simulations. Pilots almost never gain experience in maneuvers at military speeds using maximum thrusters because such sudden accelerations would propel them into the envelope of scheduled commercial air traffic. Moreover, Japanese F-15s are configured for air-to-air limitation combat over Japan's islands and do not have the capability for the kind of air-to-ground attack used by coalition aircraft in the Gulf War.⁶

The Japanese Defense Agency recently upgraded its aging F-15s with technology being developed for the FS-X missile, including "stealth material and advanced equipment." Most F-15s were configured with these new advances. F-15s are expected to escort the FS-X through heavy electronic jamming environments in their anti-ship missions. A renewed F-15 featuring a new radar, would presumably guide the FS-X successfully to its target even in such hostile conditions. The F-15 modernization would cost about \$19.2 million per plane. Japan is also developing its own improved weaponry, including missile systems. The Japanese Defense Agency's Technical Research and Development Institute sponsors three to four projects simultaneously, including missile systems, OTH projects and other "high-value-added" electronics and sensors, the heart of modern weapons systems today.

Geographic regions break down the Japanese Air Command into four major groups. The Northern Air Defense Force includes the 2nd Air Wing (Chitose), 3rd Air Wing (Misawa), Northern Aircraft Control & Warning Wing (Misawa), 3rd Air Defense Missile Group (Chitose), 6th Air Defense Missile Group (Misawa), and the 1st Base Air Defense Group (Chitose).

The Central Air Defense Force includes 6th Air Wing (Komatsu), 7th Air Wing (Hyakuri), Central Aircraft Control & Warning Wing (Iruma), 1st Air Defense Missile Group (Iruma), and 4th Air Defense Missile Group (Gifu).

The Western Air Defense Force includes the 5th Air Wing (Nyutabaru), 8th Air Wing (Tsuiki), Western Aircraft Control & Warning Wing (Kasuga), and 2nd Air Defense Missile Group (Kasuga).

The Southwestern Composite Air Division includes the 83rd Air Wing (Naha), Southwestern Aircraft Control and Warning Wing (Naha), and 5th Air Defense Missile Group (Naha). Additionally, the JASDF has two other minor divisions, Airborne Early Warning Group (Misawa) and Tactical Reconnaissance Group (Hyakuri).⁷

In looking towards the future of the JASDF and its military capabilities, a recent development which has taken place in late 1998 needs to be looked at. Mitsubishi has now begun production on the new Japanese F-2 support fighter. Plans call for the Japan Air Self-Defense Force to buy a total of 130 F-2s with first deliveries of production aircraft beginning in 2000.⁸ This is an important issue because it is the first time that Japan has produced its own military aircraft in the post-World War II era. Traditionally, the Japanese have bought planes and materials from the U.S. It appears that the Japanese air force will continue to grow in size and strength.

Current Japanese Missile Production Capabilities

Japan has fairly extensive missile production capabilities. Almost all of the missiles that the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) utilizes are produced locally in Japan. Japan's XSSM-1, capable of use in all weather, is believed to outperform America's Tomahawk cruise missile. Japan's new XAAM -3 air-to-air missile featuring an infrared homing system is nearing completion and is expected to replace the American Sidewinders. The new SASM-2 air-to-air missile is becoming operational after a series of successful tests. It features an improved homing infrared image system developed by Fujitsu and has an extended range of 62 miles, twice what Japan has had. The JDA is also allocating \$170.7 million to further develop the newest fire-and-forget XAAM-4 similar

to the U.S. Air Force's medium range weaponry. The new XAAM-4 scans and tracks multiple targets, and will be operational early in the 21st century. With the exception of the U.S. Patriot surface-to-air missile, all of Japan's missiles are now indigenous.

Concerns have arisen recently that the current missile defense system will be inadequate in the near future. The Patriot system was initially designed to shoot down aircraft, short range, low speed targets, and to defend a limited area. Defending cities from longer-range missiles requires a better system. A four-year study released in 1994 demonstrated Japan's need for a multiple layered ballistic missile defense system. By the year 2005, the study suggests North Korean missiles could be operational for intimidation against either Japanese cities or U.S. bases in Japan. The study revealed the vulnerability of Japanese cities even when all available Patriot missiles are in place. High value civilian targets, like nuclear power stations, would be at risk also. Patriot missiles have only a 30-69 mile range and can only serve as a "second-tier" defense. The more advanced Theater Missile Defense (TMD) system could serve Japan as a "first-tier" layer defense. A worst case scenario suggests that if six North Korean-level ballistic missiles were launched, two missiles would get by the older Patriot system, yielding a 46.6 percent leakage rate. A sea-based Aegis destroyer antimissile defense would reduce the leakage to just 17 percent. But with TMD, the leakage would be reduced significantly to 0.33 percent, even under "saturation bombing" attacks of 18 missiles, according to the study. The Navy has said that one or two ships could defend all of Japan from North Korea's ballistic missiles.⁹

North Korea's provocation has had a lot of influence on Japan's decision to join America's new Theatre Missile Defense program, which aims to track and shoot down

incoming ballistic missiles within a 3,000-kilometre radius. The Japanese government is stumping up money to get TMD studies underway in April, and has revealed plans to spend up to Y30 billion (\$250m) researching the new defense system over the next five years. If it could be made to work (at present a big if), the TMD would be able to reach out across China to the borders of Mongolia and Tibet and over the South China Sea to Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines. It would be difficult for Japan to accommodate such a system within the existing phrasing of its constitution.¹⁰

Foreign Influence and Attitudes

The military strength and goals of Japan obviously is of great concern to many different nations with the U.S. being one of them. Traditionally, the U.S. felt that it should provide the majority of the security that Japan needs. The reason for this solution is that it would allow the U.S. to remain active militarily in the Eastern Asia geographic area and keep Japan weak so that the country could not become a threat again.

Since the cold war ended, Americans have less interest in bearing the world's military burdens alone for the benefit of others-including rich Japan. Irritation intensified four years ago when America stood eyeball-to-eyeball with North Korea and Japan balked at providing even minimal support, though Japan was directly threatened by North Korea's missiles and by its nuclear mischief. If China and America had come to blows in the Taiwan Strait over China's intimidation of Taiwan last year, Japan would have been very hesitant to even supply the American warships involved. Japan's own ships and aircraft would have definitely stayed at home.

The U.S. began encouraging Japan to become more involved in military operations in Japan's surrounding region. There are two main reasons as to why the conclusion was arrived at. First, the area surrounding Japan is becoming more hostile as regional conflicts such as China and Taiwan augment. Any functioning Theater Missile Defense umbrella installed by America and Japan could vastly reduce the possibility of a Chinese attack on Taiwan. Going along the same lines as the first point, increased Japanese military support would take some of the military pressure off the U.S. In fact, recently updated guidelines on the U.S.-Japan defense cooperation, which commit Tokyo to support American troops in conflicts "in areas around Japan." Japanese warships will for the first time be authorized to help with sanctions monitoring, and to assist in minesweeping during a regional crisis. This is all useful military work. If the guidelines are accepted, Japan will have volunteered for much more active duty in support of regional security than ever before.¹¹

China also has a big stake in what happens with the military of Japan. Many feel for Asia to become more stable and secure, China and Japan have to start cooperating with each other. Unfortunately, it does not appear that this type of collaboration is going to occur anytime soon. The Japanese claim that China has played the more destabilizing role in the area lately. The Japanese insist their more vigorous military plans are aimed solely at Pyong-yang, and they accuse the Chinese of refusing to control its loose-cannon ally. "China knows North Korea is useful as an irritant that prompts the U.S. and Japan to moderate their attitudes to China in the vain hope of eventual assistance on North Korea," says Gerald Segal, director of studies at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London.

At the same time, evidence has emerged that the Chinese have developed the capacity to churn out medium-range missiles, which would likely be the weapon of choice in any conflict in Northeast Asia. That may help explain Beijing's vehement opposition to the updated guidelines on U.S.-Japan defense cooperation allowing Japan to show more military muscle. Japan feels that China's build up in missiles is a reaction to much hyped Theater Missile Defense. China also would like to sever U.S.-Japan ties. "The Chinese would like to weaken the American-Japanese alliance so that they can deal with the U.S. and Japan separately," says Masashi Nishihara, professor of international relations at Japan's National Defense Academy. In fact, China thinks it high time America pulled its troops out of the region.

The Japanese are very worried about the rising military power of China. Its periodic land acquisitions in the South China Sea have alarmed the smaller nations in Southeast Asia. By firing missiles in the past few years into shipping lanes around Taiwan, putting at risk the stability on which the region's growth depends, China made even some of the bigger powers queasy. So far, America's troops in South Korea, backed up by its forces in Japan, are perhaps all that has prevented conflict on the Korean peninsula.¹²

Strains in Japan-Russia relations have deep historical roots, going back to the competition of the Japanese and Russian empires for dominance in Northeast Asia. In 1993, nearly fifty years after the end of World War II, a state of war between Japan and Russia existed technically because the government in Moscow had refused in the intervening years to sign the 1951 peace treaty. The main stumbling block in all Japan's subsequent efforts to establish bilateral relations on what it called "a truly stable basis"

was the territorial dispute over the Northern Territories. Although some territories have been returned, there remains a heated dispute over the four Kurile Islands just off the coast of Japan.

Under Russian President Boris Yeltsin, relationships have improved greatly. While I could find no mention of Russia's attitudes on the JASDF, I found evidence to suggest that the two countries' militaries have been on friendly terms. There are plans for joint marine rescue exercises involving Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force and Russia's navy in the Far East. In the summer of 1997, a Russian destroyer made a courtesy call at Harumi Port in Tokyo Bay. It was the first such visit in 103 years. It is apparent that Russia would like to resolve any disputes that it might have with Japan because it would mean more power and influence for Russia.¹³

There are two more countries worth mentioning in Northeast Asia that are very influenced by what Japan does. Both North and South Korea have had their differences with Japan in the past. Many people in both Korean countries still have lingering hatred for Japan over the occupation occurring in the early 1900's. Late in 1998, Japan did issue a formal occupation for the occupation.¹⁴ South Korea has a more positive outlook on Japan than North Korea. One of the primary reasons for this is that the U.S. has much better relations with South Korea and Japan supports the U.S. South Korea is very in favor of the proposed anti-missile defense system.

North Korea, on the other hand, has a very negative attitude towards Japan. Last summer there was a heated argument over the test-fire of a TaepoDong missile from North Korea that flew right over Japan. According to a Japanese newspaper report, Defense Agency chief Hosei Norota believes the threat of missile attack from North

Korea is now so great that Tokyo ought to consider that a pre-emptive strike could be a constitutionally permitted form of self defense.¹⁵ This threat of a missile attack has expedited the research and development of the Theater Missile Defense system. Needless to say, there is a lot of tension between these two countries.

Conclusion

This is a very interesting time for the Japanese military. The Japanese appear to be increasing its military arsenal at paces not seen in the post-World War II era. The Japanese Air Self Defense Force has obtained authorization for Japan to start producing airplanes locally. The JASDF has also purchased aircraft in record numbers over the past few years. There are many factors driving this increase in military capabilities with the increased tension and military build up of Northeast Asian countries, specifically China and North Korea. In addition, the U.S. would like to take some burden off its shoulders as it has been supporting and protecting not just Japan, but keeping stability in the whole region. Japan's military capabilities have almost been magnifying in the past few years. Research and development has commenced on the much-talked about Theater Missile Defense system that will hopefully give Japan an edge over surrounding countries. The system will give Japan an increased effective range for launching missiles.

The military buildup in Japan is also filled with controversy within Japan. There are various Japanese factions arguing over the constitutionality of the whole process. Written in Japan's constitution is a "no-war" clause where Japan is only allowed to maintain military for self-defense purposes. Many Japanese are in favor of stretching the interpretation of Article 9 to allow Japan to become more active in the region.

Finally, Japan is influenced by a number of different countries, with the United States having the most. A committee reviewing the guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation performed in New York City in 1997 emphasized the importance of maintaining a close relationship with Japan and increasing the role of the Japanese military. Although a historical enemy, Russia would genuinely like to improve relationships with Japan in this post-Cold War era. China is a little wary of the increased capabilities of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces because it feels a little threatened. While military relations with South Korea have improved, relations with North Korea seem to have gotten worse. This is a very historic era in Japanese history and only time will tell how the events in the Far East will unfold and how the Japanese military is going to be involved in the picture.

Endnotes

- ¹ http://www.jda.go.jp/index_.htm (Defense Policy, The Constitution of Japan)
- ² <http://www.jda.go.jp/jasdf/asdf/missionE.htm>
- ³ The Economist, 23
- ⁴ The Economist, 23
- ⁵ Hamami, 2
- ⁶ Hamami, 4
- ⁷ <http://www.jda.go.jp/jasdf/asdf/organE.htm>
- ⁸ Proctor, 61
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- ¹⁰ The Economist, 25
- ¹¹ Hajari, 30
- ¹² Virant
- ¹³ Sarkisov, 17
- ¹⁴ Ching, 33
- ¹⁵ Wall Street Journal, Mar 11

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