

**Our Friend in the East – Nation of the Rising Sun, Japan**

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After two decades of unipolarity, we have transitioned to a bipolar world of competing ideological blocs where U.S. power has shifted towards allies and adversaries alike. As a result, the U.S. may have to rely on the allies it has developed since the end of World War II to maintain the liberal international order it established. One notable nation that has demonstrated commitment to U.S. values and its liberal order is Japan. Within the past ten years, Japan made efforts to amend its pacifist constitution in order to aid U.S. engagements toward regional threats like a rising China.

Since its defeat in World War II Japan has adopted a pacifist constitution, which [forbids the nation from using military statecraft](#) as a method of resolving international disputes. This is what is known as Article 9 of the Constitution adopted by post-Imperial Japan during the U.S. occupation in 1947. The purpose of this clause was to [neuter the regional threat post-Imperial Japan posed to the Pacific region](#), which was necessary to assure formerly Japanese-occupied territories that the brutal regime had come to an end.

The goal of the U.S. in the Pacific was to maintain stability while rebuilding nations affected by the global conflict. For about five years after World War II, the U.S. was primarily focused on ensuring Japan's recovery from the war's devastation, while developing a stable, cooperative democracy. When the Korean War began, U.S. military forces and planning focused on the Korean Peninsula, leaving Japan less defended. Though Japan's military had been significantly reduced and disarmed, Japan was allowed to develop a [strictly only defense force in 1954](#). The Japan Self-Defense Force (SDF) would become the foundation of what is today Japan's military force.

The SDF includes ground, air and maritime branches to provide Japan multi-domain defense capabilities. Japan has never had to use these defensive forces since the U.S. has provided security for Japan and guaranteed its safety from military engagement under the 1960 [Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States](#). But much has changed since the Cold War era.

We have enjoyed several decades of post-World War II globalization which, for better or worse, has brought the world closer together while developing interdependence. With this global development, greater wealth has circulated among nations with the hopes of building lasting stability. Not all nations, however, are content with increased wealth, raising populations above the poverty line, modernization of medicine and agriculture, basically betterment of nearly all facets of life. Some wish to disrupt the status quo in hopes of securing greater global influence to shape the world to their preferences. The People's Republic of China (PRC) is a perfect example of a revisionist nation that is endeavoring to reach preeminent global power status for these purposes.

The PRC has regularly made headlines with its increasingly aggressive rhetoric towards Western states that oppose its intentions to forcibly take Taiwan. Japan has stood by the U.S. preferences with respect to Taiwan and not without cost. In 2021 the [PRC threatened to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear armed Japan](#) if it were to interfere with Beijing's plans for Taiwan. Such rhetoric has prompted Japan to [reevaluate its somewhat outdated Constitution](#), which should be

amended to reflect the identity and culture of modern Japan. For decades Japan has distanced itself from the Imperial era through pacifism and ethical rehabilitation.

Furthermore, Japan can no longer afford to be a neutral party as it was during the Cold War due to its increased stake as a global economic partner. For this reason, Japan has had to confront the reality of Article 9 being an impediment to the nation's security as the U.S. may no longer be able to afford to spread itself thin. Rather than provide security for partner nations like Japan and South Korea, the U.S. should be able to rely on these partners to augment its Pacific forces when combating mutual threats.

The purely defensive doctrine of Japan is insufficient to protect its regional interests, which overlap with those of the U.S. A primary mutual interest is [preventing the PRC from becoming a regional hegemon](#), which could not only threaten the economic security of Japan, but also its national security. In 2014, when the U.S. sought to pivot to Asia the late former Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, [proposed a reinterpretation of Article 9](#), which was approved by the Japanese government. This would permit Japan to militarily engage a foreign nation if that same nation attacked one of Japan's allies. By no means would Japan seek conflict, but it would be able to balance risk when calculating military intervention to aid allies.

What is of most importance is that Japan would not act unilaterally under this new interpretation of Article 9. Rather, it would provide it the pretext for supporting U.S. military operations outside of an attack on Japanese soil. This is important as Japan has been generally recognized as a non-threatening state since the end of 1945. Modern Japan has fostered improved relations with neighbors due globalization and the growth of international trade and partnerships.

In addition, the mutual threat posed by China's aggressive rise and expansion in the region has further brought these nations together. Although not all of those nations are allies of the U.S., the mutual concern for the PRC's activity has socially permitted Japan to adopt this renewed stance on the use of military options in order to achieve mutual security.

Maintaining command of the global commons to ensure freedom of navigation for trade and security forces are essential to maintaining U.S. led global stability and security. Japan has demonstrated its commitment to Western values with regard to human rights, ethics, sound forms of governance and prudent use of force. It is, therefore, reasonable to suggest that Japan can serve as a responsible security stakeholder in the Pacific region.

It is of the interest of the U.S. to support its allies' military strengthening, through continued military cooperation, sharing of information and capabilities to ensure interoperability and maintained battlefield effectiveness. The U.S. is currently doing this, but may need to increase commitments in the latter half to achieve an effective bulwark against a belligerent China, if need be. Even without the threat of the PRC, Japan may help support U.S. interests by maintaining the balance of power in favor of the U.S. alliance. Japan has, and will continue to be, a key partner of the U.S. in all aspects of global security. The U.S. should continue supporting its best ally in the Pacific to improve deterrence and, at best, avoid conflict.