

Military Power Ambition

Japan is making its military ambitions clear. What are the regional consequences?

By PEI YUANYING

Due to Japan's history, as well as its geopolitical and current situation, surrounding countries cannot ignore any change in its policy. People are, therefore, naturally on alert over Japan's newly publicized annual defense white paper. While connecting the theory of the white paper with Japan's military operations and policies in recent years, many are feeling threatened by its changing military course.

This year's white paper, for the first time, put forth international cooperative activities as "one of the major tasks" of Japan's Self Defense Force (SDF), stressing that Japan should widen its SDF's international survival space, and prompt its SDF to make contributions to the world, in line with Japan's standing in the world. All these words hint strongly at the country's military ambitions.

Since the 1980s, Japan set out to adjust its defense policy, renew its military strategy, reform its defense system and carry out overseas deployment by taking advantage of participating in UN peacekeeping missions. In the past two years, the country passed a series of laws in quick succession, including the adoption of the three bills dealing with military emergencies in June 2003 and seven other relevant bills this June. By doing so, Japan has actually broken the limitations of its Peace Constitution, sweeping away judicial obstacles for its participation in military operations abroad. On July 3, the Japanese Diet passed a bill supporting Iraqi reconstruction, endorsing the dispatch of SDF troops to Iraq despite opposition at home and abroad. This started the first Japanese troop dispatch to an overseas war zone since World War II.

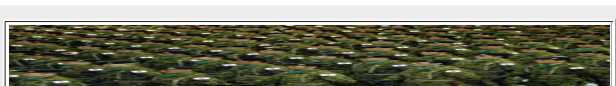
Why did Japan feel so eager about sending troops overseas?

According to the Japanese Government, overseas SDF deployment is expected to help Japan's efforts to become a "normal country." But the explanation was not all-inclusive. Obviously the intention of Japan was to further enhance its military power, especially capability of deploying troops over a long-distance with ensured logistics. Since Japan established the target of building up "a strong and well-equipped SDF," it has been active in developing advanced, heavy and long-distance military equipment, establishing a new command system, and prompting integration of land, sea and air SDFs. The country not only places an emphasis on establishing new rapid response forces—Air Mobility Division, but also plans to build aircraft carriers and develop a space military program. According to Japan's new national defense outlines, which are scheduled to be passed this fall, the SDF will boast of the capability to carry out independent operations and to protect fleets and air troops at sea. With a large military budget and well-equipped weapons that are currently second only after the United States, Japan is already a military power.

The white paper also stressed that "Japanese-U.S. cooperation should be



ON THE WARPATH? Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi answers questions regarding a set of war contingency bills at a parliamentary session in Tokyo



strengthened on global affairs.” According to the three bills for military emergencies, when Japan, or its neighboring regions, has an emergency, the country is supposed to afford civilian land for U.S. troops to build up military positions, as well as offer materials and labor services. If necessary, it will also support the U.S. Army with ammunitions. In return, Japan can receive similar support from the United States, wherever it dispatches overseas troops worldwide. In this way, the function of Japanese military forces realized a transition from “invasion defense” to “overseas intervention.”



READY TO GO: Japanese Self Defense Force troops sent to Iraq mark the nation's first military deployment to an overseas war zone since World War II

Tokyo-based Asahi News reported that, with a closer U.S.-Japanese military relationship, a new round of Japanese-U.S. military integration is being accelerated. The two countries jointly set up a vice-ministerial defense policy review commission in 2003 to attune their military chorus. It is reported that the two countries are planning to transfer part of U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Japan's Okinawa, to Hokkaido. Meanwhile, the headquarters of Japan's Air SDF will be moved to the Yokota Air Base in Tokyo's suburbs, a station for U.S. troops, so as to integrate the two countries' military strength. The Diet has approved to allocate \$1 billion this year to install a missile defense system, which is expected to be completed before March 2008 worth a total \$1.66 billion. To launch this system, Japan and the United States agree to undertake a missile interception experiment off the coast of Hawaii in 2005. As the first step, the United States is to deploy an Aegis chaser, which is able to follow long-distance missiles, in the Sea of Japan this September. This destroyer will stay there for the long-term, to enforce missions of missile defense.

Actually, Japan has become the United State's strategic core in Asia. The Kyodo News Agency revealed recently that Washington has proposed to relocate the headquarters of U.S. Army's I Corps from the U.S. mainland to Japan. The major task of the corps is to deal with emergencies and conflicts taking place in Asia-Pacific region, which hints at an obvious footnote to this long-distance move. Although Japan mainly stresses self-defense and the establishment of multilateral security systems, its security strategy is still based on its military alliance with the United States. Consequently, strengthening Japanese-U.S. security systems is the foundation of Japan's three major security strategies.

Who is the imaginary opponent of Japan and the Japanese-U.S. military alliance?

Japan's defense white paper gives the answer. With a long and specific analysis on the Asia-Pacific military situation, the white paper shows Japan's high alert to the surrounding situation, especially on “China's rising military budget,” “Chinese ships entering Japan's exclusive economic zone,” and “disputes on maritime right.” Japanese media reported that Japan's proposed new defense outlines would “discuss the country's military ability of confronting China.”

A Japanese think tank has done its best to exaggerate how China is accelerating defense modernization and how frequently Chinese troops enter Japan's offing area. Without any rational reason, it accused some of Japan's neighbors of adopting ambitious security and diplomatic policies. It said China's attitude showed Japan the arrogance of a country with growing confidence on military events. It held that there was a necessity for Japan to maintain its advantages in air and sea forces. Some Japanese analysts believed that the focus of Japan's new military strategy had shifted from guarding against threats from the north to those from its west, namely China, under a veil of anti-terrorism and nonproliferation.

Top Japanese officials have frequently reiterated that, in name of self-defense, the country has the right to carry out a pre-emptive strike against missile bases of hostile countries. Though they expressed that this strategy was not directed at China, the explanation is empty words.

It is no secret that Japan has long attempted to extend its military feelers into Chinese territory. As early as September 1997, when publishing the Review of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation, Japan announced that Taiwan was also in the field of Japan-U.S. defense cooperation. According to a spokesperson of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the area approved by Japan's three bills for military emergencies not only covers Taiwan and Diaoyu Island, but also includes the South China Sea. The spokesperson even said that once Diaoyu Island was attacked, U.S. and Japanese troops would take defensive actions by force of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.

Last November, the United States and Japan launched joint anti-submarine maneuvers in the East China Sea for the first time. In June, the two countries again held a 12-day air fight rehearsal in Okinawa. Noticeably, such maneuvers used to be held in Hokkaido, pointing to Russia. Now, it was moved to an area near Taiwan, further revealing Japan's goals.

The new definition of Japan's security standard in its defense white paper this year and the consequent breakaway of the defense-only strategy shows that the country is stepping up the advancement toward the so-called "normal country."

Japan's hope to be a "normal country" itself is rational, but the problem lies in what kind of "normal country" does it plan to be. Generally, a "normal country" will maintain harmonious ties with its neighbors, reflect historical problems with correct attitude, and push forward mutually beneficial economic cooperation and seek joint security with its neighbors. On the contrary, a country may also enlarge military strength and threaten its surrounding regions in the name of becoming a "normal country."

The contents of this year's Japanese defense white paper and some of the Japanese Government's recent moves toward Sino-Japanese ties inevitably make the Chinese people worry about the latter possibility. China, a victim of Japanese militarist aggression in history, certainly hopes Japan to become a real "normal country," which can stick to peaceful path of development and draw lessons from its history, so as to benefit the entire Asian people, including the Japanese themselves.
