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# **China's Fortress Fleet-in-Being and its Implications for Japan's Security**

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*In collaboration with the Atomic Energy Commission (CEA)*

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## Summary

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This paper analyzes the rise of maritime China and its implications for Japan's security policy. In recent years, Chinese naval capabilities have been growing. Beijing aims to expand its maritime presence in the region, but also to limit the access of other fleets – primarily the US Navy – to its nearby waters. This Chinese anti-access/area-denial approach is analyzed here through the concepts of *fortress fleet* and *fleet-in-being*. Tokyo has reinforced its deterrence capability toward Chinese naval activities by setting up a more “dynamic defense” and concentrating efforts to protect its southwestern border. In addition to Japan's efforts, the reinforcement of the alliance with the United States in the context of the American rebalancing toward Asia is also a major element in providing an effective response to Chinese maritime expansion. Despite his hawkish rhetoric, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe would not change Japan's security policy dramatically but rather seek communication with Beijing in order to ensure crisis management.

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# Introduction

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After the Japanese government's purchase of three islets, which are part of the Senkaku Islands, in September 2012, the Chinese government mobilized large-scale anti-Japanese riots in major cities and took other political and economic measures.<sup>1</sup> China also bolstered its maritime and aerial patrol of the islands, frequently violating Japanese territorial seas and airspace, to challenge Japan's legitimate claim. China also condemns Japan for "stealing the islands" at various international forums in an attempt to spread a wrong story. China's assertiveness against Japanese control of the Senkaku Islands reflects not only territorial nationalism in the Middle Kingdom but also an anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) strategy. China is testing the bottom line of Japan and the strategic position of the United States.

This paper analyzes the rise of maritime China and its implications for Japan's security policy. In recent years, China has become more assertive in the Asian littoral waters, intensifying its territorial claims in the East and South China Seas. Beijing aims to expand its maritime presence in the region, but also to deny access by other fleets – primarily the US Navy – to its Near Sea (the Yellow Sea, and the East and South China Seas) enclosed by the first island chain (a chain of islands from Kyushu, Okinawa to Taiwan and Borneo). The first section of this paper analyzes the Chinese A2/AD strategy through the two traditional naval concepts of *fortress fleet* and *fleet-in-being*.

China's assertive behaviors in the Asian littoral have attracted considerable attention in Japan's defense community. The 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) adopted by Tokyo aim to reinforce Japanese deterrence toward China by setting up a more "dynamic defense force" and by concentrating efforts on the defense of the Nansei Islands, in the southwest of the Japanese archipelago.

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<sup>1</sup> The Senkaku Islands are located in the East China Sea. First annexed by Japan in 1895, the islands came under US control after World War II but returned to Japan with the 1971 US-Japan Okinawa Reversion Treaty. China and Taiwan long acknowledged Japanese sovereignty over the islands but suddenly began to claim ownership in 1971, referring to them as the Diaoyu Islands, after it was discovered that undersea oil reserves might exist nearby.

The second section of this paper reviews the implications and challenges of the “dynamic defense force” concept.

Shinzo Abe became prime minister again after his Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) won back power from the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in December 2012. One of Abe's priorities is to bolster security policy, but he faces a different security environment, six years after he became prime minister for the first time. China has become assertive and the United States is rebalancing toward Asia. The third section of this paper examines how Abe will structure his security policy in the context of the US rebalance.

# Chinese Maritime Strategy

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China's growing maritime power is changing the military balance in Asia. Stability in Asia long rested on the strategic balance of power between the United States, Japan, Russia (the former Soviet Union), and China. The continental power of Russia and China dominated the Asian landmass, while the maritime power of the United States and Japan secured freedom of navigation in the Asian littoral. Neither side could project sufficient conventional power into the realm of the other.<sup>2</sup> However, China's assertive behavior with robust A2/AD capabilities is now penetrating the US-Japan naval supremacy in the Asian littoral.

Primary A2/AD weaponry includes a large submarine fleet and land-based aircraft carrying anti-ship cruise missiles. Anti-ship ballistic missiles to target moving ships might be added in the near future. A2/AD relies on wide-range ocean surveillance to detect and locate approaching enemy forces. A2/AD, although it was named differently in the past, has a long history. Imperial Japan adopted the "Gradual Attrition Strategy" during the Pacific War and used submarines and aircraft based on islands under Japanese control to locate and attack the US fleet. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union posed a similar threat with long-range aircraft and submarines to locate US naval forces.<sup>3</sup>

China's A2/AD strategy can be understood better through two traditional naval concepts: *fortress fleet* and *fleet-in-being*.<sup>4</sup> The fortress-fleet concept, as the American historian and naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan described, refers to a fleet that operates under cover of shore-based fire support as part of static coastal defenses. The concept of fleet-in-being – introduced by the British Admiral Arthur Herbert (Earl of Torrington) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century – describes actions by an inferior fleet to undermine a stronger fleet through limited offensives or merely the very existence of the fleet. Thanks to

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<sup>2</sup> Michael McDevitt, "The Evolving Maritime Security Environment in East Asia: Implications for the US-Japan Alliance", *PacNet* No 33, May 31, 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Christian Le Mière explains China's maritime strategy with the "fleet-in-being" concept in Le Mière "America's Pivot to East Asia: The Naval Dimension," *Survival*, vol. 54 no. 3 (June-July 2012), p. 81-94; James R. Holmes explains with the concept of "fortress fleet" in Holmes, "A 'Fortress Fleet' for China," *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations* (Summer/Fall 2010), p. 115-128.

advanced precision anti-ship weapons, China is adopting a hybrid fortress-fleet/fleet-in-being strategy, or fortress fleet-in-being.

## **China's Fortress Fleet**

Mahan observed the performance of the Russian Navy in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905 as defensive, both strategically and tactically. Russian admirals kept their main fleet passively in port to defend the coastal land futures while sheltering the fleet under the fort's big guns. Mahan criticized the Russian defensive strategic mentality for limiting the fleet's freedom of maneuver and for avoiding any battle that might have advanced their strategic goal.<sup>5</sup> Russia did not have a monopoly on this defensive mindset; the strategy was applied by other continental powers and their navies remained defensive both strategically and tactically.<sup>6</sup>

For China, coastal defense to deny seaborne invasion is a historical requirement. China, despite its 8,700-mile coastline and great navigable rivers running to the Pacific, long remained a self-sufficient land power, facing the constant pressure of armed nomads across land borders. Its century of humiliation started in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Western powers exploited China's vulnerable maritime approaches. In short, China's strategic weakness comes from the sea.

The concept of fortress fleet thus fits China's history. The missions of a continental power's navy are subordinate to those of the army.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLA Navy or PLAN) assumes a fundamentally defensive strategic posture. PLAN augments the army's coastal fortifications to help repel amphibious invasions. It also supports the PLA so that the army can take the offensive on the continent where China enjoys vast strategic depth, complex terrain, and massive manpower reserves. Given the US dominant maritime power in the Asian littoral, PLAN had no choice but to become a fortress fleet during the early stages of the Cold War. PLAN became assertive against neighboring countries' navies in the 1970s and 80s, to expand control of the South China Sea. But China's fortress fleet remained in port when two US aircraft carrier strike groups showed the flag during the 1996 Taiwan Strait crisis.

However, advances in military technologies have changed the implications for the modern fortress fleet. Land-based aircraft carrying anti-ship cruise missiles have greatly expanded the reach and accuracy of coastal defenses, providing bold access denial capabilities. Mahan could not foresee that Chinese mobile precision

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<sup>5</sup> Holmes, op cit, p. 117.

<sup>6</sup> Clark G. Reynolds, *Navies in History* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1998), p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 4.

missiles could strike US expeditionary groups hundreds of miles away from the Chinese coast. In essence, China's entire coast is the fortress today.<sup>8</sup> Because of the menace presented by precision weapons and submarines, US leaders would think twice before intervening in a contingency in the Asian littoral.

China is adding a shore-based carrier killer to its A2/AD arsenal. It has been developing and testing an anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM), based on the DF-21 medium-range ballistic missile, to target moving US aircraft carriers. Even the United States has not developed such a weapon, and huge technological challenges remain. Nevertheless, mastering such a technology would be a "game-changer" in today's strategic calculation. A successful ASBM program would greatly restrict the offensive striking capabilities of US carrier strike groups in the western Pacific and undermine the credibility of US defense commitments in Asia.

Anti-ship weapons are cheaper than aircraft carriers. Fortress-fleet strategy supported by anti-ship weaponry is thus cost-effective. Those relatively inexpensive weapons can keep the formidable US sea-control fleet further offshore. Under the coverage of fortress China, PLAN does not have to have the same size of fleet as the US Navy.<sup>9</sup>

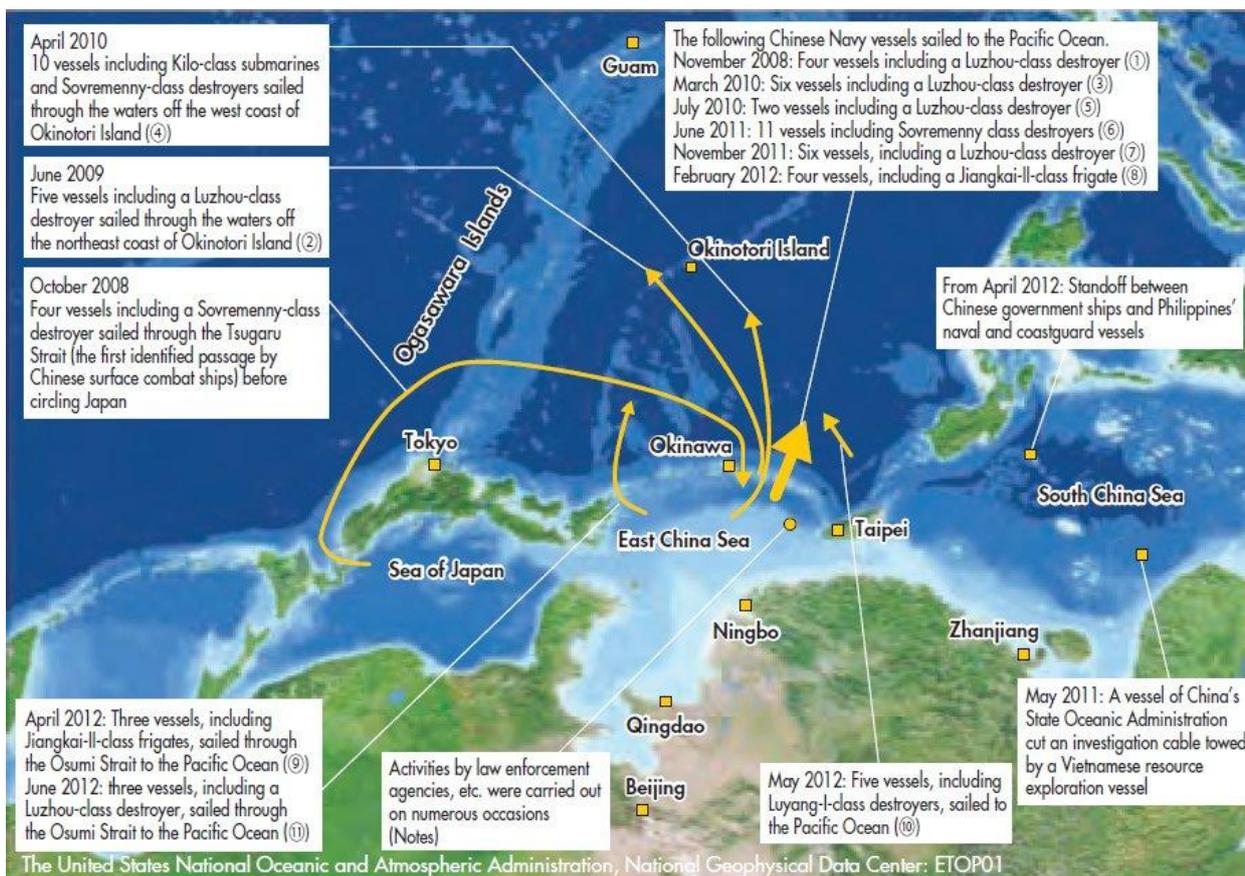
An important implication of fortress fleet in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that high technology allows the fleet to leave the port and thus expands its operational areas. Fortress fleet was seen as defensive both strategically and operationally when shore-based fire support reached only several miles. Today's fortress fleet can be offensive, at least in tactical operations, under the aegis of longer-range anti-ship missiles and submarines. This is one of the reasons why PLAN has become more assertive in the Asian littoral.

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<sup>8</sup> Holmes, *op cit*, p. 123.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.

## PLAN activities in the Western Pacific



Source: Ministry of Defense of Japan, *Defense of Japan 2012*, p. 38

The fortress fleet thus makes sense for China even today. China's maritime interests include defending territorial integration (Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, and the nine-dash line in the South China Sea), defending coastal economic centers, and protecting maritime commerce. A modern fortress fleet is a useful tool for integrating "lost" territories and defending coastal areas. However, a fortress fleet makes little sense to protect Chinese maritime trade, especially in the Indian Ocean, which is beyond the range of precision anti-ship missiles. In short, the Chinese fortress fleet can enjoy freedom only under the coverage of the anti-ship missiles.<sup>10</sup>

## Chinese Fleet-in-Being

Torrington decided not to engage the superior French fleet in the War of the League of Augsburg in 1690. The French were threatening to

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 126.

invade England but Torrington was confident that as long as he had a fleet in being they would not make the attempt. He favored keeping his fleet at the mouth of the River Thames and avoided any decisive naval battle until anticipated reinforcements arrived. On the other hand, Torrington employed aggressive tactical offensives to weaken his opponent whenever an opportunity arose.<sup>11</sup> The fleet-in-being assumes temporary strategic defense combined with offensive tactical operations. Once fully reinforced, the main fleet can resume strategic offensives.

The fleet-in-being is a natural consequence of Communist China's strategic tradition. Mao Zedong's Red Army favored aggressive operational tactics, or "active defense", at first for strategic defense and later for strategic offensive, as seen in the Long March, the Sino-Japanese War of the 1930s-40s, and the Chinese Civil War. Likewise, PLAN's "offshore active defense" concept aims to create conditions for a strategic counteroffensive through "people's war at sea," or "guerrilla warfare at sea".<sup>12</sup>

The fleet-in-being is a sea denial strategy in essence. The fleet does not seek sea control but attempts to deny enemy control of certain sea areas through its presence and menace. China's A2/AD capabilities, including the massive submarine fleet and anti-ship weaponry, are the primary tools for sea denial. China is, in line with naval historian and geostrategist Julian Corbett's suggestion, keeping the fleet "actively" in being through occasional demonstrations.<sup>13</sup> In October 2006, for example, a Chinese Song-class attack submarine quietly surfaced within nine miles of the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk as the forward-deployed flattop sailed on a training exercise in the East China Sea.

The need to protect seaborne trade requires China to develop power projection capabilities. China has just introduced its first carrier, and maintains an active indigenous carrier program and an expanding fleet of modern surface combat and amphibious ships. PLAN joined the international counter-piracy operation in the Gulf of Aden in 2008, demonstrating its blue-water capabilities. PLAN also demonstrated its power-projection capabilities by supporting and protecting the evacuation of Chinese citizens from Libya in February 2011. A large PLAN hospital ship has been engaged in humanitarian aid programs in the distant waters of South America and Africa.

Nevertheless, PLAN will continue to be weaker than the sea-control fleet of the US Navy in the western Pacific. Hence the fleet-in-being concept is still a desirable option for PLAN to deter any aggression, through the demonstration of its sea-denial capabilities. Since 2010, PLAN has increased the frequency of large-scale naval

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<sup>11</sup> Reynolds, op cit, p. 62.

<sup>12</sup> Holmes, op cit, p. 120.

<sup>13</sup> Le Mière, op cit, p. 86.

exercises, particularly in the South China Sea, sometimes involving the North Sea, East Sea and South Sea Fleets.

China's fleet-in-being is leading to a security dilemma in the region.<sup>14</sup> China's assertiveness in the Asian littoral is perceived as a common threat to other regional countries, and those countries seek stronger ties with the United States. On the other hand, China perceives US rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific and its reaffirmation of defense commitments as containment. China needs to divide and rule the US and its allies and friends in Asia to prevent containment. It succeeded in dividing the ASEAN member countries over the South China Sea in 2012, using its economic leverage. China is also attempting to divide Japan and the United States over the Senkaku by linking the issue with Japan's colonial past.

The question is: In what circumstances would PLAN's fleet-in-being launch a strategic counteroffensive. It is unlikely that PLAN will become a dominant navy in the western Pacific in the foreseeable future. PLAN needs to remain strategically defensive against the United States. On the other hand, as the naval balance between China and its Asian neighbors already favors China, the PLAN fleet-in-being may launch a strategic counteroffensive against them. Even if this is the case, China needs to deter US intervention in an armed conflict between China and a US ally or friend, as the United States has reaffirmed its treaty commitments to Japan and the Philippines, and to freedom of navigation in the South China Sea. Since an armed conflict with the US could escalate into a nuclear exchange, China's fleet-in-being would refrain from launching a strategic counter-offensive without a credible nuclear deterrent.

## ***China's Fortress Fleet-in-Being***

PLAN is a hybrid of fortress fleet and fleet-in-being.<sup>15</sup> Fortress fleet refers to anti-access and expands PLAN's operational areas. Fleet-in-being leads to area-denial and PLAN's assertive maritime behavior. Both concepts suggest that PLAN will continue to be strategically defensive. Both also indicate that PLAN will become more assertive at the tactical level because of the Red Army's legacy and affordable advanced technologies. A2/AD is an American term; Chinese strategic thinkers refer to "counter-intervention."<sup>16</sup> Thus China's fortress fleet-in-being is defensive in essence.

PLA strategic thinkers do not regard the Near Sea as a geographical concept. According to them, the range of the Near Sea changes as their capabilities develop. Accordingly, PLAN vessels

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Holmes, op cit, p. 124-125.

<sup>16</sup> McDevitt, op cit.

actively conduct training exercises not only in the Near Sea but also in the Philippine Sea beyond the first island chain. In April 2010, a PLAN fleet of 10 warships passed through the Miyako Channel between mainland Okinawa and Miyako Island. The size of the fleet was unprecedentedly large, and PLAN helicopters buzzed around the Japanese destroyers monitoring the fleet. Since then, the Miyako Channel has become a regular route for PLAN to enter the Philippine Sea. PLAN is making the Philippine Sea part of the Near Sea.

The Chinese fortress fleet-in-being persists in a series of excessive maritime claims – or legal warfare – as a sea denial strategy. China's domestic law guarantees freedom of navigation in its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) but denies such freedom in its "historic waters." Its EEZ claims are based on the historical "occupation" of the waters in the Yellow Sea, East China Sea and South China Sea. China thus does not accept surveillance activities by foreign military vessels in its EEZ and fails to recognize the airspace above its EEZ as international airspace. This type of behavior precipitated the Hainan EP-3 incident in 2001 (when Chinese fighter jets collided with a US intelligence aircraft and forced it to land) and the USNS Impeccable incident in 2009.

On the other hand, China needs to pass through foreign EEZs as PLAN's operational areas expand. For example, since much of the Philippine Sea consists of Japanese EEZ, China has tried to justify its surveys in the Japanese EEZ around Okinotorishima Island in the Philippine Sea on the grounds that it is just a rock rather than an island, thereby negating Japan's claim to an EEZ there. It appears that China is conducting those surveys to identify seabed resources and to map the sea bottom for submarine operations.<sup>17</sup>

China's fortress fleet-in-being has a new, additional detachment. China's paramilitary maritime law-enforcement agencies, called "Five Dragons" or, more recently, "Nine Dragons", are "stirring up the sea."<sup>18</sup> The most active of these actors include the China Fisheries Law Enforcement Command (FLEC), under the Ministry of Agriculture, and the China Marine Surveillance (CMS) under the State Oceanic Administration. The surveillance ships belonging to FLEC and CMS were recently employed in numerous cases in the Asian littoral, including the harassment of USNS Impeccable's surveillance activity near Hainan Island in March 2009, the standoff over the Scarborough Shoal in the Philippine EEZ in April-June 2012, and the confrontation over the Senkaku Islands after Japanese nationalization of three of the islet in September 2012.

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<sup>17</sup> Tetsuo Kotani, "A New Maritime Dispute: Japan's Okinotorishima Policy and Its Implications", *Dokdo Research Journal*, Vol. 11, October 2010, p. 65-68.

<sup>18</sup> See Lyle J. Goldstein, *Five Dragons Stirring Up the Sea: Challenge and Opportunity in China's Improving Maritime Enforcement Capabilities*, China Maritime Study, No. 5 (April 2010); and The International Crisis Group, *Stirring Up the South China Sea*, Asia Report No. 223, April 23, 2012.

China's paramilitary enforcement forces have been weak compared with those of Japan and the United States. There was little coordination among the various agencies and they competed with one another over budget and jurisdiction.<sup>19</sup> Recently, however, China has been improving its maritime law-enforcement capabilities, especially for the CMS, with a bold ship-building program.<sup>20</sup> There is also more coordination among the agencies, and the National Committee on Border and Coastal Defense is considered to provide a coordination mechanism for them.<sup>21</sup> Since the Committee is under the influence of the PLA, those "Five Dragons" are part of China's fortress fleet-in-being.

Its paramilitary ships turned out to be an effective tool for China to deny foreign countries' legitimate surveillance activities in the Near Sea. Because they are not warships, the dispatch of these enforcement ships may not constitute direct threat or use of force. But because they are owned by the state, they can enjoy sovereign immunity even in foreign territorial seas. On the other hand, they can demonstrate maritime jurisdiction while challenging other states' surveillance capabilities in contested waters without escalation into a military conflict. For example, after a two-month standoff, the CMS took control of the Scarborough Shoal from the Philippine Coast Guard. After the Japanese nationalization of the Senkaku, China has been sending five surveillance ships to the contiguous and even territorial seas of the islands on a daily basis, challenging the Japanese Coast Guard's patrol mission. If China could control the Senkaku Islands, the PLA would attempt to deny the JMSDF's daily ocean surveillance in the East China Sea.

China's fortress fleet-in-being will become formidable if China possesses a credible sea-based nuclear deterrent. China is modernizing its nuclear arsenal, but the lack of a credible sea-based deterrent prevents the country from possessing assured destruction capabilities. China is on the verge of acquiring credible second-strike capabilities with the anticipated introduction of JL-2 SLBMs (with an estimated range of 8,000 kilometers) coupled with DF-31 and DF-41 road-mobile intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). In addition, China plans to introduce up to five Type 094, or Jin-class, strategic nuclear ballistic missile submarines (SSBNs) armed with the JL-2 missiles, while constructing an underwater submarine base on Hainan Island in the South China Sea.<sup>22</sup> Although China's fortress fleet-in-being is defensive in nature, it might launch a strategic counteroffensive if/when it possesses a credible nuclear deterrent.

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<sup>19</sup> Goldstein, *op cit*, p. 3.

<sup>20</sup> The National Institute for Defense Studies, *NIDS China Security Report 2012*, December 2012, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> Tetsuo Kotani, "Why China Wants South China Sea", *The Diplomat*, July 18, 2011, <<http://thediplomat.com/2011/07/18/why-china-wants-the-south-china-sea/>>

China will continue to expand its A2/AD capabilities under the fortress fleet-in-being concept. On the other hand, the United States will not accept such capabilities denying US access to the western Pacific and developing counter-capabilities under the Air Sea Battle (ASB) concept. This is not an arms race as seen in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when a naval buildup program occupied a large part of the national budget. Instead, the region is witnessing a “military capabilities competition” or strategic competition assured access vs. access denial.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> McDevitt, op cit.

# Japan's Maritime Strategy and Dynamic Defense Force

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The growing Chinese naval capability in the Near Sea is a great concern for Japanese naval strategists at a time when the roles and missions of the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) are ever-expanding. China needs sustainable economic growth for domestic stability. China and the international community share an interest in safe maritime communication, but it is not clear whether China can peacefully coexist with the international community. Accordingly, the JMSDF developed its strategic guidance to seek deeper confidence-building with PLAN and to establish a well-balanced defense posture in case these efforts fail.

China's assertiveness in the Asian littoral waters has attracted considerable attention among the defense community in Japan. In December 2010, the Japanese government approved the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), which provide guidance for defense policy and set the force structure for the next decade, emphasizing the defense of Nansei (Southwestern) Islands, or the Okinawa island chain, to meet challenges from China's growing naval power.<sup>24</sup> The document, reflecting the changing regional and global security environment, also abandoned the decade-long "static" defense posture and introduced a new concept of "dynamic defense" that envisions an increased operational level and tempo for the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF).

## *JMSDF Maritime Strategy*

The end of the Cold War made remote the chance of a great war. But ever since the dispatch of minesweepers to the Persian Gulf in 1991, the JMSDF's roles and missions have expanded. This is why it needed to redefine its roles, missions and capabilities under clear strategic guidance. In such circumstances, then Director General of the Operations and Plans Department of the Maritime Staff Office

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<sup>24</sup> The English text of the NDPG is available at the Ministry of Defense website, <[http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d\\_act/d\\_policy/national.html](http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/national.html)>; the NDPG was first written in 1976 and revised in 1995 and 2004.

prepared a paper titled “JMSDF in the New Maritime Era” in November 2008 to discuss JMSDF strategy.<sup>25</sup>

The JMSDF assumes an “engagement strategy” for peacetime and a “contingency response strategy” for wartime. The former is a strategy to build a more advantageous security environment for Japan in peacetime, in order to prevent and deter the emergence of any hostile situation. Response strategy refers to policies to be taken when deterrence fails, and aims to provide a swift response to, and elimination of, threats against the nation.

Under the engagement strategy, the JMSDF is strengthening partnership with the United States and other like-minded nations to promote freedom of the seas. Accordingly, it contributes to capacity-building of regional navies in Southeast Asia, works with the Indian Navy in the Indian Ocean, and is expanding engagement with European and regional navies in the Middle East. To build a stable security environment, the JMSDF also conducts port visits and other defense exchanges in addition to supporting UN peacekeeping operations. It also seeks to promote mutual understanding and confidence-building through defense exchanges with China and other nations.<sup>26</sup>

The contingency response strategy assumes a self-sufficient JMSDF for a small-scale invasion through strengthening intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR), especially anti-submarine warfare (ASW), to defend Japan’s surrounding waters. The primary area of responsibility for Japan is the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea, or what Japanese naval strategists call the TGT (Tokyo-Guam-Taiwan) Triangle.<sup>27</sup> The TGT Triangle is critically important as Japan’s main shipping route and as a maritime “bridgehead” for the US military to project power into East Asia. ISR in the TGT Triangle is a key enabler for effective combined operations with the US Navy.

The JMSDF strategy requires self-sustainability, multi-layered ISR database compiling, rapid response, and joint operational posture. The paper identifies improved C4ISR, ASW, sea basing, and training/education as key requirements.<sup>28</sup>

## **Japan’s Dynamic Defense Force**

The new concept of “dynamic defense force” under the 2010 NDPG envisions active and regular surveillance to demonstrate national will

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<sup>25</sup> Tomohisa Takei, “Kaiyoshinjidaini Okeru Kaijojieitai (Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force in the New Maritime Era)”, *Hatou*, No. 199 (November 2008).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18-19.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24-27.

and strong defense capabilities. The planned introduction of the next-generation patrol aircraft P-1, and 19,500-ton helicopter-equipped destroyers will greatly enhance maritime surveillance capabilities. Japan plans to enhance such capabilities in the TGT Triangle, as PLAN expands its operational areas beyond the first island chain.

The Nansei Islands are the key to maritime surveillance since China seeks to deny foreign surveillance activities in its Near Sea. To increase maritime surveillance capabilities in southwestern Japan, the 2010 NDPG plans to upgrade the fixed 3D radar system in Miyako Island and to station a coastal surveillance unit in Yonaguni Island. E-2C early warning aircraft will be deployed to Naha Air Base on the Okinawa mainland as well.

Japan is primarily responsible for the defense of the Nansei Islands. Since they stretch for a thousand miles and have insufficient access facilities, Japan is seeking to use existing commercial facilities. The JSDF also envisions rapid deployment of combat troops, air-defense units and ground-to-surface missile launchers wherever necessary along the Nansei Islands, and tested its transport capabilities in the 2011 and 2012 annual exercises. North Korea's ballistic missile testing in April and December 2012 provided opportunities to exercise and demonstrate these capabilities.

The NDPG plans to expand the submarine fleet from 16 to 22. Due to the lack of Chinese ASW capabilities, the expansion of the Japanese submarine fleet poses significant sea-denial threats to PLAN. To patrol the waters along southwestern Japan, it is estimated that at least eight submarines are necessary (six for the Okinawa island chain and two for the Bashi Channel). Typically, a boat requires two backups for training and maintenance. A submarine fleet of 24 is thus ideal, but the planned fleet of 22 provides more operational flexibility than the current fleet of 16.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the NDPG is increasing the number of submarines but not the number of submariners. For effective use of the reinforced submarine fleet, Japan needs to address the recruitment and training of submariners.

The 2010 NDPG envisions stronger partnerships with the United States, Australia, India, South Korea and ASEAN member countries. It also calls for Japanese proactive engagement in multilateral security frameworks such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) to promote non-traditional security cooperation. It also emphasizes the necessity to encourage China to act as a responsible member of the international community, and to promote confidence-building with China.

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<sup>29</sup> Masao Kobayashi, "Sensuikan 22 sekitaiseino Kaijoboei [Maritime Defense under a 22-Submarine Force]", *Gunji Kenkyu* [Japan Military Review], December 2011.

Japan is not going to contain China or appease Beijing blindly. Under the severe fiscal constraints and in the harsh security environment, Japanese defense planners recognize both challenges and opportunities in the rise of Chinese maritime power. On one hand, Japan is going to build sufficient defense capabilities and partnerships to discourage Chinese assertiveness in the Asian littoral, while encouraging Beijing to play more responsible and constructive roles. To that end, Japan needs to establish a dynamic defense posture to secure southwestern Japan, while expanding partnerships with like-minded nations to promote freedom of navigation.

# US Rebalance and Future Prospects for Japan's Security Policy

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The United States has made clear its intention to rebalance toward the Asia-Pacific, recognizing the challenges and opportunities posed by the rise of Asia as a whole and China in particular. It is not that the United States is “returning” to Asia; it never left this dynamic region. The US is reducing its ground troops in the deserts of Afghanistan and Iraq but will maintain naval power in the Indo-Pacific. Rebalance requires the United States to maintain sustainable forces and power projection capability to counter A2/AD threats in the region.<sup>30</sup> The US Pacific Command covers the western Pacific and the Indian Ocean as a unified theater, and will continue to maintain its sea-control fleet to guarantee unimpeded access to the maritime highway.

One of the implications of the interaction between China's fortress fleet-in-being and US rebalance is that Japan needs to take greater security responsibility in Northeast Asia, as the United States shifts its focus southward and China becomes assertive in the Near Sea. Prime Minister Abe, known to be nationalist in leanings, has made clear his intention to bolster security policy to protect national territories by deploying government officials on the Senkaku Islands, investing in the coastguard, increasing the defense budget, exercising collective self-defense, and revising the constitution in order to establish a national defense force. At the same time, Abe envisions a value-oriented foreign policy and strengthening partnerships with the United States, India, Australia and other like-minded nations that share values in order to shape China's behavior in the international arena.

## ***US Rebalancing and Sea-Control Fleet***

Rebalance requires the United States to reinforce its sea-control fleet in the Pacific. Accordingly, in June 2011, US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates disclosed US plans to deploy up to four new littoral

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<sup>30</sup> Department of Defense, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, January 2012.

combat ships (LCSs) – the next-generation sea-control ships – to Singapore. The LCSs will not be based or homeported in Singapore, but up to four LCSs will be deployed to the city state on a rotational basis. The following year, Gates' successor, Leon Panetta, announced in the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2012 that about 60% of the entire fleet would be assigned to the Pacific by 2020. The new naval posture in Asia will strengthen US engagement in the region, through the port calls at regional ports, and engagement of regional navies through activities such as exercises and exchanges. The US Navy is also replacing forward-deployed naval forces in the western Pacific with the most capable ships and aircraft and seeking a basing option in Australia.

US Marines – another important element of US sea power – are in dispersal. In March 2011, the US Marine Corps announced a force structure review.<sup>31</sup> As a result of the War on Terror, the US Marine Corps became a “second army”; this report aimed at changing it into a “middle-weight” force. The new force structure emphasizes the dispersion of lighter forward-deployed forces for rapid response, increased engagement with regional partners for training, and capacity-building. Since the number of amphibious ships is insufficient, the Marines seek opportunities for working with the Navy's other platforms. In accordance with this force structure review, the deployment of up to 2,500 US Marines in Darwin, Australia was announced in November 2011. In February 2012, it was agreed that 4,700 US Marines in Okinawa would be transferred to Guam, while another 3,300 will be deployed to Hawaii and Australia on a rotational basis.

The US rebalance results in a force shift within Asia rather than a shift from the Middle East to Asia. The US military posture in Asia long focused on Northeast Asia, or the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait. To balance the rise of China, however, the United States is shifting the focus from Northeast to Southeast Asia. The US is seeking opportunities to access the ports of US allies (the Philippines and Thailand) and new friends such as Vietnam as well.

Christian Le Mière described the recent US move as “fleet-in-dispersal” to avoid direct confrontation with China, while hedging against Chinese aggression.<sup>32</sup> Le Mière observes that the consequence of this strategy is encouragement of China's assertiveness due to reduced US presence in China's Near Sea.<sup>33</sup> But the US Navy is not reducing but increasing the number of ships, and is keeping the sea-control fleet in China's Near Sea, as demonstrated in the exercises with Japan in the East China Sea, with South Korea in the Yellow Sea, and with Southeast Asian countries in the South China Sea.

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<sup>31</sup> Force Structure Review Committee, *Reshaping America's Expeditionary Force in Readiness: Report of the 2010 Marine Corps*, March 14, 2011.

<sup>32</sup> Le Mière, *op cit*, p. 86.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 92.

It would be more appropriate to describe the change in the US force structure in Asia as Marines-in-dispersal. The reduction of numbers of US Marines in Okinawa and the first island chain does not necessarily encourage China since the 31<sup>st</sup> Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU), the first responder to crisis, remains in Okinawa. In fact, Marines-in-dispersal has potential to further contribute to the deterrence as long as strategic mobility of the “middle-weight” Marines is guaranteed. Marines-in-dispersal also ensures increased engagements with regional partners.

The presumption in US rebalance is stability in the Middle East. Although the Obama administration has sought to end the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Middle East presents numerous challenges. In particular, the civil war in Syria and the nuclear program of Iran cause instability. If the situation in the Middle East becomes worse, the United States would need to review the rebalance. Fiscal constraint is another challenge to rebalance. If the United States fails to avoid sequestration and the fiscal cliff, that would undermine the foundation of rebalance and the credibility of US commitments to Asia.

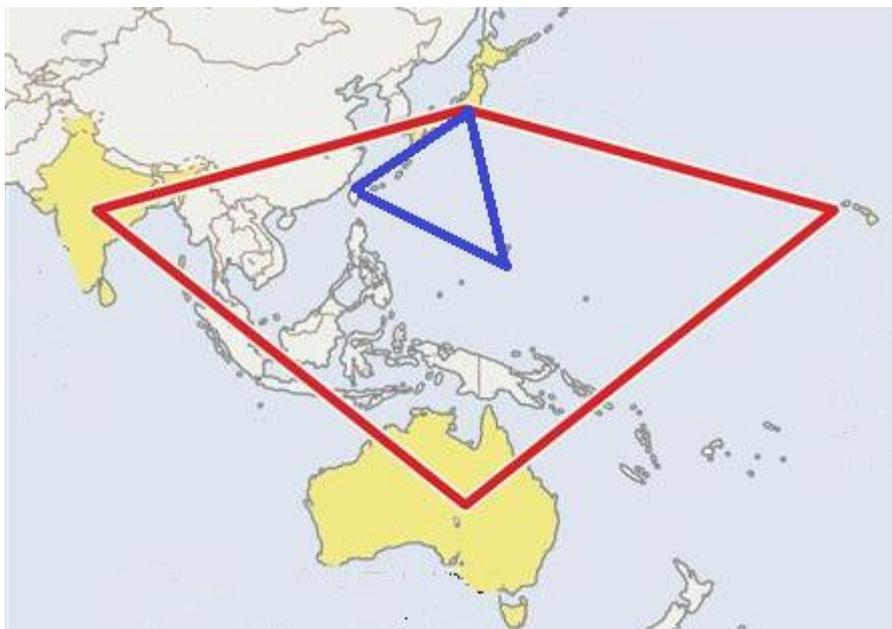
## ***Abe's Security Policy Orientation and Challenges***

The essence of Abe's value-based diplomacy is to promote national interests (national security and prosperity) by promoting universal values.<sup>34</sup> Abe and his followers once promoted an “arc of freedom and prosperity” that would connect a series of emerging democracies around the Eurasian continent. A coalition between Japan, the United States, India and Australia – establishing a “security diamond” (see map) – is the key enabler for this vision this time. In addition, Abe aims to strengthen ties with ASEAN by sending his cabinet ministers and himself to its key member states. He also sent his special envoy to NATO and EU to seek understanding for Japanese efforts to address China's assertiveness and North Korea's nuclear and missile programs while trying to keep Europe away from China.

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<sup>34</sup> See Nobukatsu Kanehara, *Senryaku Gaiko Genron* [A grand strategy for Japan in the 21<sup>st</sup> century] (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 2011).

**The “Security Diamond” (Japan, India, Australia, Hawaii)  
and the Tokyo-Guam-Taiwan (TGT) Triangle**



One of the biggest challenges for Abe in 2013 is to stabilize the confrontation with China over the Senkaku Islands. Although Abe visited Beijing in 2006 to improve the Japan-China relationship that was damaged by his predecessor's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, it is unlikely that Abe will visit Beijing until he strengthens ties with the “security diamond” countries and other Chinese neighbors – taking a “more haste, less speed” approach. This is necessary in order to engage in talks with Beijing from a position of strength.

In the meantime, Abe has bolstered discussion on collective self-defense and decided to rewrite the 2010 NDPG. Abe's priority is to build a defensive wall along the Nansei Islands. He does not have many options to differentiate himself from his DPJ predecessors, however, in the context of budget austerity. Basically, what he can do is to front-load and expand what the DPJ envisioned in the 2010 NDPG by making a supplementary defense budget. For example, since the Senkaku Islands are a blind spot in Japan's surveillance system, CMS aircraft violated Japanese airspace without being detected in December 2012. To eliminate the blind spot, Abe needs to deploy early-warning aircraft in Okinawa immediately. Purchase of US unmanned aircraft would have to follow to ensure enhanced ISR in the East China Sea.

To make progress beyond that achieved by his predecessor, Abe also needs to introduce amphibious capabilities. The DPJ government decided to introduce US amphibious vehicles to the Ground Self-Defense Force. Amphibious operations require further integration of the three services of the JSDF. Hideaki Kaneda, a

retired vice-admiral, proposes the establishment of a permanent joint task force, consisting of forces in Okinawa and Kyushu, for amphibious operations.<sup>35</sup> Abe has already showed his intention to create a “joint defense strategy,” and the introduction of amphibious capabilities is expected to be the first step toward a joint force.

The US-Japan alliance remains the key to China's A2/AD challenges. Tokyo and Washington have already agreed to develop an allied dynamic defense posture. Abe should take the leadership to develop an allied Air Sea Battle (ASB) concept to maintain assured access to the western Pacific. ASB requires three basic actions: (1) defeating enemy surveillance systems; (2) destroying enemy precision weapon launching systems, and (3) defeating enemy missiles and other weapons.<sup>36</sup> Primary roles for Japan under the allied ASB include tactical air operations, ASW and air defense, all of which require sophisticated ISR capabilities.<sup>37</sup> The allied ASB would lead to efficient use of respective defense capabilities in a period of austerity.

To promote the allied ASB concept, today's allied division of labor, described as “spear and shield” (Japan provides defensive capabilities and the US offensive capabilities), needs to be reviewed. Abe should revise the 1997 US-Japan Defense Guidelines so that Japan can take a proactive role to defend its territory with both offensive and defensive capabilities. Since the lack of transport capabilities is a common challenge for Japan and the United States, promotion of cross-service combined operations – for example, US aircraft transports Japanese ground troops, or Japanese naval ships transport the US Marines – should be considered as well.

The most important challenge for the alliance is to prevent China's fortress fleet-in-being from launching a strategic offensive. ASB is not a strategy but a tactical concept that could escalate a US-China armed conflict into nuclear war, without any deliberate strategy. T.X. Hammes proposes “offshore control”, or a blockade against China beyond the range of its A2/AD capabilities, to slow a crisis down and reduce escalatory pressure.<sup>38</sup> Offshore control makes sense because China's fortress fleet-in-being is defenseless outside the Near Sea. A long-distance blockade would require cooperation from other regional countries such as Australia and India. Since countries within the reach of Chinese A2/AD capabilities need to defend their territories, partner capacity-building for South China Sea

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<sup>35</sup> Interview with Hideaki Kaneda, 6 December 2012, Tokyo.

<sup>36</sup> McDevitt, op cit.

<sup>37</sup> See Sugio Takahashi, “Counter A2/AD in Japan-US Defense Cooperation: Toward Allied Air-Sea Battle”, Project 2049 Institute Futuregram 12-03, <[http://project2049.net/documents/counter\\_a2ad\\_defense\\_cooperation\\_takahashi.pdf](http://project2049.net/documents/counter_a2ad_defense_cooperation_takahashi.pdf)>

<sup>38</sup> T.X. Hammes, “Offshore Control: A Proposed Strategy for an Unlikely Conflict”, *Strategic Forum*, No. 278 (June 2012).

countries is also necessary. To develop such a strategy, Abe's "security diamond" makes sense.

If China succeeds in making the Near Sea off limits, it would embolden Beijing. Its excessive claim in the western Pacific needs to be addressed in order to continue maritime surveillance in China's Near Sea. The United States is the only nation that has a freedom-of-navigation program to challenge littoral countries' excessive maritime claims, but its operational tempo is decreasing. To counter China's legal warfare, Japan and the United States should develop a joint freedom-of-navigation program. The two governments should conduct an assertive operation by Japanese and American military units to physically challenge China's excessive claims.

China plays a dangerous game by employing paramilitary forces. The Japan Coast Guard (JCG) is the first responder to any violation of territorial seas. The JCG is often referred to as Japan's "hidden navy", but its vessels are too old. Japanese political leaders generally share the view that the JCG needs to be reinforced to respond to the CMS's daily offensive around the Senkaku. In addition to increasing the JCG's budget, ships and personnel, Abe should stir up world public opinion against China's use of enforcement ships to threaten Japan. China's dispatch of enforcement ships is not a peaceful gesture. Whether a warship or an enforcement ship is used is not a decisive factor in identifying a threat of force; actual conduct is the primary determinant (Guyana vs. Suriname).

There is always a chance of an accidental clash and escalation in the East China Sea, while Abe establishes closer ties with the "security diamond" countries. He should keep the doors open for communication with Beijing, especially in case of an emergency. The DPJ government agreed with Beijing on maritime search and rescue, as well as on a maritime communication mechanism, and established high-level consultation on maritime affairs. Abe should make every effort to use these communication mechanisms to reduce the risk of clash and escalation. Otherwise, the "security diamond" countries and other regional neighbors would not welcome Abe's value-based diplomacy. To put it another way, Abe's value-based diplomacy would fail without a robust engagement strategy for China.

## Conclusion

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The rise of maritime China has literally brought about a sea change in Asia. Analysis of China's A2/AD strategy through the concepts of fortress fleet and fleet-in-being leads to the conclusion that advances in precision weapons allow PLAN to expand its operational areas beyond the first island chain and to become more assertive in the Asian littoral. More importantly, there is a possibility that PLAN will launch a strategic counteroffensive unless this is prevented by other maritime powers in the region. For Japan, the fundamental challenge is to prevent PLAN from launching strategic offensives.

China's assertiveness in Japan's southwestern front and the US rebalance to Asia require Japan to take a proactive defense posture. The introduction of a "dynamic defense force" was an appropriate way to meet the strategic requirement. The defense of the territorial status quo of the Senkaku Islands and the Nansei Islands in general is the first test of Japan's strategic position. The countering of China's assertiveness will continue for some time. Despite his hawkish rhetoric, Abe has few options to differentiate himself from his predecessors. He will gradually expand the concept of a "dynamic defense force," probably with a different name, while promoting a value-based diplomacy to shape China's strategic calculations. He urgently needs to establish a crisis communication channel with Beijing due to the high tensions in the East China Sea.