

# Japan PM relaunches panel to discuss Japan's "right to collective self-defense"

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## **Abe relaunches panel to discuss Japan's right to collective self-defense**

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has begun paving the tangible way for allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, with the inaugural meeting on Feb. 8 of a private panel on the legal basis for the nation's security.

The meeting of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security was held at the Prime Minister's Office, with Abe, university professors, former government officials and other experts in attendance. The panel was first established in 2007 during Abe's first stint as prime minister but had been shelved following his resignation later that year. The Feb. 8 meeting was the first to be held under the second Abe Cabinet, which was inaugurated in December last year.

While Abe intends to have the panel discuss and help bring about his long-held pet project of authorizing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, there is no prospect of the panel reaching a conclusion anytime soon as New Komeito — the coalition partner of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party — has reservations about such an initiative.

At the outset of the meeting, Prime Minister Abe said, "I want this panel to discuss once again what our country should do, including the most effective way of operating the Japan-U.S. security system," alluding to his desire of allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense and thereby strengthening the Japan-U.S. alliance. Abe attended the nearly one-hour meeting to the end.

The collective self-defense issue is one of the two pillars of Abe's security ambitions along with the planned establishment of the Japanese-version of the National Security Council (NSC). The prime minister has apparently relaunched the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security in preparation for spelling out his hawkish and conservative colors following the House of Councillors election slated for July. At an upcoming meeting with U.S. President Barack Obama later this month, Abe will convey his plan to accelerate discussions toward allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

The advisory panel consists of the same members as those in its first incarnation during the first Abe Cabinet. The previous panel had compiled a report recommending that the collective self-defense issue be reviewed through changes to the government's interpretation of the Constitution, but the discussions were aborted in the wake of Abe's resignation.

After the Feb. 8 meeting, panel chair Shunji Yanai told reporters, "We have reconfirmed basic principles for allowing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense." The panel is believed to later compile a similar recommendation as the previous one.

New Komeito, meanwhile, has consistently held reservations about authorizing Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense as it could lead to Japan's use of force outside its territory. During a press meeting at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on Feb. 7, New Komeito leader Natsuo

Yamaguchi expressed his support for the government's constitutional interpretation that bans Japan from exercising the right to collective self-defense.

"No path has been shown (toward reviewing the constitutional interpretation), nor have we ever agreed to review it," Yamaguchi said.

The United States, on the other hand, has shown signs of change with regard to Japan's right to collective self-defense. While the issue had primarily been linked to bolstering the Japan-U.S. alliance over security in Asia during the first Abe Cabinet, the recent military emergence of China is apparently prompting the United States to avoid any excessive stimulation of China.

"For the United States, it would be a nightmare to be dragged into a quagmire of the conflict between Japan and China," said a source in the Japanese government.

While some government officials say there is no need for policy coordination with the New Komeito "as long as the issue is only being discussed," according to an aide to the prime minister, the party's cooperation is imperative for the ruling coalition to win a majority of seats in the upper house election. During the Feb. 8 panel meeting, no schedules for future discussions were presented, indicating the difficulty for the panel to deepen discussions on the collective self-defense issue ahead of the upper house poll.

"I believe the discussions will be prolonged," said Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga at a press conference on Feb. 8.

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<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130209p2a00m0na008000c.html>

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### **Abe eyes study of pre-emptive strikes**

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has suggested that his administration may study the option of pre-emptive strikes on enemy bases such as ballistic missile sites.

At a Tuesday session of the Lower House Budget Committee, Abe said that with the international situation changing fast, Japan should consider various options in terms protecting its citizens.

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<http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/02/14/national/abe-eyes-study-of-pre-emptive-strikes/#.URwZsPIrHhc>

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