

# Japan Prime Minister seeks equality in Japan-U.S. relationship through collective self-defense

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## Contents

- [Determined Abe seeks equality](#)
- [Abe advocates 'active' pacifis](#)
- [51% opposed to Abe's move \(...\)](#)

## **Determined Abe seeks equality in Japan-U.S. relationship through collective self-defense**

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on Sept. 17 expressed his desire to have the government change its interpretation of the nation's pacifist Constitution to allow Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense.

"However the Constitution is interpreted, it must not result in sacrificing the existence of the people or the nation," Abe said during a meeting of the government's Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security on Sept. 17.

At an earlier meeting with top Self-Defense Force (SDF) officials at the Ministry of Defense on Sept. 12, Abe had stated, "We must not adopt a public stance that is out of touch with reality, and end up forcing the burden upon members of the SDF." The remark hinted that he was prepared to alter the government's interpretation of the Constitution. But it is unclear what "a public stance that is out of touch with reality" actually refers to. One official from Abe's ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) commented, "I don't really understand what the prime minister hopes to achieve by altering the stance on the right to collective self-defense."

One possible reason for changing the interpretation is to provide military support to the U.S. as an ally, but there are many SDF officials who believe that this can be achieved without exercising the right of collective self-defense.

When an SDF vessel is protecting a U.S. military vessel near Japan, for example, it is highly possible that Japan would invoke the right to individual self-defense without making a judgment on which side was under attack. And when participating in joint strategies and training, it would be possible in legal terms for Japan to assist a U.S. military vessel if it applied article 95 of the Self-Defense Forces Law, which covers the use of weapons for guarding weapons, according to one SDF official.

Furthermore, there is a deep-rooted belief that Japan can intercept missiles. For example, if North Korea were to fire a missile at a target in Guam and the missile passed through Japanese airspace, then Japan could intercept it on the grounds that something could go wrong and it could fall on

Japan.

"There's nothing that would put us in a fix right away if we were not able to exercise the right of collective self-defense," commented one SDF official. "To tell the truth, there aren't many concrete details (in Abe's move)."

Kyoji Yanagisawa, who served as assistant chief Cabinet secretary under the first Abe administration, called for a more thorough explanation.

"Why make the change? If it's not simply an abstract feeling of the prime minister, then he has to give an explanation with more concrete information," Yanagisawa said.

In April 2007, during Abe's first term as prime minister, Yanagisawa, who was in charge of security, was called into the prime minister's office, whereupon Abe told him, "We will start considering the right of collective self-defense, and so we are going to create a panel of experts." Abe was referring to the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, which was recently restarted under the second Abe Cabinet. The panel is presided over by Shunji Yanai, a former ambassador to the United States.

At that stage the prime minister had practically finished the task of selecting panel members, and the specific topics for discussion had been decided. Yanagisawa questioned the need to allow collective self-defense, pointing out that "protecting U.S. military vessels became possible under the (former) Nakasone administration in an emergency situation for Japan." On the issue of missiles, he added, "It's physically impossible (for the SDF) to bring down missiles heading for the United States." However, Abe brushed these points aside, saying, "No, we're still going to go through with it."

Panel meetings commenced with a determined conclusion already in sight, but Abe suffered a bitter defeat in the House of Councillors election that took place in the summer of 2007, and he stepped down as prime minister before receiving the panel's report. In February this year he convened the panel again and made a show of finally accepting the report. "It was very painful for me not being able to receive the conclusion into which everyone's wisdom was instilled," he said.

Now, Abe is making references to changes in the security environment in East Asia. Chinese government vessels have frequently intruded into Japanese territorial waters around the Senkaku Islands that are a part of Okinawa Prefecture, and North Korea is developing nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. At the same time, U.S. military presence is weakening relatively due to the emergence of China.

Hidetsugu Yagi, a professor at Takasaki City University of Economics who is close to Abe, says the prime minister is interested in boosting equality in Japan's relationship with the United States.

"As opposed to a relationship in which Japan is a subordinate to the United States, he is interested in strengthening the alliance by boosting bilaterality and establishing an equal relationship," Yagi said. "Abe's grandfather, (former) Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, reformed the former Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, which was one-sided, into a treaty with greater equality. If you put Abe against that backdrop, it's easy to understand things."

Yagi says that Abe wants to eliminate the one-sidedness of the current treaty in which the U.S. military protects Japan, but Japan does not have to protect the U.S. military.

In January 2004, when Abe was secretary-general of the LDP, he brought up comments that Kishi made to the Diet as prime minister in 1960, saying, "He said that possession of peripheral rather

than core aspects of the right of collective self-defense is not something denied by the Japanese Constitution.” Abe underscored the fact that the Kishi administration viewed the provision of U.S. bases in Japan as a “peripheral aspect” of collective self-defense and that it therefore permitted the right to collective self-defense.

It is believed Abe holds the opinion that to boost equality, Japan must be allowed to exercise the right to collective self-defense. Masamori Sase, a member of the government’s advisory panel and a professor emeritus at the National Defense Academy of Japan, commented, “The prime minister probably wants to change the interpretation that the Constitution does not permit Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense. The security panel will comprehensively permit the right of collective self-defense.”

However, if Japan’s exercising of the right to collective self-defense is permitted, then problems will arise over whether it is acceptable to leave the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty as it stands, according to one Defense Ministry official. Article 5 of the treaty states, “Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes.” If Japan were to allow collective self-defense, then it would be assumed this would not be restricted to “territories under the administration of Japan” but also include situations in which the SDF members were protecting the U.S. military. Accordingly, revision of the stipulation in the treaty would likely emerge as an issue.

Japan has allowed the U.S. to retain large military bases in Japan in exchange for having the U.S. military defend Japan if the need ever arises. If equality in the relationship is boosted, it could possibly result in a drastic review of the state of U.S. military bases in Japan and the lopsided funding or “appreciation payment” that Japan shoulders to host U.S. bases — above and beyond the stipulations of the security treaty.

\* *Mainichi Shimbun*, September 18, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130918p2a00m0na022000c.html>

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### **Abe advocates 'active' pacifism in Japan's security strategy**

TOKYO (Kyodo) — Prime Minister Shinzo Abe said Thursday Japan should take a more active approach to ensuring global peace and stability given the changing security environment, such as the rise of China and North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile development.

Speaking at an inaugural meeting of experts tasked with drawing up Japan’s first national security strategy, Abe said his administration “aims to increase Japan’s engagement in safeguarding the world’s peace and stability in order to pursue an active pacifism based on international cooperation.”

“We need to have a more integrated national security policy,” Abe said, calling for the government to be “strategic and systematic” in addressing security issues.

A panel of experts in foreign and defense affairs, led by Shinichi Kitaoka, president of the International University of Japan, will discuss an array of security issues before the government

formulates its security strategy by the end of the year, around the same time as the Defense Ministry releases new defense program guidelines.

Among other issues, the panel will discuss the future of the U.S.-Japan alliance, a cornerstone of Tokyo's security policy, and implications of exercising the right of collective self-defense for Japan's broader security engagements, according to Kitaoka.

"It is extremely important to show our country's security policy in a more proactive and effective manner both at home and abroad," Kitaoka told journalists after the meeting.

"We need to ask ourselves whether we can maintain peace in the world just because Japan, the world's third-largest economy, looks inward and maintains that we won't possess military strength," he said.

Along with Abe, Deputy Prime Minister Taro Aso, Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida and Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera attended the meeting at the prime minister's office.

Security concerns posed by China and North Korea have prompted Abe, since he took office last December, to order a review of Japan's defense posture to cope with the changing regional security environment.

Abe has also revived another government panel to study whether to enable Japan to exercise the right of collective self-defense, or coming to the aid of an ally under armed attack, with its final report due out by year-end. Kitaoka also sits on that panel.

The current interpretation of the pacifist Constitution does not permit Japan to use the right on the grounds that doing so would violate Article 9, which forbids the use of force to settle international disputes.

To coordinate Japan's response to security threats, the government is now seeking to pass a bill to establish a Japanese version of the U.S. National Security Council, and the new national security strategy will be used as the basis.

Under Abe, the Defense Ministry aims to strengthen the ability of the Self-Defense Forces to protect remote islands, namely the Senkaku Islands, a group of uninhabited islets in the East China Sea administered by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan.

"Defense capabilities should reflect a country's will and ability to protect its peace and independence," Abe told Thursday's meeting. "So we need to acquire defense capabilities that will allow the SDF to play the role that is required of them as we review the defense program guidelines."

The purchase last September of three of the five Senkaku Islands from a private Japanese owner raised the hackles of China, which has continued to send patrol ships and planes to areas around the islets.

Even as Abe aims to change Japan's defense posture, his Liberal Democratic Party must win the support of its coalition partner New Komeito party, which has remained cautious about altering the interpretation of the Constitution.

Calling for "careful" discussions about the right of collective self-defense, New Komeito leader Natsuo Yamaguchi said the ruling bloc shares the view that they must gain public support first.

"We haven't gained public support yet," Yamaguchi told reporters in Washington after meeting with U.S. government officials. "It will be necessary to have careful and deep discussions about it from various angles."

**Kyodo News**, September 13, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130913p2g00m0dm038000c.html>

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## **51% opposed to Abe's move to invoke collective self-defense right: Mainichi poll**

Despite Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's avowed objective of enabling Japan to exercise the right to collective self-defense, 51 percent of respondents to a fresh poll by the Mainichi Shimbun are opposed to it, compared with 36 percent in favor.

Thirty-five percent of those responding to the Mainichi Shimbun poll, which was taken July 27 and 28, identified economic recovery as the top domestic priority issue they felt that Abe should tackle — revealing that the economy is a leading concern of the Japanese public. Only 3 percent singled out constitutional revision as the top priority for the Japanese leader.

During a news conference held in Manila on July 27, Prime Minister Abe reiterated his resolve to proceed with a study on the matter of collective self-defense. This doctrine holds that a country can exercise the right to use armed force against an aggressor, in cases where an ally or an extremely friendly country comes under attack.

In the Mainichi poll, 43 percent of supporters of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) were in favor of exercising this right, while 45 percent were against it. Among supporters of the LDP's coalition partner New Komeito, 45 percent were against it, and 35 percent were in favor.

As for the war-renouncing Article 9 of the postwar Constitution, 36 percent recommended amending the article to stipulate the role and limits of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), while 20 percent were in favor of upgrading the SDF to a national defense force similar to that of other countries. This revealed a combined total of 56 percent who supported amending Article 9, against 34 percent who were opposed to revising it.

Among the proponents of amending Article 9, respondents seeking to stipulate the SDF's role and limits outnumbered those who proposed changing the SDF to a national defense force. This reflected the public's cautious attitude toward an expansion of the SDF's role, at the same time as they recognized its existence. The LDP, of which Abe is president, has proposed the establishment of a national defense force as part of a constitutional revision draft. The New Komeito has also referred separately to the possibility of clarifying the SDF's role.

While economic recovery is the top priority for the public, the Mainichi poll revealed that 16 percent of respondents identified their greatest concern as social security, 14 percent as fiscal reconstruction, 13 percent as recovery from the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, and 10 percent as nuclear power and energy policy. Only 5 percent mentioned education, while a mere 3 percent indicated constitutional revision as a top domestic challenge for Abe.

Respondents were almost equally divided over Abe's summit talks with Chinese and South Korean leaders, with 47 percent in favor of such summit meetings at an early date, while 45 percent were against sticking to any specific schedule.

According to the latest Mainichi poll, 55 percent approved of the Abe Cabinet, while 25 percent disapproved of it — both unchanged figures since the previous survey in June. By party, 35 percent supported the LDP, 7 percent backed the Japan Restoration Party, 5 percent each favored the Democratic Party of Japan and New Komeito, and 4 percent picked Your Party.

*Mainichi Shimbun*, July 29, 2013

<http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20130729p2a00m0na011000c.html>

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