

***Into the Grey Zone:
Ethical Implications of Foreign Deployment of Japan's Security Forces***

Craig Mark, Kyoritsu Women's University, Japan

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Abstract

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe passed bills in the Japanese Diet in 2015 which reinterpreted Article 9 of the 1947 Constitution; this allows the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to participate in collective self-defence. Since then, the SDF can potentially engage in conventional military operations with allied forces, but other aspects of the legislation also consider possible SDF engagement in 'grey zone' operations. The scenario for such operations originally envisioned the SDF responding to or deterring occupation of Japanese-administered islands by hostile foreign paramilitary forces. This shift in security policy, accompanied by annual increases in defence spending, demonstrates how the Abe government has sought to address the complex security environment of the 21st century, where operations short of war have become the prevalent form of armed confrontation. This aims to strengthen Japan's own territorial integrity, but Japanese security policy has also been pursued further afield. The SDF and Japanese Coast Guard has actively deployed throughout the greater Indo-Pacific, training with regional security forces, and participating in multi-national anti-piracy patrols in the Indian Ocean. Amid the escalation of tensions between Iran and the erratic Trump Administration, the SDF is now indirectly part of a coalition of U.S.-led maritime surveillance patrols around the strategic Strait of Hormuz. However, this risks the SDF being drawn into a 'grey zone' conflict in the Persian Gulf, an ethical hazard where Japan risks following its American ally into a military operation of dubious status under international and constitutional law.

Keywords: Japanese Self-Defense Force, Foreign Policy, International Law

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Introduction

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe revamped Japanese foreign and defence policy in 2015, when it passed legislation to allow the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to participate in collective self-defence with the military forces of other countries. Abe's government promoted these laws as enabling a policy of 'Proactive Pacifism'. Overseas deployment of the SDF still remains under the general constraint of the 1947 constitution, but the Abe government's recent policies are pushing up against these boundaries.

A recent deployment to the Middle East therefore marks a significant shift in the role of the SDF since its formation in the wake of Japan's defeat in the Second World War, and subsequent post-war occupation. International security scholars have been paying more attention to forms of covert military action, often referred to as 'hybrid' as well as 'grey zone' warfare, which is arguably becoming a more prevalent practice in the 21st century. Engaging in unconventional military operations, which are combined with political subversion and propaganda campaigns, allows states to pursue strategic objectives through plausibly deniable proxy forces (Cormac and Aldrich, 2018, 477,493). A major challenge for the SDF as it becomes more internationally engaged, is whether it can effectively respond to such potential threats, both in the East China Sea, and the Persian Gulf.

The Background for SDF Operations Overseas

Article 9 of the U.S.-drafted constitution renounces war, and forbids maintenance of military forces (PMoJ&C, 2020). However, the onset of the Korean War in 1950 led to the formation of the National Police Reserve, to reinforce Japan's internal security. At the end of the American occupation in 1952, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed, and later updated in 1960, to ensure Japan's external defence (Dower, 1999, 547-552).

To reinforce the U.S. armed forces based in Japan, who remain to this day, in 1954 the Police Reserve was upgraded into the SDF. As part of America's Cold War alliance system to deter the Soviet Union in the Pacific, the SDF was steadily built up, as Japan's post-war economy eventually boomed into the second largest in the world by the 1970s. After the end of the Cold War, the SDF continued to increase its strength, giving Japan the seventh-most powerful military capability in the Asia-Pacific region; the SDF presently has over 260,000 personnel, backed up by around 50,000 U.S. military forces (Lemahieu, 2019, 8).

The LDP government of Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu proposed to send the SDF to support its American ally, when the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) authorised a U.S.-led international military coalition to liberate Kuwait from its invasion by Iraq in the 1990-1991 Persian Gulf War. However, a proposed bill to authorise this was opposed by strong majorities in opinion polls and the Diet, even by many LDP members. Over \$13 billion was provided to help finance the war instead, but the Kaifu government still felt pressured to make a military contribution to the alliance (Nakanishi, 2011).

However, once the main hostilities were concluded, following the mandate of UNSC resolutions, a law was successfully passed in the Diet to authorise Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) minesweepers to be despatched on rotation to the Persian Gulf, to assist in re-opening shipping lanes. Since Japan was, and remains highly energy dependent on crude oil supplied from the Middle East, this was promoted as serving multiple benefits: it protected Japan's national security; it contributed to the stability of the international community; and it reinforced the U.S. alliance, through an active, practical commitment by the SDF. This 1991 mission was therefore an important precedent for Japan to draw on in later decades (Dreyer, 2016, 295).

The SDF in UNPKOs & Disaster Relief

Since the Persian Gulf minesweeping mission seemingly had no adverse consequences, the next LDP government under Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, was encouraged to have Japan join United Nations peacekeeping operations (UNPKOs) for the first time. In June 1992, the International Peace Cooperation Act was passed in the Diet, which allowed the SDF to participate in UNPKOs, under strict conditions. Personnel were limited to serve in non-combat roles, such as logistics, reconstruction, medical support, administration, and truce observation; use of weapons was for self-protection only (Hatakeyama, 2018, 154-155).

Beginning in Cambodia in 1992-1993, the SDF has participated in ten UNPKOs, with over 10,000 personnel having served. These have included deployments as diverse as the Golan Heights (1996-2013), East Timor (1999-2004), and Haiti (2010-2013) (MoFA, 2015). The most recent deployment to South Sudan, which commenced in 2012, was withdrawn in 2017, although small numbers of SDF officers remain at UNPKO headquarters in the South Sudan and the Sinai. Maintaining these rather tokenistic efforts allows the current LDP government of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to maintain that Japan still contributes significantly to the UN. However, in effect the era of deployments to UNPKOs by whole units of the SDF has been brought to an end, allowing their availability for other purposes instead (Smith, 2019, 65).

The other major overseas deployments conducted by the SDF since the 1990s has been for emergency disaster relief operations to a range of disasters in the region and beyond, particularly in the wake of earthquakes, tsunamis and typhoons. These have included missions to Pakistan, China, Myanmar, Indonesia, and Nepal. The largest ever overseas deployment of the SDF was to the Philippines in 2013, in response to Typhoon Haiyan; around 1,200 personnel, and three vessels including the helicopter carrier *JS Ise* were sent. The largest mobilization ever conducted in the SDF's history was in response to the domestic crisis of the Tohoku disaster of March 11, 2011 (Ordaniel, 2013).

SDF Deployments to the Middle East

While UNPKOs and humanitarian relief operations have been widely considered to be a legitimate and ethically appropriate use of the SDF by Japan, two overseas missions during the 2000s were more controversial, as they were related to the U.S.-led 'War on Terror', following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. The LDP government of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law to allow the SDF to provide logistic support to U.S. forces, following

their invasion and occupation of Afghanistan. From October 2001 until January 2010, MSDF vessels provided logistic support for U.S. Navy warships in the Indian Ocean (Hatakeyama, 2018, 158-159).

Another indirect support mission for the U.S. occupation of Iraq, after its invasion in March 2003, was authorised by the Humanitarian Relief and Iraqi Reconstruction Special Measures Law, passed in December 2003. Defying public opinion, Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) engineers were deployed from 2004 until 2007, to assist in reconstruction projects in the relatively more stable southern provinces of Iraq, where they received additional protection from other allied forces, including infantry units of the Australian Defence Force (ADF). Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) transport aircraft also flew logistic support missions into Iraq. These SDF units came under occasional sporadic attacks from militant forces, but there were no fatalities (Ishibashi, 2007, 768-789). Given the unpopularity of the Iraq War, the cooperation with a mutual U.S. ally such as Australia provided diplomatic cover for the SDF's participation in another U.S.-led multi-national coalition to primarily pursue American strategic interests.

The Abe Doctrine

When Shinzo Abe returned for a second premiership in December 2012, leading the LDP to victory after a three-year spell in opposition, he was determined to raise the status of the SDF, and use it to pursue a more active role for Japan in international affairs in general. This policy was termed 'Proactive Pacifism', called the 'Abe Doctrine' by some scholars. In 2013, the Abe government adopted its National Security Strategy (NSS), to promote the policy of making a 'proactive contribution to peace', by building up Japan's deterrence capability through annual increases to defence spending, strengthening the US alliance, and promoting regional diplomacy. The NSS established the National Security Council (NSC), to facilitate a rapid response to emergency threats and crises, following the example of the American NSC. The NSC has been occasionally activated, principally following missile tests by North Korea (Envall, 2020, 42-46).

The Specially Designated Secrets bill was also passed in December 2013, which aimed to provide greater protection for information sharing and cooperation with intelligence agencies of allied countries. However, journalists, lawyers and scholars were concerned that this new law would punish whistleblowing public servants, further muzzle the media, suppress public dissent, and erode the transparency and accountability of government overall (Neary, 2019, 178).

Another dispatch of the SDF to a coalition security mission commenced in 2013. Japan has made an ongoing contribution to the multinational naval and air standing patrol maintained off the Horn of Africa, authorised by the UNSC in 2009 to protect commercial shipping from Somali-based pirate attacks. There have been rotating deployments of at least one MSDF vessel to the 11-member Combined Task Force 151 (CTF151), supported by maritime patrol aircraft of the ASDF, based in Djibouti. This SDF support base, part of a military complex which also hosts forces from the USA, France and China, was the first overseas Japanese base maintained since the Second World War (MoD, 2016, 339-343). The ability and commitment to maintain a continuous, rotating naval and air patrol in the western Indian Ocean would also

provide an important precedent for overseas operations for the SDF.

The SDF and Collective Self-Defence

In July 2014, the Abe Cabinet reinterpreted the constitution, to allow Japan to engage in collective self-defence with its allies and friendly countries. As well as supporting allies under attack, and participating in PKOs, the decision specifically referred to 'grey zone' situations, such as infiltration of Japanese waters by hostile submarines, and seizure of Japanese islands by armed groups (Mark, 2014). This was an inference to potential threats to the Senkaku Islands from Chinese paramilitary maritime units (sometimes referred to as 'little blue men'), such as the People's Armed Forces Maritime Militia (Grossman & Ma, 2020). Such contingencies cannot not be adequately dealt with by the police or Coast Guard, so allowing greater scope for operations by the SDF was therefore required.

The introduction of bills to formally implement the reinterpretation of the constitution sparked the most bitterly contested debates seen in the Diet for a generation, with rowdy confrontations during proceedings. Despite majorities in public opinion polls consistently showing a lack of support for the bills, and large-scale public protests led by student groups, this failed to dissuade the Abe government from utilising its comfortable majorities in both houses of the Diet to pass the legislation in September 2015 (Borah, 2015).

These were the International Peace Support Bill, and the Peace and Security Legislation Consolidation Bill, which amended ten existing laws. The SDF was now authorised to come to the aid of other countries enforcing peace and stability, including protection of personnel and shipping, and logistic support. International SDF operations was henceforth lawful for a range of scenarios, ranging from PKOs, to 'grey zone' situations short of direct combat. Significantly, Abe denied that the SDF would be deployed to support U.S. wars in the Middle East (Mark, 2016, 80, 102-103). While the Abe government insisted that Japan exercising its rights to collective self-defence was permitted under Article 51 of the UN Charter, opposition party politicians, lawyers and scholars have argued that such overseas deployment of the SDF risks engagement in foreign wars, and is thus unconstitutional (Kingston, 2019, 78-79).

Prime Minister Abe remained determined though to proceed with a more assertive strategic direction for Japan. At the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD VI) held in Nairobi in August 2016, he announced the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) concept, which incorporated the promotion of maritime security and freedom of navigation in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Cooperation with security partners such as the U.S, Australia, India, and the ASEAN states would therefore be more enabled by the collective self-defence laws. This would allow the FOIP vision to be pursued, implicitly against any incursions by potential geostrategic rivals such as China, and its competing 'Belt and Road' infrastructure investment initiative (Koga, 2020, 49, 63-70).

The law exercising collective self-defence was not invoked until May 2017, although only in a tokenistic fashion, when the MSDF assigned its largest warship, the carrier *JS Izumo* to escort a U.S. Navy supply ship for a short route along Japan's coastal

waters, supposedly to protect against threats made by North Korea. Even though there was no actual danger to defend against during this routine logistic journey, this escort mission demonstrated the right of Japan to deploy the SDF to support the U.S. military was now in practical effect (Wingfield-Hayes, 2017). It was also a clear diplomatic signal promoting the value of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which has frequently been brought into question by the transactionally-minded President Donald Trump (Chanlett-Avery et al, 2019, 4-5).

The Abe government has annually increased Japan's defence spending since 2012, to a record ¥5.32 trillion for FY2020. Much of this increase is going towards the purchase of new American weapons and equipment, which has the benefit of appeasing President Trump; these acquisitions include the F-35B Joint Strike Fighter, which will be carried on the adapted *Izumo* class of carriers, and the 'Aegis Ashore' ground-based anti-ballistic missile system (Kusumoto, 2019). Domestic weapons production has also expanded, such as research and development of the sixth-generation Mitsubishi F-3 stealth fighter aircraft (Roblin, 2020). As well as supplying the SDF, the Abe government has actively promoted a Japanese arms export industry, although it remains fairly uncompetitive at this nascent stage. Cabinet has also approved the acquisition of cruise missiles, and medium-range hypersonic anti-ship missiles are planned for deployment from 2026 (Zhen, 2020).

The more robust posture of the SDF was also signalled by the formal activation of the Amphibious Rapid Deployment Brigade (ARDB) in April 2018. An upgrade of its predecessor, the Western Army Infantry Regiment formed in 2002, the ARDB is specifically dedicated to defend, and seize back Japanese-controlled islands from hostile forces. It is clearly a deterrent against any territorial claims on the Senkaku Islands, claimed by China as the Diaoyu Islands (Woody, 2018).

The Iranian/Persian Gulf Crisis

An international crisis then led to the Abe government launching an additional overseas deployment of the SDF. In May 2018, the Trump administration withdrew the US from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), the multinational agreement secured by the Obama administration in July 2015 to limit Iran's production of potentially weapons-grade nuclear materials, and ramped up sanctions against Iran (Koh, 2019, 61-65).

The diplomatic hostility between America and Iran then sharply escalated after May 12, 2019, when four commercial ships anchored off the port of Fujairah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) were damaged by limpet mines, including one Norwegian and two Saudi Arabian oil tankers. U.S. military investigators blamed Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Navy (IRGCN) or its proxies for the sabotage. After a rocket attack near the U.S. embassy in Baghdad a week later, President Trump ordered an extra 1,500 troops to the Gulf region, plus more reconnaissance and fighter aircraft, the first steps of a major reinforcement to the around 60,000 U.S. troops already stationed in the Middle East (Ingber, 2019).

Amid these rising tensions, while Prime Minister Abe was on an official visit to Iran, on June 13 the oil tanker *Kokuka Courageous*, owned by the Japanese shipping company Kokuka Sangyo Corporation, was one of two oil tankers to suffer a

mysterious attack in the Gulf of Oman, heading out of the Strait of Hormuz.¹ Explosions on both ships led to both catching fire; the crews evacuated, and were later rescued by a U.S. Navy warship and Dutch and South Korean merchant vessels. The damaged tankers were later recovered and towed to the UAE for repair (Gale, 2019). US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo immediately claimed Iran was also responsible for this attack, and the U.S. military released footage which it claimed showed patrol boats from the IRGCN removing unexploded limpet mines from the *Kokuka Courageous*. The president of Kokuka Sangyo Co. stated at a Tokyo press conference that the Filipino crew members of the Panamanian-flagged *Kokuka Courageous* claimed the ship was not mined, but had been struck by a flying object ('Flying object' attacked Japanese tanker', 2019).

Abe's two-day trip to Iran, the first by a Japanese Prime Minister in 41 years, also had the purpose of delivering a message from President Trump to Supreme Leader Ali Khameni, an overture that was rejected. Despite being the closest American military ally in Asia, Japan had maintained fairly cordial relations with Iran, as a major customer of its oil, until the tightening of sanctions imposed by Trump. It can only be speculated as to whether a Japanese-owned tanker was chosen for attack, as punishment for complying with the U.S.-led sanctions. Significantly, Abe denounced the attack on the tankers, but did not direct any blame towards Iran, to preserve the state of Japan's relations with the Islamic Republic (Sharafedin, 2019).

Operation Sentinel/the IMSC

U.S. allies would have been in no doubt about the potential danger and volatility of involvement in the geopolitics of the Middle East, as tensions continued to escalate. On June 20, a U.S. Navy MQ-4C high-altitude surveillance drone was shot down by Iranian air defences, near the location of the previous week's tanker attacks in the Gulf of Oman. Iran claimed the drone was within its territorial limits, near its coastline; the U.S. maintained it was within international waters. A retaliatory U.S. airstrike against Iranian targets was called off the next day with only ten minutes to spare, as revealed by President Trump in one of his Twitter posts, since he considered the estimated death toll would be disproportionate (Law, 2019).

On July 19, the Trump administration instead announced formation of a multinational naval task force, designated Operation Sentinel, run by US Central Command (CENTCOM) to protect international shipping from 'malign activity' in the Persian Gulf. 500 U.S. troops were also approved by the Pentagon for deployment to Saudi Arabia, returning American ground combat forces to the kingdom after over a decade ('U.S. to send troops to Saudi', 2019). The United Kingdom announced it would join Operation Sentinel on August 5, and deployed three Royal Navy frigates by the end of the month. Australia also gave its commitment on August 21 of a Royal Australian Navy frigate, and a Royal Australian Air Force maritime patrol aircraft, and Israel offered intelligence support. Bahrain also joined, and became host of the headquarters for the task force, which was renamed the International Maritime Security Construct (IMSC), on September 16. Saudi Arabia and the UAE then joined, followed by Albania, Kuwait, and Qatar in November, with operations commencing from

¹ Kokuka Sangyo Corporation is an affiliated supplier of the Mitsubishi Gas Chemical Company; the other tanker was the Norwegian-owned *Front Altair*.

November 7 ('US-led coalition launches', 2019).²

The SDF Redeploys to the Middle East

Although Japan was invited to join the IMSC, on October 19, Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga announced that instead, the SDF would deploy its own new mission to "ensure the safety of vessels related to Japan". The first long-term foreign intelligence gathering mission of this type for the SDF, this separate deployment would still "cooperate closely" with the U.S. (Kelly, 2019). The legal argument for both the IMSC and the Japanese mission to uphold and enforce the international right of freedom of navigation is codified in Article 87 (1)a of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The right to collective self-defence, under the UN Charter, is also another legal basis. However, the UNCLOS also calls on countries to peacefully resolve disputes, and unlike for CTF151 and the SDF's UNPKO missions, there has not been any authorisation from the UN Security Council for the IMSC and the SDF's latest deployment (Lee & Zou, 2019, 178).

On December 27, the Abe Cabinet approved the dispatch of an MSDF destroyer and two maritime patrol aircraft, for the first of three four-month rotating tours, with the possibility of extending the mission for another year. The scope of operations was set for the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, and the el-Mandeb Strait between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, but not in the Strait of Hormuz, or further west into the Persian Gulf. If there were any emergencies, the Defense Minister would authorise use of weapons to protect any vessels in danger ('Japan to deploy warship', 2019).

Inauspiciously, on the same day a U.S. military contractor was killed, and four U.S. soldiers injured, among the casualties of a rocket attack on an air base at Kirkuk in Iraq. Blaming the Iranian-linked militia *Kata'ib Hezbollah* (KH) for the attack, which denied responsibility, American forces launched retaliatory airstrikes on KH bases in Iraq and Syria, which killed 25 and wounded 55. Officially part of the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) of the Iraqi Armed Forces, a crowd of PMF supporters breached the compound of the U.S. embassy in Baghdad on December 31 (Borger, 2020).

The new year saw an even more dire escalation, when on the night of January 2/3, 2020, President Trump authorised a drone strike near Baghdad International Airport, which killed Major General Qasem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC Quds Force, and several other senior IRGC and PMF personnel (Herman, 2020). The U.S. military build-up also continued, with 3,500 soldiers from the 1st Brigade of the 82nd Airborne Division sent to Kuwait (Martinez, 2020).³ Iran retaliated on January 8 with its own dramatic escalation, launching a ballistic missile attack on the Al-Asad airbase in Iraq, which hosted U.S. forces. There were no fatalities, but the Pentagon admitted the week after that at least 11 U.S. troops had suffered concussive injuries; it was then admitted a month later that 109 had actually suffered traumatic brain injuries. Trump ruled out another immediate military response, but imposed further sanction on Iran ('Pentagon confirms 109 US troops', 2020).

² Lithuania would join the IMSC in March 2020 (USCENTCOM, 2020).

³ 800 troops from the 82nd Airborne returned to the US from Kuwait in February.

Undeterred by these developments, on January 10, Defense Minister Taro Kono formally ordered the dispatch of the SDF task force, under the authority of the 2006 Defense Ministry Establishment Law, Article 4. This allows for foreign deployment of SDF elements for ‘research and study’ surveillance missions, of which this deployment was the first under the law, which was originally envisioned for protecting the approaches to Japan’s territorial boundaries (‘Japan Defense Chief Orders’, 2020). The two MSDF P-3C aircraft commenced their first patrols out of Djibouti into the Gulf of Aden on January 31, and the MSDF destroyer *JS Takanami* left Japan for its mission on February 2, commencing its four-month patrol from February 26. Responding to opposition questions in the Diet, Abe reiterated that the MSDF mission was not under U.S. command, and would not contribute information towards U.S. military operations, such as interdicting suspicious vessels. However, there would still be communication with the U.S. Navy, as needed, although this distinction was left unclear (‘MSDF to not take part’, 2020).

There have been no hostile incidents involving the SDF’s air and sea patrols at the time of writing, but the global onset of the coronavirus pandemic soon brought the mission under an unexpected threat. Reports of clusters at Yokosuka, the home base of the *Takanami*, raised concerns over the health of MSDF crews, which could jeopardise the ongoing operational capability of the mission (Matsuura, 2020). This anxiety was reinforced by reports that one of the dozen SDF liaison personnel at IMSC headquarters in Bahrain had tested positive for COVID-19 (‘SDF member in Middle East’, 2020).

Even as these momentous developments overshadow the SDF mission, the ongoing tensions between the U.S. and Iran risks any incident triggering wider military action, as occurred in 1987-88 ‘Tanker War’; this culminated in Operation Praying Mantis, a short but intense engagement in April 1988, which disabled half the Iranian Navy’s fleet (Bacevich, 2016, 103-108). On April 15, at least eleven IRGCN ‘swift’ boats circled a patrol of six US warships in the Persian Gulf, a harassment attempt which prompted President Trump to warn the U.S. Navy would ‘shoot down’ any Iranian boats if they repeated such actions. Iran responded with its own threats against U.S. warships if they perceived any provocation (O’Connor, 2020).

Conclusions

The publicly stated motivation by Japan for its latest deployment to the Middle East is ostensibly to secure the economic lifeline of its energy supplies, with up to 90% of Japan’s crude oil imports passing through the Persian Gulf, and to contribute to upholding international peace and security, through its vision of the FOIP. The mission is also an indirect way to support the Trump administration and the U.S. alliance, while simultaneously trying to not overtly antagonize Iran.

From the perspective of domestic Japanese politics, unlike the SDF’s previous deployments, legally approving this latest mission has not required any specific legislation to be passed, nor even any deliberation in the Diet. There was merely a decision of the Cabinet, which is subject to confidentiality. There has been little consideration though of the consequences of sending the SDF into a volatile region, if either its own ships or aircraft, or those of its U.S. ally or other countries’ forces in the IMSC come under attack from Iranian or proxy forces (ICG, 2020).

The decision to undertake such a hazardous prospect without any parliamentary debate, beyond cursory questions in the Diet after the event, thus displays a severe ethical shortcoming for any democracy. The Abe government's security policy has therefore proceeded with little regard for public opinion, and limited means for any oversight and accountability. This is hardly preferable for a situation which places the SDF at substantial risk of becoming involved in an international armed conflict.

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