

***The Suga Doctrine:
Ethical Issues in Contemporary Japanese Foreign and Defence Policy***

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Abstract

In 2016, former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe declared the strategic objective of a 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. This concept has become standard diplomatic rhetoric shared among Japan's partners in the reinvigorated Quad security partnership, concerned with China's rising hegemonic challenge. Under Abe's successor Yoshihide Suga, the ruling conservative Liberal Democratic Party has continued what some scholars have termed the Abe Doctrine, of more active use of the enlarged Self Defense Forces to support the U.S. alliance, and engage with a wider range of military partners, ranging from the Indo-Pacific region, to Europe. One of the final acts of the Abe cabinet in September 2020 was to consider acquisition of cruise missiles, and development of hypersonic missiles. The new Suga cabinet proceeded towards complementary acquisition of more sea-based anti-ballistic missile systems, and ongoing annual record increases to the defence budget. This paper examines how the Abe Doctrine has continued under the Suga government, and how ethical concerns over Japanese foreign and defence policy are being expressed through controversies raised in domestic Japanese politics. These ethical issues include: constitutional change to allow more active deployment of the Self-Defense Forces, developing a first-strike missile capability; and closer military cooperation with the U.S., Australia and India in the revived Quad, as well as with other regional middle powers. Japan is due to hold a general election by October 2021, so foreign and defence policy may yet have a significant electoral influence.

Keywords: Japanese Foreign Policy, Alliance Diplomacy, Public Policy Ethics

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Introduction

In September 2020, the longest-serving Prime Minister of Japan Shinzo Abe resigned, claiming illness. His successor, former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshihide Suga, has since carried on the 'Abe Doctrine'. This has transformed Japan's foreign and defence policies over the previous decade, replacing the long-running postwar Yoshida Doctrine, which strictly limited Japan to self-defence within the constraints of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (Dower, 2000, pp. 395, 552-553). This paper will outline the main features of the Abe Doctrine, and examine how its approaches have been continued by the Suga government, particularly as the United States (U.S.) has made its own domestic political transition from the Trump to the Biden Administration. Ethical challenges presented by the 'Suga Doctrine' will then be critically analysed, concluding with consideration of how the electoral politics of 2021 might influence any policy changes.

1. The Abe Doctrine

1.1. Strengthening the SDF

One of the consistent policies of the conservative nationalist Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) government since it returned to office in 2012, led by Prime Minister Abe, is increased defence spending. Under Abe's record eight-year tenure, the budget for the Ministry of Defense rose each fiscal year. This has been one of the core elements of what has been termed the Abe Doctrine, which aims to: 1) increase the capabilities of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF); 2) deepen the military alliance with the U.S.; and 3) increase diplomatic activity in the Indo-Pacific region, as part of a revamped role for Japan in international affairs (Envall, 2020, pp.31-59).

The Ministry of Defense budget grew from ¥4.65 trillion in 2012, to ¥5.07 trillion in 2020, the eighth largest in the world. The expansion of the SDF's arsenal, outlined in the 2019 National Defense Program Guidelines, includes refitting two aircraft carriers to deploy 42 F-35B strike/fighter aircraft, in addition to the 105 F-35As being purchased from the U.S., plus development of a locally-produced stealth fighter (Kelly, 2020a).

The number of submarines will increase to 22, and extra destroyers and frigates will raise the number of capital ships in the Maritime SDF to around 60 by 2024. The 150,000 strong Ground SDF has expanded its amphibious warfare brigade, and sited air defence and anti-ship missile units in the southern islands of Okinawa prefecture. The SDF is acquiring greater cyberwarfare capabilities, and the Air SDF is activating a space-based operations unit, following the example of the U.S. Space Force (IISS, 2020, 279-283). The 2020 Ministry of Defense White Paper stated China's military activities in the East China Sea are a 'grave matter of concern', so deterring the growing capabilities of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) forces remains Japan's main strategic challenge, with Russia and North Korea the other major security threats (MOD, 2020a).

Anxious over any threat to global shipping lanes, which Japan heavily relies upon, the SDF has participated in a multinational antipiracy mission since 2009, operating from Japan's first postwar overseas bases, hosted in Djibouti. In 2019, the Abe cabinet authorized the dispatch of another MSDF vessel and two more ASDF maritime patrol aircraft to the Middle East, in rotating deployments for intelligence gathering missions off the Strait of Hormuz, in response to rising regional tensions between Iran and the U.S. (Asahi Shimbun, 2020).

As one of the final acts of the Abe cabinet, in September 2020 the National Security Council (NSC) raised the acquisition of cruise missiles, and approved research and development of hypersonic missiles. This would give the SDF capacity to carry out pre-emptive strikes against hostile external forces preparing an imminent attack on Japanese territory, implying the missile threats from China, Russia, and North Korea (Kelly & Takenaka, 2020).

1.2. The U.S. Alliance and the TSD

A core aspect of the Abe Doctrine was strengthening the U.S. alliance, primarily through collective self-defence, possibly the most far-reaching legacy of the Abe government. Following the creation of the U.S.-modelled NSC in 2013, the Abe cabinet ignored objections from many legal scholars, and in 2014 reinterpreted force-restricting Article 9 of the constitution, arguing Japan was within its rights under the UN Charter to come to the defence of other countries. Utilising comfortable majorities in both houses of the Diet, the LDP passed legislation in September 2015 which allowed the SDF to participate in collective self-defence, primarily to assist the U.S., but potentially for other favourably-aligned countries, without geographic restriction (Mark, 2016, 101-104, 113).

Collective self-defence was first invoked in 2017, when SDF vessels accompanied U.S. Navy warships on naval patrols and escort missions (Smith, 2019, 161). Along with promised large-scale purchases of U.S. military equipment and weapons systems, this action helped ameliorate the obstreperous impulses of President Donald Trump, who threatened to extort higher costs on Japan for hosting U.S. military bases (Lind, J, 2018, pp.241-242). One of the major diplomatic achievements of Shinzo Abe was thus his ability to flatter Trump, and defuse his long-held suspicions towards Japan (Mark, 2017).

A parallel development was to deepen the ‘quasi-alliance’ with Australia, part of a hedging strategy to balance against the rise of China. This was enabled through Japan joining Australia and the U.S in the Trilateral Security Dialogue (TSD), aimed at improving security policy coordination, including cooperation between intelligence agencies (Samuels, 2019, 199-201). The first TSD meeting between the U.S., Japan and Australia was held in 2002 at the bureaucratic level; the first ministerial meetings were held in 2006. The first informal TSD leaders’ meeting briefly took place at the sidelines of the 2007 Sydney APEC summit, between Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe (just before he resigned a year into his first term, due to illness) and John Howard, and President George W. Bush (Ashizawa, 2010, 100-101).

The TSD oversaw a steady increase in defence cooperation between the Australian Defence Forces (ADF) and the SDF. This formally commenced in 2007 through the bilateral Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation (JDSC), and the trilateral Security and Defence Cooperation Forum (SDCF). These agreements authorised unit-level exchanges, ship and aircraft visits, and joint trilateral training with the US military. This commenced in 2008, when the SDF first participated in the ADF’s regular *Kakadu* manoeuvres held in northern Australia (MOFA, 2008).

In 2010 an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) was signed, allowing mutual supply and maintenance of defence equipment. A Transfer of Defence Equipment and Technology Agreement was then signed in 2014, and the first formal TSD leaders’ meeting was finally held on the sidelines of the G20 Brisbane Summit in 2014, between Prime Ministers Shinzo Abe and Tony Abbott, and President Barack Obama (Satake, 2017, 3-4).

Australia's 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper by then considered Japan a 'Special Strategic Partner' (DFAT, 2017, 40-41). A ministerial-level meeting of the TSD was held in August 2017, followed by a leaders' summit between Prime Ministers Abe and Malcolm Turnbull and President Trump on the sidelines of the Manila ASEAN summit in November (Reuters, 2017). One outcome of Turnbull's visit to Tokyo in January 2018 was to have the Royal Australian Air Force conduct reconnaissance patrols from SDF air bases in Japan, to enforce sanctions against North Korea (Mark, 2018).

1.3. Indo-Pacific Diplomacy

During his first term in office, in 2007 Prime Minister Abe proposed extending the TSD into a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or the 'Quad', by inviting India's participation, invoking the four countries' cooperative response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The MSDF and Royal Australian Navy joined the *Malabar* Exercises in 2007, the manoeuvres held semi-annually between the U.S. and India since 1992. However, Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd withdrew Australia from the Quad in February 2008, not wishing to alienate China (Medcalf, 2008).

The second Abe government from 2012 still determined to increase the tempo of Japan's diplomacy in the region, and Abe went on to become the most-travelled Prime Minister in Japanese history, visiting all the ASEAN states in his first year back in office. Japan became the leading source of foreign investment and Overseas Development Aid (ODA) for ASEAN, which includes support for maritime security training and operations (Mark, 2016, 62-63, 66).

In Nairobi, Kenya for the 2016 Tokyo International Conference on African Development TICAD summit in August, Abe announced the strategic vision of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) (MOFA, 2016). This led to the re-emergence of the Quad, driven by mutual concerns over the growing hegemonic challenge of China. A foreign ministers' meeting of the Quad first took place in New York in September 2019, and again on the sidelines of the 2019 East Asia Summit in Bangkok in November (Panda, 2019).

2. The Suga Doctrine

2.1. Continued SDF Expansion

One of the first national security decisions of the new Suga cabinet was to explore acquisition of sea-based anti-ballistic missile systems, as the plan for the Aegis Ashore anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system had been abandoned in June 2020, due to domestic opposition. The anticipated sea-based replacement system, based around a larger class of Aegis-equipped destroyer, may blow out to twice the original expected cost of Aegis Ashore, to over US\$4 billion. The deployment of the system is likely to be delayed until 2028, beyond the intended 2025 deadline for Aegis Ashore (Kelly, 2020b).

A Cabinet decision on December 18, 2020 confirmed the reinforcement of ABM defences, which includes upgraded PAC-3 Patriot missile systems. Despite concerns by the LDP's more pacifist-inclined coalition partner Komeito, the Cabinet also approved extension of the range of the SDF's ground-to-ship missiles, to up to 1,000 kilometres (Tsuyoshi, 2020).

The budget for FY2021 passed the Diet in March, with another record deficit of ¥106.61 trillion. This included another record defence budget, of ¥5.34 trillion (Kyodo News, 2021).

¥33.5 billion will be directed towards development of Japanese-manufactured stand-off long range anti-ship missiles, a new class of submarines, and Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) capabilities such as the new P-1 patrol aircraft. More minesweepers and amphibious warfare vessels, as well as the continued acquisition of F-35s, and the expansion of the amphibious warfare brigade will also be priorities (MOD, 2020b, 14-25). One assessment now ranks the SDF as the seventh most powerful military force in Asia (Lemahieu and Leng, 2020).

¥240 billion will also be allocated for research and development of hypersonic missile technology; the Ministry of Defense's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency has contracted Mitsubishi Heavy Industries to have hypersonic cruise missile and hypervelocity gliding projectile models ready to enter production and service by 2026 (Yeo et al, 2021).

2.2. Closer Bilateral Alliances

Under the Suga government, Australia has become only the second nation after the U.S. to have SDF protection provisions under the 2015 collective self-defence legislation. Announced during the visit of former Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds to Tokyo in October 2020 to meet new Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, this declaration intensified the Special Strategic Partnership between Australia and Japan (Teramoto, 2020). Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison was the first world leader to call Suga to congratulate him on becoming Prime Minister, followed up the month after in the first official visit by a world leader to meet Suga as Prime Minister in Japan (PMOA, 2020).

This visit finally confirmed a long-negotiated Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), although the sticking point over ADF personnel being subject to the death penalty if they committed capital crimes in Japan was left unresolved. The RAA nevertheless now allows the ADF to fully utilize bases and facilities in Japan, and the SDF of those in Australia, the only such arrangement Japan now enjoys other than with the U.S. The next stage in the Australian-Japanese security relationship would be a formal military alliance, which China would certainly resent (Mark, 2020).

The primary foreign policy priority of the Suga government remains the U.S. alliance though. Suga was among the first world leaders to hold a call with newly-inaugurated President Joe Biden, which reassured the U.S. commitment to Japanese control of the Senkaku Islands (claimed as the Diaoyu Islands by China), under Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (White House, 2021).

This was reinforced by the first overseas visits of the new Secretaries of State and Defense, Antony Blinken and Lloyd Austin, to Japan and South Korea on March 15-17, for '2+2' summits with their northeast Asian allies. These summits confirmed the renewal of Status of Forces Agreements (SoFA) in both countries, and in Japan, the talks coordinated planning for a joint response by U.S. Indo-Pacific Command forces and the SDF to any Chinese incursions into the Senkakus, and any potential attack by the People's Liberation Army (PLA) against Taiwan (U.S. Department of State, 2021).

A confrontational meeting between chief Chinese and American diplomatic officials, including Secretary Blinken, in Alaska on March 18 further signalled the Biden administration's willingness to confront China. Sanctions were imposed on Chinese officials by the U.S. (but not yet by Japan), over China's genocidal actions in Xinjiang province against its Uighur population, and for crushing democracy in Hong Kong (Qingguo, 2021,

6-7). This diplomatic activity culminated in Prime Minister Suga's visit on April 16 to the U.S., the first foreign leader to be officially hosted by President Biden. Their meeting recommitted the U.S.-Japan alliance as the cornerstone of the FOIP, and referred to Taiwan for the first time in a U.S.-Japan summit since 1969 (NHK, 2021b).

This summit was the fulfilment of the consistent efforts of first the Abe, and then the Suga governments, to secure the U.S. military presence in the region. For several years, Japan has been the highest-spending foreign lobbyist nation in the U.S., followed by South Korea. Japan's recent lobbying efforts have been to encourage the Pentagon to upgrade resources in the Pacific by \$35 billion, via passage of the Indo-Pacific Deterrence Act. As well as encouraging Japanese trade and investment, up to a quarter of Japanese lobbying expenses has gone towards military-related policy (Freeman, 2021).

The PLA Navy has nevertheless continued to assert its presence, with more frequent and larger-scale naval exercises and cruises, including regular deployment of its aircraft carriers closer to Okinawa (Lendon, 2021). While Japanese Ministry of Defense officials are concerned about China's new assertive Coast Guard law, negotiations with their counterparts are ongoing to establish a hotline between the SDF and PLA, to prevent territorial incidents escalating into hostilities (NHK, 2021a).

Japan's strategic difficulty is maintaining smooth relations with China, its largest trading partner, as the Sino-American relationship has become ever frostier (Medcalf, 2020, pp.153-155). This was managed fairly successfully under the Abe government, backed by major factions in the LDP (such as the one led by LDP Secretary-General and powerbroker Toshihiro Nikai), and its coalition partner the Komeito party, which stress the mutual benefits of trade with China; this has largely continued under Suga (Chan, 2021). Upon his return from Washington D.C., Suga was pressed during Diet questions that there was no explicit commitment for the SDF to defend Taiwan (Smith, 2021). It was revealed though that scenarios for the SDF to assist the U.S. in case of a Chinese attack are being explored (Kyodo News, 2021b).

More hawkish LDP members such as Defense Minister Kishi, who strongly back Taiwan, and favour balancing with ASEAN, India and Australia, are pushing a tougher line, with concerns over China reiterated in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' 2021 Diplomatic Bluebook (Qi and Xiaojing, 2021). A panel of LDP Diet members has proposed revising the Japanese Coast Guard Law and the Police Duties Execution Act, to allow greater action by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG) to deal with grey zone scenarios; other LDP politicians and the JCG itself maintain current laws already allow the JCG to respond with force against illegal landings on Japanese islands, with backup from the SDF if required (AMTI, 2021).

2.3. The Deeper Quad

In August 2020, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun opined the Quad could become a 'mini-NATO' in Asia. Pressed for a reaction, incoming Prime Minister Suga denied this was a path Japan intended to follow. Beijing still reacted angrily, claiming the Quad aimed to contain China (Jaipragas and Sukumaran, 2020). As mutual concern about China escalated into 2020, the second foreign ministers' meeting of the Quad was held in Tokyo on October 6. While there was no direct reference to China, all four countries reaffirmed a mutual commitment to the FOIP; this term is now utilized as standard diplomatic

rhetoric by Quad members, but denounced by China as propaganda to justify U.S.-dominated hegemony (Madan, 2020).

Australia then resumed participation in the November 2020 Malabar naval exercises, ending a 13-year hiatus. This finally brought the Quad back into a cooperative military arrangement, if not yet a joint military alliance (Greene, Dziedzic, and Oaten, 2020). The first leaders' summit of the Quad, held online on March 12, 2021, again did not directly mention China, but it was clearly the implied target, as all leaders committed to upholding the FOIP's 'rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas' (PMOJ&C, 2021).

The Suga government is therefore continuing the policies of the Abe government to encourage the Quad, and build security ties with ASEAN and Europe. Suga's first official overseas trips as Prime Minister to Vietnam (as was Abe's in 2013), and then Indonesia, was largely to counter rising Chinese hegemony, even though this was never overtly stated (MOFA, 2020). '2+2' security meetings have now been held with Germany, adding to those already conducted with the UK and France (Yamaguchi, 2021). There is also now a push for Japan to join the Five Eyes intelligence-sharing agreement between the US, UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Mark, 2021b).

3. Ethical Concerns over the Suga Doctrine

3.1. Pushing Constitutional Limits

Chief among the ethical worries about the direction of Japanese security policy is whether the planned acquisition of new weapons systems exceeds the legal restraints of self-defence, imposed by Article 9 of the constitution. Development of long-range cruise missiles, and hypersonic missiles would potentially empower the SDF with an offensive strike capacity for the first time. While a deterrence capacity can be justified as defensive, such weapons can also be unleashed beyond self-defence. Adaptation of the *Izumo*-class carriers to operate F-35B fighter aircraft provides greater air defence capability for the MSDF, but could also conduct offensive airstrike operations (Iida, 2021, pp.12-15).

Shinzo Abe had favoured altering Article 9 to formally mention the SDF, in what would have been the first ever change to the constitution. However, despite having the window of a two-thirds majority in both Houses of the Diet from 2017 to 2019, which could have allowed the passage of bills for a constitutional referendum, Abe squandered this opportunity. His government was consumed instead with economic issues, such as raising the consumption tax, nepotism scandals, and other foreign policy challenges, especially handling relations with the frequently erratic Trump administration (Mark, 2019a).

Abe was also likely deterred by realizing changing Article 9 does not enjoy the widespread public support needed to pass any referendum with a simple majority (Kingston, 2019, p.78). A member of the ultranationalist lobby group *Nippon Kaigi*, as is Abe and most other LDP Diet members, Suga is similarly in favour of constitutional change. This is a long-held ambition of the LDP, which desires numerous liberty-eroding amendments in its preferred draft to the constitution (Boonen and Herber, 2020, pp.10, 15).

However, given the persistently poor approval ratings of the Suga cabinet, which has mishandled the ongoing pandemic with a range of largely reactive and indecisive public health measures, and a series of corruption and influence-peddling scandals, it is unlikely that

Suga, or any successive LDP leaders will dare to attempt constitutional ‘reform’ in the near future (Siripala, 2021). The long-held opposition by the LDP’s coalition partner Komeito to altering Article 9 will also continue to be an important constraint (Neary, 2019, p.180).

3.2. Overriding Concerns of Local Communities

Symbolic of the burden long endured by Okinawa, which has the majority of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ), is the relocation of the main USFJ air base from Futenma to Henoko. The national government in Tokyo has determined it will go ahead, despite the opposition of local communities, and the Okinawan prefectural government (Dudden, 2019, pp.178-181). The estimated cost of the project has nearly tripled to ¥930 billion, and the completion date extended from 2022 into the 2030s. Concerns about soil instability, in addition to the political controversy, have increased doubts that the relocation will ever be completed (Kuniyoshi, 2021).

There are also concerns over the risk of accidents from U.S. military helicopter flights even in central Tokyo (Oba and Uchihashi, 2021). However, the proposed Aegis Ashore ABM system was abandoned after protests by local communities in Akita and Yamaguchi prefectures over safety concerns, which were ineptly handled by government officials. This shows democratic action can lead to policy change, and greater actual security for ordinary people (Unbehauen and Decker, 2020, pp.103-105).

3.3. Escalating the Regional Arms Race

Global military spending reached US\$1917 billion in 2019, and for the first time, two Asian countries were in the top five spending states. China (\$261 billion) and India (\$71 billion) were the second and third largest spenders, after the U.S., followed by Russia and Saudi Arabia. Japan (\$47.6 billion) and South Korea (\$43.9 billion) were the next largest spenders in Asia, where military budgets have increased every year since 1989. Japan’s arms imports have increased by 124% over the past five years (SIPRI, 2020, 240).

To forestall this escalation, a Conventional Forces in Asia (CFA) treaty is sorely required, with particular emphasis on limiting the development of cruise and hypersonic missiles, the weapons likely to initiate a future war in the Indo-Pacific (Reddie, 2020). At present, there seems to be little interest among the region’s leaders, including those of the Japanese government, for any diplomatic effort towards even beginning to seriously discuss arms control. A multilateral CFA treaty could curtail the wasteful and dangerous arms race, and be the badly needed diplomatic circuit breaker that reduces regional tensions (Gatopolous, 2020).

Suga is thus continuing Abe’s strategy to encourage maintenance of American hegemony in the Pacific, through utilizing its regional alliance structure, of which the dominant U.S. military presence in Japan, South Korea, and increasingly Australia is key (Brenes and Steinmetz-Jenkins, 2021). Towards this end, the Suga government also continues to refuse to sign the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, citing its reliance on the nuclear deterrent of its US ally, despite objections from disarmament groups and the aging *hibakusha* survivors of the 1945 atomic bombings (ICAN, 2021).

The hazards of pursuing this policy were reflected in the annual East Asia Strategic Review of the Japanese Ministry of Defense think tank, the National Institute for Defense Studies. It

paid particular attention to a declaration in February 2021 by the PLA's Coast Guard, that it reserves the right to use force against foreign vessels making unauthorized incursions in China's claimed territorial waters, which includes the Senkakus/Diaoyus. The report alarmingly claimed a 'new Cold War' is already under way between the U.S. and China (Kyodo News, 2021a).

3.4. Risk of Middle East Conflict Escalation

The decision by the Suga cabinet to renew SDF deployment to the Middle East, again without referring to a vote in the Diet, shows an ongoing tendency to evade parliamentary accountability. It also displays a lack of regard for the popular sentiment against placing the SDF at risk, in an unstable region. This remains a consistent danger, given the first airstrikes by the Biden administration against Iranian-backed militias in Syria (Barnes-Dacey and Geranmayeh, 2021), and naval incidents in the Persian Gulf (Mitchell, 2021).

Also of concern are ambitions to promote the Japanese arms export industry (Sakaki and Maslow, 2020). Potential clients being sought for Japanese-manufactured weapons systems include Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, despite the role of their military forces in perpetuating the humanitarian disaster of the war in neighbouring Yemen, which has led to arms embargoes by European countries (Lamont, 2020).

3.5. Deeper Ties with Human Rights Violators

Showing how the democratic ideals of the FOIP are readily compromised by *realpolitik*, the Japanese government continues to develop security ties with Indo-Pacific countries that have poor human rights records (Kersten, 2021). Japan has increased its maritime security training with both Vietnam and the Philippines, supplying weapons systems such as coast guard vessels (Jain, 2020). This is despite Vietnam remaining a Communist dictatorship (U.S. Department of State, 2020), and widespread extrajudicial killings perpetuated by the government of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte (Al Jazeera, 2021). Japan also retains close relations with Thailand, despite the ongoing suppression by its military junta of the student-led democracy movement (Strangio, 2021).

While the Chief of the SDF joined 11 other allied Defence Chiefs to condemn the recent military coup in Myanmar, and the mass killing of democracy protesters, the response of the Suga government has otherwise been muted (Gibbons, 2021). Beverages conglomerate Kirin, and other Japanese companies have sought to divest themselves from the military regime. However, a consortium of construction and property management companies and banks, led by the government-owned Japan Overseas Infrastructure Investment (JOIN) firm, and the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation are still investing in a major hotel and office construction project owned by the Myanmar military, in development since 2017. As well as large amounts of ODA, Japan is the fifth-largest foreign investment source for Myanmar, investing over \$1.4 billion since 2016 (Park and Geddie, 2021).

As the relationship of the Quad intensifies, there has been little consideration of the implications of closer security ties with India, such as the ACSA signed in September 2020 (Laskar, 2020). The deterioration of civil rights under the autocratic direction of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist government, including citizenship laws that erode the rights of Muslims (Human Rights Watch, 2021), and violent policing of mass protests by farmers against agricultural deregulation, are of recent concern (Vanaik, 2021).

This is in addition to the geopolitical hazards if the Quad develops into an enmeshed military alliance involving the Indian Defence Forces (IDF); long-running counterinsurgency operations are still conducted against separatists in Kashmir, and the Maoist 'Naxalite' rebel movement (Ganguly, 2021). The IDF also confronts the perennial nuclear standoff against neighbouring Pakistan, and has had recent violent border clashes with China (Tarapore, 2020).

A cross-party group of Diet members is nevertheless seeking to make human rights a priority for Japanese foreign policy. They are lobbying for a bill similar to the U.S. Magnitsky Act, which would allow easier imposition of sanctions against individuals and organizations in oppressive countries, with China a desired target. This is not favoured by the Suga cabinet though, reflecting the contradictions within the government over its China policy, so any such legislation is unlikely to be passed for the time being (Sato and Nikaido, 2021). Instead, the Diet has approved Japan's entry into the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, centred around China (NHK, 2021c)

4. The 2021 Election – Possible Policy Change?

Suga faces an LDP leadership election in September, and the Diet's lower house election must be conducted by October 2021. The upcoming election is likely to be dominated by the government's lacklustre response to the coronavirus, worsening inequality in the sluggish post-pandemic economic recovery, climate change and nuclear safety, and the dubious legacy of the Tokyo Olympics (Mark, 2021a).

Foreign policy is unlikely to be a major focus, unless the opposition parties can promote distinctive policies. When the main opposition Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) was in government, in its previous manifestation as the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the U.S. alliance was also the core of its foreign policy, despite disputes over the development of the Henoko base in Okinawa, which contributed to the downfall of Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama in 2010 (Hook, 2012, p.150).

In reparation for the 2021 election, the CDP has released a revamped policy platform, hoping to avoid the severe election defeat suffered by the DPJ in 2017. Based on issues such as raising economic support for the middle class, promoting gender equality, including for the monarchy, phasing out nuclear power, and transitioning to a zero-emissions economy, it also pledges to repeal the 'unconstitutional part' of the 2015 security laws, and review the 2013 Designated State Secrets Law. The relocation of the Henoko base in Okinawa would be cancelled, and the SOFA renegotiated, while maintaining the deterrence of the US alliance. The JCG would be strengthened, to deal with 'grey zone situations', uphold the rule of international law, and oppose changing the status quo through use of force. The CDP will also work towards global nuclear disarmament (CDP, 2021).

It remains to be seen whether the CDP, currently led by Yukio Edano, can successfully market this new platform to sufficiently appeal to the electorate, and win government.

Any future CDP government is unlikely to reverse the main emphasis of Japanese foreign and defence policy, so any changes are likely to be marginal. A CDP government may at least be more cautious about the deployment of offensive weapons, and sending the SDF overseas. Since the LDP, with Komeito and aligned independents, has a comfortable majority of 311 out of 465 in the lower House of Representatives the Diet, it remains a daunting challenge for

the CDP to win power. The LDP enjoys the benefits of incumbency, a gerrymandered electoral system, and a largely submissive media (Kingston, 2019, pp.150, 174). However, if the opposition can significantly erode this majority, as occurred in the 2019 Upper House election, an electoral rebuke may at least caution the next LDP government against any tendency towards militaristic adventurism (Mark, 2019b).

Conclusion

The foreign and defence policies of any Japanese government are unlikely to depart far from the current path of increased military spending, a reinvigorated U.S. alliance, and closer military ties with the other middle powers of the region. This direction also brings along the potential ethical risks inherent in pursuing these policies, particularly in a time of worsening geopolitical and geoeconomic rivalry. Along with its Quad partners, Japan faces a classic security dilemma with neighbouring Russia, North Korea, and especially China, where any country increasing its military strength engenders an adverse reaction from the others.

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