

The economic superpower can no longer duck an expanded military role in the Pacific, but the controversy is not over.

Japan Steps Up to a Stronger Defense

BY ROBERT S. DUDNEY, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

JAPAN'S military buildup, once dismissed by many as a project doomed to fail, is proving to be a surprising success at a time of mounting problems for Western defense.

When Tokyo unveiled its plan in 1986, numerous analysts wrote it off as unlikely to go very far. Japanese advances, however, are forcing a reassessment of military prospects for the island nation of 123,000,000 citizens.

Impressive strides have been made in overcoming an acute lack of modern arms that has hampered the 245,000-man Japanese Self-Defense Forces. The SDF, though small, will possess some of the world's most advanced aircraft, warships, ground combat weapons, and communications equipment.

Among these systems are F-15 interceptors, Patriot air-defense missiles, AEGIS-equipped destroyers, Yushio-class submarines, new tanks, sophisticated communications, and advanced SX-3 fighters.

Japanese defensive capabilities are growing steadily. The judgment of the Pentagon now is that by 1991, Japan will achieve a minimum force

level required to carry out fundamental defense missions. Previously, Japan fell far short of that goal.

Expanded defense budgets, high-technology prowess, and—until recently—strong domestic political stability all have contributed to the Japanese turnabout on defense.

For the US, Japan's progress is a boon as Washington confronts pressures to cut Pentagon budgets and signs emerge that military efforts will decline sharply in West European nations. Events in Japan shape up as a singularly positive development.

One thing has not changed. US protection, codified in a 1960 defense treaty, remains the bedrock of Japan's security.

Also, Japan's involvement with military power still stirs controversy. Asian neighbors harbor concern about how far Japan may go. In Congress, by contrast, Tokyo is condemned as a piker, free-riding on the back of the United States.

Tokyo's new military effort comes as an addition to a broader Japanese thrust that is expanding its influence. Japan's \$2.5-trillion

The Air Self-Defense Force is essential to protection of Japanese airspace and sea-lanes. Japan performs airborne reconnaissance with a fourteen-plane squadron of RF-4EJ aircraft (right). Japan's air arm, soon to reach a level of 400 aircraft, also boasts of US-designed, Japanese-produced F-15J air-superiority fighters and F-4EJ multirole fighters.



economy has helped make it the world's greatest supplier of capital. Japan is set to become the largest foreign-aid donor. Even on the diplomatic front, Tokyo has begun to make waves.

A "Major Military Power?"

Surveying Tokyo's defense plan, Henry Kissinger declared not long ago that "Japan will emerge as a major military power in the not-too-distant future."

Well, maybe, but the former Secretary of State might have been laying it on a bit thick. Japan has no plans to acquire the long-range strike aircraft, missiles, or offensive naval forces of a conventional great power. Nuclear weapons are proscribed. But Kissinger was right about the determination with which Japan would pursue its modest goals. The 1986-90 Mid-Term Defense Program projected spending of \$132 billion (at prevailing exchange rates in 1987); it has been fully funded in each of its first four years, and the same is virtually certain in 1990. Spending will top \$31 billion in 1989.

With one year left in the MTDP, notes a recent Pentagon report, Japan has now achieved eighty-eight percent of its goal for tanks, eighty-two percent for artillery, eighty-

nine percent for destroyers, eighty percent for submarines, seventy-five percent for interceptors, and 100 percent for transports.

Nowhere is the impact of the Japanese effort more apparent than in the 45,000-strong air force.

The Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF), with 340 front-line combat aircraft, can put aloft more planes than the US has permanently based in the Far East. By the end of 1990, Japan will deploy 400 warplanes in ten interceptor squadrons, three fighter-support squadrons, and other units.

Today, nine squadrons of US-designed, Japanese-built F-15s and F-4Es form the backbone of Japan's air defense interceptor force. In a crisis, the ASDF could call on 130 new F-15DJ jets and another 129 F-4EJ Phantom II planes. These forces are armed with AIM-7 Sparrow III and AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles.

Plans call for Japan to form a tenth full fighter squadron by 1993 with new-production F-15s.

Today, most ASDF missions entail intercepting Soviet fighters and reconnaissance aircraft entering Japanese airspace to the north of the island of Hokkaido. Japan confronts several hundred of these intrusions each year.

In war, Japan's air force would also be charged with providing support to ground and naval forces. The mainstay of the interdiction mission today is the fleet of about seventy-five Japanese-built F-1 fighter-bombers, organized into three squadrons. These are armed with Japan's Type-89 air-to-surface missile and with conventional ordnance.

A World-Class Fighter

The F-1 force is a weakness. Thus, two years ago, the US and Japan announced plans to jointly develop a new support fighter in a project to cost more than \$8.2 billion, based on a projected production run of at least 130 planes. The fighter, known in the US as the FSX and in Japan as the SX-3, is to be based on the General Dynamics F-16, but with heavy infusions of Japanese technology.

Under current plans, a prototype of the SX-3, expected to be one of the world's finest fighters, will fly in 1993. The ASDF will organize a new wing to operate the SX-3. The first squadron will be in place in 1998, with two more to come soon after.

The ASDF is undergoing a modernization program to improve its reconnaissance and early warning capabilities. Today, Japan's reconnaissance mission is based on the fourteen-plane squadron of RF-4EJ planes. The fleet is scheduled to get upgraded reconnaissance packages. The first prototype is to reach operational status next year. ASDF's fleet of eight E-2C Hawkeye airborne early warning craft will expand to ten by 1991.

Japan's navy, the Maritime Self-Defense Force, has come far.

In a crisis, Tokyo would rely on the 44,000 men of the Japanese fleet to keep open critical sea-lanes or to blunt seaborne attack. Five regional naval commands defend specific geographic areas. A high-seas fleet would operate further from home.

Already, the MSDF could go to sea with fourteen attack submarines, fifty destroyers, seventeen frigates, forty-six amphibious craft of various sizes, thirty-seven mine-warfare ships, and fourteen small patrol combatants. The MSDF operates about 100 support, training, and survey ships.

By 1991, Japan plans to reach its goal of deploying sixty destroyers—



The Mitsubishi F-1, a made-in-Japan support fighter, will be replaced by advanced SX-3s in the 1990s. Deliveries of the single-seat, supersonic F-1s began in 1977. Powered by two Rolls-Royce engines, it can carry two air-to-surface missiles, 750-pound bombs, and four AIM-9 Sidewinder missiles.

twice the number in the US Seventh Fleet, which operates across the entire western Pacific. The attack-submarine fleet will probably level off at sixteen or seventeen boats when the program is complete. Some 100 P-3C Orion submarine-hunter aircraft, assembled in Japan by Kawasaki Heavy Industries, will be flying.

For anti-air warfare, Japan is to build at least three, and perhaps four, destroyers outfitted with the US-developed, ultrahigh-capacity AEGIS air-defense system. The first of the class will be launched in 1991. The ships will greatly strengthen fleet defense against missile and aircraft attack.

Japan's ability to wage antisubmarine warfare against Soviet undersea craft will improve. Aging Japanese Uzushio-class boats are being replaced with Yushio- and Improved Yushio-class submarines. Japan wants a sophisticated sonic depth-finder vessel for ASW. Also on tap: more and better equipment useful in tracking USSR naval movements, plus new ASW helicopters.

Japanese Landpower

Less conspicuous but no less important has been Japan's modest upgrading of its army, referred to as the Ground Self-Defense Force, or GSDF.

Goals that will soon be met include deployment to specific regions of twelve active divisions, with between 7,000 and 9,000 troops each, and three composite brigades; one armored division and additional armored, helicopter, and airborne brigades for mobile warfare; and eight anti-aircraft artillery groups.

The Army, responsible for ground combat, amphibious landings, some ground-based air defense, and close air support, stands at only 156,000 troops, below the authorized level of 180,000. Even so, Japan's Army has embarked on several weapon-update programs to be completed in the 1990s.

Foreign acquisitions include the American Patriot air-defense SAM system and the US 227-mm Multiple Launch Rocket System.

Japan plans to produce Type-90 THX main battle tanks to replace its aging inventory of Japanese Type-61 models. The GSDF's units possess



Japan's army, the Ground Self-Defense Force, possesses some 1,200 main battle tanks, many of them aging. Tokyo's planned production of new Type-90 THX tanks is intended to strengthen the force's ability to repel a small-scale amphibious or airborne invasion of the home islands.

a total of nearly 1,200 main battle tanks, half of them Type-61s, and 700 armored vehicles of all classes.

Overall, notes a recent General Accounting Office assessment, Japan is now close to meeting all its defense goals. There is progress in lower-profile areas, such as more coordination between the various services. US military officers applaud Japan for coming so far in a short time.

Says one Pentagon study: "Japan is making rapid progress towards the military capability to fulfill its agreed mission—*i.e.*, the defense of its territory, including air and sea lanes to an offshore distance of 1,000 nautical miles."

No one, however, thinks even that limited task would be easy. Soviet forces also have improved. Adm. Huntington Hardisty, US Pacific Commander, points out that in the past four years Moscow has deployed to the Pacific advanced *Akula* submarines, MiG-31 fighters, and long-range bombers with cruise missiles.

With an 8,485-mile coastline, Japan naturally focuses its attention on maritime and coastal defense operations. Heavy concentrations of Soviet airpower around Vladivostok make air defense an additional concern.

Japanese forces would be called on to repel a limited assault on the home islands. Japan would also face the tasks of combating Soviet submarines and airpower in its vicinity and monitoring the passage of Soviet submarines and other warships through straits connecting the Sea of Japan with open ocean.

For all its improvement, say analysts, the GSDF's ability to undertake such sustained combat leaves much to be desired.

Radars and vital air bases, for example, still go undefended. The Air Force, lacking refueling capabilities, can't provide air defense cover or strike support for ships at more than moderate distances. Day-to-day readiness and combat sustainability are problematic. Survivability of critical installations is doubtful. Command control and communications would be tenuous at best.

Such weaknesses presumably will be addressed in Japan's next defense plan, covering the years 1991-95 and due next fall. The Japan Defense Agency already has begun work on it. The government has affirmed its intent to seek long-term real growth in funding.

The Pentagon maintains that it is important that the next defense plan continue improvements in air de-

fense, anti-invasion and antisubmarine warfare, and C³I capabilities, as well as combat sustainability and infrastructure.

Japan evidently will do so. The GAO investigation of the Japanese program reports that Tokyo is giving serious thought to acquiring an over-the-horizon radar system, three to four new squadrons of interceptors, eighteen to twenty refueling aircraft, twelve to sixteen long-range early warning aircraft, and fifteen to twenty large air transports, plus readiness improvements.

"The Minimum Necessary"

Japanese politicians, however, will face some hard questions. One of the most important, Japanese observers maintain, will be whether to set a new force goal for the SDF. Some believe that a larger military is in order, but any move in that direction is sure to cause a political uproar.

Another major question concerns extending the range of Japan's aircraft. Building a modest refueling capability is one option. Tokyo is also evaluating the use of small aircraft carriers with updated AV-8B Harrier II jump jets on board. Either scheme could run afoul of domestic politics. To many in Japan, range-extension would make the

aircraft "offensive" military equipment, prohibited by Japan's pacifist constitution.

Domestic opinion is not the only constraint. Japan must satisfy its Asian neighbors—in particular, China, South Korea, and the nations of Southeast Asia—that its power will remain nonthreatening.

Some nations worry that Japan is on the road to becoming a military power again, despite Pentagon assurances that "Japan is still doing the minimum necessary to meet its defense goals, goals which are clearly limited."

Japan openly professes, in fact, that US military power remains and will continue to remain the ultimate guarantor of its national survival. Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu, on his recent visit to Washington, emphasized the need to "ensure the effective operation of US-Japan security arrangements."

A Pentagon report is more direct: "The Japanese force structure requires the presence of complementary US forces to remain viable."

The American presence in and around Japan is substantial, about 65,000 US troops on Japanese ter-



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The F-15J (above), a Japanese-made version of the US-designed F-15 fighter, is the backbone of indigenous Japanese air defense. Japan has 130 F-15Js now and plans for another full F-15J squadron by 1993. Working in tandem with Japan's force in a wartime crisis would be three squadrons of USAF F-15C/D aircraft (below) assigned to the 18th TFW at Kadena AB on Okinawa.

—Staff photo by Jeffrey P. Rhodes

ritory or waters. The largest segment, a 38,000-man Marine Expeditionary Force, is based on the island of Okinawa. USAF maintains in Japan some 16,200 personnel and three squadrons of F-15C/Ds, two squadrons of F-16s, and eighteen of RF-4Cs. The Navy has a major presence in the Western Pacific and a major facility at Yokosuka.

In recent years, cooperation between US and Japanese forces has improved markedly. Japanese naval forces, for example, now exercise with Pacific Fleet and other friendly Pacific navies.

A Sense of Grievance

Even so, the Tokyo-Washington relationship is becoming a troubled one, for reasons that have more to do with domestic politics and economies than with security matters.

The most fundamental problem causing friction between the two allies is the lopsided economic relationship between Japan, the world's biggest creditor nation, and the US, the largest debtor. Last year, Japan's trade surplus with the US fell by \$8 billion, but it still came to \$52 billion.

In addition, Americans and Japanese alike have been wounded by bitter disputes over technology exports. On the US side, Americans felt betrayed when it was revealed that Toshiba Corp. illegally sold the Soviet Union sensitive milling technology, which was then used to manufacture quiet propellers for Soviet nuclear attack submarines.

Japan's sense of grievance was fueled by the Bush Administration's reopening and modification of the US-Japan SX-3 agreement after Tokyo thought a deal had been struck. Japan believed it was being made into a scapegoat for US economic weakness and mismanagement.

Compounding the tensions is an increasingly sharp dispute over "burden-sharing." Japan resents congressional charges that it is shirking its defense obligations. Tokyo points out that it no longer holds defense expenditures below one percent of its gross national product, as it did officially for ten years. It points to the fact that Japan now has the third largest defense budget in the world, surpassed only by the two superpowers.



The Japanese fleet is now expected to patrol and secure Japanese waters out to a distance of 1,000 nautical miles from the home islands. Air-defense destroyers, antisubmarine-warfare destroyers and patrol aircraft, attack submarines, and communications are high priorities.

\$45,000 per American

Host-nation support for US bases and troops in Japan is higher than ever. When all factors are considered, says Tokyo, it contributes the equivalent of \$2.7 billion annually to upkeep of American forces based in Japan. That works out to about \$45,000 per US serviceman.

Many members of Congress remain distinctly unimpressed by these arguments. They note that, though the one-percent limit no longer is official policy, defense budgets remain only slightly above that level. The US outlay is closer to six percent of GNP. They add that much of the growth in Japan's arms spending, calculated in US dollars, stems not from new commitments but from the spectacular rise in value of the yen compared to the performance of the US dollar.

"The Japanese have a long way to go on the burden-sharing front," charges Rep. Pat Schroeder, a Colorado Democrat who sits on the House Armed Services Committee. "Their support of US forces in Japan is generous, but considering they only spend one percent of their [GNP] on defense, they can afford to be much more generous."

A recently completed Defense Department report on burden-sharing supports Schroeder's charge. In

its analysis of the defense performances of the US, Japan, and America's NATO allies, Japan receives the lowest possible rating in six of the nine areas in which it can be judged. West Germany, by comparison, rates high or highest in eight of fourteen areas in which it can be judged and medium in another three.

GNP per capita in Japan is \$19,500, compared to that in the US of \$18,200. Even so, the average Japanese spends only \$200 on defense, vs. \$1,200 for the average American.

Congress voted overwhelmingly in 1987 to urge Japan to triple defense spending to three percent of GNP. The question is where Tokyo would spend it all. Richard Armitage, the former Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, estimated that Japan could buy everything on its wish list for the equivalent of two percent of its GNP. A significantly higher level of spending, he implied, would transform Japan into a truly formidable military power.

Japan's military effort has made strong progress against heavy odds. The trick for Tokyo now will be to navigate between the insistent demands of a superpower patron and the dangers of military excess. ■