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Japan's National Security Perspective 2022 (1) The Need for Enhanced Deterrence against China

HIDA Masafumi (Head, America, Europe, and Russia Division,
Regional Studies Department)

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China's Increasing Military Strength

China has vigorously advanced the modernization of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) for roughly 30 years since the end of the Cold War. Beijing has continued to expand its defense expenditures, with the announced defense budget for FY2022 increasing 7.1% year-on-year to over 1.45 trillion RMB (approximately 26.6 trillion JPY), around five times larger than Japan's.

Backed by the ample budget, the PLA has updated outdated equipment and developed and introduced new equipment (mechanization), while promoting the military application of information and communications technologies (ICTs) (informatization). These efforts seek to build advanced command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (C4ISR) capabilities. In recent years, the PLA has made steady preparations for victory in "intelligentized warfare," anticipating that it will become the future form of warfare. In "intelligentized warfare," the PLA will use artificial intelligence (AI) for military purposes, namely, to conduct combat with unmanned systems as the mainstay, make swift and effective operational decisions, and establish superiority in the cognitive domain.

In addition, under the strong leadership of President Xi Jinping, the PLA has forged ahead with major reforms since the end of 2015. These reforms include the upgrading of the Second Artillery Corps to the Rocket Force, a military service, in order to build a system for reinforcing missile capabilities. The PLA also established the Strategic Support Force to enhance capabilities in the space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains. At the same time, with a view to strengthening joint operation capabilities to defeat foreign forces in actual combat, the PLA established five theater commands with permanent joint operation headquarters to increase readiness for the warfare assumed in their respective districts.

Furthermore, the PLA procures large quantities of a wide variety of new-type equipment. For nuclear capabilities, it has been developing new intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and pushing ahead with the construction of new launch silos. Stealth strategic bombers and strategic submarines are newly under development. For the naval force, the PLA has been building one warship after another, such as new aircraft carriers with electromagnetic catapults, large Aegis destroyers, and amphibious assault ships. For the air force, it has introduced various types of aircraft, including early warning aircraft, information gathering aircraft, electronic warfare aircraft, bombers, and patrol aircraft, in addition to new fighter jets such as stealth fighters. For missile capabilities, the PLA is believed to have deployed hypersonic missiles, in addition to anti-ship ballistic missiles (ASBMs) capable of striking enemy vessels in the distance.

As a result of these military reforms and equipment buildup, the PLA has enhanced its capabilities to a level that overwhelms surrounding countries. In reality, the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) lag behind the PLA in capabilities, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively.

China's Moves to Change the Status Quo with Military Power

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has pressed ahead with the development of the PLA's capabilities, with the objective being to leverage its military power to change the status quo in East Asia and establish a new security order where China has a dominant position. The Xi Jinping regime has employed the slogan of the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" since its inauguration and set the "second centenary goal" of achieving it by the 100th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 2049. The prerequisite for realizing the great rejuvenation is to bring back what Beijing regards as "lost territories," namely, Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, and the Spratly Islands. The biggest barrier to it is, however, the US forces maintaining a strong presence in East Asia and supporting the regional security order. Therefore, the CCP's long-term goal is to build military power exceeding the US forces' in East Asia and establish a new China-led security order, thereby ensuring the recovery of "lost territories." The CCP has set the goal of transforming the PLA into a "world-class military" by 2049.

The CCP has already stepped up its efforts to recover "lost territories" undergirded by its military power. Beijing ostensibly claims that it aims for "peaceful unification" with Taiwan under "one country, two systems." In fact, it has increased pressure on the democratically-elected Tsai Ing-wen administration by intensifying PLA activities in the waters and airspace surrounding Taiwan. The PLA has repeatedly conducted training and exercises involving aircraft and vessels in the Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea southwest of Taiwan, and other sea areas, and Beijing proclaims that these activities are aimed at "pro-independence forces in Taiwan" and "external forces" supporting them.

China unilaterally asserts its territorial claim to the Senkaku Islands, which are part of Japan's inherent territory, posing a greater challenge to Japan's sovereignty. The People's Armed Police Force Coast Guard Corps, also known as the China Coast Guard (CCG), which forms a part of China's military force, constantly deploys its ships around the Senkaku Islands, and these ships repeatedly intrude into Japanese territorial waters. PLA vessels and aircraft have also been gradually bolstering their presence near the Senkaku Islands, thereby continuing attempts to leverage military power to change the status quo, i.e., Japan's effective control over the islands.

In the South China Sea, Beijing has repeatedly changed the status quo with force and actually used its military force to expand control over the Paracel and Spratly Islands from the 1970s to the 1980s. In recent years, China carried out large-scale land reclamation of seven rock reefs and sunken reefs in the Spratly Islands to build artificial islands and made them into military bases to consolidate the PLA's presence. In addition, it has also utilized the maritime militia to step up military pressure on Vietnam, the Philippines, and Malaysia, which are disputing with China over territorial sovereignty and maritime interests.

The PLA aims to reinforce so-called anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities as well, in order to prevent US forces from approaching China and hinder their activities in areas surrounding the country. In 2019 and 2020, China test-fired ASBMs into the South China Sea. It has also strengthened activities in the Western Pacific by navy vessels, including aircraft carriers, with a fleet of four vessels advancing into Hawaii's vicinity in a far-sea exercise in 2020. The PLA has even obstructed the activities of US forces near China, including the case where a Chinese destroyer navigated in a dangerous proximity to a US destroyer in the South China Sea in 2018.

How Should Japan Successfully Defend Itself?

The CCP will continue to put effort into reinforcing military strength with a view to establishing a China-led regional security order that would replace the one led by the United States, as well as successfully changing the status quo with

regard to Taiwan, the Senkaku Islands, and the Spratly Islands, among others. Should such attempts by China succeed, it would fundamentally threaten Japan's stability and prosperity. In order to maintain the security of Japan, there is no other choice but to enhance a system to deter China, which intends to change the status quo with military power.

Preventing Beijing's use of force requires building up capabilities to conduct counterattacks that would inflict damage exceeding China's tolerable limit in the event of a Chinese attack. The CCP leadership will carefully weigh gains and losses when considering whether to launch a military strike on Japan. If Chinese leaders recognize that Japan possesses capabilities that could inflict intolerable damage to China, they would hesitate to conduct such attacks.

Whereas the PLA is building up its arsenal capable of attacking bases and critical infrastructure on mainland Japan, including intermediate-range ballistic missiles, long-range cruise missiles, and long-range bombers, the SDF have currently no capabilities to destroy bases for attacking Japan on mainland China. Even the US forces, which are expected to serve as the "spear" in the Japan-US alliance, have limited assets capable of conducting long-range strikes in East Asia. Japan, for its part, needs to examine all possible options on the table, including encouraging US forces to develop and deploy long-range precision-guided weapons, which enable attacks on the PLA's missile and air force bases from which long-range strikes would be launched against Japan. Another option is for Japan to possess such capabilities to complement deterrence of the US forces against China. Moreover, if Tokyo has its own strike capabilities, it would prevent Beijing from harboring expectations that a military strike on Japan would not lead to large-scale counterattacks, provided that the US forces are not involved. In other words, it would result in less room for the Chinese side to make a wrong strategic calculation on the false assumption that it can drive a wedge between Japan and the US, which would substantially improve Japan's deterrence against China.

The PLA is pushing for military applications of emerging technologies, such as AI, quantum technologies, and big data, in an aim to acquire so-called game-changing technologies. In response to this situation, Japan needs to engage in technological competition through industry-government-academia efforts. In particular, China expects unmanned systems to play the central role on future battlefields and intends to combine AI with robotics to develop unmanned systems capable of autonomously conducting sophisticated operations. Combat using unmanned systems is considered advantageous compared with that using manned platforms, as the former involves lower costs for the production and operation of the systems as well as reduced personnel costs. Having limited defense budgets and facing challenges in securing personnel due to Japan's aging population and declining birthrate, the SDF must strongly promote the development of unmanned aircraft, vessels, and combat vehicles.

Looking ahead to "intelligentized warfare" in the future, China places importance on operations in the cognitive domain. In addition to the traditional "three warfares (public opinion warfare, psychological warfare, and legal warfare)," Beijing aims to win without fighting in the physical domain, such as by spreading AI-driven fake videos and conducting cyberspace activities, thereby confusing the situational awareness of the leaders and the people of hostile countries and creating divisions. Japan, for its part, should heighten its vigilance and capacities against Chinese influence operations in the cognitive domain, while at the same time building capabilities to reach out in China's cognitive domain. The cognitive domain pertains to a wide range of relevant areas and involves a diversity of actors, making it impossible for the Ministry of Defense and SDF alone to respond adequately. Increasing Japan's capabilities to defend itself and counter operations in the cognitive domain will require a government-wide response that cuts across ministries and agencies as well as enhanced communication with industry and academia, including information sharing.

プロフィール

profile

IIDA Masafumi
Head, America, Europe, and Russia Division,
Regional Studies Department

Fields of expertise:

Chinese Foreign and Military Affairs
East Asian Security Studies

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Planning and Coordination Office
National Institute for Defense Studies
Telephone (direct): 03-3260-3011
Telephone (general): 03-3268-3111 (ext. 29177)
FAX: 03-3260-3034
* National Institute for Defense Studies website:
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