

Preface

The *East Asian Strategic Review (EASR)* was established in 1996 by the National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), Japan's sole national think-tank in the area of security affairs. The aim at that time was to support the then Defense Agency's efforts to foster mutual understanding and to build trust with neighbors and regional countries in the post-Cold War era. Without the critical but constructive comments and encouragement received from readers and experts, this annual report would have not grown into the flagship publication of NIDS and marked the 25th year of publication this year.

Over these 25 years, the strategic geography of "East Asia" has expanded, and Japan's security challenges have become more complex and diverse. However, we have kept our editorial policy the same; the contents are scholarly analyses of individual researchers and the views expressed do not necessarily represent the official position of the Government of Japan or the Ministry of Defense. In recent years, *EASR*'s standing as an academic work has become more explicit as is evidenced from specifying contributors and their responsible parts as well as providing citations at the end of each chapter.

The year 2020 dawned with the outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) that the world has yet to contain successfully. What are the security environment implications of this pandemic, which changed our life? Grappling squarely with this question, Chapter 1 discusses "pluralization" in international politics even under the divisive pressure of U.S.-China competition. Focusing on the roles of non-U.S. and Chinese major powers as well as small and medium-sized countries in the Pacific and Europe, it presents the struggle for agency and autonomy of those countries. Chapters 2 to 6 are country and region-based analyses of major developments during January to December 2020, including each country/region's responses to U.S.-China competition as well as the impact of COVID-19 on domestic politics and foreign policy. This edition of *EASR* examines the increasingly assertive diplomatic and military positions of the Xi

Jinping government, South Korea's search for reconciliation with the increasingly coercive North Korea, ASEAN member states' responses to the pandemic and the South China Sea dispute, the Putin administration's constitutional amendments, and the U.S. policy toward China and outlook for the Biden administration. Chapter 7 presents relevant policy reviews, including Japan Self-Defense Forces' response to COVID-19 as well as the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty that marked its 60th anniversary.

This edition was authored by: Ishihara Yusuke and Tanaka Ryosuke (Chapter 1); Iida Masafumi (Chapter 2); Watanabe Takeshi (Chapter 3); Matsuura Yoshihide and Tomikawa Hideo (Chapter 4); Hasegawa Takeyuki and Sakaguchi Yoshiaki (Chapter 5); Kikuchi Shigeo (Chapter 6); and Tsukamoto Katsuya (Chapter 7). It was edited by Sukegawa Yasushi, Masuda Masayuki, Kurita Masahiro, Oshite Junichi, Tanaka Ryosuke, Asami Asaki, Aizawa Riho, and Oguma Shinya.

As the debate continues about what our post-COVID-19 world might look like, it is our hope that *EASR* will cultivate knowledge and awareness of the East Asian strategic environment and promote an intellectual discourse among the public, which will eventually serve as the building block of the emerging security architecture.

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