



Japan-US military relations continue to remain important to both countries. This picture illustrates the depth of this bilateral cooperation with JGSDF soldiers onboard a US Navy warship preparing for an exercise.

BIG IN JAPAN

US Navy

Rising concerns over the strategic assertiveness of the People's Republic of China in the East and South China Seas, as well as regarding the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's (DPRK's) missile and nuclear threat, have brought renewed strength to US-Japan relations.

by **Dr. Alix Valenti**

For the past fifty years, Japan has been a peaceful nation, focused primarily on self-defence of its own territory. This posture is embedded in Article Nine of its constitution which stipulates that the people of Japan "forever renounce war as a sovereign right". Today, as the PRC continues the modernisation of its military, the country's defence budget is expected to rise to around \$150 billion this year,

according to media reports in March, and as concerns about the DPRK's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programme escalate, Article Nine is at the forefront of the national debate over Japan's defence policy. Cognisant that the constitutional restraints imposed on its armed forces would be insufficient to deter aggression from either the PRC or DPRK, Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has been lobbying Japan's parliament over the past five years to

modify the country's constitutional renouncement of war. In what is perhaps the loosest interpretation of Article Nine since 1947, Mr. Abe has lifted Japan's arms export restrictions and expanded the role of its armed forces, under much criticism from his own government yet much praise from his international allies, notably the administration of President Barack Obama, which is keen for Japan to play a fuller role in ensuring peace and security in the Asia-Pacific.

Mounting Tensions

Sino-Japanese relations have remained tense since the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 which saw the deaths of thousands of Chinese citizens, and the subsequent Rape of Nanking between December 1937 and January 1938 in which over 300,000 Chinese citizens lost their lives. Beijing has frequently argued that Japan has shown insufficient remorse for its actions. These tensions are amplified by the competing claims of both nations towards the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in the East China Sea. Although under US control following the San Francisco peace treaty between the US and Japan, the islands were handed to the Japanese in 1971. Tensions simmered quietly for nearly three decades, but the purchase of three of the islands in April 2012 by the Japanese government from their Japanese private owner, sparked a wave of diplomatic protests from the PRC that have been ongoing ever since. As a result, the past four years have seen number of diplomatic incidents between China and Japan relating to regular sightings of Chinese ships in what Japan claims are

its territorial waters. Beijing’s implementation of an Air Defence Identification Zone (ADIZ), requiring all civilian and military aircraft to identify themselves when flying within a defined zone that extended beyond China’s maritime territory, encompassing the disputed islands, has done little to soothe Japan’s concerns.

The strengthening of the relationship between the US and Japan, which regained significant momentum with Mr. Abe’s arrival as Prime Minister in 2012, has also been a source of apprehension for the PRC government which looks at the US strategic ‘pivot’ towards the Asia-Pacific announced by Mr. Obama’s administration in 2011 with discomfort. For the Chinese government the revision of the Mutual Defence Guidelines between the US and Japan last year, which provide a framework for bilateral defence cooperation, combined with Mr. Abe’s recent push for more strategically assertive Japanese armed forces, are all signs that the US is seeking to exert more power in the Asia Pacific. Finally, Japan’s implementation in March of a radar station on Yonaguni island in the East China Sea close to the Sen-

kaku/Diaoyu islands has raised concerns in Beijing that Japan is evolving a more outward-looking military posture.

DPRK

On 6 January, the DPRK made headlines for conducting its fourth nuclear bomb test, followed by a long-range rocket launch on 7 February. Both events raised serious concerns within the international community despite the DPRK’s government arguing that the rocket was for civilian purposes, namely launching an earth observation satellite. The US government has responded to the actions of their counterparts in the DPRK by establishing an emergency ‘hotline’ communication system between the US, Japan and the Republic of Korea to facilitate speedy information sharing with regard to future, similar actions by the DPRK, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Japan and the US to waive restrictions on Japanese components used in American military equipment.

Changes in the geopolitical landscape of the Asia Pacific and the evolution of the US-Japan alliance described above



The JMSDF remains one of the most advanced navies in the Asia-Pacific region. Like its other armed forces, Japan’s navy maintains close links with the US Navy, with this photograph showing ships from both forces.

US Navy

One of the JMSDF's SH-60J maritime support helicopters. Like other platforms in the JMSDF, the force will soon need to contemplate the replacement of these aircraft.



US DoD

have led Mr. Abe to embark on the very difficult, and controversial, task of reinterpreting Article Nine of the country's constitution.

According to a report published by the Heritage Foundation, a Washington DC based think tank, in January 2016 entitled *Japanese Defence Reform Supports Allied Security Objectives*, reinterpreting Article Nine could include allowing the Japanese armed forces to perform out-of-area operations, authorise their armed support of other allies, expand the range of logistical support Japan can provide to allied forces, interact with allies in scenarios where military action is required to secure Japan's peace even if an attack was not directed at the country, lessen restrictive rules of engagement for the military to use force, and all the Japanese armed forces to protect allies. The new laws will also facilitate military involvement in international peacekeeping operations by lifting the requirement that the Diet enact a temporary law for every dispatch. Despite much controversy within some elements of Japanese society, and within her Asia-Pacific neighbours mindful of Japan's activities during the Second World War, the rules for the deployment of lethal force by Japan's military in future operations remains limited by three conditions: whether Japan's survival is at stake, whether all other non-military options have been exhausted to resolve a crisis, and that the use of force is limited to the minimum necessary to deter aggression.

Much less debated, yet perhaps far more significant for Japan's involvement in the defence and security world, has been Mr. Abe's move to lift restrictions on arms exports in April 2014. He replaced the "Three principles on arms exports and their related policy guidelines", which effectively banned arms exports, with the "Three principles of defence equipment and technology". The latter continue to ban exports to countries subject to United Nations arms embargoes, but opened the Japanese defence market to exports where they can con-

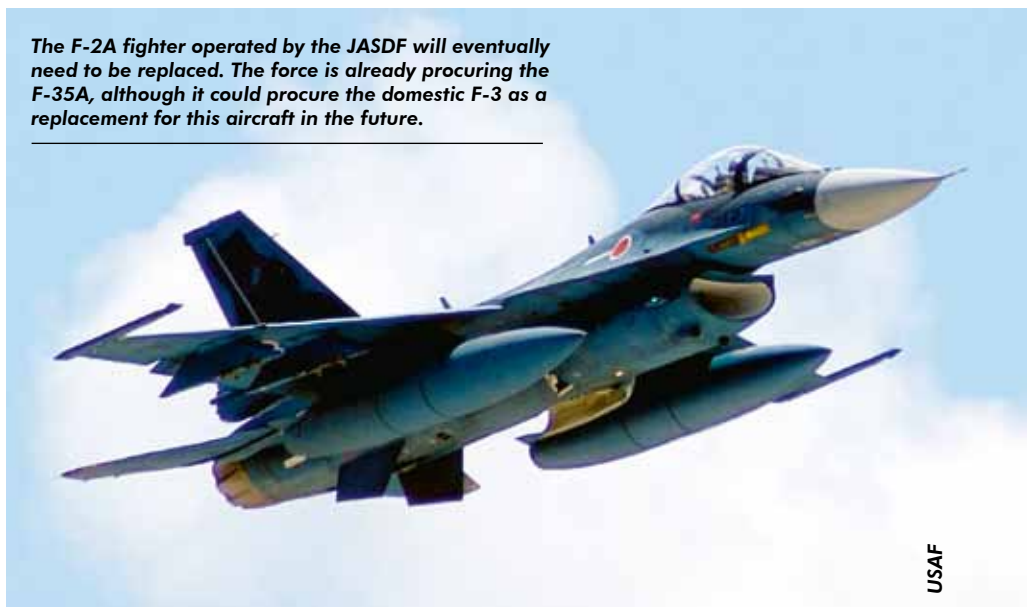
tribute to the active promotion of peace and to Japan's security. To facilitate this task, in October 2015 Japan's Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ATLA) was established. The country's largest procurement agency, ATLA has been tasked to handle approximately 40 percent of the annual defence budget, by overseeing procurement from both international and national suppliers.

Major procurements

Over the next five years, Japan's Ground Self-Defence Forces (JGSDF) are planning to reduce their main battle tank fleet, from 740 to 300 vehicles, and replace them with up to 300 lighter Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) Manoeuvre Combat Vehicles (MCVs). The JGSDF will also look to acquire 52 BAE Systems' AAV-7A1 amphibious landing vehicles, seven Bell-Boeing CV/MV-22A Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft and Boeing CH-47F heavy-lift helicopters.

As a first step in fulfilling these needs, in April the Japanese Ministry of Defence (MoD) awarded BAE Systems a contract to provide 30 new AAV-7A1 Reliability, Availability and Maintainability/Rebuild to Standard (RAM/RS) vehicles. These vehicles will be armed with a General Dynamics/US Ordnance M2HB 12.7mm heavy machine gun, and a General Dynamics Ordnance and Tactical Systems Mk.19 40mm automatic grenade launcher. According to BAE Systems' press release, "the AAV-7A1 RAM/RS variant provides a more powerful engine and drive train, as well as an upgraded suspension system, allowing the new vehicles to meet or exceed original AAV-7A1 performance".

The F-2A fighter operated by the JASDF will eventually need to be replaced. The force is already procuring the F-35A, although it could procure the domestic F-3 as a replacement for this aircraft in the future.



USAF

US Marines and their Japanese counterparts perform joint exercises. Japan's military may have an increasingly outward looking strategic posture in the future, as a response to increasing regional threats.



Sea

Away from the JGSDF, the government will be looking to continue improving Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces' (JMSDF) capabilities. To this end, in March 2016 the JMSDF commissioned its new 'Soryu' class conventional hunter-killer submarine, the JS *Jinryu*, delivered by MHI. The 'Soryu' class is powered by two Kawasaki 12V 25/25 SB-type diesel engines and four Kawasaki-Kockums V4-275R Stirling engines which provide it with a range of 6100 nautical miles/nm (11297 kilometres/km). The class is fitted with six 533mm torpedo tubes that can accommodate MHI Type-89 homing torpedoes and Boeing UGM-84 Harpoon anti-ship missiles, the latter having a range of over 66.9nm(124km). The JS *Jinryu* is the seventh 'Soryu' class submarine received by the JMSDF, out of a total of eleven such submarines to be delivered by 2020.

Moreover, in 2014 the Japanese Ministry of Defence (MoD) decided to begin the replacement of its ageing helicopter fleet, which currently comprises 46 Sikorsky SH-60J and 39 SH-60K Seahawk maritime support helicopters. To this end, Leonardo (formerly AgustaWestland) announced at the 2016 Singapore Air Show that it intended to offer Japan an improved version of its MCH-101 Helicopter, of which eight have already been delivered. Similarly, in March 2016

Airbus Helicopters announced that it had been awarded a contract for the purchase of an additional H-225 medium-lift utility helicopters by the Japan Coast Guard (JCG), of which it already owns five. The H-225 is an eleven-ton twin-engine rotorcraft, which can accommodate up to 19 passengers, with delivery of the H-225 is scheduled for the end of 2018.

The *Medium Term Defence Programme*, published by the MoD outlining defence procurement priorities for the years 2014 to 2018, also mentions plans for the procurement of nine ship-based medium-lift utility helicopters to perform diverse tasks including at-sea replenishment and casualty evacuations. However, to date there have been no further indications as to the preferred options regarding the rotorcraft to be procured, how many aircraft will be purchased, or when the procurement will take place.

Aviation

The Japan Air Self-Defence Force (JASDF) has been replacing its ageing fleet for the past few years. Key to this significant upgrade is the selection of Lockheed Martin, in 2011, for the procurement of 45 F-35A Lightning-II fighters. Four aircraft are already being assembled at Lockheed Martin's production line in Fort Worth, Texas, while the rest will be assembled locally by MHI. MHI began local assembly

of the first F-35A in December 2015. The F-35 will replace the McDonnell Douglas/Boeing EF/RF-4EJ Phantom fighter currently in service, and the total of the contract has been estimated at approximately \$8 billion.

The ageing MHI F-2A and McDonnell Douglas/Boeing F-15J fighter fleets are also in need of replacement, although uncertainties remain as to when this will occur and with what aircraft. In January 2015, MHI presented its X-2 Shinshin fifth generation fighter demonstrator, which was developed at a cost of approximately \$335 million, thus indicating that there will be some level of local competition in the procurement process for the replacement of these aircraft. More information regarding this aircraft can be found in this issue's *Asia-Pacific Procurement Update* article. Finally, in October 2015 the MoD selected the Boeing's KC-46A to supplement the JASDF's KC-767 tanker fleet. The intention is to procure three tankers, to be delivered by 2020, for a cost of approximately \$173 million per tanker.

Conclusion

Although increasing tensions in the Asia-Pacific region have triggered significant changes to Japan's defence stance in the international arena, the road to the country's successful entry in the defence market, however, remains paved with pitfalls. Firstly, only one percent of Japan's industrial output is military-related, and Mr. Abe will have to work to overcome national industries' reluctance in producing arms, as MHI and Kawasaki refuse to be labelled as 'merchants of death'. End-user monitoring is also likely to be an initial obstacle. Lacking previous experience in the complex arms trade market, Japan will have to be particularly careful in ensuring that its newly exported weapons will not fall into the hands of state or non-state actors acting against one of Japan's three principles.

Despite these concerns, the lift on arms exports and the extended Japanese military mandate have already brought a number of defence cooperation deals to the table. With a view to expanding into the development of major weapon systems and whole platforms, Japan has started working on the development of partnerships with countries such as France for unmanned underwater vehicles, and the UK for the development of a new air-to-air missile, an initiative which involves the pan-European missile concern MBDA. [AMR](#)