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Chinese Perspectives on Japan's Defense Transparency

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Summary

In China, discussions of defense transparency usually revolve around China's defense affairs and those of its counterparts, with little comment on the actions of other countries. This brief touches upon the basic evolution of Japan's defense transparency and its current status, and analyzes three differing Chinese perspectives on Japan's defense transparency.

The Defense Transparency Project (DTP) is a project of the University of California Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation. DTP Policy Briefs provide analysis and recommendations based on the work of project participants. Author's views are their own.

INTRODUCTION

In China, discussion of defense transparency usually revolves around China's defense affairs and those of its counterpart countries. While China follows the international trend of defense transparency, it has only been to show its own defense intentions and capabilities with almost no direct mention of or criticism towards neighboring countries. There are few public and academic discussions on defense transparency in China and even fewer on Japan's defense transparency.

However, generally speaking, at least three differing perspectives on Japan's defense transparency can be found in Chinese discussion:

1. There is little real defense transparency even though Japan publishes white papers and hosts debates in the Diet and public briefings by the Ministry of Defense;
2. Japan's defense transparency, including all arrangements related to the military, is only a copy of U.S. defense transparency. There is nothing new to share with the outside world; or
3. Defense transparency is a way for Japan to show its muscle to its neighbors. By doing so, Japan shows its defense intentions and capabilities in a deterrent way.

How do these perspectives affect relations between the two countries?

CHINESE VIEWS OF THE EVOLUTION OF JAPAN'S DEFENSE TRANSPARENCY

Military transparency is an important measure for a country concerned with expressing its military intentions and principles or making public its military capability and actions. Such measures usually take a certain commitment, give up certain rights, or make public relevant security policies through government statements and documents. They include:

Policy transparency. A country or its military department releases relevant programmatic documents such as a white paper on national defense or reports on national security strategy and national

defense. These documents present the challenges a country faces and the policy of response, and make public the composition of armed forces and their mission, military expenditures, armament research and development, and warfare theory and principles.

Information transparency. A country or its military department provides a military spokesman, holds press briefings from time to time, and informs the international community of the relevant military trends. China set up such a system in 2008.

Transparency of exchanges. These include the exchange of visits by military leaders, scheduled meetings between frontier armed forces of countries, port calls of naval ships, joint military exercises, and military academic exchanges, and other activities. Transparency is aimed at demonstrating military intentions and capabilities to enhance mutual trust.

Among the Asian countries, Japan was one of the earliest to adopt defense transparency policies and put them into practice. Yet only since the end of the Cold War has the Japanese government realized the importance of promoting military-to-military confidence building. In 1995 the Japanese government issued its second National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) since World War II. In this document, the Japanese government pointed out that the Self-Defense Forces held at least three assignments: 1) participation in international peacekeeping cooperation; 2) promotion of security dialogues and defense exchanges, especially the enhancement of confidence building measures (CBMs) with its neighboring countries; and 3) participation in and promotion of arms control and disarmament processes.

Since then, defense transparency has been an important part of Japanese government documents and publications. In recent years, it has become an essential part of Japan's military publications, which stress that trust can be promoted through the enhancement of military power and defense policy transparency, through exchanges and dialogues between defense organizations, and through joint military training, so that meaningless arms expansion and accidental situation can

be avoided. In the National Defense White Paper issued in 1995, there are paragraphs describing the importance of international cooperation and military-to-military confidence building.

When the 8th Asian Security Conference was held in Singapore in May 2009, then-Japanese Defense Minister Hamada Yasukazu pointed out that to have trust among big powers the armed forces should go even further. He said that transparency did not only include strategic intention, but also arms storage, weapons transfers, defense budgets, and decision-making processes.

CHINESE PERSPECTIVES ON JAPAN'S DEFENSE TRANSPARENCY

As mentioned above, China's academic publications on defense transparency are few, and research on Japan's defense transparency is even rarer. However, there are responses to Japan's defense transparency by China's media, TV shows, websites, and papers by some so-called experts. For example, when the Japanese government publishes its defense papers the response from the Chinese side is typically negative because the Japanese publications almost always position China as a threat, especially since the Cold War's end.

Perspectives on Japan's defense transparency from China can be divided into at least three groupings:

Group One: There is little transparency in Japan's defense transparency.

It is insufficient to discuss the defense transparency of Japan without looking at Japanese history and culture. When evaluating whether a country constitutes a threat, one should look at not only its military strength but also its domestic and foreign policies, including its defense policy. As a representative Asian country, Japan's culture and history have had great impact on its defense transparency.

In the eyes of some Chinese, the Japanese used to have an ambiguous attitude toward some sensitive defense affairs, even though it has been westernized for more than more a century. Chinese in this group use their philosophy and their Northeast Asian cultural background to judge Ja-

pan's defense transparency, finding that it keeps everything ambiguous, especially with regard to defense issues. Their conclusion is that Japan will not reveal its real defense intentions and capabilities although there are white papers and live broadcasts of the budget debate in the Diet.

Group Two: Japan's defense transparency policies are copied from the United States.

Military transparency has been one the most important parts of international confidence building measures for about one hundred years. It was after World War I that military transparency formally became an important component of international relations. At the time, in order to ensure the implementation of the Treaty of Versailles and then the Washington Naval Treaty, the victor countries formulated provisions on mutual supervision and monitoring treaty implementation.

The occupation of Japan by the United States completely changed the social structure and Japan's philosophy regarding international mechanisms. In the eyes of some Chinese, Japan's defense transparency is actually a replica of that of the United States. For example, if we read Japan's defense white paper carefully, it has almost the same chapters as the U.S. military strategy report, including threat assessment, force structure, and defense budget. Chinese of this group have never been surprised when Japan issues its defense white paper because it predictably reflects that of the United States.

Group Three: Japanese officials manipulate defense transparency against China.

Another group of Chinese believe defense transparency has already become a bargaining chip in the hands of Japan to put pressure on Chinese military affairs. Thus, China's lack of transparency on military modernization has become an excuse to make it seem threatening, which is the same tone the United States uses towards China.

In the eyes of Chinese in this group, military transparency has become an excuse for the United States and Japan to view China as a threat. In raising the issue of China's military transparency, these countries do not refer to bilateral or multilateral issues, but mostly request that China become unilaterally and all-dimensionally transparent in

military affairs. They are focusing on China's military transparency either out of their lack of trust in China or for to pave the way for concocting the "China threat theory."

Recent Japanese white papers have many examples. In October 2007, Japan's white paper on national defense requested that China increase its military transparency, stressing that China's role as a regional political and economic power made its military tendencies subject to the attention of various countries. Thus it was more and more important for China to enhance the transparency of its national defense policy and military strength. Even in recent days, Japanese government leaders from the Prime Minister to the Defense Minister have declared their worries about China's lack of defense transparency.

JAPAN'S CURRENT DEFENSE TRANSPARENCY

No matter how Chinese view Japan's defense transparency efforts, Japan has been trying its best to be more transparent. There are several reasons. Defense transparency is an important part of Japan's defense and foreign policy. The political and social system requires each government to explain its defense policies and expenditures. To some extent, this is legally mandated. However, the influence of the United States on Japan's defense transparency has been heavy. On one hand, Japan should make its defense policy, military capability, and military budget open to the outside world. On the other hand, the United States will not let Japan go any further if it will hurt the military alliance among the United States, Japan, and South Korea.

According to Chinese experts, there are several areas in which the defense transparency of Japan can be demonstrated. These include:

- **Policy transparency.** Since 1957, Japan's government has published its basic national defense principles and established a series of principles by law.
- **Capability transparency.** There are several official publications by Japan's government each year, through which the Japanese government gives a detailed in-

roduction to its military system and reports on build-up and deployment of forces.

- **Defense budget transparency.** This aspect of transparency has been seen by the Japanese government as one of the most important parts of defense transparency.
- **Activities transparency.** In each year's publications and on the official military websites, there is a description of the operations of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, including activities such as routine training, disaster relief, and anti-piracy operations.

There are also many similarities between how U.S. and Japanese defense transparency are demonstrated. These include:

- **Official defense publications, such as guidelines, white papers, and operational doctrines.** Japan's first Defense White Paper was published in 1970 and immediately received criticism from the former Soviet Union, China, and North Korea.
- **The defense briefing system.** Japan established its defense briefing system in March 2005 in the Ministry of Defense. The Defense Minister, Vice Defense Minister, and the Chief Staff of Self-Defense Forces are usually the key spokesmen for this arrangement.
- **Websites.** The wide use of websites by Japanese defense organizations has played an important role in its defense transparency in recent years. These websites are not only in Japanese, but also in English, Chinese, and some other languages. The Japanese military posts updates on, for example, military news, operations, the defense budget, and logistical build-ups to give the public a good understanding on what is going on in the defense sector of Japan.

No one could argue that Japan has not been doing well in defense transparency in theory and practice in recent years. However, as with any country's defense transparency, Japan is not and will never be 100 percent transparent. There are censorship policies in place that affect each military briefing. Items which cannot be touched upon include the use of Japanese forces and operations plans; intelligence information; defense

build-up assessments, plans, and research; the number of weapon systems; military communications arrangements; and military codes. As well, the Japanese forces have made arrangements with U.S. forces for secrecy on certain issues.

In conclusion, by most accounts, Japan has done well in the theory and practice of defense transparency in this region. Yet in the eyes of the Chinese, the theories and practice are only one side of Japanese military build-up. These conclusions come not from the theory and practice themselves but from long-standing mistrust between the Chinese and Japanese. It also comes from the involvement of the United States, stemming from

its post–World War II occupation and current military alliance with Japan.

Because China is always mentioned in Japanese official publications, some Chinese think that defense transparency as practiced now will not enhance a responsible image of Japan—or, rather, it will lead the Chinese people to remember the tragic history of last century, when Japan imposed heavy suffering on China. Japan’s current mentions of China as a threat do nothing to enhance bilateral trust.

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