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# Policy Brief 2012-2

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## *Japan's Defense White Paper as a Tool for Promoting Defense Transparency*

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### Summary

**T**his policy brief explains how Japan produces its annual defense white paper and how this publication and other defense reports promote transparency on Japan's national defense. I outline the process of putting together the white paper and then suggest ways in which the process and the structure could be applied by other nations seeking to improve their defense transparency.

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*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.*

## THE DEFENSE WHITE PAPER

*Defense of Japan*, the annual white paper of the Ministry of Defense (MOD), was first launched in 1970 under the ministership of Yasuhiro Nakasone. The defense white paper is a relative newcomer to the lineup of annual white papers in Japan. The majority of ministries already published white papers, with the economy white paper launched in 1947 as the first. The Japanese white papers are published either because the government is required to do so by law and to report to the Diet, or so ministries can stimulate public interest in and promote public understanding of policy areas of which they are in charge. The defense white paper is the latter case, and policymakers recognized this need as especially compelling in the area of national defense, one of the biggest bones of contention in postwar Japanese politics.

Several predecessors to Nakasone thought about publishing a defense white paper, starting in the 1950s, but in vain. This historical legacy lingered, and the defense ministry was not able to publish a second white paper until 1976.

When the inaugural issue came out, Minister Nakasone said the following in a speech at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan on March 5, 1970: "My mission is to open the door on defense discussions and make defense issues so clear that even taxi drivers and house maids will be able to understand and support our defense efforts." His statement may well exemplify the purpose of the defense white paper.

The defense white paper has been published annually since 1976. The initial small booklet (67 pages in B6 size) has gradually developed into a larger volume. A chapter on the overseas activity of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) came to be included in the white paper in 1992, a year marked by the enactment of legislation to deploy troops abroad to participate in international peacekeeping operations. In 1998 the white paper widened its coverage to include the SDF's disaster responses and cooperation for a more stable international environment. Now the defense white paper contains about 400–500 pages, including about 100 pages of reference materials. It is comprised of four major pillars: a special topic and important

events of the year; the international security environment (Part I); fundamental issues on defense policy (Part II); and the institutions and activities of the MOD/SDF (Part III). It is one of the best-selling white papers in Japan.

The defense white paper is produced by a team which is established on an ad hoc basis every year. It is a task force, not a standing office. Writing and editing for the first white paper was done by three civilian officials. At the time of the second issue, officers from the three service branches joined the writing and editing team. The current task force usually consists of seven people: one deputy director-general level official; one civilian official; three military officers, one from each service; and two support staff, one civilian, one in uniform. (They are sometimes called the "seven samurai.") This practice is not the norm among the Japanese ministries since in most cases a permanent office formulates a white paper, yet the task force system seems to be successful.

There is no strict regulation about how a white paper must be produced in the defense ministry. The process may vary from year to year, but typically goes through the following steps.

### **Planning**

First of all, a task force is established. Its members begin with intensive discussion to develop an "editorial policy," the overall idea and structure of the white paper for the year. Civilian and military offices in the Ministry of Defense are asked to provide their views on the proposed editorial policy. The task force also asks politicians, academics, journalists, and so on for their suggestions, and may even ask a public relations/design company for advice on the layout of the white paper. Through such internal and external interactions, the team members gradually settle on the "image" of their product. The team also plans the schedule of work.

Once the task force and consulted offices have agreed on the editorial policy, the task force presents it at a meeting at which director-generals and staff chiefs meet, and then to the ministers (Minister, Parliamentary Senior Vice-Minister, and two Parliamentary Vice-Ministers), for their endorsement.

### ***Writing and Ministerial Consultations***

The task force drafts chapters on its own or assigns chapters and sections to particular offices which write and provide supporting materials (photos, graphs, charts, and figures). In recent years, Part I, which assesses the security environment, has been written by the intelligence analysis office of the Defense Policy Bureau.

Once the various pieces have been consolidated, draft chapters are circulated among the internal bureaus and the staff offices. Based on their comments, the task force revises the drafts. There are three rounds of intra-ministerial consultation. Again, once the relevant offices have agreed, the task force submits the draft to a meeting of director-generals and staff chiefs, and then to the ministers, for their approval.

After the ministerial clearance, the task force brings the draft to other government agencies. The foreign and finance ministries and the Cabinet Legislative Bureau (CLB) are the most likely to say something about the draft. For example, the Foreign Ministry may want to discuss how to view the security environment, while the CLB is keen to check what the MOD writes about the Constitution and governmental principles on national defense. Revisions are made, if necessary, before inter-ministry talks come to an end.

### ***Publication***

The final draft is presented to the *Kantei*, or the Prime Minister's Office. Then the MOD's Defense Council, the highest forum for ministerial decision-making, is held to endorse the final draft. On the day of publication, the white paper is first distributed to the Cabinet and then released to the public. The white paper is at the same time uploaded on the website, as is a draft English translation. Later it is published in English, and its summary is provided in Chinese, Korean, and Russian.

The MOD vigorously engages in dissemination activities. The white paper is sent and presented to a variety of individuals and organizations inside and outside the country. A briefing is provided to defense attachés in Tokyo. Briefings to political parties are quite important in terms of government accountability to the legislature on defense policy. No less important are presen-

tations to the ministry's regional branches (Regional Defense Bureaus) since they in turn, make presentations to local governments and residents in their respective jurisdictions.

As this process indicates, a defense white paper seems to be developed through a bottom-up, collective, and consensus-based approach. This does not mean, however, that top leadership does not matter. Senior leaders may provide direction on what should be explained in the white paper. A case in point is the 2008 white paper, which devoted pages to MOD reforms in the wake of a series of scandals. Civilian leaders may also provide input on when to publish the paper.

Importantly, day-to-day communications between the task force and the higher officials and ministers are dense; the task force incorporates their suggestions into the product at various stages of production. Thus the bottom-up process does not hamper transparency; rather, it may have a couple of advantages.

One advantage is high credibility and accuracy. The white paper contains writing and data provided by almost every office in the ministry. All the information comes from primary sources, that is, the very offices in charge of the matter in question. Also, the draft is cross-checked at least three times as described above. Another advantage is timeliness. Information and data are stockpiled on a daily basis at the headquarters of the MOD/SDF. The task force's close working relationships within the MOD give them access to this information without having to spend additional time compiling it. This means that every year the public can obtain the latest information, updated by the relevant offices.

### ***Contents and Transparency***

There are several aspects of the Japanese defense white paper which could be of use to other countries as they consider how to improve transparency. First, the white paper is comprehensive in its coverage of the policies, institutions, activities, and budgets of the MOD and SDF. Readers can get what they want somewhere in it. For example, if one wants to know about Japanese international peace cooperation, the white paper provides information from the legal framework to normal time

preparation (for example, education and drills) to detailed accounts of recent operations. Also included is a list of all the missions the SDF units have participated in. The white paper is a useful tool for fact checking and understanding the current status of Japan's defense.

Next, the white paper outlines the basic concepts and principles of national defense, usually in Part II. Part II begins with Japanese views on national security and constitutional interpretations (that is, the constitutionality of the SDF). It then states some of the basic principles, such as defense-only and non-nuclear policies, followed by a detailed account of the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), which outline a direction of posture and structure targeting for the next several years. The white paper would not satisfy those who expect something new every year. However, it is important to include the things that have not changed, at least on this basic conceptual level, rather than assuming that readers are familiar with a particular policy. The paper shows what has changed and what has not changed. This can prevent or at least reduce unnecessary misunderstanding and suspicion.

Third, the white paper tries to provide intentions as well as facts. For example, the 2005 white paper offered extended explanations of the 2004 NDPG, elaborating on the intentions and force structure planning adopted in it. For another, when the Defense Agency was upgraded to the status of a full ministry in 2007, the white paper of that year gave an account of why the elevation was important. The MOD uses the the white paper to provide answers to those "why" questions.

Fourth, the MOD has made every effort to make the white paper easier to read and understand. Its main texts are supplemented with numerous footnotes, photos, maps, charts, illustrations, figures and "columns." Even a manga edition has been published since 2003. The 2011 white paper is a case in point. Two columns are provided to explain in plain language what is meant by "dynamic defense force," a new concept adopted in 2011NDPG to replace the "basic defense force" concept introduced in 1976. Such efforts may improve the accessibility of information by the general public.

These features of the white paper, in tandem of the ministry's vigorous dissemination effort, may lead to greater domestic and international transparency re Japan's defense. Some might find the defense paper prosaic, which would be inevitable to some extent considering that it is not made public until after consensus is reached among offices within the MOD and between the MOD and other ministries. However, the white paper is not the place for the defense ministry or the Japanese government to make an argument. It is to help the public understand and discuss the nation's defense.

## **THE ROLE OF OTHER GOVERNMENT DEFENSE REPORTS**

The MOD publishes two additional annual defense and security reports. The National Institute for Defense Studies (NIDS), the defense ministry's think tank, has published the *East Asian Strategic Survey* (EASR) since 1996, and quite recently launched a *China Security Report*. The EASR focuses more narrowly on the developments of the year in East Asia. The *China Security Report* is totally issue-oriented and aimed at analyzing the recent military trends in China. These two annual reports touch upon topics not much dealt with in the white paper and other public relations documents, and in this sense could be regarded as complementary to them, although the NIDS reports do not necessarily represent the official views of the ministry.

The two reports, written by NIDS researchers, are intended to provide a perspective, and even an argument in some cases, independent of the ministry. For example, the 2011 *China Security Report* proposed that Japan and China develop bilateral defense exchanges and in particular communications at the practical level between the naval authorities of the two countries. This is partly because the report's aim is to promote dialogue with other countries. Examples of opportunities for such dialogue conducted by NIDS include, but are not limited to, a briefing to defense attachés, a foreign press conference, and bilateral and multi-lateral workshops. For this purpose, both reports

are published in English as well as in Japanese. The *China Security Report* is published also in Chinese to make it easy for the Chinese people to directly learn a Japanese perspective on the Chinese military. These reports may be understood as part of the ministry's effort to promote defense transparency.

## CONCLUSION

The white paper (together with the NDPG and the Mid-Term Defense Program) may be the surest guide to the official lines of Japan's defense policy. Furthermore, it is the most systematic and best organized point of reference in terms of the nation's defense. Launched to stimulate public interest in and promote public understanding of defense issues at its origin, the white paper is now integral to the ministry's public relations. At the

same time, Japan's white paper has also contributed to its defense transparency vis-à-vis the domestic and foreign audience. In this regard, it may not be too much to say that the collective nature of formulating the white paper functions in a way that fosters transparency, ensuring the most comprehensive, accurate, and up-to-date information. This approach has worked well because senior leaders and the offices involved seem to share the view that the white paper is the most important vehicle for the ministry to explain itself to the public.

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