From Management Crisis to Crisis Management?

Japan's Post-2012 Institutional Reforms and Sino-Japanese Crisis (In)Stability

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ABSTRACT

Since 2012, China's force deployment to assert its sovereignty claim to the contested Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands has significantly raised the risk of a potentially escalatory political-military crisis with Japan. As circumstances worsen, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has championed major institutional reforms aimed at centralizing Japanese security policy decision-making and vastly improving crisis management. This article assesses these reforms' significance for ameliorating Japan's longstanding internal crisis management weaknesses, and enhancing its ability to communicate with Beijing promptly under challenging conditions. While significant issues remain, recent developments—especially Japan's first-ever National Security Council—demonstrate significant progress. Bilaterally, however, important firebreaks remain conspicuously absent.

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Since September 2012, China's employment of military and paramilitary forces to challenge Japan's decades-old administrative control of the Senkaku (Chinese: Diaoyu) Islands has introduced significant uncertainty and risk into the most volatile flashpoint between the world's second- and third-largest economies. Under this 'new normal,' China's civil maritime and air forces, backed by navy and air force power as necessary, provocatively assert Beijing's sovereignty claim. The stakes are high: conflict—even unintended—between China and Japan (with its US ally) over the uninhabited islands could be catastrophic. It would involve the world's three largest economies and be disastrous for regional and global stability, as well as the world economy.

Despite these manifest costs, and the fact that neither Beijing nor Tokyo *wants* conflict, the post-2012 operational status quo has significantly increased the possibility of even an unintended miscalculation or incident. Especially in a potentially volatile domestic political context, a subsequent political-military crisis could escalate if not managed rapidly and effectively. History provides particularly sobering lessons regarding the escalation risks in territorial disputes, however ill-advised on material grounds. A vast political science literature demonstrates that disputes over territory are the primary cause of most modern wars.[4] During remarks on bilateral tensions at the 2014 World Economic Forum, the Japanese prime minister's ominous reference to strong economic ties failing to prevent war in 1914 made global headlines.[5]

Specific to the East China Sea (ECS), global commentators and political and military leaders from both sides have warned of escalation risks, wisely calling for enhanced crisis management to ensure robust firebreaks and fail-safes. In this context, operational realities, especially given deepening regional tensions, power shifts, and North Korea's advancing nuclear

[4] Toft, Monica. 'Territory and War,' *Journal of Peace Research* 51/2 (2014), 185–198.
[5] "Abe Sees World War One Echoes in Japan-China tensions," *Reuters*, January 23, 2014.

and missile capabilities, have rendered the maturity of Japan's internal crisis management institutions, and the degree to which Tokyo and Beijing are capable of managing a crisis effectively, important policy concerns to all interested in East Asian peace and stability. This is especially true for Washington—Japan's sole security ally and China's top trading partner.

Remarkably, however, how capable the two sides are of actually managing a possible crisis remains a crucial, yet rarely-engaged question. This study aims to fill this major lacuna in the literature. It does so through the first systematic assessment of post-2012 developments regarding Japan's internal and external crisis management capabilities most relevant to the ECS. It provides an overdue complement to recent scholarship examining China's side of the ledger,[6] and provides extensive assessment of the impact of Japan's new National Security Council (JNSC).

Not coincidentally, a dynamic environment in Tokyo means the time is ripe for reexamination of Japanese institutions and practices. Since returning to the Kantei in December 2012—three months after his DPJ's predecessor 'nationalization' of the islands catalyzed Beijing's increasingly assertive behavior—Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has spearheaded a panoply of institutional and other reforms designed to directly address longstanding problems with Japan's security policy- and crisis management-relevant institutions. Chief among these: the 2013 establishment of Japan's first-ever NSC. Its creation reflects and occurs concomitantly with Abe's centralization of security decision-making in the executive branch, itself a manifestation of a long-term trend of institutional and security policy reforms driven by external national security challenges (China; North Korea) and deepening US pressure; all enabled by shifting domestic

[6] Alastair Iain Johnston, 'The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China,' *Naval War College Review* 69/1 (2016), 29-72; Andrew S. Erickson and Adam P. Liff, 'Installing a Safety on the "Loaded Gun"? China's Institutional Reforms, National Security Commission and Sino-Japanese Crisis (In)Stability,' *Journal of Contemporary China* 25/98 (2016), 197-215.

political winds. Externally, Abe's administration has also pursued negotiations with Beijing on the establishment of robust bilateral crisis management hotlines to serve as diplomatic firebreaks.

Beyond policy relevance, the issues examined herein also have important implications for academic literatures on East Asian international relations, comparative politics, Sino-Japanese relations, and Japanese politics and foreign policy. In assessing the drivers and significance of recent developments, this article draws primarily on newly available Japanese government and think tank documents, analyses, and interviews with knowledgeable interlocutors in Tokyo, Washington, and Beijing. It also builds on a small but important English-language scholarly literature on Japan's crisis management.[7]

I. Motivating the Study: Mitigating Risk

Over the past several years, China's increasing usage of military and paramilitary forces to assert sweeping sovereignty claims in the South and ECSs has unnerved its neighbors and the United States—an ally/security partner of many. Though since early 2014 the world's attention has turned to Beijing's South China Sea activities and the associated international response, circumstances in the waters and airspace surrounding the Senkakus remain operationally and diplomatically unstable. For its part, the US government has cited an 'unprecedented rise in risky activity.'[8] Washington has a direct interest, not only because of its extensive economic and

[7] James L. Schoff, *Crisis Management in Japan & the United States* (Dulles VA: Brassey's, 2004); Richard Bush, *The Perils of Proximity: China-Japan Security Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2010); Richard J. Samuels, *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 2013); Special Issue (Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity: In Search of New Approaches), *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 14/2 (2013); Yoichi Funabashi, *Japan in Peril? 9 Crisis Scenarios* (Hong Kong: CLSA Books, 2014); and Sanaa Yasmin Hafeez, 'The Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Crises of 2004, 2010, and 2012: A Study of Japanese-Chinese Crisis Management,' *Asia-Pacific Review* 22/1 (2015), 73–99.

[8] Daniel Russel, *Maritime Disputes in East Asia: Testimony Before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific*, 5 February 2014, http://www.state.gov/p/eap/rls/rm/2014/02/221293.htm.

political ties with Tokyo and Beijing but also because of its treaty commitment to back the former in a possible conflict over the Japan-administered islands.[9]

A. Operational Trends and Risky Behavior

The contemporary operational reality throws the potential stakes—and risks—into sharp relief. Following the government of Japan's (GOJ) 'nationalization' of three of the islands in September 2012, China has employed military and paramilitary forces and coercive means to overturn the decades-old status quo of Japanese administrative control.

At sea, activity in Japan's de facto territorial waters and contiguous zone by China Coast Guard (CCG) vessels has surged.[10] As CCG has grown into the world's largest coast guard, its vessels and their capabilities have expanded commensurately. Beijing is recommissioning former navy frigates as white-hulled CCG vessels, while its newest ships displace as much as 10,000 tons—larger than US *Arleigh Burke*-class destroyers and dwarfing their Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) counterparts. This is not a purely paranaval competition, however, and action-reaction dynamics are clear. As CCG vessels enter Japan-administered waters, PLA Navy (PLAN) warships sit sentry over-the-horizon. Meanwhile, in the air, as Chinese fighter and other aircraft activity reaches unprecedented levels, so have scrambles of Japan's Air Self-defense Force (JASDF) fighters to intercept. Figures for the first half of 2016 (407 scrambles against Chinese aircraft) indicate a 76-percent increase over the previous year, itself a record high.[11]

Beyond general trend lines, specific incidents provide further grounds for concern. Most notably, in January 2013 Japan reported two incidents of PLAN employment of fire control

[9] 'Obama Says Pact Obliges US to Protect Japan in Islands Fight,' *New York Times*, 24 April 2014.
[10] Data from Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, October 31, 2016. http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000170838.pdf ,
[11] 'Statistics on Scrambles during the First Half of FY2016,' *Ministry of Defense*, 14 October 2016.

radar—the penultimate step in the engagement sequence—against the JMSDF. That October, Beijing called Tokyo's threats to down Chinese drones entering Japanese airspace a potential 'act of war';[12] later, it expressed interest in employing its rapidly-expanding drone fleet to assert its island claim.[13] In November 2013, Beijing abruptly declared a controversial ECS Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) notable for its overlap with Japan's decades-old ADIZ, inclusion of Senkaku airspace, and nature of its implementation. Not coincidentally, recent years have also seen several dangerous fighter jet encounters. The 2001 fatal collision of a Chinese J-8 fighter into a US EP-3 surveillance aircraft in international airspace exemplifies the risks of close encounters by fixed-wing aircraft—which, to stay aloft, must maintain speed, leaving little time for decision-making or collision avoidance measures. Within days of the first-ever entry of a PLAN warship into the island's contiguous waters in June 2016, there were reports of mock dogfighting occurring near the islands—an unprecedented escalation of risk.[14]

Beyond the possible 'real time' crisis management challenges owing to operational matters in increasingly crowded waters and airspace surrounding the islands, additional grounds for concern about escalation risks and sustainability of the status quo exist:

- Noxious bilateral political relations, characterized in part by mutual antipathy and mistrust, and irregularity of political or military exchange exacerbating a general lack of exchange, much less personal leadership connections.
- Domestic politics that may shape leaders' calculations, especially widespread 'anti-Japanese nationalism' within China, which may frustrate efforts to de-escalate.

[12] 'China Warns Japan Against Shooting Down Drones Over Islands,' *Times of India*, 27 October 2013.
[13] 'PLA Considers Drones for Island Patrols,' *South China Morning Post*, 13 June 2015.
[14] Interviewee A, Tokyo, June 2016. For Chinese accusations, see 'Chinese and Japanese Fighters Clash over ECS,' *USNI News*, 5 July 2016. https://news.usni.org/2016/07/05/chinese-japanese-fighters-clash-east-china-sea.

- China's own crisis management weaknesses (summarized below), risk acceptance, and apparent effort to exploit operations and bilateral negotiations to extract a major political concession from Tokyo on the sovereignty issue.

II. Diagnosis: Traditional Weaknesses in Sino-Japanese Crisis Management-Relevant Institutions

Even before the ECS became so unstable, characteristics of China's and Japan's crisis management-relevant institutions long provided grounds for concern about the two parties' ability to rapidly and effectively manage a political-military crisis. Since 2012, the worsened operational picture underscores the importance of understanding these traditional limitations, and examining the extent to which leaders on both sides have addressed them.

In this article, *crisis* is defined as a subset of the comprehensive typology outlined by Sakaki and Lukner: a man-made, unanticipated event that threatens something valuable, disrupts routine decision-making, and imposes 'trade-offs and dilemmas… under time pressure and insufficient information.' 'Crisis management' refers to the 'organizational and political response during the most critical and precarious phase following the onset of a crisis.'[15]

A. China (Summary of Existing Research)

Building on a two-decade old literature on crisis management in China, recent academic studies reveal persistent weaknesses in China's internal crisis management capabilities; in particular rapid, effective coordination across Party, government, and military and paramilitary

[15] Alexandra Sakaki and Kerstin Lukner, 'Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity: In Search of New Approaches' *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, 14/2 (2013), 156-57.

organs.[16] Internal debates, coupled with several recent reforms, suggest Beijing is increasingly cognizant of these problems and has taken some measures to address them. Yet doubts persist concerning whether recent reforms have significantly ameliorated longstanding, fundamental problems: poor coordination and information sharing, civilian oversight of the military limited to the very highest level, ad hoc decision-making by an unwieldy array of stakeholders, and opaque policy implementation that is slow to delegate authority or empower officials to act or communicate with foreign counterparts.

Case-in-point: one major recent institutional reform—the establishment of a standing Central National Security Commission (CNSC)—appears focused primarily on internal, not external security: domestic stability, anti-terrorism, countering threats to Chinese Communist Party (CCP) control, and other primarily *internal* matters. It remains unclear whether CNSC is adequately staffed or empowered to play a robust convening, coordination, and externally-focused decision-making and crisis management role akin to that of a typical NSC under normal conditions—let alone emergencies when theoretical flowcharts might well default to an informal chain of command under an over-taxed Xi as the 'commander in chief of everything' and a murky constellation of personally-connected advisors who might be poorly suited to offer him a full range of updated information, perspectives, and executable options in real time. Nor is there yet a National Security Advisor representing the paramount organ of executive power—Xi Jinping and the Politburo Standing Committee—with whom foreign counterparts can establish a working

[16] Samantha Hoffman and Peter Mattis, 'Managing the Power Within: China's State Security Commission,' *War on the Rocks*, 18 July 2016, http://warontherocks.com/2016/07/managing-the-power-within-chinas-state-security-commission/; Phillip C. Saunders and Andrew Scobell, eds., *PLA Influence on China's National Security Policymaking* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 2015).

relationship in advance, or seek out as a direct pipeline in a crisis, when normal channels may not function properly.[17]

B. Japan

The small existing scholarship assessing Japan's crisis management capabilities predates both the instability in the ECS and major institutional reforms since Abe's return to the primeministership in December 2012, especially establishment of Japan's first-ever NSC (*kokka anzen hosho kaigi*). The remainder of this article aims to fill this literature lacuna by assessing the extent to which the NSC and other recent reforms significantly mitigate traditional weaknesses. It begins with an overview of traditional factors weakening Japan's crisis management.

Due in significant part to historical legacies of Japan's 1930s-40s experience and the Allied Occupation following its 1945 defeat, postwar leaders have traditionally faced significant internal obstacles—both institutional and normative—to rapid, effective crisis response. This is especially true as it concerns incidents requiring involvement of Japan's de facto military—the Self-defense Forces (JSDF). Accordingly, Japan has limited experience with military crisis management. Indeed, much of the associated literature has focused on the government's ability to handle other sorts of crises—ranging from natural disasters to financial crises. Most assessments are critical, while acknowledging incremental progress.[18]

At a basic level, effective management of non-military crises has similar requirements to those necessary for a political-military crisis—rapid response and involvement of key principals, cooperation between politicians and bureaucrats, and robust coordination across the bureaucracies

[17] Erickson and Liff, 'Installing a Safety on the "Loaded Gun"?; David M. Lampton, 'Xi Jinping and the National Security Commission: Policy Coordination and Political Power' 24/95 (2015), 759-77; Johnston, 'The Evolution of Interstate Security Crisis-Management Theory and Practice in China'; author's discussions with Chinese military officers and government-affiliated scholars, January 2017.

[18] For examples, see Special Issue (Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity: In Search of New Approaches), *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14/2 (2013); Samuels, *3.11*; and Funabashi, *Japan in Peril?*

themselves. Nevertheless, military crises often differ in risk intensity, time sensitivity, escalation potential, and imperatives to take rapid, complex, decisive, and possibly lethal kinetic action; potentially vis-à-vis other actor(s) with whom transparent, constructive communication may be difficult or impossible—at least in the short run. Unlike, say, a natural disaster, the latter inherently involve a strategic interaction—necessitating that internal coordination and decision-making and external diplomatic outreach occur concomitantly, expeditiously, and be centered on a strong, decisive executive.

In these regards, Japan's limited experience and its leaders' traditional reluctance to capitalize on JSDF expertise in planning and crisis response is particularly noteworthy. Japan's political system has typically deemphasized proactive political leadership on foreign and security affairs, with key aspects heavily shaped by Washington. Meanwhile, its bureaucracy has traditionally been known to dominate elected officials. Even among bureaucrats, inter-agency stove-piping and 'turf wars' are widely recognized. There has also been significant resistance from both groups to active involvement of uniformed military personnel in decision-making. Collectively, and distinct from discussion of additional military and intelligence capabilities, these institutional characteristics provide clear grounds for concern about the government's ability to communicate rapidly and effectively internally in a political-military crisis. In contrast to, say, a Cold War-era crisis with Moscow, although Washington today commits to assisting Tokyo in an ECS contingency, it also stresses that Japan is on the front lines and thus primarily responsible for crisis management.

Research and interviews with knowledgeable Japanese officials, military officers and analysts—many with direct knowledge and first-hand experience vis-à-vis important processes and cases—confirm existing academic studies' identification of significant and longstanding

deficiencies in Japan's crisis management-relevant institutions. What follows is an overview of key traditional weaknesses in Japan's internal crisis management.

Centralized Decision-making, Executive Leadership

Political-military crisis management is a complicated, multi-constituency, time-sensitive affair. Accordingly, efficient, effective formulation and prosecution requires standard operating procedures, clearly prescribed roles for major players, institutionalization of regular inter-agency coordination, planning and implementation. For these reasons, a strong executive and centralized decision-making are central to rapid and effective interagency information sharing and policy coordination. Alas, not only has Japan traditionally lacked this strong executive, but its ministries have been notorious for balkanization and vigorous competition exacerbated by deep parochial loyalties.[19]

Effective crisis management depends on a strong, well-informed, proactive executive. Ideally, a 'buck' stops with a paramount political leader, upon whom responsibility for a final decision rests, and who issues clear marching orders to relevant politicians, ministries/agencies (including the intelligence community), and JSDF and JCG leaders. Slow response, unclear delegation rules, or lack of order clarity increases miscalculation risk.

In Japan, a general political culture of consensus-based decision-making, coupled with deprioritization of foreign and security policy, has traditionally exacerbated structural deficiencies. Especially during the Cold War, focus on economic growth and extraordinary reliance on Washington meant that foreign policy suffered from poor central coordination and oversight.

[19] For associated literature review, see Sakaki and Lukner, 'Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity,' 160-62.

Leading scholars have varyingly referred to Tokyo's basic approach as 'reactive,' 'minimalist,' or simply 'coping,' and following Washington's lead through 'karaoke diplomacy.'[20] While scholars disagree on how well this approach has served Japan's interests, few would have considered it generally proactive, rapid, assertive, or adept at managing crises. Case-in-point: for the first seven decades postwar, Japan did not even have an independent, comprehensive national security strategy around which to orient foreign policy and crisis management.

Beyond the issue of priorities, Japan's political leaders and the Cabinet have historically been effectively weak relative to powerful bureaucracies in certain contexts. Especially in the military/security domain, domestic political disincentives further discouraged leaders from 'rocking the boat.' Already extremely sensitive territory given widespread resentment of the military's legacy in Japan's wartime politics and decision-making, massive riots in the wake of the 1960 revision of the US-Japan Mutual Security Treaty rendered security affairs a third rail of postwar Japanese politics, although incremental reforms have occurred—especially since the late 1970s.[21] Exacerbating these normative headwinds, structural issues abound: turnover among Cabinet ministers is frequent and politicians have had extraordinarily small policy staffs, with few resources available to develop significant foreign policy expertise. Consequently, political leaders relied on the bureaucracy (and Washington) for much foreign policy leadership.[22] Limited

[20] Kent Calder, 'Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State,' *World Politics* 40/4 (1988), 517-41; Gerald L. Curtis, 'Introduction,' and Michael Blaker, 'Evaluating Japanese Diplomatic Performance,' in Gerald L. Curtis, ed., *Japan's Foreign Policy After the Cold War: Coping with Change* (Armonk, N.Y: M.E. Sharpe, 1993); Takashi Inoguchi and Purnendra Jain, 'Beyond Karaoke Diplomacy?' in Takashi Inoguchi and Purnendra Jain, Eds. *Japan's Foreign Policy Today: A Reader* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), xi-xix.
[21] For seminal analyses, see Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1996); Thomas U. Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism: National Security in Germany and Japan* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1998); Andrew Oros, *Normalizing Japan: Politics, Identity, and the Evolution of Security Practice* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2009).
[22] Gerald L. Curtis, *The Logic of Japanese Politics* (New York: Columbia UP, 1999), esp. 228-234; Michael J. Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (NY: Palgrave, 2003), Ch.2.

proactive engagement has also been another problem. In several past crises, prime ministers were remarkably disengaged or out-of-the-loop. For example, in February 2001, after being informed that a Japanese training ship was sunk accidentally by a US nuclear submarine, leaving nine people dead, then Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro reportedly continued playing golf. After a major earthquake in 1995, then Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi did not receive the first report for more than an hour.[23]

These factors have historically hamstrung prime ministers when it came to shaping foreign policy and actively managing or reforming relevant institutions. Even those leaders who did try to lead on sensitive security issues, transform the JSDF's structure or posture, or push through significant institutional reforms to mitigate existing deficiencies enjoyed limited success, or even faced severe political backlash.

Exacerbating the historically deleterious impact of weak institutionalization of a strong executive has been rapid turnover of key principals responsible for spearheading crisis management and decision-making. After all, even the most perfectly-designed institution is only effective to the extent its leaders are experienced, present, engaged, and knowledgeable. Post-Cold War, this was lacking for much of two-plus decades. During 1989-2012 Japan had 16 prime ministers, each with short-lived tenure averaging 537 days. The exception proves the rule: the proactive, stable prime ministership of Junichiro Koizumi (2001-2006) was instrumental in consolidating Kantei-centered foreign policy leadership and bolstering crisis response, including responses to 9.11 and the Iraq War.[24] Yet the six weak prime ministers who followed had average

[23] 'Abe's Power Play,' *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 7 March 2015.
[24] Tomohito Shinoda, *Koizumi Diplomacy* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007). Koizumi's leadership demonstrated the importance of executive leadership in crises. Under Koizumi, a 2004 Senkaku landing by Chinese nationals was handled effectively. In 2010, political instability, a hands-off prime ministerial response, and a Cabinet reorganization during a similar incident arguably significantly exacerbated the crisis, with lasting political and diplomatic consequences for Sino-Japanese relations, the ECS dispute especially. Hafeez, 'Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Crises.'

tenures of merely 381 days. Even more frequent turnover among the three other Cabinet officials most relevant to foreign affairs/crisis management/inter-agency coordination is also debilitating. During 1989-2012, Japan experienced 27 chief cabinet secretaries and 25 ministers for foreign affairs. Between the Japan Defense Agency (JDA)'s 2007 upgrade to a full-fledged ministry and 2012, Japan had 10 ministers of defense. Creating additional obstacles to rapid, effective responses, in some cases appointees have not had any particularly deep expertise in their assigned portfolio.

Even the most capable leader may not manage crises effectively if overburdened, distracted, unfamiliar with their assigned portfolio, or simply new to the job and lacking connections to the relevant players within the bureaucracy, to say nothing of their foreign counterparts.

Bureaucratic stove-piping

Absent strong, consistent political oversight and leadership, Japan's crisis management has historically been further weakened by internal inter-agency coordination issues: reflected in bureaucratic stove-piping (*tatewari gyosei*) and the typically infrequent, inadequate coordination among national security-relevant ministries and agencies.[25] A former official encapsulated Japan's past modus operandi as 'not crisis management but management crisis.'[26]

Throughout its postwar history Japan has lacked a robust, standing institution to facilitate interagency coordination among national security-relevant principals, ministries and agencies. The 1986 Security Council (*anzen hosho kaigi*; SC) was an attempt to partially address this issue, but it has long proved ineffective, with irregular, infrequent meetings and ad-hoc responses the norm

[25] *Tatewari gyosei* came up repeatedly during research interviews with Japanese and American officials and experts. Directly translated as 'vertical administration,' the term refers to vertical segregation and lack of communication and cooperation across ministries and agencies, sometimes active turf wars. For more, see T.J. Pempel, 'Japanese Strategy under Koizumi,' in Gilbert Rozman, et al., Eds. *Japanese Strategic Thought Toward Asia* (NY: Palgrave, 2007), 111-12; Hitoshi Tanaka, *Gaiko no Chikara* (Tokyo: Nikkei, 2009), 226-227; Samuels, *3.11*, esp. 8-9, 22-23.
[26] Interviewee B, Tokyo, January 2015.

(see NSC section, below). As the complexities of decision-making in the post-Cold War period manifest, deficiencies with existing institutions became increasingly recognized. Calls even proliferated for Japan to establish a standing, US-style NSC—an organization designed precisely to strengthen executive leadership and overcome these and other obstacles to inter-agency coordination. Yet existing bureaucracies' strength and parochialism led them to oppose deeper centralization and the establishment of a strong coordinating body in Kantei. Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA), in particular, regarded an NSC as a threat to its 'turf'.[27] Absent a motivated, strong executive able and willing to overcome bureaucratic resistance, a robust NSC proved elusive.

The Kaifu Cabinet's tortured reaction to the 1990-91 Persian Gulf crisis illustrates the practical consequences of such traditional deficiencies. A post-mortem of Japan's widely-criticized policy response ascribes the administration's 'ad-hoc,' 'reactive,' 'equivocating,' and 'incoherent' response to domestic factors, first among them a 'malfunctioning internal crisis management system.'[28] Japan's traditional bottom-up *ringisei* consensus-building approach to policy formulation proved time-consuming and ineffectual, as 'the Iraqi crisis required a top-down style of decision-making by informed political leaders.' Yet the prime minister was 'weak,' had been in office only a year, and 'lacked foreign policy expertise […and…] a large, independent staff to advise him on security matters,' leaving him excessively dependent on MoFA bureaucrats. Meanwhile, the debilitating absence of institutionalized inter-agency cooperation manifested itself in 'muddled' decision-making, due significantly to Kaifu's failure to convene the SC until months after the crisis began. Time constraints in crisis proved the *ringisei* system 'dysfunctional' and

[27] Interviewee C, Tokyo, January 2015.
[28] See Courtney Purrington, and A. K. 'Tokyo's Policy Responses during the Gulf Crisis.' *Asian Survey* 31/4 (1991), 307–23.

forced reliance on ad hoc MoFA task forces. These, in turn, proved ineffective given MoFA's insufficient engagement of and attention paid to input from other security-relevant institutions, especially JDA and MITI, despite its own weakness in independent intelligence-gathering and assessment. Accordingly, Kaifu was poorly informed.

Intelligence gathering, assessment, and sharing

Timely, accurate advance and real-time intelligence is crucial for effective crisis response, especially in situations like an ECS incident where the risk of miscalculation may be extremely high. Yet bureaucratic balkanization and ineffective communication with policymakers has been widely documented across the five members of Japan's relatively small intelligence community (IC): the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO; the chief coordinator directly connected to the PM), Defense Intelligence HQ (in MoD), Intelligence and Analysis Service (in MoFA), Public Security Intelligence Agency, and National Police Agency (NPA).[29]

The IC itself is widely criticized (outside and within) for internal stove-piping and lack of coordination among member agencies. One former official described agency-specific information hoarding and protection of direct channels to top leaders as egregious.[30] Interviews reveal the extent to which views differ concerning the source of the problem. For example, past Directors of Cabinet Intelligence (DCI) have complained in print about MoFA's and MoD's refusal to share intelligence, and CIRO's inability to force them to do so.[31] For their part, some security-focused

[29] The analysis in this paragraph draws on Yoshiki Kobayashi, 'Assessing Reform of the Japanese Intelligence Community,' *International Journal of Intelligence and CounterIntelligence* 28/4 (2015), 717–33 and interviews in Tokyo, January 2015 and July 2016.
[30] Interviewee D, Tokyo, January 2015.
[31] Ken Kotani, 'Japan,' in Robert Dover, ed., *Routledge Companion to Intelligence Studies* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), 205-06.

ministry officials disparage CIRO as a 'colony' of the NPA[32] and judge CIRO 'unqualified' to take the lead on national security-related intelligence.[33] Others blame the NPA for inappropriately monopolizing intelligence to preserve its direct line to the prime minister (overreaching by trying to be 'both the FBI and CIA of Japan').[34] Naturally, such internecine battles within GOJ and the IC itself pose significant obstacles to rapid coordination in a crisis requiring whole-of-government response.

Weak leadership authority, integration and information sharing has further exacerbated Japan's relatively (by G7 standards) immature intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities. One expert argues that beyond its reliance on the extended deterrence of the US nuclear umbrella, Japan has long 'counted on the US intelligence umbrella to make life-and-death decisions.'[35] On the demand side, Japan's government has lacked effective means for policymakers to convey intelligence requirements to the IC. Exacerbating this issue is a culture prioritizing political consensus-building, rather than sound policy based on careful examination of intelligence.[36] Japan's lack of a security clearance system and robust classification scheme to facilitate the protection of sensitive intelligence laws to protect secrets, etc., has long been identified as a major obstacle to effective intelligence-sharing internally, and also with foreign counterparts—most significantly, Washington. On the supply side, despite being responsible for coordination across the IC, both CIRO and the DCI have lacked means—e.g., budgetary or personnel authority—to compel greater information sharing. The lack of a clearly designated institutional hub connecting the IC and political leaders—the DCI's lacking formal designation as IC 'head'—facilitated

[32] Interviewee E, Tokyo, January 2015.
[33] Interviewee E, Tokyo, August 2016.
[34] Interviewee F, Tokyo, January 2015.
[35] Interviewee G, Tokyo, January 2015.
[36] Kotani, 'Japan,' 206.

members seeking out the prime minister directly, bypassing DCI/CIRO. The functions of the Kantei as a coordinating body have traditionally been weak. Experts with first-hand experience in Japan's crisis management consider this 'lack of integrated, filtered intelligence' a 'big problem' hamstringing Japan's responses to past incidents.[37]

Integration of Civilian and Military Aspects of Crisis Response

Beyond general institutional issues negatively affecting purely civilian sides of decision-making and internal coordination, several weaknesses specific to the security/military domain—and therefore especially relevant to a possible ECS crisis—have also affected crisis response.

For a variety of historical, normative, constitutional, and political reasons, since its 1954 establishment JSDF's role in high-level decision making has been extraordinarily circumscribed. For more than half-a-century, anti-militarism kept the JDA institutionally inferior and JSDF officers ostracized from much security planning/decision-making. Though influence gradually expanded during the Cold War—especially in response to the Soviet Far East military buildup beginning in the late 1970s—defense authorities' and uniformed officers' roles in policymaking remained extraordinarily constrained by any major power standards.[38] JSDF response to crises was limited significantly 'not by a lack of skills, expertise, or professionalism, but rather by constitutional constraints.'[39]

Several institutional characteristics are especially salient. First, the defense bureaucracy established to oversee the JSDF was set up as a sub-Cabinet-level agency, not a full-fledged

[37] Interviewees B and H, Tokyo, January 2015.
[38] Berger, *Cultures of Antimilitarism*.
[39] Katsumi Ishizuka, 'The Crisis Management Capability of Japan's Self Defense Forces for UN Peacekeeping, Counter-Terrorism, and Disaster Relief,' *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14/2 (2013), 201–22.

ministry, making it institutionally inferior and weak relative to other ministries (e.g., MoFA and the Ministry of Finance) and limiting its influence. Second, JSDF officers were often prevented from significant direct interaction with political leaders—even in an advisory role—and sidelined from national security decision-making. At important junctures, perspectives of military experts have often been downplayed, if not ignored. For example, when debating how to respond to the 1990-91 Gulf War crisis, Kaifu reportedly forbade members of his Cabinet and MoFA even to mention the term 'Self-defense Forces' when discussing Japan's policy response.[40] Meanwhile, JSDF did not deploy a large contingent to assist in disaster relief following the 1995 Kobe earthquake out of concern for 'anti-militarist sentiments and accusations about exploiting the crisis to expand the SDF's military role and scope of action.'[41]

Limited Experience with Military Crises

Japan has simply had limited experiences dealing with external military crises. Indeed, when one searches the historical record for instances of major crisis management, most have involved domestic affairs—especially responses to natural disasters such as the Kobe earthquake in the mid-1990s; or more recently, the 2011 triple disaster in Tohoku, which entailed the largest mobilization of JSDF personnel in history. The JSDF's lack of involvement in traditional military contingencies—since its 1954 establishment no member has employed fatal kinetic force—and primary role in natural disaster relief and limited in experience with external military crises cannot be ignored. Meanwhile, an emphasis on jointness within the JSDF itself of the sort central to an ECS political-military crisis or contingency is historically lacking; to say nothing of inter-organizational cooperation between Japan's de facto front line of defense—JCG—and the JSDF.

[40] Masaru Tamamoto, 'Trial of an Ideal: Japan's Debate over the Gulf Crisis,' *World Policy Journal* 8/1 (1990), 97.
[41] Sakaki and Lukner, 'Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity,' 166.

C. Sino-Japanese Bilateral Crisis Management

The existence, regularity, and robustness of high-level political, diplomatic, and military exchanges between Japan and China is a crucial factor in assessing their ability to rapidly and effectively manage an ECS crisis. Numerous examples from the Cold War and beyond demonstrate that regular dialogue, high-level diplomacy, and crisis hotlines can help prevent miscalculation or misunderstanding that might otherwise foment a military crisis; or forestall escalation if one occurs. Tokyo and Beijing would thus appear to have a mutual interest in establishing, implementing, and effectively utilizing robust high-level diplomatic and emergency communication channels in a crisis to minimize miscalculation risk. If nothing else, geographical proximity and the importance of the relations between the world's second- and third-largest economies would lead one to expect extensive institutionalization of bilateral hotlines and other mechanisms.

The reality is sobering. Multifarious factors—including geopolitics during the Cold War and anti-Japanese nationalism and other domestic political disincentives in China since—have historically rendered institutionalization of bilateral channels capable of rapidly and effectively preventing crisis escalation extraordinarily weak.[42] The informal pipelines between politicians central to diplomacy during the Cold War have atrophied, while high-level political and military exchanges are irregular and infrequent—often years apart. At times, Beijing even suspends them for protracted periods to express dissatisfaction with Tokyo—e.g., following prime ministerial visits to Yasukuni Shrine or, more recently, a two-year cut-off of summit meetings following the September 2012 island 'nationalization.' In recent years, most diplomacy occurs through ministries of foreign affairs—particularly problematic given the institutional weakness of

[42] Hafeez, 'Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands Crises'; Erickson and Liff, 'Installing a Safety on the "Loaded Gun"?.

China's MFA, often rendered irrelevant and ostracized from decision-making by far more powerful CCP organizations. Finally, despite a 2007 joint statement to establish a communications system between defense establishments to avoid naval and air incidents, the two sides have failed to achieve it. They remain unable to agree on terms to establish high-level political or military crisis management hotlines—a major potential impediment to escalation control in the event diplomatic or political resolution of a bilateral crisis.

Moreover, like some of its neighbors, China has a poor track record of actually using established hotlines in crisis.[43] Likewise, while Japan and China have signed the Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea (CUES), it is highly limited, non-binding, and Beijing has not employed it consistently even in peacetime.[44]

III. Prescription: Japan's Internal Crisis Management Capabilities: Recent Reforms, Remaining Challenges

Beyond the manifest operational dangers, the preceding analysis provides clear institutional grounds for concern about the risk of escalation in waters or airspace surrounding the islands: China's and Japan's respective abilities to manage a possible crises rapidly and effectively—both internally and bilaterally. But past is not destiny. In recent years, real-world crises ranging from the Gulf War and 9.11 to natural disasters such as the 1995 Kobe Earthquake have made Japan's leaders increasingly aware of problems and willing to incrementally reform crisis management-relevant institutions.

[43] Euan Graham, 'Maritime Hotlines in East Asia,' May 2014, https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/RSIS_RFQ_Maritime-Hotlines-in-East-Asia_160514_Web.pdf.
[44] Author's interview with maritime operator experienced interacting with Chinese naval vessels, December 2016.

A series of post-2009 developments appear to have catalyzed a critical mass of elite support for and public acceptance of more rapid, significant reforms. A major catalyst: concern about Japan's changing security environment—not only the risk of a possible future military or paramilitary crisis involving China or North Korea but also growing awareness that in particular contingencies Japan is the front line. Additionally, manifest failures in the government's response to the March 11, 2011 'triple' (earthquake/tsunami/nuclear) disaster in Tohoku exposed persistent problems and inspired calls for a fundamental overhaul of Japan's crisis management system. Ineffectual political and bureaucratic leaders and institutions were widely blamed for exacerbating the disaster's catastrophic damage and fatalities. The crisis management center established in the Kantei was ad-hoc, and did not function effectively.[45] '3.11' also had direct implications for military-focused crisis management, challenging the JSDF and US-Japan alliance in unprecedented ways. Japan's response entailed the largest-ever mobilization of JSDF personnel and first-ever establishment of a JSDF joint task force, while the US deployed nearly 20 ships, 140 aircraft, and 20,000 troops to assist.[46] As Samuels notes in his seminal post-mortem, GOJ officials criticized the Kan administration's response with terms ranging from 'feckless' to 'reckless.' Puzzling to many observers, despite the JSDF's massive and unprecedented deployment of over 100,000 personnel, Kan neither convened the SC nor involved senior JSDF officers in his emergency management team.[47]

[45] Tsuyoshi Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC to wa Nani ka* [What is the JNSC?] (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2014), 27.
[46] For the seminal English-language analysis of 3.11's diversified impact on Japan, see Samuels, *3.11*. Samuels highlights 3.11's limited transformational effect. However, recognized response failures influenced Japan's and alliance managers' thinking about crisis management deficiencies, which manifested in several important concrete reforms after his book went to print. The impact of 3/11 probably was not sufficient, but likely necessary. On the DPJ's crisis response, see Tomohito Shinoda, 'DPJ's Political Leadership in Response to the Fukushima Nuclear Accident,' *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14/2 (2013), 243–59.
[47] Samuels, *3.11*, 9-16.

With these lessons learned, to what extent have recent reforms ameliorated longstanding Japanese weaknesses in crisis management, with particular application to a possible ECS contingency? Specifically, what deficiencies have post-2012 Abe administration reforms—especially its most significant, Japan's newly-established NSC—addressed?

A. Establishing Japan's National Security Council: A Tortuous Path

As discussed above, Japan has long suffered major bureaucratic coordination problems and lacked a strong executive, especially concerning foreign policy. Despite the lack of progress, nevertheless, dissatisfaction prompted attempts at reform, reorganization, and new institutions. Accordingly, since the 1980s several past leaders promoted institutional reforms and various efforts to consolidate decision-making in the Cabinet (and the PM's office). Due in large part to political leaders' difficulties responding to various crises, especially the Persian Gulf War, 9.11, and various natural disasters, since the early 1990s period political debates about policy-making process—in particular centralization of decision-making in a strong executive, national strategy formulation, and crisis management—gathered momentum.

As many Japanese observers have noted, an institution designed to mitigate many of the very weaknesses manifest in Japan's political system is the US NSC, established in 1947. Though imperfect and shaped critically by presidential personality and priorities even today, the US NSC is widely considered *relatively* proficient at interagency policy coordination and real-time crisis management. It is designed to:

- consolidate security policy formulation, implementation, and crisis management in a strong civilian/political executive;

- facilitate coherent, long-term national strategy formulation; provide a full-time staff with security and foreign policy expertise focused on formulating 'big-picture' policy ideas and managing crises in service of that larger, defined NSS;
- surmount internal coordination problems through a 'whole-of-government' approach designed to overcome bureaucratic sectionalism, balkanization and 'turf wars' by assembling both principals (Cabinet officials) and their staffs for regular meetings to share intelligence and generate policy responses to crises;
- and, in the person of a National Security Advisor, offer to foreign leaders a direct pipeline to the president. This channel can be crucial when tensions rise and normal diplomatic channels are ineffective.

In short, so the theory went, a Japanese NSC could significantly strengthen Tokyo's ability to manage crises rapidly and effectively.

Early efforts to address Japan's longstanding institutional deficiencies by establishing a similar institution coalesced in the administration of Yasuhiro Nakasone (1982-87), as Tokyo confronted an increasingly aggressive Moscow. In an effort to bolster the Cabinet's control over foreign policy, in 1986 Nakasone—a former JDA chief, unabashed champion of a more 'normal' Japanese security posture, and one of Japan's strongest, most ambitious, and longest serving post-war prime ministers—succeeded in establishing the aforementioned SC, which replaced the outdated (1956) Defense Council (*kokubo kaigi*). Its objective: to strengthen Cabinet crisis management and security decision-making efficacy.[48]

[48] Yuichiro Hitoshi, '*Nihon-ban NSC,': Nihon no anzen hosho kaigi to Beikoku no NSC* [Issues concerning 'JNSC': Japan's security council and the US NSC] (Tokyo: National Diet Library, 2006), 1. For a seminal overview of the SC's origins, see Yasuaki Chijiwa, *Kawariyuku Naikaku Anzen Hosho Kiko: Nihon-ban NSC Seiritsu e no Michi [Changing Cabinet Security Organizations: Road to NSC Establishment]* (Tokyo: Harashobo, 2015), Ch.3.

Yet the SC functioned more effectively in theory than in practice. It met only 6-8 times annually.[49] While useful for formulating key documents (e.g., National Defense Program Guidelines), it was convened irregularly and often ignored. As noted above, Kaifu did not even convene it during the first months of the Persian Gulf crisis. Not designed as a standing body and without a secretariat, in practice the SC's meetings were unwieldy, infrequent, and ad-hoc, sometimes lasting a mere ten minutes. As one expert assessed, SC meetings were 'ceremonial, with no practical discussion,' and members often simply read transcripts prepared by bureaucrats.'[50] Though this may be hyperbole—for example, the order for Japan's first-ever maritime police operation against an armed North Korean spy ship (March 1999) was given during an SC meeting[51]—the larger point remains: In contrast to a US-style NSC, it was not a standing body with fixed participants, regular meetings, and a large support staff with daily responsibilities (e.g., conducting advance planning sufficient to handle crises demanding rapid response). Accordingly, when asked to reflect on the erstwhile SC, current and former officials and JSDF officers disparage it as ineffective in policy coordination and managing crises.[52] Despite its familiar-sounding name, it was not designed, empowered, or functional in practice as a mature NSC.

Administrative reform and centralization of decision-making in the Kantei accelerated in the 1990s, particularly under PM Ryutaro Hashimoto, who established an Office for Crisis Management in the Cabinet Secretariat and in April 1998 created a coordinator position: Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for Crisis Management.[53] The idea for a Japan-style NSC (*Nihon-ban*

[49] Hitoshi, '*Nihon-ban NSC' no kadai*, 2; *Boei Handobukku* [*Handbook for Defense]* (Tokyo: Asagumo, 2016), 25.
[50] Interviewee E, January 2015.
[51] Hitoshi, '*Nihon-ban NSC' no kadai*, 3.
[52] Various interviews; Tokyo, January 2015, July 2016 and August 2016.
[53] Sakaki and Lukner, 'Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity,' 161. See also Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC*,' 44-56.

NSC) gained significant traction during the Koizumi years, due to a changing regional strategic environment—especially North Korea—and internal and external (US) pressures to respond to 9.11 and Operations *Iraqi Freedom* and *Enduring Freedom*.

Specific to crisis management, in 2001 reforms created three assistant deputy chief Cabinet secretary positions to assist the chief cabinet secretary with coordination over foreign affairs, domestic affairs, and contingencies and crisis management.[54] After taking office that year, Koizumi—a charismatic, proactive premier—championed various reforms to strengthen the Cabinet's role in foreign policy and the Kantei's coordinating role within the government (so-called *kantei shudo:* 'Kantei leadership').[55] Two years later, in the aftermath of 9.11, the government developed a basic outline for crisis response and passed three laws governing responses to 'armed attack' situations, bringing closure to a 25-year-old (1977) JDA study whose legislative implications had theretofore been deemed too politically sensitive to submit to the Diet.[56] Such emergency legislation had proved politically (and constitutionally) problematic in the past, even when crises (e.g., the 1995 Kobe Earthquake) generated widespread demand.[57] Now, however, Koizumi pushed important legislation through. Meanwhile, the Koizumi-commissioned expert 'Araki Commission' took—arguably—a major step toward formulating a clear national security strategy and NSC proposal.[58]

Over time, calls for further centralization of decision-making and strategic formulation—and an NSC in particular—became increasingly explicit. Meanwhile, academic interest in an NSC

[54] 'SDF Officer Could Become Assistant Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary for 1st Time.' *Mainichi Shimbun*, 17 April 2015. http://mainichi.jp/english/english/newsselect/news/20150417p2a00m0na020000c.html.
[55] For seminal English-language analysis of Koizumi's foreign policy, see Shinoda, *Koizumi Diplomacy*.
[56] *Defense of Japan 2006* (Tokyo: Japan Defense Agency, 2006), 125-133. http://www.mod.go.jp/e/publ/w_paper/pdf/2006/2-3-1.pdf
[57] Richard J. Samuels, 'Politics, Security Policy, and Japan's Cabinet Legislation Bureau: Who Elected These Guys, Anyway?.' *JPRI Working Paper No. 99* (2004). http://www.jpri.org/publications/workingpapers/wp99.html
[58] Yuki Tatsumi, 'First step to a national security strategy,' *Japan Times*, 23 October 2004.

and its implications for improved crisis management and security policy integration grew.[59] Koizumi's successor, Abe, championed legislation to establish a US-style NSC, not only to facilitate swift decision-making and coordination but also to establish a robust Kantei-IC intelligence cycle.[60] In addition to extensive ties with US NSC and other officials, he came to appreciate the importance of a 'control tower' during his time responsible for crisis response within the Kantei as chief cabinet secretary (2005-06), when he had to respond to North Korean missile tests.[61] Abe's abortive first prime-ministership (365 days in office) prevented him from achieving this goal, however, and the effort stalled under his successor, Yasuo Fukuda. Ironically, whereas Fukuda, who had been Koizumi's chief cabinet secretary, appeared less interested in security affairs—and an NSC in particular—and the Aso administration was too short-lived, a related effort gained steam after the longtime opposition DPJ became the ruling party in 2009. The DPJ created a National Strategy Office (*kokka senryakushitsu*) led by Kan, then deputy prime minister, staffed by politicians and tasked with formulating national strategy—albeit in practice focused more on economic growth and financial affairs. The ultimate goal was a new National Strategy Bureau designed to coordinate foreign, national security, and economic policy, but this was never realized.[62] Meanwhile, the 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines called for the Kantei to establish a body 'responsible for national security policy coordination among relevant ministers and for providing advice to the Prime Minister.'[63]

[59] The seminal comparative study in the Japanese context is Matsuda Yasuhiro, Ed. *NSC Kokka Anzen Hosho Kaigi: Kiki Kanri/Anpo Seisaku Togo Mekanizumu no Hikaku Kenkyu* [NSC: Comparative Research on Crisis Management and Security Policy Integration Mechanisms] (Tokyo: Sairyusha, 2009).
[60] Kotani, 'Japan,' 206-07.
[61] Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC*, 38-42.
[62] Sheila A. Smith, *Japan's New Politics* (NY: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2014), 24-25.
[63] Ministry of Defense, 'NATIONAL DEFENSE PROGRAM GUIDELINES
for FY 2011 and beyond,' 17 December 2010. http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf.

The DPJ's desire to centralize policy-making in political leaders (*seiji shudo*) and disdain for career bureaucrats dominance led it to adopt arguably well-intentioned policies that backfired, at least temporarily—especially given its leaders' relative inexperience. Especially under PM Yukio Hatoyama (2009-10), its approach created new dysfunction and coordination problems. Intentional ostracization of the bureaucracy and ineffective coordination by the chief cabinet secretary proved particularly problematic.[64] Hatoyama even abolished the regular administrative vice ministers' meeting (*jimu jikan kaigi*)—designed to coordinate policy across ministries but seen as institutionalizing 'mutual self-protection of each bureaucratic stovepipe.'[65] The DPJ's third and final prime minister—Yoshihiko Noda—proved far more interested in security affairs than his two predecessors, and attempted to change course. Not only did he reinstate the administrative vice ministers' meeting,[66] but with extensive involvement of fellow DPJ member (and security expert) Seiji Maehara, he also actively pursued an NSC, even preparing a full detailed proposal. Though the DPJ would lose power before implementing it, Maehara reportedly shared the proposal with Abe and the LDP.[67]

Despite decades of incremental reforms and differing strengths and weaknesses, structural problems, internal and inter-agency communication failures, and ad-hoc approaches plagued Japan's crisis management efforts under both LDP and DPJ administrations, and past reforms (as of 2012) were insufficient.[68] Noda-era developments revealed, however, that bipartisan support existed for an NSC.

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[64] Hitoshi Tanaka, 'Hatoyama's Resignation and Japan's Foreign Policy,' *East Asia Insights* 5/3 (2010), http://www.jcie.or.jp/insights/5-3.html.
[65] Michael J. Green, 'Japan's Confused Revolution,' *The Washington Quarterly* 33/1 (2010), 9.
[66] Smith, *Japan's New Politics*, 24-25.
[67] Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC*, 124-30.
[68] Ellis Krauss, 'Crisis Management, LDP, and DPJ Style,' *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 14/2 (2013), 177-99.

B. Abe-Era Breakthrough: Accelerating Reforms and NSC Establishment

By the time Abe returned to Kantei in December 2012, several stars had aligned to allow success where past leaders (including himself) had failed. He capitalized on a decades-old trend of incremental reforms. With Abe at its head, the ruling LDP-Komeito coalition also exploited widespread voter discontent with the DPJ—due significantly to perceived mishandled crisis management during 3.11—and fractious opposition parties to achieve stunning election victories. Meanwhile, widespread external perceptions of Japan's increasingly 'severe' and 'complex' security environment led many in Japan to conclude that security and institutional status quos were unsustainable, creating political space for major reforms. North Korean nuclear and missile tests; coupled with China's rapidly growing military capabilities, the increasing scope of its military operations and exercises, and the upsurge in military and paramilitary activity in the ECS; were concrete enablers. More abstractly, a changing distribution of power within East Asia and deepening concerns about Japan's longstanding, disproportionate reliance on Washington given new geopolitical complexities also played a role.[69] In particular, the emergence of uninhabited islands as the major flashpoint in Sino-Japanese relations and concerns about American willingness to fight for them have accelerated a realization within Tokyo that Japan must be prepared to take the lead.

Context: Security policy and alliance reforms under Abe

In this domestic and international context, elite support for major reforms reached critical mass during the first year of Abe's second stint as prime minister. Accelerating longer-term trends, Abe moved to significantly consolidate Kantei control over foreign and security policymaking. He

[69] Adam P. Liff, 'Japan's Defense Policy: Abe the Evolutionary.' *The Washington Quarterly* 38/2 (2015), 79-99.

picked up where he left off in 2007 in pursuing centralization of power in the Kantei and more robust national security-relevant institutions. The move with arguably the greatest significance for mitigating longstanding Japanese institutional deficiencies in crisis management was the establishment of Japan's first-ever NSC and promulgation of its first-ever comprehensive National Security Strategy in December 2013. Abe also pushed through major reforms to the JSDF's mandate and capabilities (including introducing amphibious forces for the first time since 1945), further expanded JCG's capabilities, supported significant changes to the US-Japan alliance, culminating in the 2015 Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation—the first major revision since 1997—and pushed through the Diet a package of security legislation to provide legal foundation for operationalization of the 2014 Cabinet resolution allowing Japan limited exercise of the right to collective self-defense.

Japan's New National Security Council

By establishing JNSC a year after returning to the prime-ministership, Abe overcame extant, if weakening, bureaucratic and political resistance (and complacency) to further consolidate security decision-making in the executive, bolster inter-agency coordination, and strengthen Japan's intelligence gathering, analysis, and sharing capabilities.

i. Reasons for Establishment and Key Characteristics

Established in December 2013 in the Cabinet Secretariat, JNSC's mandate and potential far exceed the institution it replaced: the ineffectual and largely ad-hoc 1986 SC.[70] As defined in Japan's 2014 defense white paper, the rationale for JNSC's creation was straightforward:

[70] For major Japanese-language analyses of JNSC's origins and significance, see Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC*; Ken Kotani, 'Nihon-ban Kokka Anzen Hosho Kaigi (NSC) no Kinoteki Tokucho' [National Security Council of Japan and Its Functional Features]', *Kokusai Anzen Hosho* 42/4 (2015), 61–75; Chijiwa, *Kawariyuku Naikaku Anzen Hosho Kiko*.

> *'While the security environment surrounding Japan is further increasing in severity, the government is working towards the establishment of a National Security Council which would give fundamental direction for foreign and security policies from a strategic perspective, with a consciousness that it is necessary for the entire Cabinet to work on the strengthening of foreign affairs and the security system of Japan.'*[71]

Although a work-in-progress, JNSC's degree of institutionalization and capability already suggest that it is well on its way to achieving its basic mandate: to serve as a 'command center (*shireito*) for […] diplomatic and security policies.'[72] In so doing, it appears well-placed to ameliorate Japan's longstanding crisis management deficiencies delineated in Section II.B, above. Key aspects include:

- further consolidation of strategic and policy-planning in the Cabinet (the executive), manifest in the genesis and promulgation of Japan's first-ever comprehensive National Security Strategy;
- a standing national security advisor who reports directly to the prime minister, runs a new National Security Secretariat (NSS; see below), and plays a crucial diplomatic role as the PM's representative on security matters (thus serving as the direct counterpart of national security advisors in the US and other countries). The National Security Advisor's role as a diplomatic pipeline can also be essential in a crisis, or any other

[71] *Defense of Japan 2014* (Tokyo: Ministry of Defense, 2014), 105.
[72] *Defense of Japan 2014.*

time when normal diplomatic channels and links between top leaders are not functioning properly;[73]

- regular meetings convening key national security-relevant principals, their staffs, and relevant ministries and agencies;
- active efforts to streamline policy planning and strengthen inter-agency coordination by creating (in January 2014) within the Cabinet Secretariat a new NSS that assembles roughly 70 bureaucrats from various ministries and agencies (especially MOD/JSDF, MoFA, and the NPA) with national security policy expertise under one roof to plan, draft, and coordinate foreign and defense policies; integrate and compile intelligence, and serve as JNSC's secretariat;
- de facto decision-making power (lacking in its predecessor) effectively requiring only 'rubber stamp' approval from the Cabinet;[74]
- legal mandate to force relevant ministries and agencies (read: IC) to provide the JNSC with national-security relevant materials, intelligence, and analysis;[75]
- and more direct involvement in security policy decision-making of military experts—uniformed JSDF personnel.

As countermeasures against bureaucratic stove-piping and to facilitate rapid, effective internal policy coordination and crisis management, the JNSC/NSS's membership is widely

[73] Abe named former vice-minister for foreign affairs Shotaro Yachi as Japan's first national security advisor. Yachi meets regularly with other countries' national security advisors, and was also the main player in secret negotiations in secret negotiations with Beijing leading up to the November 2014 four-point statements and subsequent Sino-Japanese APEC summit —ending China's two-year ban on summitry.
[74] Kotani, 'Japan.'
[75] See Article 6, Clause 2 of *Kokka Anzen Hosho Kaigi Secchiho* [National Security Council Establishment Law], http://law.e-gov.go.jp/htmldata/S61/S61HO071.html.

representative across government bureaucracies, including intelligence agencies and uniformed SDF personnel. Thus, one function is to establish and deepen working relationships among national security-relevant personnel through regular meetings. Knowing who to call in a crisis is a key component of crisis management.

Reinforcing these salutary trends is that JNSC and associated legislation have come into force concomitant with major reforms of intelligence collection, analysis, and synthesis of intelligence ongoing since the mid-2000s. Though not an intelligence gathering or analytical agency itself, the NSS plays a crucial role in synthesizing intelligence for the policy sector; intelligence which is essential for policy formulation and crisis response. JNSC thus functions as a key institutional hub connecting the IC to policymakers.[76] The DCI attends NSC meetings regularly and provides Abe a regular consolidated but detailed 'all-sourced' brief on intelligence data and policy choices. Compared to a decade earlier, post-2012 prime ministerial meetings with the DCI have more than doubled, with a dramatic increase in meetings involving both the DCI and other members of the IC—suggesting significantly enhanced intra-IC coordination and reduced efforts to bypass the DCI.[77] JNSC is legally empowered to require IC-relevant components of ministries and agencies to provide intelligence, which is then synthesized to facilitate a whole-of-government response. This powerful legal mandate facilitates direct political requests to the IC, in addition to basically compelling various ministries and intelligence agencies to gather and, importantly, to share information on national security affairs. It thus helps dissolve the IC's historic balkanization and protectionism. While they still jockey for influence, one official assesses that MoFA, MoD, and NPA competition increasingly manifests more constructively: 'competition to provide high quality intelligence' to JNSC and 'good, comprehensive reports' to the Prime

[76] Kobayashi, 'Assessing Reform of the Japanese Intelligence Community.'
[77] *ibid*, 718; 727-30. Kobayashi notes the exception is IAS' (MoFA) head, who still visits the PM without the DCI.

Minister. Information sharing is described variously as 'much better' and 'now more effective, efficient, and immediate.'[78] The 2013 Act on the Protection of Specially Designated Secrets, another Abe-spearheaded initiative which came into force in December 2014, facilitates this effort by raising the costs of leaks, thus making agencies more comfortable sharing information inter-agency.[79]

ii. Organizational Structure and Current Status

In contrast to its ad-hoc predecessor, JNSC is standing (meets regularly), flexible, and scalable: able to convene meetings at different levels depending on the issue, or nature of an issue or crisis. Most important is the new, regular (biweekly) 'Four-minister Meeting'—the first of its kind of Japan's postwar history—which assembles the prime minister, chief cabinet secretary, and ministers of defense and foreign affairs to discuss national security issues. The 2014 Defense White Paper specifies their mandate: 'Giving fundamental direction for foreign and defense policies concerning national security.'[80] As needed, principals meetings can be expanded to include additional players, including: a Nine-Minister Meeting (Prime Minister (Chair), Minister for Internal Affairs and Communications, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Minister of Finance, Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry, Minister of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, Minister of Defense, Chief Cabinet Secretary, Chairman of the National Public Safety Commission). Particularly relevant to the present study is the ability to surge personnel in the event of a major security crisis—especially the newly established 'Ministerial Emergency Meeting.' Though the deputy chief Cabinet Secretary for crisis management remains in charge of crisis management, the NSS administers the meeting, which involves the key

[78] Interviewee D, Tokyo, January 2015.
[79] Email exchange with Interviewee I, July 2016; Interviewee J, Tokyo, July 2016.
[80] *Defense of Japan 2014*, 105.

principals. Meanwhile, NSS itself consists of six standing teams—administration, strategy, intelligence, and three geographically-defined "policy groups"—tasked with analysis and briefings on specific issue areas. Each group is led by an official equivalent to a ministerial division chief.

In short, in the context of additional related reforms, JNSC and associated legislation represents an historic breakthrough in bolstering Japan's national security and crisis management-relevant institutions. More generally, recent developments significantly strengthen the executive's decision-making role in foreign policy. In important aspects, these reforms are designed to directly ameliorate many of the longstanding deficiencies in Japan's institutions discussed in Section III. Though the function and efficacy of any NSC varies widely from administration to administration, with Washington's a clear case-in-point, at least at present JNSC appears to represent a major institutional innovation and for Japan.

iii. Additional post-2012 trends auguring well for crisis management

- *Low turnover of national security principals; Stable, focused, and proactive political leadership:*
    - To date in the post-war era, Abe is the sixth-longest continually-serving prime minister, Suga is the longest-serving chief cabinet secretary (the hub for crisis management and inter-agency/whole-of-government coordination), and Kishida is the longest-continually-serving foreign minister (Caveat: Abe has had four defense ministers).
- *Continuing IC reforms to improve collection, analysis, and sharing as well as information security, and to deepen connections between policymakers and the IC by clearly designating the Cabinet Intelligence Council as the institutional hub:*

  - These reforms accelerated since a special panel on intelligence reform (established by Abe during his first premiership) released policy recommendations in 2008.[81]
  - Directly relevant to the ECS, since 2008 four new 'associate members,' including JCG, participate ad-hoc in IC activities. Japan's reconnaissance satellites became fully operational in 2013.

- *Bolstering JCG presence and capabilities near southwestern islands to speed response and reduce pressures to escalate to mil-mil interaction.*[82]
- *Measures to strengthen JSDF ISR and other capabilities and crisis response, including:*
  - significant expansion of ISR capabilities in Japan's remote southwestern islands (near Senkakus), including a new base (radar station) on Yonaguni;
  - legislation expediting decision-making by granting relevant key JSDF leaders equivalent status to their civilian MoD counterparts and calling for them to assist the defense minister jointly, with the former providing military advice, the latter policy advice;[83]
  - and amphibious capabilities and rapid-response Ground Central Command headquarters to be established by 2018.[84]
- *Measures to strengthen US-Japan crisis coordination, including:*
  - Increased focus on and planning for rapid, "seamless"—across all possible conflict phases—and "whole-of-government" responses to various contingencies, including 'gray zone' incidents short of armed attack, independently and together, including

[81] Kobayashi, 'Assessing Reform of the Japanese Intelligence Community.'
[82] 'Japan Coast Guard Deploys 12 Ships to Patrol Senkakus,' *Japan Times*, 4 April 2016.
[83] 'Defense Ministry Bureaucrats to Lose Their Rank Superiority over SDF Officers,' *Japan Times*, 10 June 2015.
[84] 'Rapid-Response Headquarters to Be Launched to Help GSDF Act in Crises,' *The Japan News*, 17 June 2015.

replacement of the (never-activated) Bilateral Coordination Mechanism with a standing, 'always-on' Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM).[85]

- Incremental steps to deepen collaboration between the JCG, on the ECS front lines, and the JMSDF, including their first-ever joint drills.[86] GOJ has also deepened integration among JSDF branches to bolster jointness, and may announce a permanent joint headquarters soon.[87]

C. Caveats and Outstanding Questions

Given a widely-perceived worsening regional security environment, coalescing elite support for major reforms to Japan's security policy and related institutions and crisis management has generated significant progress in addressing longstanding problems. Nevertheless, JNSC remains nascent. Many questions remain concerning its long-term role and efficacy.

First, how sustainable are Abe-era developments? How deeply institutionalized is this institution, as well as the integration and cooperation that its effective functioning requires? How much will efficacy depend on leadership: the composition of a Cabinet—and the PM in particular?

The American case demonstrates wide variance in function, efficacy, and mandates of NSCs, based on the preferences, views, and experience of each president. In Japan's case, one must be cautious generalizing from an 'N' of 1, particularly when that one case is Abe—widely-

[85] *The Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation* (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 2015), http://www.defense.gov/pubs/20150427_--_GUIDELINES_FOR_US-JAPAN_DEFENSE_COOPERATION_FINAL&CLEAN.pdf. The allies often exercised but never activated the BCM in a real-world crisis—even in cases of North Korean nuclear or missile tests, or when urgent military coordination in which thousands of lives were at stake, such as Operational Tomodachi in 2011. The apparent precondition was armed attack (war). Washington had requested activation but Tokyo refused due to concerns about domestic and foreign backlash.
[86] 'Japan Defense Force to Hold Drill to Handle Maritime 'Gray Zone' Case,' *Kyodo*, 7 July 2015.
[87] 'Japan eyes permanent joint HQ for SDF,' *Japan Times*, 13 March 2016.

recognized as an especially motivated, proactive champion of more robust Japanese foreign policy, especially in the security domain.

Specific to JNSC, as its immediate progenitor Abe has a strong personal interest in the institution, whose efficacy impacts his legacy. Indeed, he was the primary driver of the 2007 legislation providing the basic framework, and the 2013 National Security Strategy reflects his own strong personal views.[88] Future leaders will have different perspectives, and policy priorities. Despite relative stability at present, Japan's high turnover of key principals and high variability concerning PM interest in security affairs raises additional uncertainty post-Abe. Is the (nearly four-year-old) second 'Abe era' a harbinger of a 'new normal' of greater leadership stability in Japan? When one reflects on Japan's recent leaders, Abe and his Cabinet may prove exceptional on both counts.

Second, a significant new institution's creation, particularly one with an integrative mandate, inevitably raises questions of how smoothly it interacts with extant institutions. Given overlapping mandates, how JNSC cooperates with officials in institutions traditionally responsible for related issues—especially MOFA, MOD, and the NPA—is a key issue. Will cooperation or competition prevail? Japan's ministries have historically been powerful, balkanized, and resistant to consolidation of decision-making in the Cabinet. MoFA was resistant to NSC's establishment, and concerns that the latter will emerge as a second MoFA have some anecdotal support—such as National Security Advisor Shotaro Yachi's extremely active role in Kantei-centered diplomacy, especially with China. (Concerns may be partially mitigated at present because Yachi is a retired career MoFA diplomat). Within the IC, despite recent reforms the DCI still has no budgetary or personnel authority over other community members, raising questions about the extent to which

[88] Yuki Tatsumi. 'Can Japan's National Security Strategy Outlive Abe?' *East Asia Forum*, 18 November 2014. http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2014/11/18/can-japans-national-security-strategy-outlive-abe/.

the DCI's coordinating role remains under-institutionalized and perhaps unique to the current administration.[89]

Another concern, both practical and regarding domestic sensitivities concerning civilian control: how will MOD bureaucrats respond to JSDF officers' new status equivalence, increasingly direct role in decision-making and direct line to the PM, within and outside JNSC?

While JNSC principals (ministers and directors) are political appointees and likely relatively loyal to the Cabinet (and PM), the large (~60-~70 strong) staff of career bureaucrats seconded to NSS from other ministries and agencies may face contradictory loyalties and incentives, and will be a major variable shaping the organization's efficacy. (Here, the traditional colonizing role of Ministry of Finance staff seconded to the erstwhile JDA provides a potential warning). So far the Abe NSC/NSS appears to have benefited from these organizations' willingness to send their 'best and brightest.' Some bureaucrats note the unique 'attractiveness' of an NSC under Abe, who is widely seen as prioritizing foreign affairs and security issues, which affords prestige and influence to seconded officials. Whether ministries and agencies will willingly second to an NSS sufficient quality and number of staff in the future remains uncertain, especially if they judge a future prime minister uninterested (or unqualified) to lead on national security. Among those seconded, high turnover is another possible problem.

One final note directly relevant to effective crisis response in certain scenarios: the new security legislation makes clear that Diet approval is necessary to deploy the JSDF overseas.[90] Despite recent efforts to institutionalize roles and missions, much decision-making in practice is likely to remain ad-hoc, subject to heavy political contestation, and dependent in large part on

[89] Kobayashi, 'Assessing Reform of the Japanese Intelligence Community,' 731.
[90] There is some space for ex post Diet approval in some emergencies. See Alexandra Sakaki and Kerstin Lukner, "Japan's uncertain security environment and changes in its legislative–executive relations," *West European Politics* 40/1 (2017), 139-160

personalities: who is the Prime Minister, what is the makeup of the Diet, and what are their respective interpretations of specific laws (and the Constitution itself). These processes may delay—or prevent—effective crisis response, especially in cases requiring 'use of force' (*buryoku koshi*); extremely controversial in a country whose JSDF has not used deadly kinetic force since 1945. In certain scenarios, this otherwise laudable resistance to using deadly force may be an obstacle to rapid crisis response or deterrence to prevent escalation.

Outstanding challenges for alliance crisis response

Under certain political-military crises, rapid and effective coordination between Japan and the United States will be crucial. Though establishment of the new standing Alliance Coordination Mechanism (ACM) and creation of a direct counterpart to the US NSC/National Security Advisor bodes well for real-time, whole-of-government US-Japan crisis management, several caveats and outstanding questions remain.

First, the alliance's formal structure, which is unchanged, may delay effective crisis response—especially in a military contingency. Separate chains-of-command may limit rapid, unified response and interoperability. Second, despite the 2015 Guidelines' emphasis on a 'global' alliance, interpretations of international 'crises' may differ widely. Without constitutional revision, Japan's global security role may be limited to logistical support, except in extreme cases posing existential (*kuni no sonritsu*) threats. Again, extensive Diet debate could still delay practical action. [91] Despite immense hype surrounding the Abe Cabinet's 2014 constitutional reinterpretation to allow Japan to defend an ally under attack,[92] three restrictive conditions ensure

[91] Liff, 'Japan's Defense Policy.'
[92] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 'Cabinet Decision on Development of Seamless Security Legislation to Ensure Japan's Survival and Protect Its People,' 1 July 2014, http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page23e_000273.html.

that exercise of Collective Self Defense even in an alliance-related crisis in or near the ECS is not guaranteed. Conditions under which the Japanese government can actually support the United States with the Self-Defense Forces will be subject to political interpretation. As the 2015 Guidelines state, 'each' party will decide (separately) whether to employ kinetic force.[93] This means that JSDF involvement will be a political decision. Left to the Diet, response may be slow. Heightening ambiguity and uncertainty regarding alliance coordination in a crises in the ECS, although Washington is committed to playing *a role* in any conflict posing a threat to territory under Tokyo's administration, it is not entirely clear what specific role the US would play in a so-called 'grey zone' contingency—one that falls below the use of force. Fortunately, recent security legislation has expanded the scope of bilateral operational planning and exercises.[94]

IV. External: Sino-Japanese Bilateral Crisis Management Capabilities

In high-stakes crisis diplomacy, it takes two to tango. As it concerns external crisis management specific to the ECS, despite nearly a decade of Tokyo-led efforts to establish bilateral hotlines with Beijing little has changed. As of this writing, in an apparent game of diplomatic chicken and effort to extract political concessions from Tokyo as its increasing military and paramilitary deployments significantly increase risk, China's leaders have thus far resisted signing a previously negotiated agreement to establish robust, rapid and effective communication channels in the event of an incident. Though negotiations are underway on a three-pronged 'Air-Sea Contact Mechanism,' reportedly to include a hotline, annual meetings, and common radio frequency ship and aircraft communications near the islands, these discussions have persisted for years. The proof

[93] *Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation*, 16.
[94] Corresponding author's interviews, Tokyo, Washington, D.C., and Honolulu, June-July 2016.

of progress will be in its formal establishment and actual utilization.[95] Meanwhile, national security advisors can at least serve as pipelines in moments of crisis. Until bilateral relations—including hotlines and regular military contacts—are less beholden to shifting political winds, the JNSC remains a key mechanism for increasing crisis manageability and reducing escalation risk.

Beijing's posture vis-à-vis bilateral crisis management mechanisms is remarkable given its establishment of crisis hotlines with many countries over the past two decades, including Washington and even SCS disputant Vietnam. But it is also symptomatic of other trends in Sino-Japanese relations with negative implications for bilateral crisis communication. Noxious political relations severely limit official political and military exchange. For example, as of spring 2016 the PLAN and JMSDF had not held a defense exchange for seven years.[96] Politically, after Japan's September 2012 'nationalization' of three of the islands Xi Jinping severed high-level dialogue, declining summit meeting requests from Abe for more than two years, precisely as Chinese operations significantly increased risk of a clash. Though summits, albeit infrequent and irregular, have resumed since November 2014, even basic communication channels are hardly robust. In early 2016, FM Kishida's Chinese counterpart reportedly ignored Kishida's phone calls after North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile tests.[97]

An unfortunate commentary on bilateral political relations today, coupled with other aforementioned factors, the absence of basic, much less robust, crisis management mechanisms between Tokyo and Beijing exacerbates the possibility of miscalculation or escalation in a possible fast-moving political-military crisis.

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[95] Adam P. Liff and Andrew S. Erickson, 'Japan-China Crisis Management--the Urgent Need for Air-Sea Contact Mechanism,' *AJW by Asahi Shimbun*, 9 July 2015.
[96] 'Interview: Adm. Tomohisa Takei, Chief of Staff, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force,' *Defense News*, 30 March 2016.
[97] 'Chinese Foreign Minister Won't Take Kishida's Calls during N. Korean Crisis,' *AJW by Asahi Shimbun*, 10 February 2016.

V. Conclusion

In a declassified 1991 cable to Washington following the Persian Gulf crisis, US Ambassador to Japan Michael Armacost candidly summarized Japan's crisis management weaknesses as 'totally inadequate.' He continued, 'Emergency cabinet meetings were held regularly with no real agenda, simply to give appearance of action. Cabinet members and senior bureaucrats were tied up all day in sterile Diet sessions and then returned to their offices in the evening to review material for next day's sessions, leaving little time for policy development.' As for intelligence collection, Armacost writes, 'Relevant MoFA office directors stayed in the building round the clock for days on end […redaction…] while in reality the ministry ended up relying on CNN.' 'The GOJ was caught off-guard by the Gulf Crisis, proved incapable of developing its own analysis of the situation as it evolved, and came up with no policy response other than following the US lead.'[98]

How times have changed! On December 4, 2013, the first-ever meeting of Japan's newly-established NSC convened the prime minister, the chief cabinet secretary, and the foreign and defense ministers in the first of regular biweekly meetings. The agenda was instructive: Japan's new National Security Strategy, the National Defense Program Guidelines, and China's newly-established ECS ADIZ.[99] The personnel involved demonstrates deepening executive leadership of national security policy and inter-agency coordination. The first item indicates its central role articulating a 'big picture' national security strategy that foreign policy and crisis management are to support; the second indicates how major defense planning is further centralized in Kantei, with

[98] Armacost, Michael, 'US Ambassador Michael Armacost cable to the State Department,' *The National Security Archive*, 14 March 1991. http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB175/japan2-13.pdf
[99] Sunohara, *Nihon-ban NSC*, 3.

input from inter-agency (including the IC and JSDF); and the third shows how JNSC will address concerns about China and exigencies in the ECS and beyond—including potential crises—requiring a rapid, whole-of-government response. From December 2013 to December 2015, JNSC convened 77 times—roughly once every ten days—a stark departure from its SC predecessor's roughly half-dozen meetings *per year*.[100]

Recent operational trends in the ECS raise serious concerns about risk, room for error, and paucity of escalation firebreaks in the event of a Sino-Japanese incident, unintended or not. Unilaterally asserting that its actions since September 2012 'terminat[ed]' Japan's 'exclusive actual control' of the islands, Beijing appears determined to maintain if not expand its operational footprint.[101] Japan shows no signs of yielding, yet Chinese expectations (and capabilities) have only grown—exacerbating tensions that together with widespread, CCP-encouraged anti-Japanese nationalism, may provide dry kindling for escalation of a political-military crisis.

What Japan can achieve unilaterally is limited, and there is no such thing as a perfect array of institutions. Nevertheless, it appears that Japan's recent reforms, especially its new standing NSC and NSS, significantly ameliorate longstanding institutional deficiencies within Japan's political system. In particular, they bolster centralization of decision-making in an executive, help reduce stove-piping within and across ministries and agencies, and strengthen internal communication and intelligence sharing and analysis. Specific to a potential political-military crisis, also significant is the extent to which Abe has accelerated ongoing security reforms, including strengthening the role of uniformed personnel and bolstering interoperability and coordination with Washington. Remarkably, these reforms directly address each of five major

[100] Combined total of four- and nine-minister meetings. *Boei Handobukku*, 25.
[101] Xing Qu, 'Four Features of the International Situation in 2012,' in *CIIS Blue Book on International Situation and China's Foreign Affairs* (Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2013). http://www.ciis.org.cn/english/2013-06/04/content_6002574.htm.

deficiencies with Japan's crisis management identified by six academic studies conducted immediately before Abe's return to Kantei in late 2012.[102]

These efforts exemplify Abe's relative focus on capacity building, prioritization of security issues, centralization and enhanced internal coordination of foreign and security policymaking, and rationalization of the military-civilian sides of relevant bureaucracy. As with other security policy reforms, however, this is not 'all about Abe.' In establishing JNSC, Japan under Abe has built on past reforms, achieving rapid and significant—albeit still evolutionary— progress. Much is due to timing and circumstance. Indeed, Abe has deftly exploited an enervated, fractious opposition, deepening and increasingly widely-held perceptions of a worsening regional security environment, and years of incremental efforts by his forebears to dissipate strong bureaucratic, political, and normative resistance, to significantly strengthen intra-governmental policy coordination and the role of the prime minister and his Cabinet as a 'control tower' in national security decision-making.

Though it remains in its infancy, preliminary evidence suggests that JNSC may be Japan's most significant national security- and crisis management-relevant institutional reform in decades. Current trends suggest that Japan's crisis management-relevant institutions may face increasing challenges in the years ahead. In the ECS, China seems unlikely to ease operational and diplomatic pressure on Japan. More generally, as PLA capabilities (and operational area) expand, Sino-Japanese maritime and air encounters are likely to increase. Meanwhile, with two nuclear and more than twenty missile tests in 2016 alone, North Korea's provocative missile and nuclear programs are progressing rapidly. How effectively Japan's institutions evolve to meet these challenges will be an important issue going forward. As with many aspects of

[102] Sakaki and Lukner, 'Japan's Crisis Management amid Growing Complexity,' 171.

contemporary East Asia, reality is fluid and many outstanding questions remain. Analysis of Japan's NSC and other crisis-management related institutions should be updated and revised as new conditions (and data) emerge.

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