



Institute of Chinese Studies

WEDNESDAY SEMINAR

*The US-Japan Alliance:
Prospects and
Challenges under
Japan's Recent National
Security Strategy*

REPORT

Speaker :

Tomohito Shinoda

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Speaker: Prof. Tomohito Shinoda, Professor, Graduate School of International Relations; and, Director, Matsushita Library and Information Centre, International University of Japan, Niigata.

Chair: Prof. Srabani Roy Choudhury, Professor, Japanese Studies, Centre for East Asian Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; and, Adjunct Fellow, Institute of Chinese Studies, New Delhi.

Venue: Zoom Webinar

The seminar centred on the US-Japan Alliance, signed in 1951, in the context of the National Security Strategy (NSS) released by the Japanese government in December 2022. Laying down the foundations of Japan's security imperatives, Prof. Shinoda outlined various phases of Japanese security since 1945 from demilitarisation during the Occupation years, and the Yoshida Doctrine in the post-war era to the latest iteration of the National Security Strategy brought forth by Prime Minister Kishida Fumio's government. Covering the trajectory of the evolution of Japan's security policies, Prof. Shinoda endeavoured to identify key determinants that shape Japan's security.

The speaker emphasised that the US-Japan Alliance is highly asymmetrical in nature. Even during the height of the Cold War, Japan was primarily responsible for maintaining American military bases within its territory. Prof. Shinoda asserted that the genesis of this asymmetrical dependence is enshrined in the Yoshida Doctrine, named after former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (1946-47 and 1948-54), and that it has defined the last several decades of Japanese security policy. Explicating further, the speaker defined the Yoshida Doctrine as an effort by the Japanese leadership towards prioritising economic recovery after the war, while relying on the US for security. Most importantly, it ensured that Japan merely maintained minimum defensive capacity. Apart from this, Prof. Shinoda stated, the Basic Policy for National Defense was introduced by the government in 1957, but only as an "exclusively defensive security policy."

The country's demilitarised status and the Japanese post-war security tradition characterised by the Yoshida Doctrine left Japan unprepared to provide personnel support for even peacekeeping operations (PKO) under the aegis of the United Nations. This led to global

criticism during the Gulf War (1990-91), prompting Japan to table legislation in the National Diet centred on expanding its international security role. The first of these bills, the 1991 UN Peace Cooperation Bill, however, did not pass muster, amidst vociferous debates surrounding Japan's constitutionally-mandated pacifist stance. Under Prime Minister Miyazawa Kiichi's leadership, the PKO Legislation was passed the following year, however, it sparked concerns among neighbouring countries, including China, over the potential re-militarisation of Japan.

In the wake of the 1993-94 Korean Nuclear Crisis, concern over North Korean belligerence was at its peak. Despite the promulgation of aforementioned PKO Legislation, the Japanese government was unable to find legal grounds to provide rear-echelon support to the American troops during a possible war with North Korea. According to Prof. Shinoda, such inability directly threatened the sanctity of the US-Japan bilateral alliance. It was only in response to this threat that the Japan-US Defense Guidelines were established in 1997.

Furthermore, comprehensive efforts to re-calibrate the attendant asymmetry in the US-Japan Alliance, Prof. Shinoda explained, came to life under the government led by Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro (2001-06). Japan successfully passed critical security-related bills, including the Anti-Terrorism Legislation 2001, in the context of the 9/11 attacks and the reconstruction of Iraq in the aftermath of the American invasion. "Koizumi diplomacy", as Prof. Shinoda described it in his book on Prime Minister Koizumi, was succeeded by Abe Shinzo in 2006-07, and carried forward in his second tenure from 2012 to 2020. Under Abe, several important milestones, such as the establishment of the National Security Council and National Security Secretariats, the introduction of the first National Security Strategy in 2013, and the Security Legislation in 2015 were achieved in order to reduce Japan's external dependency.

Prof. Shinoda proceeded to contrast Japan's postwar security tradition with the most recent iteration of the NSS, and noted that the latter is more upfront about "participating in power politics". Rather than trying to balance the US and China, Japan is now more forthcoming about a deeper integration with the former. The speaker stated that the Kishida government is aiming to double its military spending in the next few years. By preparing the country to match the capabilities of its adversaries, he argued, Japan is more likely to effectively respond to Xi Jinping's regional and global strategies. Japan's efforts toward this have primarily manifested in the form of the Indo-Pacific strategic construct.

The speaker revisited Abe's two security initiatives: the Democratic Security Diamond or the QUAD, and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, which include the participation of Japan, the US, India, and Australia, while also catering to the ASEAN and Pacific nations. He argued that by broadening connectivity measures in its immediate neighbourhood, Japan has prioritised the rule of law, the pursuit of economic prosperity, and its commitment to peace and stability. As part of this segment, Prof. Shinoda also briefly described the incremental degree of Japan's strategic relationship with India, with both countries participating in regular bilateral military-to-military exercises.

In his conclusion, Prof. Shinoda summed up and reviewed four critical variables that will influence order in East Asia and the Indo-Pacific. These included the Japanese economy, the Chinese economy, the US' commitment to the region, and China's evolving ambitions. China's economic slowdown in the 2020s and Japan's "lost decades" are bound to bring to the fore some interesting, and decisive, elements. Furthermore, Prof. Shinoda argued that the US-China rivalry and Japan's posturing in this context, will be critical determinants in the region's stability. Prof. Shinoda also provided an intriguing insight into Japan's future policy direction by laying down the potential outcomes. First, a stronger China and a stronger Japan would give rise to the "US-Japan Alliance vs. China" scenario within the context of a new Cold War framework. Second, a stronger Japan and a stronger US would entail an "East Asian Community" with joint US-Japan multilateral leadership. Third, a stronger China and a weaker Japan would lay the foundations for a "Sino-Centric Region", with Chinese hegemony and near-defunct US-Japan Alliance. Fourth, a stronger US and a weaker Japan would lead to "instability and frictions", leading to a US-centred East Asia. Prof. Srabani Roy Choudhury summed up the seminar by noting the key tenets of the NSS 2022, and offered her insights on their relevance to Japan's security, in the context of the US-Japan Alliance. She also highlighted the importance of Japan's recently introduced Overseas Security Assistance (OSA) policy. During the interactive session, Prof. Shinoda answered a plethora of questions ranging from Japan's role in a Taiwan contingency, and the feasibility of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific trade, to the recent releasing of nuclear wastewater from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

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