

Rise of a rearmed Japan

The nation looks set to increase its defensive military power and reach, using the excuse of deterrence

To arm or not to arm Japan? For the United States under the administration of President Donald Trump, and for Japan helmed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, this is no longer a question.

Trump has put the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, a move expected to irritate the regime. The US has also slapped new sanctions on the country.



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The DPRK was on the US' terrorism sponsor list for the 1987 bombing of a Korean Air flight that killed all 115 people aboard. But the administration of former US president George W Bush took Pyongyang off it in 2008 in exchange for progress in talks on denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The talks collapsed soon after and have not been revived since.

During his Tokyo visit in early November, Trump asked Japan to purchase "massive amounts" of advanced US military gear to "shoot down" the DPRK's missiles.

In a recent interview with Japan's national broadcaster NHK, former

White House chief strategist Steve Bannon said the two allies are just beginning to ensure their militaries can work together. "The United States is there to help its ally Japan rearm and rearm appropriately," he said.

In its 2017 annual report to the US Congress, released on Nov 15, the US-China Economic and Security Review Commission blamed China for a problematic relationship between Beijing and Tokyo. It recommended that the congress examines the state of the US-Japan alliance in light of China's military modernization.

The report said China-Japan relations remain strained, with the East China Sea dispute the central flashpoint.

China's continued regional assertiveness and military modernization is contributing to deteriorating Japan-China relations, the report said. Japan is likely to continue pursuing military capabilities that would enable it to counter China's expanding military might, as well as the DPRK's growing nuclear and missile arsenal.

Some experts at US think tanks have recommended that Japan build offensive capabilities.

Jeffrey Hornung, a political scientist at the RAND Corporation, asserted in an article published in *The Japan Times* that: "To boost

its deterrence capabilities, Japan should consider being even more proactive." He said it is time for Japan to contemplate acquiring long-range strike capabilities.

James L. Schoff and David Song of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace said the US should be receptive to Japan taking on a wider range of security roles, including adopting limited strike capabilities.

The US State Department has approved the sale of a \$113 million weapons package to Japan, which includes the Japanese government's request for up to 56 AIM-120C-7 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles, or AMRAAMs.

The AMRAAM is one of the US military's most ubiquitous air-to-air weapons and was used in June when a US Navy Super Hornet pilot shot down a Syrian Sukhoi Su-22.

In fact, influential Japanese lawmakers are pushing harder for the country to develop the ability to strike preemptively at the DPRK's missile facilities.

Relying on the Japan-US security alliance that requires its ally to take the fight to its enemies, Japan has so far avoided taking the controversial and costly step of acquiring bombers or weapons such as cruise missiles with enough range to strike other countries.

Successive governments have said that Tokyo has the right to attack

enemy bases overseas when the enemy's intention to attack Japan is evident, the threat is imminent and there are no other defense options.

Previous administrations shied away from acquiring the hardware to do so. Now the lawmakers of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party have called on the Abe administration to start considering giving the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) the capability to strike enemy missile bases. And they have been joined by like-minded legislators from the opposition parties.

As the SDF's name implies, the exclusive purpose of Japan's military — one of the most advanced armed forces in the world — is defensive.

Abe has loosened postwar restraints on the SDF with a historic shift in Japan's policy in 2016 that allowed the country to exercise its right to collective self-defense.

The SDF and US military have ramped up joint exercises, including a massive drill in the Western Pacific on Nov 11-14 involving three of the US Navy's aircraft carriers.

The Yomiuri Shimbun reported that Japan is considering developing a cruise missile capable of striking targets on the ground, and it plans to start research in fiscal 2018. If realized, it will be the first time for Japan to develop land-attack cruise missiles on a full scale. Japan's defense ministry aims to

build a test model by fiscal 2022.

The new cruise missile, dubbed a "Japanese version of the Tomahawk" for having much in common with the US Tomahawk cruise missile, according to *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, will be technically able to attack enemy bases.

Abe has welcomed Trump's move to re-designate DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism, saying it would ramp up pressure on Pyongyang.

He told a plenary session of Japan's upper house on Nov 2 that the DPRK "might have already succeeded in" miniaturizing nuclear weapons and developing missile-mountable nuclear warheads. "Further careful analysis is necessary" to confirm whether Pyongyang has acquired atmospheric reentry technology, Abe added.

Citing the possibility of fresh DPRK provocations following the Trump administration's latest moves, Japanese Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera said on Nov 21 that it is "important to strengthen surveillance" against the DPRK's actions.

To deal with the DPRK and China and play a bigger role in world affairs, Japan is slowly and surely building its strike capabilities.

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China, Myanmar to expand trade

Economic corridor proposal to boost strategic cooperative partnership and regional development

By **SONG QINGRUN**

At his meeting with Myanmar's State Counsellor and Foreign Minister Aung San Suu Kyi on Nov 19, visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi proposed a China-Myanmar economic corridor, which will start from Southwest China's Yunnan province and extend to the central Myanmar city of Mandalay, and then east to Yangon and west to the Kyaukpadaung Special Economic Zone.

The plan, Wang said, will be made in accordance with Myanmar's national development plan and actual needs to strengthen the comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership between the two countries.

Given the complementary economic nature of China and Myanmar, the proposal aims to serve as

a flagship project of the Beijing-led Belt and Road Initiative to revive the ancient Silk Road routes.

For China, the economic corridor would open its less-developed southwestern region to overseas markets, contributing to the local economy and China's poverty-alleviation efforts.

The proposed China-Myanmar economic corridor, which can build synergy with the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar economic corridor, has the potential to expedite trade between China and the regions beyond Myanmar, including Bangladesh and India, even the Middle East via the sea route, while enhancing China's land connectivity with the Bay of Bengal.

Its effects could further boost global confidence in the Belt and Road and give rise to closer transnational cooperation under the framework.

Myanmar, too, is expected to greatly benefit from China's proposal in terms of infrastructure and poverty alleviation. Myanmar's "underdeveloped" infrastructure has discouraged many investors.

That situation could change if the bilateral economic corridor that prioritizes connectivity is implemented.

Paying equal attention to Myanmar's Yangon-Mandalay economic belt and its "underdeveloped" western states like Rakhine, the corridor will seek to strike a balance between revamping economic engines and targeted poverty-alleviation programs.

The latter, in particular, will help to ease the conflicts between local Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state, which has forced hundreds of thousands of Rakhine residents to flee the country.

The consequences could have been less serious had Myanmar

effectively reduced poverty and distributed social resources in a fairer manner. The China-Myanmar economic corridor could also help secure regional stability, which is key to nipping terrorism and extremism in the bud.

China and Myanmar also have a lot to gain from cooperation on projects in the economic corridor. On the one hand, an increasing number of Chinese enterprises have felt the urge to invest in overseas markets and strengthen production capacity with the countries in need, and developing economies such as Myanmar are an ideal destination.

On the other hand, Myanmar needs Chinese investment to bolster its lackluster industrial sector.

Besides, closer ties with the Chinese market of more than 1.3 billion people and increased people-to-people exchanges will be more than a bonus for Myanmar.

The opportunities should not be missed by other countries as well. With more participants on board, the project could expand and become more mutually beneficial.

Sufficient funding, for one, is a necessity and should be provided by multiple parties, including the governments and enterprises of China and Myanmar as well as international organizations.

Of course, the security risks require deft handling as the economic corridor will extend to the region near the conflict-prone states and the Golden Triangle that straddles Thailand, Laos and Myanmar, where opium smuggling and human trafficking are still rampant.

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