

# Real work begins in 2015 for security policy review

BY [NORIYUKI SUZUKI](#)

KYODO

DEC 30, 2014

Next year could be a major turning point for Japan's security policy as the country reviews its list of do's and don'ts in the postwar era, and tries to raise its security profile abroad.

This year, Japan took a big step toward a greater security role. The Abe administration eased the rules on arms exports and reinterpreted the pacifist Constitution to enable the country to exercise the right to collective self-defense. A controversial secrecy law also came into force to prevent state secrets from being leaked.

For a country that has maintained an "exclusively defense-oriented" policy, a spate of changes that will push the limits of its pacifist stance will be closely watched, even as Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, whose party won the Dec. 14 general election, says the security environment surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe.

The real challenge has yet to come, as many security experts expect upcoming legislative work to give teeth to the Cabinet decision on collective self-defense, and other security policy changes will be wide-ranging and complicated.

Undoubtedly, the future shape of the U.S.-Japan bilateral alliance — the very security arrangement that enabled Tokyo to commit to self-defense — will come into focus, given that Tokyo and Washington plan to complete in the first half next year the first revision since 1997 of their defense cooperation guidelines.

"Can and will Japan turn down a request for help from the United States, and say its use of collective self-defense should be limited?" asked **Takashi Kawakami, a professor at Takushoku University in Tokyo**. "It will be more of a political decision."

**Kawakami** said Japan should be able to exercise the right to collective self-defense, an inherent right under the U.N. Charter, but only after securing support from the public.

Before the Cabinet decision in July, successive governments had maintained that collective self-defense — coming to the aid of allies under armed attack even when Japan itself is not threatened — would go beyond the minimum use of force for self-defense permitted under the Constitution.

“The United States hopes to expand the global reach of the bilateral alliance, whereas Japan is more focused on security in this region that encompasses the South China Sea. Japan needs to decide in what situation, and how far Japan will go overseas,”

**Kawakami** added.

The Abe administration is expected to submit to the Diet a slew of bills on security, probably after nationwide local elections in April. The ruling coalition of the Liberal Democratic Party and Komeito will discuss how to define the future scope of Self-Defense Forces operations as early as January, given the planned update of the defense guidelines with the U.S.

Domestic debate is expected to revolve around the rise of an assertive China and North Korea’s missile and nuclear development, but such drastic reworking of security policy remains a divisive issue. In a recent Kyodo News survey conducted after the landslide victory of the ruling bloc, 54.3 percent of the respondents said the administration should take more time before seeking passage of the bills.

“We will maintain the existing pacifist stance and consider how to address real issues within the framework of the Constitution,” Defense Minister Gen Nakatani, a former SDF officer who once headed the predecessor of the ministry, told his inaugural news conference.

The legislative work will also cover “gray zone” incidents that fall short of full-fledged military attacks on Japan, as well as peacekeeping operations and logistical support.

The LDP appears willing to create a permanent law that would govern the dispatch of SDF operations overseas for logistical support, most likely for the U.S. military.

Some security experts caution against Japan placing too much emphasis on playing catch-up with countries that do not have similar constitutional constraints, as it would risk losing sight of relatively new challenges in cyberspace and space — areas that are not limited by geographical boundaries.

Their argument appears to take on greater importance at a time when North Korea has been blamed by the United States for hacking Sony Pictures Entertainment Inc. over “The Interview,” a movie depicting the fictional assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

More work is needed to achieve the peaceful and stable use of cyberspace and of space — a vital domain for missile defense, according to the experts.

Gregory Schulte, former U.S. deputy assistant secretary of defense for space policy, said Japan’s reinterpretation of the Constitution opens “new doors” for U.S.-Japan cooperation in common defense, as space has become increasingly congested, contested and competitive.

“The more countries, the more systems, and the more allies are operating together and sharing capabilities in space, the harder it is for a potential adversary to interfere with those capabilities,” Schulte said in Tokyo.