

executive summary

CHINA'S MILITARY & THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE IN 2030

a strategic net assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the People's Republic of China as an increasingly significant military power in the Western Pacific presents major implications for Japan, the U.S.-Japan alliance, and regional security. The uncertainties associated with this development were a major factor motivating the Obama administration's recent decision to place a greater overall emphasis in its foreign and defense policies on the Asia-Pacific region—the “pivot” or “rebalancing” to Asia.

Of greatest concern to both U.S. and Japanese defense analysts is China's acquisition of so-called antiaccess/area denial (A2/AD)-type capabilities,¹ combined with its growing military and paramilitary presence along the East Asian littoral and beyond. These developments are casting doubt on the ability of the military forces of Japan and the United States to operate freely and, if necessary, to prevail in future disputes with Beijing over a variety of contentious national security issues, from maritime territorial and resource rivalries to the handling of crises over Taiwan or North Korea.

In addition, the tensions and uncertainties associated with a greater and more active Chinese military and paramilitary presence near Japan have the potential to reduce trust and spur Washington and Tokyo to adopt zero-sum approaches toward Beijing in many *nonmilitary* policy areas—such as economic and trade relations—while channeling more scarce resources into military development.

This dynamic is most clearly evident at present in the ongoing tensions between Beijing and Tokyo over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. China is using its expanding military

and paramilitary capabilities to challenge Japan's claim to sovereign authority over those maritime territories. Those activities, combined with Tokyo's actions, are resulting in a level of overall contention and a risk of military conflict that was arguably inconceivable even a decade ago.

If mishandled, China's growing military capabilities and presence could weaken Japanese confidence in America's security commitment to Tokyo and increase support in Japan for a much larger and offensive-oriented conventional military and perhaps even the acquisition of nuclear weapons. Alternatively, any mishandling of this challenge could also conceivably induce Tokyo to accommodate Chinese interests in ways that do not serve U.S. interests over the long term. Likewise, Tokyo's responses to these dynamics—whether involving a failure to commit resources, accommodation, or an overreaction to China's military rise—will greatly affect Washington's views of the bilateral alliance and regional security writ large.

If mishandled, China's growing military capabilities and presence could weaken Japanese confidence in America's security commitment to Tokyo and increase support in Japan for a much larger and offensive-oriented conventional military.

To determine the most viable future path, it is necessary to analyze the current and future dimensions of China's security challenge along with the capacity and willingness of the United States and Japan to meet that challenge over time and under varying circumstances.² A detailed and systematic examination of the possible consequences of China's growing military capabilities for Japan and the alliance over the next fifteen to twenty years, to approximately 2030, is therefore essential. Such an assessment will aid Washington and Tokyo in their efforts to sustain allied confidence and cooperation and maintain regional stability in the face of China's growing military presence.

The features, relative probabilities, and risks of the six possible regional security scenarios presented in this report shed light on the future of regional dynamics. Each scenario entails varying levels of Chinese cooperation and coercion, derived largely from combinations of several possible trajectories of security behavior and views for Beijing, Tokyo, and Washington.

This approach is broader than the standard net assessment emphasis on military variables. The wider scope facilitates an examination of not only relative military capabilities and competitions but also an equally important range of nonmilitary domestic and external variables likely to influence the security behavior of China, Japan, and the United States through 2030; hence the use of the phrase "strategic net assessment."

A strategic net assessment of the long-term challenge posed to Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance by China's growing military presence in the Western Pacific offers several advantages over other types of military-centered analysis. Beyond its *broad military and nonmilitary approach*, it *focuses on the long-term nature of the competition*, bringing into relief the gradual, accumulative effects of changes in variables while incorporating the long lead

times required to devise and implement strategies and related weapons systems. Such an assessment also *recognizes the importance of trends*, reflecting the influence of momentum and deeply rooted beliefs while also drawing attention to factors that can halt or suddenly change those beliefs. It *acknowledges the critical nature of national differences* as well as the *importance of asymmetries*. And last, it *identifies the critical military domains of competition* in order to determine the relative vulnerabilities and advantages of all actors in both weapons and support systems.

This approach allows for the in-depth development and analysis, in this report, of possible future country trajectories, trilateral regional security scenarios, and various U.S. and Japanese responses through 2030, all of which will help sharpen the understanding of the security challenge posed by China. Each identified U.S. and Japanese response—a robust forward presence, conditional offense/defense, and defensive balancing—reflects different emphases on deterrence or reassurance and varying levels and types of military capabilities, doctrines, and deployments. Thoroughly examining these scenarios could force debate in both Tokyo and Washington about the future of the U.S.-Japan alliance and the hard choices that will be required in both capitals in the years ahead.

KEY FINDINGS

The Threat Is Not a War With China

The most likely potential challenge to the U.S.-Japan alliance over the next fifteen to twenty years does not involve full-scale military conflict between China and Japan or the United States originating, for example, from Chinese efforts to expel Washington from the region. Instead, it derives from two other far more likely developments.

First, growing absolute or relative Chinese military capabilities could enable Beijing to influence or resolve disputes with Tokyo in its favor without resorting to a military attack. In particular, Beijing could use its growing coercive power with respect to contested territories and maritime resources in the East China Sea.

Second, an increase in the People's Liberation Army's presence in the airspace and waters near Japan and disputed territories could raise the risk of destabilizing accidents that could dangerously escalate into serious political-military crises involving the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Significant Absolute and Possibly Relative Shifts in the Military Balance Near Japan Are Likely

By 2030, the Northeast Asian security environment will likely witness significant increases in the military capabilities and nearby presence of China in relation to Japan and

the U.S.-Japan alliance. These dynamics are evident in the two most likely future trilateral regional security scenarios identified in this report: eroding balance and limited conflict.

The eroding balance scenario is marked by significant *absolute* Chinese gains in all military domains. Certain domains are especially likely to see such change: ground (via increases in the number, range, and sophistication of ballistic and cruise missiles), naval (via an anti-ship ballistic missile system, more advanced submarines, and both military and paramilitary

Growing absolute or relative Chinese military capabilities could enable Beijing to influence or resolve disputes with Tokyo in its favor without resorting to a military attack.

surface vessels), air (via more advanced surface-to-air missiles, ballistic and cruise missiles capable of targeting U.S. air bases in Japan, and larger numbers of more advanced aircraft capable of operating over water), and command and control (via long-range radars and more sophisticated command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance—C4ISR—networks). In addition, this scenario includes an overall more frequent presence among both Chinese military and paramilitary assets operating in nearby airspace and waters.

The more troubling limited conflict scenario is marked by both the above absolute gains as well as likely *relative* gains against the alliance in several key domains, including naval (especially via submarines and naval mines) and

air (via larger numbers of advanced next-generation fighters and possibly several outfitted aircraft carrier battle groups). Equally important, this also involves a greatly increased local presence of paramilitary aircraft and naval vessels.

Greater Political–Military Tensions, Coercion, and Crises Are Probable, Albeit Within Limits

Intensified military and paramilitary competition and political-military uncertainties under the above two most likely scenarios will almost certainly lead to a significant increase in political-military tensions and limited crises in areas surrounding Japan by 2030, especially under the limited conflict scenario. Equally worrisome, the limited conflict scenario could result in a gradual process of coercion, whereby incremental Chinese encroachment over disputed territory and resources in the East China Sea and elsewhere increasingly endangers Japanese and alliance interests, possibly enabling the Chinese to “win without fighting” in a range of disputes.

That said, incentives to maintain or deepen cooperation between China and the alliance, to avoid severe crises or conflicts, and to limit escalation if crises or conflicts occur will probably remain fairly strong. However, despite continued parallel efforts by both Beijing and the alliance to advance cooperative relations, the emergence of credible mutual security assurances or other fundamentally stabilizing arrangements, although possible, will remain unlikely over this time frame, given both the intractable nature of the sovereignty and re-

source disputes dividing Tokyo and Beijing and the overall depth of strategic distrust likely to continue between Washington and Beijing.

Both the eroding balance and limited conflict scenarios, involving greater instability alongside continued cooperation and restraint, are deemed most likely primarily due to

- expectations regarding long-term mid- or high-level increases in both Chinese and U.S. economic capabilities and defense spending levels and only modest (at most) levels of Japanese economic growth and defense spending;
- the ongoing presence of significant levels of mutual suspicion between China and the alliance; and
- the counterbalancing effects of increasing levels of bilateral and regional economic integration, Beijing's continued need for a peaceful external environment, and the resulting likely absence of truly paradigm-changing events, such as the emergence of a vastly more aggressive Chinese leadership or crises that escalate into military conflict and loss of life.

A Significant Drop in the Potential Threat Posed by China Is Possible

A third regional security environment, the mitigated threat scenario, is less likely than the eroding balance and limited conflict scenarios but is still quite possible. This scenario would entail continued high levels of cooperative engagement between China and Japan and between China and the alliance, alongside either a very slowly increasing or steady level of Chinese military and civilian presence near Japan, lower levels of military competition in most domains, and a resulting decreased capacity for serious tensions and crises. That said, again assuming the absence of any credible regional or bilateral mutual security assurances or crisis management mechanisms or processes, the danger of an inadvertent crisis and rapid escalation in a crisis would probably remain—although such occurrences would arguably be less likely than under the previous two scenarios.

The mitigated threat scenario would result from the less likely possibility of a serious decline in Chinese economic capacity, significant levels of domestic social and political unrest, mid- or high-range levels of economic development in the United States, and probably lower Japanese growth levels than in the case of eroding balance or limited conflict. Those factors would be combined with continued domestic political and social restraints on defense spending.

Three Major Shifts in the Strategic Landscape Are Less Likely

Three regional security scenarios are less likely to emerge:

- A full-blown Asian cold war scenario characterized by a steadily increasing level of zero-sum strategic rivalry and across-the-board political, economic, and military

competition between China and the alliance and a greatly increased likelihood of severe political-military crises

- Two other types of scenarios precipitated primarily by a major withdrawal or hollowing out of the U.S. military presence in the Western Pacific:
 - ◆ A Sino-centric Asia scenario marked by a high level of Japanese strategic accommodation of an economically important and yet politically and militarily nonthreatening China
 - ◆ A Sino-Japanese rivalry scenario marked by an intense and dangerous military, political, and economic competition between an aggressive, ultranationalist China and a nuclear-armed Japan with all the doctrinal and force structure features of a “normal” conventional military power

These three scenarios are deemed far less probable than the mitigated threat, eroding balance, and limited conflict scenarios. This is largely due to the lower likelihood, during the time frame examined in this report, of two necessary precipitants relevant to one or more of them: first, the emergence of an aggressive, ultranationalist Chinese leadership or second, a major collapse in American economic capabilities and political commitment to the Western Pacific.

Three Allied Responses Are Preferred

Three general types of political-military responses by Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance would offer the best prospects of success in advancing allied interests over the long term:

- Robust Forward Presence: a deterrence-centered response designed to retain unambiguous allied regional primacy through either highly ambitious and forward-deployment-based military concepts, such as Air-Sea Battle, or approaches more oriented toward long-range blockades, such as Offshore Control
- Conditional Offense/Defense: a primacy-oriented response that nonetheless avoids both preemptive, deep strikes against the Chinese mainland and obvious containment-type blockades and stresses both deterrence and reassurance in a more equal manner
- Defensive Balancing: a response that emphasizes mutual area denial, places a greater reliance on lower visibility and rear-deployed forces, and aims to establish a more genuinely balanced and cooperative power relationship with China in the Western Pacific

No Response Offers a Clear Chance of Success

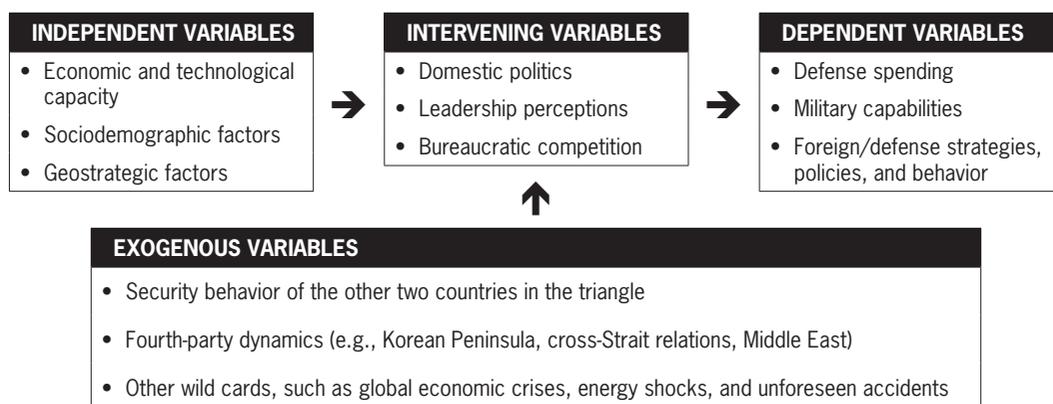
There are no “silver bullets” in regional or alliance responses that can single-handedly deliver a stable military or political balance at minimal cost to all parties involved. Each of the major conceivable responses to this daunting challenge will likely require painful trade-offs and, in some cases, the adoption of radically new ways of thinking about the roles and missions of both the U.S. and Japanese militaries.

In particular, policymakers could find their efforts complicated by (a) limits on the ability or willingness of Japan or other nations in the Asia-Pacific region to advance substantive security cooperation or embark on major security enhancements, (b) unwillingness in the U.S. military to alter doctrinal assumptions in Western Pacific operations, and (c) China’s own suspicions of security agreements that might constrain the use of its growing capabilities. Likewise, any strategy that includes vigorous political or diplomatic efforts to reach critical understandings of vital security interests will necessarily require a high tolerance for uncertainty and even failure.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

Six domains of possible military competition between the United States and Japan, on one hand, and China, on the other, are examined in this report: maritime, air, ground, space, cyberspace, nuclear, and command and control. The major independent variables employed in the analysis of these military competitions and other security features of China, Japan, and the United States include each nation’s economic and technological capacity, social and demographic factors, and geostrategic position (see figure 1). Intervening or mediating variables include key aspects of domestic politics, bureaucratic relationships, and leadership

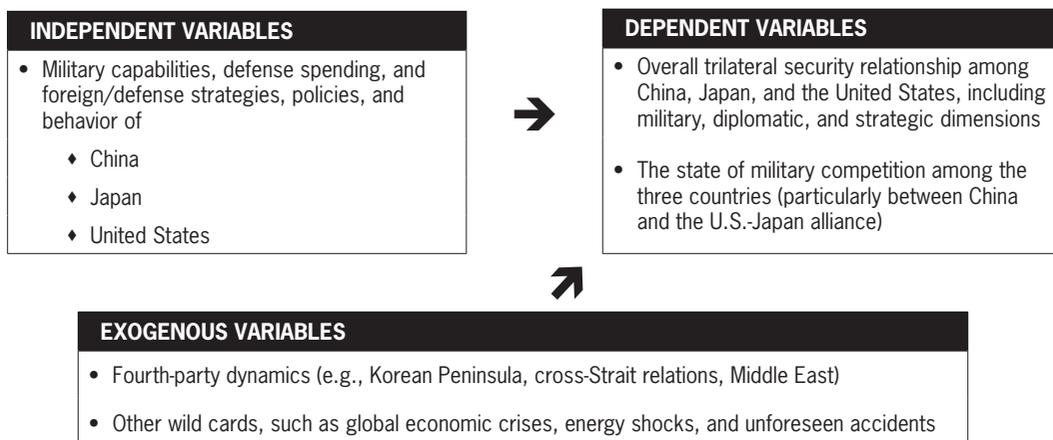
FIGURE 1
Analytical Approach for Individual Countries



outlook. Exogenous or external variables relevant to each country consist of the behavior of the other two nations in the trilateral relationship, a variety of singular “wild-card” events such as major clashes over, for example, territorial disputes, and the policies and actions of fourth party actors such as North Korea or Taiwan.

Analysis of differences among these variables over time result in several trajectories of security behavior and views for Beijing, Tokyo, and Washington. Each trajectory comprises alternative levels or types of national military capabilities within the seven domains of potential military competition, overall defense spending levels, and foreign and defense strategies and policies of particular relevance to Northeast Asia (figure 2). Various likely combinations of these country trajectories, along with possible exogenous variables, form the basis of the six alternative possible future trilateral security scenarios identified in this report—eroding balance, limited conflict, mitigated threat, Asian cold war, Sino-centric Asia, and Sino-Japanese rivalry (these are described in detail in table 4).

FIGURE 2
Analytical Approach for Trilateral Security Scenarios in 2030



INDIVIDUAL COUNTRY TRAJECTORIES

China

Alternative projections of Chinese economic and technological capacity will likely play an important independent role in determining the various levels of defense spending and

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types of military capabilities that could emerge within the seven domains during the next fifteen to twenty years.

At the same time, several intervening variables associated with the views of the Chinese leadership, levels of domestic political and social stability, various bureaucratic and political factors, and the tenor of Japanese and U.S. policies toward China will likely exert the strongest long-term influence on China’s foreign and defense policies toward Japan and the alliance. In addition, individual crises or wild-card events over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands or resource disputes, if severe enough, could exert a major and lasting impact on Chinese policies.

TABLE 1
Possible Trajectories for China Through 2030

		CAUTIOUS RISE	ASSERTIVE STRENGTH	COOPERATIVE WEAKNESS	AGGRESSIVE ULTRANATIONALISM
CHARACTERISTICS	Probability	Likely	Likely	Possible	Possible
	Military capabilities	Mid	High	Low	High
	Policy toward Japan and the alliance	Engage and hedge, emphasis on engage	Engage and hedge, emphasis on hedge	Relatively cooperative and benign	Highly nationalist and assertive
DETERMINANTS	Average annual GDP growth 2012–2030	4–5%	6–8%	3–4%	6–8%
	Defense spending as % of GDP	1–1.5%	1.5–2%	1%	> 2%
	Social unrest	Mid	Low	High	Mid
	Political dynamics	Regime focused on domestic stability	Increasingly confident leadership	Unstable regime focused on internal security	Unstable regime, emergence of ultranationalist leadership
	Public opinion	Dissatisfied with regime, somewhat nationalist	Nationalist	Highly dissatisfied with regime	Highly nationalist (precipitated by wild-card event)

Four trajectories for China are possible through 2030, classified according to the overall degree of Chinese military capability vis-à-vis Japan and the alliance and the level of emphasis in foreign and defense strategy and policy placed on cooperation versus competition or confrontation. These four trajectories are ordered according to their likely probability, although the first two trajectories are deemed roughly similar in likelihood (see table 1).

Japan

Since the last decade of the Cold War, Japan has moved incrementally to relax political and legal constraints on the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, enhance its security relationship with the United States, and expand its security horizons. In delineating possible Japanese future trajectories through 2030, it is instructive to note that Japan has evolved significantly since 1994.

There are no “silver bullets” in regional or alliance responses that can single-handedly deliver a stable military or political balance at minimal cost to all parties involved.

Despite the important steps it has taken, however, it is also worth remembering how restrained Japan has been. Japan continues to adhere to a constitutional interpretation that prohibits exercising the right of collective self-defense. It still maintains an “exclusively defense-oriented policy” and eschews “becoming a military power.” It severely restricts the provision of support that might appear to be directly integrated with the use of force in cases that do not involve a direct and immediate threat to Japanese security. Even as Japan was augmenting its international security role at the beginning of the twenty-first century, economic stagnation and fiscal constraints compelled the

Japanese government to freeze and even reduce defense expenditures.

Overall, numerous domestic factors (constitutional, normative, political, budget constraints, and economic interests vis-à-vis China) suggest that Japan’s defense response to China is likely to be restrained. Despite the recent ascendancy of those who advocate a full-blown competitive strategy, Japan is more likely to pursue a policy of cooperative engagement that encompasses either a hard or a soft hedge.

That said, there is indeed growing support in Japan’s security policy community for dealing firmly with China’s expanding military capabilities and ambitions, especially in light of the most recent crisis over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands.

Five trajectories for Japan are possible through approximately 2030 (see table 2). They are ordered according to their likelihood, with the cooperative engagement with a hard hedge trajectory deemed most likely, followed closely by cooperative engagement with a soft hedge. Framed in terms of Japanese military capabilities, the hard hedge is described as a “midrange” trajectory, the soft hedge as a “low-range” trajectory, and a competitive trajectory as “high-range”—while accommodation and independence are more extreme outliers on the low and high ends.

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TABLE 2
Possible Trajectories for Japan Through 2030

		HARD HEDGE	SOFT HEDGE	COMPETITION	ACCOMMODATION	INDEPENDENCE
CHARACTERISTICS	Probability	Most likely	Likely	Possible	Very unlikely	Most unlikely
	Military capabilities	Mid	Low	High	Low	High (Nuclear)
	Policy toward China	Cooperative engagement	Cooperative engagement	Competitive engagement	Strategic accommodation	Strategic independence
	Policy toward the alliance	Dependent; more integrated; active technical and planning consultations, but resource-constrained strategies and operations	Dependent; integration deferred; active but politically self-constrained consultations	Integration and rationalized efforts replace dependence	Dependent; integration deferred; placeholder consultations	Essentially independent; Japan self-reliant; alliance in name only; technical consultations might continue
DETERMINANTS	Average annual GDP growth, 2012–2030	0.6–0.8%	0.6–0.8%	0.6–0.8%	0.6–0.8% < 0.6%*	0.6–0.8% < 0.6%*
	Economic integration with China	High	High	Mid	High	Mid
	Defense spending as % of GDP	1%	< 1%	1.2–1.3%	< 1%	> 1.3%
	Political dynamics	More stable government, higher capacity for reform and defense effectiveness	Weak and unstable governments, incrementalism and erratic behavior	Political realignment and electoral mandate for constitutional revision and robust defense	Political realignment and electoral mandate for military restraint and regional cooperation	Political realignment and nationalist mandate for nuclear weapons
	Public opinion	Wary of China	Subdued	Concerned about China, nationalist	Strongly pacifist, friendly toward China, wary of alliance	Much less pacifist, highly nationalist

*If Japan's economy were to face severe difficulties beyond what it has experienced in recent years, with GDP growth falling below 0.6 percent, the probability of the two unlikely trajectories (strategic accommodation and strategic independence) would increase somewhat.

Given the domestic factors that continue to constrain Japanese defense policy and steer Japan toward policy continuity and incremental change, the more dramatic changes represented by competition, accommodation, and independence will require significant shifts in the exogenous variables and are on balance less likely. The most important exogenous variables will be the level of Chinese military capabilities and China's political and military behavior, the relative attractiveness of the Chinese market for Japan, and the robustness of the U.S. security commitment to Japan and the region as reflected in U.S. military capabilities and presence.

The United States

Continued Japanese ambivalence and restraint regarding its military capabilities and foreign/defense strategies and policies, along with both China's growing economic and military influence in Northeast Asia and Washington's current economic malaise, challenge the ability of the United States to craft an effective, long-range policy toward Japan and the alliance. Such a policy must simultaneously meet three basic goals:

1. Reduce fears that future U.S. political-security policies toward China might either expose Tokyo to unwanted pressures and threats from Beijing or, alternatively, reduce the credibility of U.S. security assurances to Japan
2. Facilitate the peaceful handling of possibly intensifying Sino-Japanese territorial disputes and encourage the development of a more cooperative overall Sino-Japanese relationship
3. Maximize the likelihood that Tokyo will acquire the kinds of capabilities and policies that are deemed necessary by Washington to defend U.S. and allied interests in the face of a likely more assertive, rising China

Many factors will influence U.S. efforts to achieve these goals and objectives over the next fifteen to twenty years, including the future of Washington's political and diplomatic relations with both Tokyo and Beijing, the state of the U.S. economy and technological base and its capacity to sustain sufficient levels of defense spending and deployments, and both Japanese and Chinese domestic political and economic developments. All these areas are to varying degrees under debate within U.S. (and Japanese) policy circles and are subject to larger political and economic forces within Asia and beyond. As a result, many could evolve in very different directions over the next fifteen to twenty years, thus resulting in different types and levels of U.S. policies and capabilities toward China, Japan, and the alliance (see table 3).

TABLE 3
Possible Trajectories for the United States Through 2030

		STRENGTH	FALTERING	WITHDRAWAL
CHARACTERISTICS	Probability	Most Likely	Likely	Unlikely
	Military capabilities	Mid-High	Low-Mid	Very Low
	Policy toward China	Variante A: Cooperative engagement and hedging, emphasis on hedge Variante B (as a result of wild card): Containment	Variante A: Cooperative engagement and hedging, emphasis on engage Variante B: Limited accommodation	Withdrawal combined with cooperative accommodation
	Policy toward the alliance	Pressure on Japan to boost defense capabilities, significantly enhance interoperability	Incremental strengthening of alliance, improvements in interoperability	Major reduction of military presence in Japan, but mutual security treaty and skeleton of alliance maintained
DETERMINANTS	Average annual GDP growth, 2012-2030	2.5-3%	2-2.3%	1-2%
	Defense spending as % of GDP	4.5-5.5%	3.5-4.5%	≤ 3%
	Political dynamics	Less domestic discord, resources directed toward bolstering Asian presence	Domestic discord, but a general bipartisan consensus on need to maintain presence in Asia	Persistent gridlock, preoccupation with domestic problems
	Public opinion	Heightened perception of Chinese threat	Ambivalent, not a policy constraint	More inward-looking

REGIONAL SCENARIOS

The above country trajectories suggest the possibility of six alternative future scenarios for the trilateral security environment. (See table 4 for a full summary of the six scenarios.)

Eroding Balance

The first of two roughly equally likely scenarios would be marked by the overall continuation of present-day diplomatic and military approaches, centered on similar policies of cooperative engagement in China, Japan, and the United States alongside hedging or deterrence efforts in the military realm. In this scenario, cooperation would likely be reinforced

TABLE 4
Alternative Scenarios in the China–United States–Japan Security Relationship in 2030

		ERODING BALANCE	LIMITED CONFLICT	MITIGATED THREAT	ASIAN COLD WAR	SINO-CENTRIC ASIA	SINO-JAPANESE RIVALRY	
CHARACTERISTICS		Probability	Most likely	Likely	Possible	Unlikely	Very unlikely	Most unlikely
		Degree of stability	Somewhat unstable	Very unstable	Somewhat stable	Very unstable	Medium-term stability but long-term uncertainty	Extremely unstable
		Actor favored by military balance	Alliance (narrowly)	Uncertain	Alliance	Alliance (narrowly)	China	China (narrowly)
TRAJECTORIES		China	Cautious Rise or Assertive Strength	Assertive Strength	Cooperative Weakness	Aggressive Ultrationalism	Cautious Rise or Cooperative Weakness	Aggressive Ultrationalism
		U.S.	Strength (engagement variant)	Faltering (engagement variant)	Faltering (accommodation variant)	Strength (containment variant)	Withdrawal (gradual variant)	Withdrawal (precipitate variant)
MILITARY CAPABILITIES		Japan	Soft Hedge	Hard Hedge	Soft Hedge	Competition	Accommodation	Independence
		China	Mid–High	High	Low	High	Low–Mid	Variable (likely High)
		U.S.	Mid–High	Low–Mid	Mid	High	High	Low
STRATEGIES, POLICIES, AND BEHAVIOR		Japan	Low–Mid	Low–Mid	Low	High	Low	High
		China	Engage and hedge	Engage and hedge, emphasis on hedge	Engage and hedge, cautious and internally focused	Aggressive	Benign	Aggressive
		U.S.	Engage and hedge, emphasis on hedge	Engage and hedge	Engage and hedge, emphasis on engage	Containment, strengthened alliance	Withdrawal or hollowing out	Withdrawal or hollowing out
DETERMINANTS		Japan	Engage and hedge	Engage and hedge, emphasis on hedge	Engage and hedge, emphasis on engage	Normal military power	Strategic accommodation	Strategic independence (nuclearization)

by deepening levels of Sino-Japanese economic interdependence and an emphasis by all sides on stability-inducing positive-sum interactions in dealing with common problems.

Although the military realm would remain characterized primarily by significant levels of allied superiority in most domains, under this scenario, China would nonetheless have made notable *absolute* gains in all military domains. Certain domains are especially likely to see such change: ground (via increases in the number, range, and sophistication of ballistic and cruise missiles), naval (via an antiship ballistic missile system, more advanced submarines, and both military and paramilitary surface vessels), air (via more advanced surface-to-air missiles, ballistic and cruise missiles capable of targeting U.S. air bases in Japan, and larger numbers of more advanced aircraft capable of operating over water), and command and control (via long-range radars and more sophisticated C4ISR networks). In addition, this scenario includes an overall more frequent Chinese presence among both military and paramilitary assets operating in nearby air and waters.

This situation would result in a greater likelihood of tensions and incidents, especially over territorial and resource issues—assuming, as would be likely, a continued absence of credible mutual security assurances or crisis management mechanisms. At the same time, the scenario assumes that the region would avoid the kind of truly severe incidents or highly adverse developments that could generate a rapid increase in the level of threat perception and hostility among the elites and publics of China, Japan, or the United States.

In all, the regional security environment under this scenario would be more unstable than at present yet most likely would still prove manageable, despite significant increases in Chinese capabilities. This scenario would likely result from combinations of either high- or midrange levels of economic development, military spending, and hence military capabilities for Washington and Beijing—that is, the strength trajectory for the United States and either the cautious rise or the assertive strength trajectory for China. It would also involve low- to medium-level military capabilities for Japan, resulting in part from continued restraints on Japan's willingness to greatly increase defense spending, as postulated in the soft hedge trajectory.

Limited Conflict

The second likely scenario would be marked by a significant increase in the relative military capabilities of China vis-à-vis Japan and the alliance in several key domains, including naval (especially via submarines and naval mines) and air (via larger numbers of advanced next-generation fighters, as well as possibly several outfitted aircraft carrier battle groups). This also involves a greatly increased local presence of paramilitary aircraft and naval vessels, alongside a significantly increased emphasis on the hedging dimension of each nation's overall strategic approach. Under this troubling scenario, increasingly sophisticated and high levels of Chinese military capabilities would considerably reduce, though not entirely eliminate, the large margin of conventional superiority that the allies have traditionally enjoyed in the air and waters surrounding Japan.

Although positive-sum political, diplomatic, military, and economic engagement between Beijing and both Tokyo and Washington would continue (albeit probably at a diminished level), the security environment would likely witness intensifying patterns of military competition and rivalry as China's capabilities increase relative to the alliance.

Indeed, the perception, if not the reality, would likely emerge in some quarters that China had achieved a very significant level of deterrence against U.S. and Japanese inter-

Even as Japan was augmenting its international security role at the beginning of the twenty-first century, economic stagnation and fiscal constraints compelled the Japanese government to freeze and even reduce defense expenditures.

vention in a Taiwan crisis, and perhaps even (albeit to a lesser extent) in a crisis over Sino-Japanese disputes in the East China Sea. This would result in an increased likelihood that Japan would pursue a somewhat harder hedge in its overall cooperative engagement with China, involving modest reinterpretations of constitutional constraints and sustained (though not significantly increased) levels of defense spending. These developments would also likely increase the probability of serious crises or even limited conflict, especially in the absence of credible mutual security assurances between China and the alliance.

That said, incentives to avoid severe crises and to limit escalation if crises occur would remain fairly strong, especially given continued high levels of Sino-Japanese economic interdependence and the likely absence of truly paradigm-changing triggering events, such as the emergence of a vastly more aggressive Chinese leadership.

Nonetheless, taken as a whole, the regional security environment under this scenario would likely be one of the more unstable of the six scenarios (along with the Asian cold war and Sino-Japanese rivalry scenarios), involving a significant weakening of allied deterrence capabilities and the unnerving of other Asian nations.

Overall, this scenario would likely result from low- to midrange levels of economic development and military spending in the United States (that is, the faltering trajectory for the United States) and continued relatively high levels of economic development, military spending, and military capabilities in China (assertive strength trajectory), alongside a Japan that marginally reinterprets its political, military, and social constraints to pursue a hard hedge trajectory.

Mitigated Threat

The third scenario, less likely than the first two but also a real possibility, would be marked by continued high levels of cooperative engagement between China and Japan and between China and the alliance. It would also entail a slowly increasing or steady level of Chinese military and civilian naval presence in both the "open" ocean and disputed waters around Japan, lower patterns of military competition in most domains, and a resulting de-

creased capacity for serious tensions and crises. In this scenario, cooperation would be reinforced by deepening levels of Sino-Japanese economic interdependence and an emphasis by all sides on stability-inducing, positive-sum interactions in dealing with common problems.

While achieving some modest gains (such as more sophisticated conventional ballistic and cruise missiles, robust surface-to-air-missile batteries, and a credible ballistic-missile-centered weapons system in the maritime domain), the People's Liberation Army's capabilities would be developed and deployed at a significantly less-than-expected level. As a result, the lethality and accuracy of the Chinese A2/AD network in the sea and airspace beyond the 200-nautical-mile exclusive economic zone would remain porous and uncertain, largely due to an insufficient and vulnerable C4ISR network, relatively weak antisubmarine warfare capabilities, and a limited number of costly aircraft carriers and fifth-generation aircraft. Thus, China would prove unable to alter both the perception and the reality of the existing military imbalance in the Western Pacific; that is, the United States and Japan would continue to operate their forces in the Western Pacific near Japan as a clearly superior combined force in all military domains.

This trajectory would likely entail a China faced with more severe social unrest than in the eroding balance or limited conflict trajectories and focused on maintaining internal stability rather than pursuing greater external military capabilities. As a result, Chinese leaders would likely become even more cautious and conservative in their actions abroad than at present, especially given their need to address growing domestic social problems associated with seriously declining growth rates, a weak social safety net, controls on internal migration, and increasing concerns about government corruption. The likelihood of such a Chinese tack would increase further if Tokyo also adopted a cautious and conservative approach to its territorial and resource disputes with Beijing, a likely occurrence under this scenario.

That said, assuming the absence of any regional or bilateral mutual security assurances or crisis management mechanisms or processes, the danger of an inadvertent crisis and rapid escalation in a crisis would almost certainly remain—although such occurrences would arguably be less likely than under the eroding balance and limited conflict scenarios. In addition, adverse developments, such as the emergence of an aggressive, ultranationalist Chinese leadership in response to domestic unrest and a U.S. effort to consolidate its military superiority through deployment of a more threatening Air-Sea Battle concept or an Offshore Control-based force structure, cannot be entirely discounted under this scenario. In other words, U.S. and Japanese behavior toward a weakened China, as well as Chinese leadership politics, would constitute key variables.

This scenario would likely result from midrange levels of economic and technological development in the United States and a significant downside in economic development and military spending levels in China, as represented in the faltering trajectory for Washington and the cooperative weakness trajectory for Beijing. On balance, Japan would most likely witness lower growth levels than in the eroding balance and limited conflict scenarios, due to the probable influence of a declining Chinese economy, while continuing to operate under most if not all of the other domestic restraints on defense spending and policies as-

sociated with its soft hedge trajectory. Nonetheless, such constraints would not appreciably erode the military balance favoring Tokyo or weaken the overall level of allied superiority over China.

Asian Cold War

The fourth scenario, possible but less likely than the three scenarios described above, would be characterized by an incipient cold war in Asia, centered on a steadily increasing level of zero-sum strategic rivalry. It would also be marked by across-the-board political, economic, and military competition between China and the alliance as well as a greatly increased likelihood of severe political-military crises, assuming an absence of credible mutual security assurances between the two sides. Under this scenario, Japan would become something close to a “normal” conventional military power and a fully active security partner of the United States in the alliance, largely in response to the emergence of a highly assertive, if not aggressive, and militarily strong China and the occurrence of one or more serious Sino-Japanese wild-card crises.

Japan's geographic proximity to China and its geostrategic significance for Chinese military calculations give Japanese policymakers a strong incentive to keep a watchful eye on the strategic implications of China's rise.

Although all three countries would likely continue to seek diplomatic and economic cooperation with one another (and other Asian nations) where possible, their military actions and defense policies would suggest a much greater willingness to employ military instruments in support of regional foreign policy objectives, including resource and territorial claims in the East China Sea. This scenario would therefore likely witness a shift toward more ultranationalist and assertive leaderships to varying degrees in all three capitals but probably emerging first in Beijing and then, in response, in Tokyo and perhaps to a lesser extent in Washington.

Despite significant absolute and some relative Chinese gains in military capacity (particularly the development of a highly integrated C4ISR network that will allow China to present challenges to allied forces in the maritime and air domains), considerable enhancements in alliance capabilities under this scenario would prevent major erosion in the superiority of the U.S.-Japan alliance in most military domains. That said, by approximately 2030, China would be able to field a set of air, naval, cyber, and C4ISR capabilities that could challenge regional perceptions of allied superiority under certain contingencies, such as a crisis over Taiwan or in the South China Sea.

Such uncertainties, combined with the emergence of more risk-acceptant leaderships, more stridently nationalistic publics in both China and Japan, and a zero-sum-oriented U.S. China policy, would almost certainly result in an increased likelihood of miscalculations or assertive behavior by all sides, especially regarding highly sensitive security issues

such as territorial disputes. More broadly, this type of security environment could significantly weaken overall regional deterrence and greatly unnerve nearby nations.

This scenario would likely result from mid to high levels of economic and technological development in the United States and China and a Japanese transition toward higher levels of defense spending and a higher and more expansive set of military capabilities and defense objectives. The emergence of an ultranationalist Chinese leadership would likely result from a combination of both domestic and external factors, including high but socially destabilizing levels of economic growth and heightened threat perceptions due to high levels of U.S. and Japanese military capacity and an increased regional presence.

In terms of country trajectories, this Asian cold war scenario would most likely result from a highly assertive China (the aggressive ultranationalism trajectory), an intensely competitive variant of the strength trajectory for the United States (offering little support for cooperative interactions with Beijing), and a competition trajectory for Japan that sees Tokyo become a normal military power.

Sino-Centric Asia

The fifth and sixth scenarios emerge primarily as a result of a major withdrawal or hollowing out of U.S. forces in the Western Pacific, a highly unlikely but not entirely inconceivable possibility over the time frame of this study. The first variant of this contingency, a Sino-centric Asia, would be marked by a high level of Japanese strategic accommodation to an economically important and yet politically and militarily nonthreatening China. Under this scenario, Beijing's military presence and capabilities relevant to Japan would likely increase at a more gradual pace than at present, especially if China's economy were experiencing serious problems.

In particular, China would likely respond to the U.S. drawdown by reducing the more threatening aspects of its force deployments, training and exercise programs, and defense policy statements of most relevance to Tokyo, while pushing hard to expand levels of bilateral military-to-military, political, economic, and diplomatic cooperation. Moreover, Beijing would be more likely to seek mutual security assurances and confidence-building measures with Tokyo under this scenario, including joint development of East China Sea resources and the shelving of territorial disputes over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands. Beijing would also likely seek to avoid provocative or threatening political or other actions toward Washington that might reverse the U.S. withdrawal.

This scenario would almost certainly witness a significant downgrading of the U.S.-Japan alliance. As a part of this development, Tokyo would likely seek to greatly reduce or eliminate its support for U.S. basing in Japan, including those U.S. defense policies and military actions viewed as most threatening to China, either in response to Chinese "encouragement" or as a result of an independent decision. However, Beijing would likely support a gradual approach to the process of alliance revision, in an effort to not overly alarm the United States and to reduce Japanese arguments in favor of acquiring a nuclear weapons

capability. And Tokyo would seek to retain at least the basic framework of the alliance, in order to remain covered by the United States' extended deterrence umbrella and possibly to secure support in missile defense vis-à-vis North Korea.

This scenario would most likely result from a long-term, severe level of U.S. economic stagnation and decline, combined with strong U.S. public pressures to reduce America's overseas commitments, and low- to mid-level economic growth rates in Japan and China; however, other combinations of growth rates and spending levels would be conceivable, such as a high-capacity China without an ultranationalist leadership. The scenario also likely assumes significant positive changes on Taiwan and Korean Peninsula issues, ranging from peaceful reunification in a way that precludes residual political uncertainty or conflict to the establishment of a very stable long-term modus vivendi between the sides.

Taken together, these features mark this scenario as relatively stable—albeit with some significant uncertainties—over the time frame examined in this study but possibly quite unstable over the long term (that is, beyond twenty years) and certainly very unlikely. This scenario would most likely involve variants of China's cautious rise or cooperative weakness trajectories, the accommodation trajectory for Japan, and the gradual variant of the withdrawal trajectory for the United States.

Sino-Japanese Rivalry

The final scenario would be marked by a very different strategic consequence of the U.S. withdrawal or hollowing out in the Western Pacific. In this instance, Beijing would seek to take advantage of the situation by increasing pressure on Tokyo in a range of political and economic disputes, particularly those related to territorial and resource claims in the East China Sea and possibly also historical issues. Out of a sense of insecurity fostered by the U.S. withdrawal and provoked by aggressive Chinese behavior, Tokyo would implement a major realignment in its national security strategy, moving toward an independent military capability that most likely would include nuclear weapons, as well as all the doctrinal and force structure characteristics of a “normal” conventional military power. The result would be a sharpening Sino-Japanese rivalry.

For its part, China would seek to increase greatly its military capability to coerce Japan without the use of force, relying on enhanced conventional and nuclear capabilities in specific areas. Under this scenario, the process through which Japan developed and deployed nuclear weapons would have an enormous influence on the propensity for crises or even conflict with Beijing. For example, to establish a credible and timely deterrent before Beijing might conceivably attempt to coerce Japan militarily,

Decisionmakers in both Tokyo and Washington will probably be tempted to avoid making many of the hard choices required over the next fifteen to twenty years and opt for some variation of “business as usual.”

such as over disputed territorial and resource claims, Tokyo would need to establish a survivable and highly potent second-strike nuclear capability within a relatively short time frame.

This scenario would result from a badly prepared and probably precipitate U.S. withdrawal from the Western Pacific, most likely brought on by a far more intense and prolonged economic crisis than the recent global financial crisis of 2008, and would almost certainly involve a severe hollowing out, if not abrogation, of the U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. It would also likely require the emergence of a highly nationalist, aggressive, and risk-acceptant leadership in China, in the context of continued mid to high levels of economic growth accompanied by inadequate reforms, significant social unrest, and sharp leadership debate; a greatly alarmed Japanese public willing to acquire nuclear weapons to ensure its security; and a sea change in U.S. leadership attitudes or a level of domestic political discord that compels a rapid U.S. withdrawal, despite China's more aggressive behavior. This Sino-Japanese rivalry scenario would combine the aggressive ultranationalism trajectory for China, Japanese independence, and a domestically focused, disorganized variant of the withdrawal trajectory in the United States.

Needless to say, this scenario would present an enormous potential for severe crises and escalation and thus marks the most unstable of the six scenarios. Fortunately, this scenario is also extremely unlikely, given the limited possibility that the United States would withdraw from the region in the face of high levels of Chinese assertiveness and acute Sino-Japanese security competition. Even if confronted with major economic constraints, Washington would likely go to great lengths to prevent such a scenario from unfolding. Moreover, Beijing would probably recognize the self-defeating aspects of adopting such a belligerent stance in the face of a withdrawal by Washington, and it would thus be more likely to respond in the manner presented in the Sino-centric Asia scenario.

ALLIED RESPONSES

Three general types of political-military responses by Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance to the six regional trilateral security scenarios would likely offer the best prospect of success in advancing allied interests over the long term. (See table 5 for a summary of three possible responses.)

Robust Forward Presence

This response, designed to retain unambiguous allied regional primacy through extensions of existing or new muscular operational doctrines such as Air-Sea Battle or Offshore Control, would signal a clear and convincing commitment to a continued strong—indeed, superior—U.S. military capability and close set of alliance relationships as the basis for security in the Western Pacific well into the future. As a result, it would likely considerably

TABLE 5
Three Possible Responses for the U.S.-Japan Alliance

	ROBUST FORWARD PRESENCE	CONDITIONAL OFFENSE/ DEFENSE	DEFENSIVE BALANCING
Possible Doctrines/ Operational Concepts	<p>Variante A: Air-Sea Battle (deep strikes)</p> <p>Variante B: Offshore Control (naval blockade)</p>	Primacy without deep strikes or blockade	Mutual Denial Strategy
Political/Diplomatic Strategy	Engage and hedge, strong emphasis on hedge; integration with Japan and other regional allies	Engage and hedge	Engage and hedge, emphasis on engage, with limited accommodation of China
Force Posture	<p>Variante A: Short-range tactical aircraft (TACAIR) and naval assets forward-deployed OR naval assets rear-deployed with emphasis on long-range deep strike</p> <p>Variante B: Naval assets deployed at first island chain</p>	TACAIR forward-deployed; dispersed basing; large naval assets rear-deployed in early stages of conflict	Submarines forward-deployed; large naval surface assets rear-deployed; TACAIR rear-deployed
Emphasized Weapons Systems	<p>Variante A: Long-range, deep-strike aircraft and missiles, integrated C4ISR, cyber- and space-based offense and defense</p> <p>Variante B: Submarine and surface naval platforms, integrated C4ISR</p>	Ballistic missile defense and base hardening, TACAIR, integrated ISR, cyber-based offense and defense	Submarines, long-range drones, long-range missiles, enhanced cyber and integrated ISR, antisubmarine warfare, and mine countermeasures
Affordability	Low	Low-Mid	Mid
Political/Bureaucratic Feasibility	<p>Variante A: Mid</p> <p>Variante B: Low</p>	High	Low
Deterrence Capacity	Mid-High	Low-Mid	Low-Mid
Alliance Integration	Mid-High	Mid	Low-Mid
Sino-Alliance Tension	<p>Variante A: Mid-High</p> <p>Variante B: High</p>	Mid	Low

reduce, if not eliminate, Japanese fears of abandonment by the United States and could facilitate the creation of a more stable long-term regional security environment, assuming that its likely deficiencies were resolved.

On the negative side, this response could increase Japanese fears of entrapment in an increasingly hostile, zero-sum U.S.-China rivalry. Indeed, the implementation of the muscular operational doctrines associated with this response would likely make it much more difficult to put in place the cooperative, reassurance-focused dimensions of this strategy. Equally important, it is quite probable that the United States and Japan will lack the financial resources, technological capacity, and political willpower necessary for such an ambitious military response, especially in the next fifteen to twenty years. Finally, from a purely military perspective, even if implemented as designed, this strategy could prove to be an ineffective deterrent and might severely aggravate instability in a crisis.

Conditional Offense/Defense

This less muscular response, stressing both deterrence and reassurance in a more equal manner, would seek to maintain a commitment to military primacy in key areas through the use of less offensive-oriented and (in some cases) preemptive operational concepts than would be seen in the robust forward presence approach. It would probably prove more affordable, less provocative, and less likely to require major, unprecedented increases and expansions in the level and function of Japanese (and to some extent U.S.) military capabilities and missions over the next fifteen to twenty years. Thus, it would probably place the United States and Japan in a better position to sustain a more economically viable and politically realistic level of deterrence and perhaps a greater capacity to control escalation in a crisis. It might also reduce fears of entrapment in Japan and reassure, to some extent, those in Japan and elsewhere who fear growing regional polarization and an increasingly hostile and dangerous Sino-U.S. relationship deriving from the interaction between a preemptive-oriented A2/AD-type strategy and a deep-strike-oriented, counter-A2/AD strategy (Air-Sea Battle) or a de facto blockade strategy (Offshore Control).

That said, this response would not eliminate the arguably increasing threat perceptions and other dangers that would likely result from the major increases in capability and presence on both sides that would accompany it. Moreover, the overall credibility of alliance deterrence might suffer under this strategy, given its greater emphasis on reassurance and use of a less offensively based military strategy, unless such deficiencies were compensated by significant reductions in tensions through more effective security assurances involving volatile and sensitive issues such as territorial disputes.

Defensive Balancing

This response emphasizes the creation of a defensive-oriented, A2/AD-type of doctrine to counter Beijing's growing counterintervention capabilities within the first island chain,

thus resulting in an overall mutual denial strategy that places a greater reliance on more missile-resistant, lower-visibility forces (such as submarines and long-range, standoff weaponry) deployed in both forward and rear locations. Broadly speaking, it aims to establish a more genuinely balanced and cooperative power relationship with China in the Western Pacific.

This approach would involve a very significant change in current U.S. defense doctrine, force posture, and possibly political arrangements in the Western Pacific. It would entail a shift away from efforts to sustain existing military advantages and freedom of action throughout the first island chain via offense-oriented, forward-presence-based military strategies and alliance-centered political strategies. The emphasis would be on a more genuinely balanced regional power structure based on more defense-oriented, asymmetric strategies and greater efforts to defuse the likely sources of future crises through mutual accommodation and meaningful multilateral security structures.

Compared to the robust forward presence and conditional offense/defense responses, this defensive balancing approach might require fewer, if any, major, unprecedented increases in the level and function of most U.S. military capabilities, with the likely exception of submarines, some standoff systems, and integrated intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Moreover, this approach might place the United States and Japan in a better position to sustain a more credible level of deterrence and avert political-military crises over the next fifteen to twenty years, especially if both countries only manage to attain mid-capacity levels of development at best and China sustains a high-capacity level of development.

However, this response would likely present a higher level of uncertainty and risk in maintaining deterrence and constrain U.S. and Japanese options in a crisis. It could exacerbate Japanese fears of abandonment and enflame the insecurity of other U.S. allies and partners in the region. Moreover, such a strategy would arguably require paradigm shifts in the U.S. defense bureaucracy, doctrine, and technology and likely depend for its success to a significant degree on the effectiveness of efforts to reduce strategic distrust through mutual security assurances.

An Unsustainable Status Quo

Given the uncertainties and risks associated with the future evolution of the China-Japan-U.S. security environment, all three of these approaches could encounter serious obstacles to implementation. As a result, decisionmakers in both Tokyo and Washington will probably be tempted to avoid making many of the hard choices required over the next fifteen to twenty years (especially for the robust forward presence and defensive balancing approaches) and opt for some variation of “business as usual,” involving only marginally greater levels of U.S. presence and virtually no significant change in allied and regionwide policies and political relations.

However, considering current and probable future economic, military, and political trends and events in China, Japan, and the United States, such conservative status quo poli-

cies and strategies are unlikely to remain capable of ensuring a stable security environment conducive to U.S. and Japanese interests over the long term.

NOTES

1. These Chinese A2/AD-type capabilities are centered on ballistic and cruise missiles; increasingly capable air forces, submarines, and surface combatants; long-range radars and sophisticated C4ISR networks; and other types of offshore weapons systems.
2. The full Carnegie report, *China's Military and the U.S.-Japan Alliance in 2030: A Strategic Net Assessment*, can be found at <http://carnegieendowment.org/NetAssessment>.

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