

Increasing Military Tensions in Northeast Asia and Japan's Response

Throughout 2021, the security environment in northeast Asia became more challenging. The United States and its allies deployed the largest number of troops in the Western Pacific since the end of the Cold War, while the international community increasingly called for China to maintain peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait as it increased military pressure on Taiwan. Despite its economic difficulties, North Korea pushed ahead with the enhancement of its nuclear



North Korea has successfully tested a new hypersonic gliding missile, September 2021. (Photo by AFP/Aflo)

capabilities to make their nuclear weapon possession a *fait accompli* and the modernization of its armed forces in order to rebuild its relations with the United States. Meanwhile, the challenges facing the cooperative systems among the United States, Republic of Korea (ROK) and Japan were highlighted. As the security environment surrounding Japan has become increasingly severe, there was intensive discussion in Japan about Japan's role in the event of a contingency in Taiwan, and about attacking enemy bases in preparation for the threat of North Korean and Chinese new nuclear and missile capabilities.

US-China tussle over Taiwan

The United States has been deliberately vague about whether it would intervene if China invaded Taiwan, but with tensions rising over the Taiwan Strait, attention has turned to whether the Biden administration will abandon this strategic ambiguity. Shortly before leaving office in January, the Trump administration declassified the Indo-Pacific Strategic Framework approved in February 2018. This Framework assumed that China would take stronger measures to compel unification with Taiwan and stipulated that the US would defend Taiwan in the event of an armed invasion. This shows that strategic ambiguity over Taiwan's defense had been abandoned within the Trump administration. At a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing in March, outgoing US Indo-Pacific Command Commander Philip Davidson testified that the military balance in the Western Pacific was becoming more unfavorable to US forces, charting China's military capabilities over the past 20 years. He mentioned the possibility of China invading Taiwan "within the next six years" amid growing nationalism in China and expressed his support to consider

reexamining the strategic ambiguity. His successor, Admiral John Aquilino, testified at his confirmation hearing that the timing of the invasion “may be much earlier than most expected.” In table-top exercises conducted by the US military, it is said that the US military is increasingly being defeated by the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), and the statements of these commanders reflect the sense of crisis prevailing within the Indo-Pacific Command.

Meanwhile, Kurt Campbell, who became the Indo-Pacific coordinator of the Biden administration’s National Security Council, indicated that he would maintain strategic ambiguity because of the adverse impacts that would result if the United States were to openly declare an obligation to defend Taiwan. General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, expressed skepticism about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan anytime soon as China does not yet possess the overwhelming power to control the whole Taiwan, saying that China’s armed reunification with Taiwan was “unlikely to happen in the near future,” and went along with Campbell in asserting that revising the strategic ambiguity policy posed a risk and that the policy should be maintained for the foreseeable future. However, President Biden repeatedly referred to a US obligation to defend Taiwan in his remarks to the US media and the general public and, every time he did so, senior administration officials corrected him by saying that there was no change in policy. While some believe that these statements were intentional and that the Biden administration was effectively abandoning its strategic ambiguity, there is little basis for asserting that the Biden administration has revised this policy. At the US-China online summit in November, which was mainly aimed at preventing a conflict between the United States and China, President Biden explicitly told President Xi Jinping that the US would maintain its “one-China policy” but, immediately afterward, he contradicted this by saying that Taiwan was “independent,” a remark he later corrected. President Biden’s series of remarks should be taken as slips of the tongue, but his remarks on Taiwan seem to have aroused China’s suspicion.

In recent years, the Chinese military has increased its flights in the air defense identification zone in southwestern Taiwan, with 920 confirmed flights in 2021 as of the end of the year. Immediately after the inauguration of the Biden administration in January, eight Chinese bombers and four Chinese fighter jets flew through Taiwan’s air defense identification zone for two consecutive days. The purpose of the flight was initially thought to be an expression of dissatisfaction with the invitation of Taiwan’s representative to the US inauguration ceremony. However, it was reported that the actual purpose of the flight was a mock attack on the *USS Theodore Roosevelt*, which was heading from the south of Taiwan to the South China Sea. It has been believed that Chinese warplanes are flying through Taiwan’s air defense identification zone to put military pressure on the Tsai administration, which does not accept the “one China” principle, and to express dissatisfaction with the US government’s relationship with Taiwan and

its continued provision of weapons, but it is possible that these flights also serve a new purpose of training to check US military intervention in the event of a contingency on Taiwan.

Since then, several Chinese planes have conducted threatening flights in conjunction with a series of visits by US congressmen to Taiwan, exercises conducted by US forces around Taiwan, and Taiwan's application to join the CPTPP. In October, about 150 Chinese warplanes flew through Taiwan's air defense identification zone over four days, apparently in response to naval drills by six countries, including Japan, the US and the UK, in east of Taiwan. Unlike in 2020, however, Chinese aircraft seemingly avoided crossing the midline of the Taiwan Strait, and it is believed that they are acting cautiously to avoid incidents. Meanwhile, China built up air bases in Fujian Province on the shore opposite Taiwan, and it was confirmed that it had expanded runways, reinforced hangars and installed surface-to-air missiles. Military use of civilian airports was reported to be underway, and shows of force against Taiwan were expected to increase in the future. From June to August, the PLA conducted about 40 exercises in the waters around Taiwan, and in September, the PLA carried out live-fire naval and air exercises off the southwest coast of Taiwan. In November, the PLA undertook an unusual landing exercise in the waters off eastern Taiwan, indicating the possibility that the PLA was planning to land not only from the Taiwan Strait side but also from the eastern side of Taiwan in the event of an invasion. The US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, a congressional advisory panel, said in its annual report that the PLA has acquired or is gaining the initial capabilities needed to invade Taiwan.

In February, Taiwan said US aircraft were flying in its air defense zone, apparently to show that the zone was not dominated by the Chinese military. In addition, US naval forces passed through the Taiwan Strait once a month. In August, an Aegis-equipped destroyer and a Coast Guard patrol ship passed through the Strait, and in October, a US Aegis-equipped destroyer and a Canadian Navy frigate jointly passed through the area. In August, the Biden administration announced for the first time since its inauguration that it would sell Taiwan 40 self-propelled artillery pieces and related equipment worth \$750 million. While the Obama administration, Democrat, was cautious about arms sales to Taiwan, it was confirmed that the Biden administration would follow the Trump administration's policy and continue to sell weapons to Taiwan.

In recent years, Taiwan has been seeking to build a multilayered and asymmetric military under the Overall Defense Concept. In September, the Taiwanese armed forces conducted their annual "Han Kuang" large-scale military exercise in various parts of Taiwan in preparation against a Chinese invasion of Taiwan. The maneuverability and stealth of the navy's surface-to-ship missile unit was tested for the first time, and fighter jets were trained for takeoff and landing on open roads in the event of a military airport

being bombed. Taiwan's armed forces have placed greater emphasis on the introduction of asymmetric weapons, such as anti-ship missiles, air defense missiles, and torpedoes, and are ready to deter the PLA more effectively from invading Taiwan. Taiwan has a regular army of about 93000, but more than 1.6 million reservists could be deployed, and the US Congress introduced a Taiwan partnership bill that would allow the National Guard to train Taiwan's reservists. In addition, it had been reported for some time that US special forces and others secretly trained Taiwanese troops in Taiwan, and Tsai herself confirmed this in an interview with US media in October. In response, China vehemently opposed any intervention by outside powers in the Taiwan issue, and warned that Taiwan's independence would be a "dead-end road."

US-China military relations in the western Pacific

The Biden administration, like the Trump administration, has shown that it places top priority on the Indo-Pacific region, and it has also shown that it will prioritize the region in terms of defense spending. Before leaving office, Commander Davidson, in a report on the war potential of the Indo-Pacific Command, expressed the view that the Command would require about \$4.9 billion in spending in FY2022 and a total of \$22.7 billion from FY2023 to FY2027. Subsequently, the Biden administration requested \$5.1 billion for the Pacific Deterrence Initiative (PDI) in the FY2022 defense budget, a substantial increase from the \$2.2 billion requested in FY2021. The FY 2022 National Defense Authorization Act set the total defense budget at \$77.7 billion and raised the total PDI to \$7.1 billion. This provides budgetary support for missile defense in Guam, a constellation of small satellites, decentralization and strengthening of base functions, training and logistics, and maintaining survivability and strike power in the Chinese A2/AD environment, which the Indo-Pacific Command wanted but was neglected in the administration's request. However, cuts in the military budget are seen as inevitable under the Biden administration, partly due to the wishes of the left wing of the Democratic Party. In November, the Biden administration completed a global posture review and positioned the Indo-Pacific region as the most important region. However, while the administration indicated its intention to diversify its forces within the region, such as by deploying air force units to Australia on a rotating basis and strengthening military infrastructure in the Mariana Islands, it did not significantly redeploy forces from the Middle East and other regions.

On the other hand, China's defense spending in fiscal 2021 was reported to be 1.35 trillion yuan, up 6.8% from the previous year and equivalent to about one-fourth of the US defense spending. The increase was earmarked for reform, science and technology, and training of talented personnel, but no details were given. China is said to be improving the capability of its nuclear missiles, using advanced technologies such as hypersonic weapons, quantum technology, and unmanned aerial vehicles for military purposes, and using artificial intelligence (AI) to prepare for intelligentized warfare in the cognitive domain as well

as the land, sea, air, space, cyber, and electromagnetic domains. There is no doubt that the military use of AI will continue. In August, China flew reconnaissance and attack drones back and forth from the East China Sea to the Pacific Ocean, possibly for AI machine learning purposes.

Deterrence between the United States and its allies on one hand and China on the other, coupled with China's aggressive modernization of its nuclear and missile forces, is making the situation increasingly opaque and unstable. "China is accelerating the pace of its nuclear expansion and is likely to be able to possess 700 nuclear warheads by 2027. China appears to have an intention to possess at least 1000 warheads by 2030, at a pace and size that exceeds the Pentagon's 2020 projections," the US Defense Department stated in its November 2021 annual report on China's military capabilities.

As for China's strategic nuclear forces, which had numbered only 20 silo-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) in the 2000s, new mobile ICBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) were increasingly deployed in the 2010s. The US Department of Defense estimated in 2021 that China possessed 100 ICBM launchers and 150 ICBMs. Further deployment of the latest multiple independently-targetable reentry vehicled (MIRVed) DF-41 ICBMs and JL-2/3 SLBMs is also likely to increase China's number of deployed strategic nuclear warheads. In July, analysis of satellite images revealed that more than 300 ICBM silos, probably for DF-41 missiles, had been constructed at three sites in inland China. It was reported in October that China had test-fired a nuclear-capable hypersonic glider vehicle (HGV) in August, orbiting the Earth at a low altitude before landing off-target. China explained that it was experimenting with reusable spacecraft technology, but some experts analyze Beijing may pursue an attack system that launches HGVs from a fractional orbital bombing system (FOBS).

At the theater level, China's approximately 2000 DF-21, DF-26 and other ground-launched medium - and intermediate-range missiles (including hypersonic missiles) are among the world's best in terms of both quality and number of missiles. China's non-strategic missiles are considered to have relatively high accuracy and are expected to be used as an important component of A2/AD in counterforce strikes against Taiwan, Japan, Guam and other targets, and in the event of interventions by the United States and its allies in regional conflicts. In addition, China's overall military capabilities at the theater level are increasingly superior to those of the United States and its allies due to, among others, the deployment of the DF-17 hypersonic missile, the reinforcement of naval and air power, the enhancement of precision strike capabilities, and the introduction of cyber-attack capabilities for combat management networks. At the March meeting of the US Senate Armed Services Committee, Commander Davidson expressed a sense of urgency about the increased risk that China would attempt to unilaterally change the status quo before the United States could take effective action, saying "the greatest danger to the United States is that

conventional deterrence is eroding.”

China has not provided a convincing explanation whether and to what extent its nuclear and missile modernizations will transform its nuclear posture. Since China acquired nuclear weapons in 1964, it has maintained a declaratory policy of minimum deterrence, no first use (NFU) of nuclear weapons, and negative security assurances for non-nuclear-weapon states. In addition, the modernization of strategic nuclear forces, such as the adoption of mobile and/or MIRVed ICBMs and the expansion of SLBM capabilities, seems to be aimed at enhancing survivability vis-à-vis counterforce strikes and ballistic missile defense (BMD) by adversaries, particularly in order to preserve and strengthen its assured retaliation capabilities against the United States.

However, it has been pointed out that China, which is building up MIRVed ICBMs such as the DF-41s, improving the readiness and precision of intermediate- and longer-range missiles, and constructing an early warning system with Russian cooperation, may shift to a higher alert status such as launch under attack (LUA) or launch upon warning (LOW), as in the case of the United States and Russia, or not only maintain a retaliatory countervalue posture but also adopt a counterforce strike posture including first use of nuclear weapons. In addition, it is not clear to what extent China intends to expand its nuclear arsenal numerically. China has insisted that it would maintain only the minimum nuclear force necessary for national security, but *Global Times* (July 2) linked to the Chinese Communist Party noted “that minimum level will change as China’s security situation changes.”

As the military confrontation between the United States and China deepened, crisis management between the two countries became increasingly important. In January, amid confusion in the United States over the results of the presidential election, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Milley telephoned the Chief of the PLA’s Joint Staff Department of the Central Military Commission to say that the United States had no intention of attacking China because he had been informed that China was concerned about an attack from the United States. It turned out that he had the clearance from higher ranking officials within the administration and that the two sides had been in daily contact with each other. However, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has been unable to contact the Chinese side since the inauguration of the Biden administration. A working-level dialogue was held in August to discuss crisis management. At the US-China summit held online in November, the two sides discussed the establishment of a “guardrail” to manage “strategic risks,” and it was reported that they had agreed to setup a consultation between the Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the Communist Party of China. Nevertheless, progress in talks on strategic stability and arms control for missile forces, including hypersonic weapons, remains difficult to predict.

Strengthening cooperation between the United States and its allies and moves by China and Russia

In the Indo-Pacific region, the United States and its allies conducted the largest exercises since the end of the Cold War, and China and Russia also deepened their military cooperation. In August, the U.S. military carried out the largest global exercise since the end of the Cold War. First, the US Navy and Marine Corps conducted large-scale exercises (LSE) in the Indo-Pacific and Atlantic oceans. The exercises tested a shift from conventional tactics focusing on carrier strike groups to tactics of conducting dispersed operations across theaters. This is believed to have been aimed at building the capacity to deal simultaneously with threats posed by China and Russia. In addition, a large-scale global exercise (LSGE 21) was hosted mainly by the US Indo-Pacific Command, and joint exercises for surface warfare, landings, ground warfare, air warfare, and resupply were conducted with the United Kingdom, Japan and Australia. Japan, the United States, Australia and India also conducted their Malabar exercises off Guam starting in August and in the Bay of Bengal in October. The US Navy sent the aircraft carrier *Carl Vinson*, which carries the state-of-the-art F-35C, to participate in both exercises. Three aircraft carriers, the US Navy's *Ronald Reagan* and *Carl Vinson* and the British Navy's HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, participated in the above-mentioned six-nation exercise off Taiwan's east coast.

In September, it was announced that Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States would establish AUKUS, a new framework for military cooperation, under which the UK and the US would assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarines. The French government, whose joint development of submarines with Australia was cancelled, strongly opposed the deal, and President Biden admitted that there was a problem in the way the matter was handled. However, since the US Navy's nuclear submarine fleet is expected to be temporarily reduced from the 2030s, the acquisition of nuclear submarines by Australia is a strategically significant arrangement for filling that gap. AUKUS will also collaborate on AI and quantum technologies.

As the United States was deepening its cooperation with its allies, the navies of China and Russia conducted an annual joint exercise in the Sea of Japan in October and thereafter a group of ten warships from both countries passed through the Tsugaru Strait, headed south into the Pacific Ocean, passed through the Osumi Strait via the Izu Islands, and entered the East China Sea. This is believed to be the first joint cruise by the fleets of the two countries in waters around Japan. Along the way, China and Russia launched and landed ship-based helicopters near the Izu Islands, while China operated its ship-based helicopter in the East China Sea. In November, for the third consecutive year, bombers from both countries flew jointly over the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea. In recent years, the two countries have deepened their cooperation in Asian waters, and similar actions are expected to be repeated in the future. As China and Russia pursue closer strategic and operational cooperation, there is growing concern

that the two countries may simultaneously start conflicts in Asia and Europe, respectively, and that they may work together to make it difficult for the United States and its allies to operate in conflicts in Asia.

Situation on the Korean Peninsula: stagnation in US-North Korea negotiations and inward-oriented policies

In 2021, following the stalemate in negotiations with the United States over the nuclear issue, North Korea announced at the 8th Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea at the beginning of the year a policy of pursuing "restoring of the military balance" and of strengthening its military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, while also advocating economic development through "internal motive force." The new Biden administration inaugurated in the US immediately after the convention reviewed its North Korea policy and announced an "open and practical approach" in May. Details of the approach were not disclosed but the general direction indicated was that of "strategic patience 2.0", as the US says that the ball for resuming dialogue was in North Korea's court. Against this backdrop, North Korea has taken the opportunity of closing its borders due to the coronavirus pandemic to mobilize its scarce resources to the maximum extent possible while further advancing its nuclear development program. By continuing and expanding its existing policy of strengthening domestic control and making nuclear weapon possession a *fait accompli*, it has also apparently adopted a policy of increasing its bargaining power with the United States.

North Korea's actions, which surfaced under such intentions, had three main characteristics. The first is the realization of the strengthening of its military capabilities. At the Party Congress, the following were listed as National Defense Development Strategies: advancement of nuclear technology and development of miniaturization, weight reduction, and tactical weaponization of nuclear weapons; production of supersized nuclear warheads, upgrading of the capability to preemptively strike and retaliate against strategic targets within a range of 15,000 km; introduction of the Hypersonic Gliding Combat Unit; development of underwater and ground-launched solid-fuel ICBMs; possession of nuclear submarines and submersible strategic nuclear weapons; operation of military reconnaissance satellites; and development of high-performance unmanned reconnaissance aircraft. In 2021, a total of eight missile launches were carried out, ranging from cruise missiles, hypersonic missiles, anti-aircraft missiles, and SLBMs. While avoiding any decisive provocation against the United States through ICBM launches or nuclear tests, the aim seems to diversify and improve the reliability of nuclear weapons delivery systems, and to strengthen the "escalation ladder" from conventional weapons to tactical and strategic nuclear weapons in all directions.

The second feature is the move towards closer relation with China. North Korea emphasized the US-

China conflict by referring to the “neo Cold War structure” in international affairs, linking the Taiwan issue with the situation on the Korean Peninsula and portraying the resistance to interference by the “United States and its allies” as a common denominator between China and North Korea, such as the reference by the leader Kim Jong-un in his September policy speech. On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the signing of the China-DPRK Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in July, North Korea expressed its active support for China’s “core interests” such as the Taiwan issue, and emphasized its position in the Chinese camp in the Sino-American confrontation, likening China-North Korea relations to a pseudo-alliance.

Third, the North Korean authorities’ heightened sense of crisis over the coronavirus pandemic and economic sanctions has become clear, and visible improvements in living standards, such as the construction of large-scale housing and the stable supply of food, have become urgent issues. The resources for these projects were sought through “internal motive force”, i.e., clawing back surpluses and improving efficiency through strengthened control. However, the facts that Kim Jong-un reasserted in February that strengthening controls would help realize the so-called “people-first principle”, and that he set a new goal of “building a powerful and prosperous socialist country within about 15 years” in April, suggest that the Kim Jong-un regime, which has been in power for 10 years, has no choice but to take greater pains to stabilize public lives and views.

In the wake of the stalemate in negotiations with the United States, North Korea demanded more strongly than ever that the ROK “cease its complacency toward the United States as a precondition for dialogue” and implement joint projects based on the inter-Korean agreements stalled by sanctions. At the same time, North Korea reacted coolly to the ROK’s offer of humanitarian assistance and other measures that would not improve its relations with the United States. After a US-ROK joint military exercise, which North Korea demanded to cancel under a threat of abrogation of the North-South military agreement (September 2018), was held in August (albeit on a smaller scale than usual due to the coronavirus pandemic), North Korea one-sidedly restored the inter-Korean communication line that had been severed following the June 2020 demolition of the inter-Korean liaison office building. However, North Korea did not respond positively to President Moon Jae-in’s “declaration to end the Korean War” (described below), which he proposed in his address to the UN General Assembly, stressing that a change in the US’ hostile policy should come first.

In the ROK, the Moon administration’s intent of building a legacy came to the fore ahead of the next presidential election in March 2022. At the US-ROK Summit Meeting in May, references were made to the ROK’s interests in areas outside the Korean Peninsula, such as confirming the common ground between

the ROK's ASEAN policy (New Southern Policy) and the Indo-Pacific strategy, and the importance of stability in Taiwan and the South China Sea. Domestically, however, support from the new Biden administration for the Moon Jae-in administration's policy of inter-Korean dialogue and the abolition of the US-ROK "missile guidelines" that would allow the ROK to develop its own missile capabilities were presented as the achievements of the meeting. In September, the launch test of an independently developed SLBM was made public, and in December the ROK government confirmed a budget plan that included a 3.4% year-on-year increase in defense spending, again emphasizing the "self-reliant national defense" pursued by the Moon administration. Although President Moon tried to push for a declaration of the end of the Korean War in his final speech to the UN General Assembly in September, North Korea's response was lukewarm, as mentioned above, and it did not lead to a new momentum in inter-Korean and US-North Korean relations.

In the wake of a series of missile launches by North Korea, the need for security cooperation among Japan, the United States and the ROK was reaffirmed at the Japan-US and the US-ROK summit meetings, and dialogues were frequently held among officials of Japan, the United States and the ROK and between Japan and the ROK (7 Japan-US-ROK, 12 Japan-US, and 13 Japan-ROK working-level and high-level consultations and exchanges). However, challenges remained in implementing the Japan-ROK General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) in response to North Korea's missile launches. As for Japan-ROK relations in general, differences in positions on the so-called Korean laborers and comfort women issues could not be bridged, and direct talks between the leaders of the two countries were not held on the occasion of the G7 Summit (June) or the Tokyo Olympic Games (July-August).

The case for a new way of thinking in defense issues in Japan

In addition to traditional preparations against threats from North Korea and China, the possibility that a contingency in Taiwan could lead to an emergency in Japan has been pointed out, and responses have been publicly discussed in Japan. Following the Japan-US 2+2 meeting in March, the peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait were discussed at the Japan-US summit in April for the first time in 52 years since 1969. In December, it was reported that Japan and the United States were discussing a joint operation plan for a possible Taiwan contingency. At the G7 summit and the Japan-EU summit, Japan confirmed with other countries the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait, and together with the international community, continued to signal China to think better of invading Taiwan. In addition, legislators from Japan, the United States and Taiwan held a dialogue in July and the ruling parties of Japan and Taiwan held a "2+2" dialogue in August, deepening exchanges at the legislator level.

As North Korea and China increased their nuclear missile capabilities, the issue of attacking enemy bases

was debated during the Liberal Democratic Party leadership election in September and became a point of contention during the October House of Representatives elections as well. Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has announced his intention to review the National Security Strategy, as well as the National Defense Program Outline and the Medium Term Defense Program, and more in-depth discussions are expected in future.

From August to November, the Ground Self-Defense Force conducted its largest exercise ever, the first in 30 years involving the participation of all units. The JSDF and US forces carried out mobile deployment, logistics and hygiene training, and system communications training with the aim of improving integration and Japan-US joint operational capabilities. In October, the Maritime Self-Defense Force conducted a test to launch and land a US F-35B on the destroyer JS *Izumo*. Now that it has been confirmed that the F-35B can complete deck landings without any problems, the government aims to put the F-35B, which will be introduced into the Air Self-Defense Force inventory in the second half of the 2020s, into full-scale operation.

As of the end of December, vessels belonging to the China Coast Guard (CCG) entered Japanese territorial waters off the Senkaku Islands on 40 occasions. The total number of days of entry into the contiguous zone was 332, the second highest after the previous year. CCG vessels repeatedly followed Japanese fishing boats in Japanese territorial waters but took no coercive measures and employed no weapons. In August, the Japan Coast Guard and the US Coast Guard deepened their cooperation in the East China Sea off the coast of Kyushu by conducting tactical exercises, intelligence conveyance drills, and law enforcement drills. In November, the US military participated for the first time in a joint exercise of the Self-Defense Forces exercise to practice regaining control of a remote island.

The China Coast Guard Law, whose contents had raised concerns among neighboring countries, came into effect on February 1. The law stipulates that the CCG can take all measures, including the use of weapons, to protect Chinese sovereignty, and that it conducts defensive operations based on orders from the Central Military Commission, making the CCG less of a law enforcement agency and more of a branch of the military. The Japanese government announced that any attempted landing by a CCG vessel on the Senkaku Islands would be considered a serious and flagrant crime and that the vessel could be fired on in self-defense. However, despite the concerns sparked by passage of the China Coast Guard Law, there have yet to be any confirmed use of weapons or landings on the Senkaku Islands by the CCG.

In April, a Chinese naval contingent led by the Chinese aircraft carrier *Liaoning* made a round trip through the Miyako Strait, and an airborne early warning helicopter launched from the *Liaoning* and

flew in the vicinity of the airspace of the Senkaku Islands in Okinawa Prefecture. Fighters from the Air Self-Defense Force scrambled in response, but the helicopter did not violate Japanese airspace. As of the end of December, the Air Self-Defense Force had scrambled 652 times to intercept Chinese aircraft, and airspace violations by drones and ship-based aircraft have been confirmed, highlighting the need to consider means of more efficiently scrambling fighter aircraft.

Confidence-building measures between Japan and China continued, with holding of high-level maritime consultations and annual meetings of their maritime and aerial communication mechanism. The February high-level maritime talks were upgraded from deputy director-general level to director-general level. At the third annual meeting/expert meeting of the Japan-China maritime and aerial communication mechanism held in March, while Japan conveyed its strong concerns about Chinese actions heightening tensions in the East China Sea and about the China Coast Guard Law, China simply asserted its own position and the meeting ended inconclusively. At the end of the year, Japanese and Chinese defense ministers held a meeting and agreed to establish a hotline between defense authorities in 2022.

Throughout 2021, Japan expanded its security cooperation with Australia, the UK, France and other countries. In May, at France's request, Japan, the United States and France conducted an island defense drill in Kyushu, simulating landings and land battles. At a June 2+2 meeting between the Japanese and Australian governments, Australian naval vessels became the first foreign warships that the SDF can protect all the time outside the US military. The two governments also agreed in principle



The Liaoning, China's first aircraft carrier, departs Hong Kong, July 2017. (Photo by AP/Aflo)

by the end of 2021 on a reciprocal access agreement that would simplify procedures for SDF and ADF personnel entering the respective countries for joint exercises etc. In addition, in conjunction with the deployment of the UK's HMS *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to Asia, the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) conducted joint tactical training in the East China Sea and the Philippine Sea. Negotiations on a facilitation agreement between Japan and the UK began in October, and it is expected that Japan will consider protecting British naval vessels. As the British Navy plans to station two patrol ships in the Indo-Pacific region for at least five years, further cooperation between Japan and Britain is expected. In addition to the US Navy, ships from Germany, Australia and Canada participated in the MSDF exercise for the first time in November.

Perspectives and recommendations

The formulation of security policy needs to be based on a dispassionate deterrence perspective, and it is particularly important for Japan and the United States to face up to the necessity of pursuing enhanced deterrence. China continues to build up its military capabilities in a wide range of fields without transparency and is increasingly intensifying its “offensives” in the East China Sea, South China Sea, and Taiwan Strait. In response to the modernization of China’s nuclear and missile forces, the United States and its allies, including Japan, are faced with the question of how to build a comprehensive deterrence posture, to include studying the feasibility of deploying ground-launched intermediate-range missiles in the Indo-Pacific region as well as establishing an integrated air-defense missile defense system.

As for the situation on the Korean Peninsula, the development of new weapons by North Korea has already become a direct threat to Japan’s defense posture. Since North Korea has declared its intention to build up its military to enhance deterrence, it is possible to estimate that it will resume ICBM and nuclear tests if no progress is made in US-North Korea relations. In addition, North Korea has made it clear that it intends to avoid a repeat of the Hanoi US-North Korea summit structure in which North Korea renounces its nuclear weapons program in exchange for the lifting of sanctions by increasing its nuclear capabilities. In this context, in addition to reaffirming and adhering to the principle of North Korean denuclearization, it is also important that Japan, the United States and other countries reexamine their deterrence posture. From this point of view, it is hoped that Japan-ROK cooperation on security issues will advance under the next president, regardless of whether the current ruling party candidate Lee Jae-myung or opposition candidate Yoon Suk-yeol becomes the next president of the ROK.

Given this regional outlook, the Biden administration’s National Security Strategy (NSS) and Nuclear Posture Review (NPR), scheduled to be formulated in early 2022, are of particular interest from the perspective of restoring deterrence by the United States and its allies. In Japan, the new administration of Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, which was inaugurated in October, announced a review of the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Program Guidelines. The direction of Japan’s and the United States’ deterrence posture to be defined in these strategic documents is not yet clear, but the most important thing for Japan is to adapt its foreign and security policies to the times and radically improve its own defense capabilities. The times demand that defense spending be increased to a level of 2% or more of GDP within, say, in the early part of ten years. In addition, the debate on Japan’s capability to strike enemy bases, which has become increasingly necessary in recent years, should not simply be an argument over the pros and cons, but should be structured in a manner consistent with the deterrence theory, in which a first strike is prevented by missile defense and the second and subsequent strikes are hindered by the capability to counterattack. At the same time, as China accelerates the modernization of its nuclear

and missile forces and intensifies competition and confrontation over various flashpoints, there is also an urgent need to develop arms control measures such as crisis management mechanisms, confidence-building measures, and transparency measures between the United States and China and between Japan and China to prevent escalation into a deliberate or accidental armed conflict or even a nuclear and missile attack. Japan's overall foreign and security policy must respond to regional structural changes. ■