

Japan's Abe Administration Lifts Ban on Collective Self-Defense

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Article 51 of the United Nations Charter stipulates that sovereign states have an inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a member of the United Nations. Collective self-defense is a national defense concept. It means that when a country with close relations to country X faces an armed attack by a third country, country X has the right to use military force to interfere and block such an attack even if country X itself is not under attack. Putting it simply, collective self-defense can be viewed as the right to dispatch troops abroad or to intervene in the wars of other countries, including potential offensive combat. Article 51 is the legal basis for the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

In the past the legal department of the Japanese cabinet used to interpret the law as follows: “As a member of the United Nations Japan has the right to collective self-defense. However, due to the particular requirements of Japan’s pacifist Constitution Japan is not able to exercise its right to collective self-defense.” As a result, Japan has taken a highly reserved attitude toward the right to collective self-defense. Nevertheless, following a cabinet decision the government of Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe announced July 1 the lifting of the ban on collective self-defense. This constitutes an important, epoch-making decision in Japan’s history after World War II that signals the country’s shift from an exclusively defensive role to possible assistance in offensive combat. This shift is bound to greatly affect the situation in all of Asia and to boost the importance of Taiwan’s position in the region. The

military alliance between Japan and the United States is a public good for the maintenance of security in Asia. Taiwan-Japan relations are an extension of the U.S.-Japan Alliance. The Abe government’s announcement that the ban on collective self-defense will be lifted is not only Japan’s contribution to peace in all of Asia. It will also create positive effects in the future in terms of security guarantees for Taiwan and the Taiwan Strait.

China’s hegemonic aspirations to control Asia are the major cause of instability in the region. These have not only caused relations between China and Japan to continue to grow more hostile, but even led to rising tension between China and its Southeast Asian neighbors. Washington has adopted a “rebalancing to Asia” strategy, hoping to reestablish peace and stability in the Asian region. In contrast to Japan’s past “passive pacifism” Abe will make “active pacifism based on international cooperation” the core of his security doctrine.

Against this background, Abe revived the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in February 2013. At the same time, he established an expert panel on the establishment of a National Security Council (NSC). In June of the same year, he approved legislation for the creation of a NSC and submitted it to the legislature. Following its adoption, Abe convened the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities in September, tasked it with the design of a national security strategy and a new National Defense Program Outline. On Jan 7, 2014, the Abe government announced the official launch of the National Security Bureau. On July 1, the cabinet decided to reinterpret the Constitution

and declared that the ban on collective defense will be lifted. Japan stated that it would actively contribute to world peace.

Abe's lifting of the ban on collective self-defense will lead to massive changes with regard to the situation in Asia. Yet the Ma Ying-jeou government continues to stick to its China leaning policy, completely unfazed by the grim situation Taiwan is going to face, a quite irresponsible attitude toward the nation. Should the government fail to come up with a concrete foreign policy, Taiwan's future will be in even greater jeopardy. The Taiwanese government should stand on the side of the Taiwanese people, clarify its strategic goals and position and state Taiwan's very own views and standpoints. It should also strengthen the partnership with Japan, which shares the values of peace and democracy, to jointly protect peace and democracy in the Asian region and defend their conviction that non-peaceful foreign strategies cannot be used against other countries. Or else, it will not be possible to achieve true peace and security. **BT**

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