

North Korea: A convenient threat for US-Japan alliance

By [Feng Zhaokui](#)

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During the just-concluded US-ROK military exercises in the Yellow Sea, Japanese Prime Minister Naoto Kan asked his cabinet ministers to remain in Tokyo, in case of any unforeseen incident that required immediate action.

After the recent exchange of fire between the two Koreas, the Japanese government has strengthened its security vigilance by dispatching more patrol aircraft to the region.

The Air Self-Defense Force at Hanamatsu Airbase has also been put on 24-hour standby.

Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshito Sengoku remarked at a press conference, "I don't think the present situation is close to a military attack," but it's clear that the Japanese leaders are worried about the possibility.

The US-Japanese role in a new Korean conflict should not be underestimated.

In fact, as early as in the 1990s, the US was preparing to fight a second Korean War. According to historical records, in 1993 the US military began to consult Japan about its support if "something happened in North Korea."

After Morihiro Hosokawa took office as Japanese Prime Minister in 1993, his administration studied the measures necessary in case of an "emergency on the Korean Peninsula," and, in particular, what actions the Japanese Self-Defense Forces would take. The study was completed in March 1994, with the code name "Operation 00."

At the same time, the US envisaged that in the case of a second Korean War, it would gather 400,000 troops, about 200 ships and 1,600 aircraft in South Korea and Japan. The US asked Japan to act as a forward base in the event of war.

In March 1994, Japan received dozens of documents from the US, listing over 1000 requirements, including "de-mining the territorial waters of South Korea" and other military or quasi-military tasks. In December 1995, the Japanese categorized the US requirements into 1,059 items, involving eight categories that Japan provided for the US military: Airports, ports, transport, supply, mine clearance, communications and security.

Of course, numerous strategic plans are constantly drawn up by national militaries to cope with all possible scenarios. But this one was actually part of US global strategy, and was an important measure to strengthen the US-Japan military alliance.

Scholars of international relations generally believe that alliances are fundamentally formed in order to counter a common threat to the member states.

The clearer the threat is, the more vital the alliance is. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the US-Japan alliance lost its common enemy.

Combined with the economic conflicts between Japan and the US, the US was compelled to find a specific threat for the US-Japan alliance as soon as possible.

By doing so, it could end the belief in Japan that an alliance with the US was no longer needed after the Cold War, and make the Japanese feel that they were facing a threat that they could handle alone.

In deliberately exaggerating the severity of the threat posed by North Korea, the US convinced the Japanese that the security provided by the alliance against common threat was greater than the costs Japan had to pay for the alliance.

With the US determined to consolidate its alliances with neighboring countries, especially Japan, the two Koreas should be very careful to avoid playing on the brink of war. They need to avoid the recurrence of accidental discharge incidents, or they will draw fire upon themselves.

The author is a researcher with the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. forum@globaltimes.com.cn

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