

# DPRI

## Strengthening U.S.-Japanese Posture in INDOPACOM

by Maj Nick Oltman

The Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) is a United States-led and Japanese-supported INDOPACOM posture and force redistribution plan consisting of nineteen interrelated and interdependent initiatives.<sup>1</sup> The goals of DPRI are to reduce the U.S. footprint on Okinawa and better position U.S. forces.<sup>2</sup> These initiatives will have lasting military, diplomatic, and economic implications for both governments.

The force redistribution is part of a 26-year effort to ease tensions and return land occupied since World War II. DPRI mandates the United States to return thousands of acres of land used by the U.S. military to Okinawa.<sup>3</sup> DPRI shifts 5,000 Marines and 1,300 dependents from Okinawa to Guam; 2,700 Marines and 2,000 dependents to Hawaii; 1,300 Marines to Australia; a Marine KC-130 refueling Squadron (approx. 420 Marines) from Okinawa

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to Iwakuni, Japan; and 800 Marines to locations in CONUS.<sup>4</sup> The core programs of DPRI include the Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF), movement of forces off Okinawa, and the preparation of Iwakuni, Australia, and Guam infrastructure to meet naval training and support requirements.

The 2012 DPRI program of record provides an improved INDOPACOM posture to counter regional threats by enabling a stronger U.S.-Japanese relationship, hardening the mutually supported military basing in the area, and securing the economic ecosystem for the United States and Japan. DPRI is coming to fruition as Japan integrates more robust military capabilities, to in-

clude U.S. Major Defense Acquisition Programs, further distributing lethality.<sup>5</sup> This initiative places Japan and the United States in position to protect free and open trade routes through every domain, supporting the United States' free and open Indo-Pacific strategy.<sup>6</sup>

### Where We Are Today

The movement of forces and capabilities across INDOPACOM has begun in tandem with base infrastructure and facility development. Camp Blaz (Guam), the Marine Corps' first newly opened base since 1952, is ready to receive follow on III MEF units. Missile defense initiatives on Guam are moving forward along with the construction of naval maneuver ranges. Guam's flow of forces is expected in 2023, followed by the movement of forces to Hawaii. The movement of a Marines KC-130 refueling Squadron to Iwakuni is complete; the FRF has broken ground north of Camp Schwab on Okinawa (completion date ~2030); and Australia has reached the programmed 2,500 large MAGTF in 2019. DPRI is well on the way to establishing a more resilient force distribution and military infrastructure to support training and operations that promote economic security and geopolitical relations throughout the region.

### Why DPRI Works: Improves Diplomatic Relations with Japan

DPRI will strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and convey the United States' commitment to INDOPACOM stability. DPRI is returning land and resources, including military bases, to the Japanese, easing long-held tensions



**The Corps continues to establish capabilities on Guam. The Marine Corps Base Camp Blaz Operations Officer briefs RADM Benjamin Nicholson, the Joint Region Marianas Commander, during a visit on 10 June 2021. (Photo by Cpl Andrew King.)**

with Okinawa. DPRI will provide an opportunity for Japan to further their defense role in the region through their purchase of military capability and a renewed national focus on national defense, thus becoming a more capable partner in the U.S.-Japan alliance.

DPRI addresses the burden of U.S. troop hosting on Okinawa. Okinawa carries the majority of U.S. forces in Japan; 25 percent of all facilities used by U.S. Forces in Japan, and about half of the U.S. military personnel are located on Okinawa, which comprises less than 1 percent of Japan's total land area.<sup>7</sup> DPRI addresses this disproportional and legacy posturing by removing 10,000 Marines, returning 1,000 acres of land, consolidating bases, and returning Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. Not only will DPRI improve favor in Okinawa's eyes, but it will have a positive socio-cultural impact in Japan and promote political stability. DPRI meets the Okinawan's desire for less U.S. military presence following the 1995 atrocities, ultimately reducing the number of Marines on the island by over 50 percent.<sup>8</sup> The Okinawa relief is evidence of the United States' long-term commitment to the alliance and the desire to ease any residual social tension.

DPRI impetuses more responsibility on the Japanese in INDOPACOM. Japan has seized the opportunity, as evident in their 2018 National Defense Program Guidelines. The guidelines look to further the alliance and improve Japanese defense capabilities and posture. These initiatives include a record-high 11 percent increase in defense spending, 70 percent increase in the purchase of Foreign Military Sales, and the development of multi-domain defense force, which postures Japan to collaborate with the United States in every warfighting domain.<sup>9</sup> Having a strong ally in close proximity to China will continue to be beneficial for collective East Asian security.

### Distributed Basing

DPRI will alter U.S. INDOPACOM force posture, distributing U.S. forces and capabilities on Okinawa, mainland Japan, Guam, Hawaii, and Australia.

This geographic distribution will enhance lethality, support operational and strategic resilience, and enable Japan to better support U.S.-led operations. This redistribution will challenge the Chinese hegemonic aspirations in the region.

INDOPACOM forces are primarily distributed between Korea, Japan, and Hawaii. These bases afford a critical positional advantage, reinforce the joint force's ability to compete, extend its operational reach, and enable sea control, sea denial, and deterrence.<sup>10</sup> However, these advantages are countered by China's U.S.-focused, anti-access/area denial strategy. The primary objective of the modern Chinese strategy is to disrupt the network of U.S. military bases.<sup>11</sup> The Chinese threat has in-

closing of U.S. bases on Okinawa allows the Japanese Self-Defense Force to leverage this existing infrastructure to train and increase their warfighting capacity. Japan's acquisition of standoff systems, to include long range anti-ship missiles and F-35A/B, permits Japan to integrate more seamlessly with U.S. forces in the area. Japan can shoulder more responsibilities and fit their new capacity and capabilities gains into a U.S.-led contingency force.

### Secures the Economic Ecosystem

The U.S.-Japan alliance will enable opportunities for economic prosperity throughout the region.<sup>13</sup> Japan and the United States account for over 30 percent of world's gross domestic product, a significant portion of international

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vigorated a reevaluation of the force posture and application of resources to distribute U.S. basing infrastructure in INDOPACOM.

DPRI distributes military capability in INDOPACOM, building a more resilient Guam. Guam will embark a MEB outfitted with MV-22 and CH-53 Squadrons permanently on the island, expand Anderson Air Force Base, modernize Naval Base Guam, and add multiple range complexes and a modernized missile defense system. Guam will complement the existing bases in the INDOPACOM region, increase naval readiness and operational flexibility, and better support joint maneuvers into the region. Furthermore, a more capable Japan can support future distributed basing in INDOPACOM.

Japan's assumption of a larger role in East Asian security effort supports the 2018 *National Defense Strategy* and aligns with DRPI by bolstering partners and sharing responsibilities for common defense.<sup>12</sup> This paradigm shift also aligns with Japan's 2018 National Defense Program Guidelines. The

trade, and a major portion of international investment. Total trade between the United States and Japan reached \$303 billion in 2019 and over \$500 billion in foreign direct investment.<sup>14</sup> Japan, with a newly understood interdependency on their own nation's security with global security, has the need to protect economic interests beyond their economic exclusion zone.<sup>15</sup> DPRI supports the growth of a more capable U.S.-Japanese alliance that will contribute to East Asian security, protect trade routes and freedom of navigation, and support U.S.-Japanese economic interests.

A mutual vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific, coupled with a desire to protect lines of communication, is paramount to the success of the U.S.-Japanese economic relationship. Like China, Japan is also one of the United States' main debt financiers, and as China continues to threaten the free flow of trade, the U.S.-Japan alliance needs to be capable of responding in the East and South China seas. With more distributed basing and capability, the United States and Japan (and other

allies) can better protect and ensure the globe's vital lines of communication remain open.

**Counter Argument**

The financial cost of DPRI is significant to both the United States and the Government of Japan. It will cost an estimated \$8.7 billion to move forces to Guam, \$2.7 billion to move forces to Hawaii, and \$22.7 billion for the FRF.<sup>16</sup> For over \$30 billion, it appears the United States is decreasing presence near the South China Sea and degrading deterrence against China's expanding reach by removing forces from Okinawa.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, transferring critical forces off the island may present little benefit other than noise and population reduction on Okinawa and further splitting American forces from the nine-dash line.<sup>18</sup> DPRI is also shaping a more robust Japanese Self-Defense Force, which is contrary to the U.S.-Japan post World War II agreements and may present a future security dilemma.<sup>19</sup> Many experts argue other tenable courses of action may achieve the same result as DPRI, including prepositioning of equipment in INDOPACOM and maturing joint basing with the Japanese and other allies.

The benefits of DPRI outweigh any opposition. DPRI improves diplomatic relations with Japan, military force posture, and the East Asia region's economic conditions. Leaving the INDOPACOM posture "as is" will only lead to a predictable, stagnate force posture that cannot contend with the aspiring Chinese hegemony. DPRI bolsters the Japanese military presence, putting China against the first and third ranked economies and supporting militaries. Furthermore, a strengthened U.S.-Japanese relationship better counters the Chinese hegemonic aspirations by mutually supported trade agreements and foreign direct investment, providing partners an attractive counter to China's expansion.

**Conclusion**

DPRI provides the United States, Japan, and INDOPACOM an important capability to engage in the increasingly dynamic security environment. DPRI

enables a stronger U.S.-Japan relationship, operationally and strategically, by distributing and hardening the basing in the region, and thus potentially provides a more secure economic ecosystem for the United States and Japan while effectively countering the ever-increasing China threat.

**Notes**

1. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Marine Corps Asia Pacific Realignment: DOD Should Resolve Capability Deficiencies and Infrastructure Risks and Revise Cost Estimates*, (Washington, DC: GAO, 2017).
2. The U.S. military presence in Japan, particularly Okinawa, allows it to fulfill its obligations under the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security to defend Japan and maintain security in the Asia Pacific region. See also *Marine Corps Asia Pacific Realignment*.
3. Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Military Presence on Okinawa and Realignment to Guam," *In Focus*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2019).
4. *Ibid.*
5. Japan is currently procuring the MV-22 Osprey, E2D-Hawkeye, stand-off missiles (LRASM, JASSM), and (150) F-35A/B Joint Strike Fighters, the most of any U.S. ally.
6. U.S. Senate, *U.S. INDOPACOM Posture Statement. Presentation, before the Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture*, (Washington DC: 2019).
7. U.S. Government Accountability Office, *The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa and the Futenma Base Controversy*, (Washington, DC: GAO, 2016).
8. Long-held grievances erupted in 1995 when three U.S. service members were convicted in a Japanese court of raping a twelve-year Okinawan girl, prompting the allies to try to alleviate the burden on hosting communities.
9. Staff, "Japan's National Defense Strategy, Speaker: H.E. Takeshi Iwaya, Minister of Defense of Japan," Center for Strategic International Studies, (January 2019), available at <https://www.csis.org>.
10. William Bowers and Thomas Wood, "The Shield of the Indo-Pacific: Investment in Indo-Pacific Installations is a Strategic Imperative,"

*Proceedings*, (November 2020), available at <https://www.usni.org>.

11. Christian Brose, *The Kill Chain*, (New York, NY: Hachette Books, April 2020).

12. U.S. Department of Defense, *Unclassified Summary of National Defense Strategy*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2018).

13. *U.S. INDOPACOM Posture Statement*. Presentation, before The Senate Armed Services Committee on U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Posture.

14. Numbers pulled from the U.S. President, Office of the United States Trade Representative.

15. Christopher Hughes, "Japan's Grand Strategic Shift: From the Yoshida Doctrine to the Abe Doctrine?" *Power, Ideas, and Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, (Washington, DC: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2017).

16. *Marine Corps Asia Pacific Realignment*; and Congressional Research Service, "U.S. Military Presence on Okinawa and Realignment to Guam," *In Focus*, (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2019).

17. Though much of the cost is shared (Guam), the "FRF" is funded solely by Government of Japan; and Okinawa is located approximately 400 miles from Taiwan and 500 miles from China and is critical to many regional operational plans.

18. Lee Cooper, "USMC Relocation to Guam: Political Pressure and Poor Planning to Blame For An Ill-Postured U.S. Military In The Pacific," (master's thesis, Marine Corps University, 2010), available at <https://apps.dtic.mil>.

19. 1951 Security Treaty and the San Francisco Treaty, 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, and the 1978 U.S.-Japan Defense Guidelines.

