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ABSTRACT
The aim of the article is to examine decision-making process on the revision of Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation in April 2015. The analysis is conducted from the perspective of neoclassical realism both at domestic and international levels. It is argued that while international determinants, such as policy of the US and situation in the Asia-Pacific region, played a significant role in prompting the Japanese government to initiate the dialogue on guidelines' revision, it is the ideological leaning and institutional strength of the Abe administration that heavily influenced the efficiency of decision-making processes and the final contents of the guidelines. Particular emphasis is placed on Kantei’s leadership vis-à-vis the National Security Council, Cabinet Legislation Bureau, and ruling party decision-making bodies.

KEYWORDS: Japan-US Defence Cooperation, decision-making process, US policy, Asia-Pacific region

Introduction
The New Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation were announced in April 2015. The aim of this article is to examine the decision-making process on the revision of the guidelines, both at domestic and international levels. At the domestic level, the analysis will focus on institutional aspects (Kantei’s leadership vis-à-vis the National Security Council, Cabinet Legislation Bureau, and ruling party decision-making bodies), Prime Minister Abe’s political convictions, as well societal factors (e.g. the evolution of cabinet support rate and public opinion on security issues). At the international level, in turn, the policy of Washington, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region, and role of Japan–US Security Consultative Committee (2+2) will be examined. It is argued that while international determinants played a significant role in prompting the Japanese government to initiate the dialogue on guidelines’ revision, it is the ideological leaning and institutional strength of the Abe administration that
heavily influenced the efficiency of decision-making processes and the final contents of the guidelines. Analysis is conducted from the perspective of neoclassical realism. This relatively new theory of international relations is positioned between the realist and liberal views on salience of domestic determinants in foreign policy making. As pointed out by Gideon Rose (1998: 158), while the structure of the international system delineates the limits of decisions that statespersons are capable to implement, “the translation of capabilities into national behavior is often rough and capricious over the short and medium term.” If domestic conditions, such as political interests of the ruling parties, institutional structure of the government, or societal moods, are in line with external stimuli, it is easier for decision makers to adhere strictly to realistic point of view. If, on the other hand, internal factors run counter to international situation, it may take more time and more effort to conform with external pressures.

The first section briefly describes the evolution of the US–Japan alliance until the beginning of the 21st century. The second and third sections examine external and domestic factors behind the revision of the guidelines under the second Abe administration. In light of these determinants, the fourth section focuses on the analysis of negotiations between Japan and the US as well as on the decision-making process that led to the revision of the guidelines.

Evolution of the Japan–US Alliance
The Security Treaty Between the United States and Japan was signed together with the peace treaty in San Francisco in September 1951 and entered into force in April 1952. The agreement was unequal, as it unilaterally granted to the US the right to maintain military bases in Japan, did not explicitly stipulate US obligation to protect Japan from an armed attack by a third country, and even mentioned that US forces could be used “at the express request of the Japanese Government to put down large-scale internal riots and disturbances in Japan, caused through instigation or intervention by an outside power or powers” (Database of Japanese Politics and International Relations 1951). For these reasons, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke invested extensive political resources in negotiating and ratifying a revised alliance agreement in 1960. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States of America did not contain the controversial clause on the possibility of US interference in Japan’s domestic affairs and it finally confirmed US obligation to defend Japan, but Tokyo was still treated as an unequal
partner. In Article 5 each side recognized “that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety” as well as declared “that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes” (MOFA 1960). In other words, in exchange for unilateral provision of land for US military bases, Japan gained US’s unilateral guarantee of assistance in case of an armed attack.

While both the 1951 and 1960 treaties recognized Japan’s right to individual and collective self-defense, due to constitutional restraints Tokyo could take advantage only of the former. Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution that came into effect in May 1947 clearly prohibited Japan from waging wars, using “force as means of settling international disputes,” or maintaining any “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential” (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 1947). If interpreted literally, Japan would be deprived of the right to possess its own army, but Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were established in 1954. Based on the official constitutional interpretation from the 1950s, Article 9 allowed Japan to defend itself in case of foreign invasion, but it prohibited Tokyo from participating in collective self-defense pacts. In this light, reference to “constitutional provisions and processes” in the 1960 treaty suggested that Japan would be unable to provide direct military assistance to the US, even if American forces in East Asia were attacked.

Ever since the US changed its policy towards Japan from the one of disarming to the one of remilitarization after the outbreak of Korean War in 1950, Tokyo has been under constant pressure from Washington to increase Japan’s contribution to the alliance. In the 1951 treaty the American side expressed its expectation “that Japan will itself increasingly assume responsibility for its own defense against direct and indirect aggression” (Database of Japanese Politics and International Relations 1951). In Article 3 of the 1960 treaty, in turn, both parties declared their obligation to “maintain and develop, subject to their constitutional provisions, their capacities to resist armed attack” (MOFA 1960). The main aim of the US, obviously, was to enmesh Japan more strongly into the system of American alliances in East Asia. American pressure increased particularly at the end of the 1960s, when Japan became an economic power whose GDP surpassed that of Western Germany.

Nevertheless, domestic-level intervening variables heavily distorted Tokyo’s response to external stimuli. The so-called “Yoshida Doctrine,” named after Yoshida Shigeru, Japanese prime minister in 1946-1947 and 1948-1954, came to constrain Japan’s foreign policy throughout the whole
Cold War. Yoshida was convinced that Japan should shelve the plans of remilitarization, base its security on the American forces, and instead focus on post-war reconstruction. While Yoshida treated his policy as a temporary means of rebuilding the country, his concept was interpreted more dogmatically by the members of his faction who dominated the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) (Zakowski 2011: 182-188). Despite several attempts at revising the pacifist Constitution, which were undertaken by non-mainstream LDP politicians such as Kishi Nobusuke, Article 9 kept hindering the plans of elevating Japan’s position in the alliance with the US to a more equal footing.

Domestic determinants explain why Japan only to a limited degree responded to American demands for greater contribution to the alliance. Instead of increasing deterrence capabilities, in 1967 the Satō administration announced three non-nuclear principles (not to produce, manufacture, nor allow introduction into Japanese territory of nuclear weapons), and in 1976 the Miki government decided to prohibit export of military technology as well as limit military expenses to 1% of GNP. In 1978 Tokyo established so-called “budget of sympathy” (omoiyari yosan) to cover a large part of costs of maintaining US military facilities in Japan, but it was an insufficient measure to please Washington.

Meanwhile, the 1960 treaty was supplemented with more detailed regulations. The first Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation were announced in November 1978. Their main aim was to clarify the responsibilities of both sides in 1) deterring aggression; 2) responding to an armed attack against Japan; as well as 3) cooperating “in the case of situations in the Far East outside of Japan which will have an important influence on the security of Japan” (MOD 1978). Regarding the first point, it was specified that Tokyo’s obligation was to possess defense capability appropriate for self-defense and assure stable usage of the facilities in US military bases. Washington, in turn, promised to “maintain a nuclear deterrent capability and the forward deployments of combat-ready forces and other forces capable of reinforcing them” (MOD 1978). In addition, both sides declared their intention to establish cooperation in the fields of intelligence, logistics, and operations such as joint defense planning, exercises, or training. Regarding the second point, it was clarified that aggression on a limited scale would be repelled by Japan alone, while larger attacks would be countered together with US forces. Both sides also decided to jointly protect sea lines of communication in the waters surrounding Japan. Regarding the third point, Tokyo and Washington only agreed to “consult together from time to whenever changes in the
circumstances so require,” and that any assistance by Japan to the US would have to conform with relevant agreements, laws, and regulations (MOD 1978). The document maintained the asymmetric character of the alliance as focused purely on the protection of Japan’s territory. Evolution of international situation in the 1990s clearly showed that the 1978 guidelines did not fit the post-Cold War reality. Focused on repelling potential invasion from the north, the old regulations proved insufficient to address security problems that appeared after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Outside of their framework, in 1992 Tokyo allowed SDF to participate in the United Nations peacekeeping operations. However, the greatest operational gaps in the old guidelines were revealed during the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993-1994. To exert pressure on Pyongyang after its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Washington planned to transfer additional forces to South Korea through Japanese airfields and ports, but encountered opposition from Tokyo. As argued by Japan, such action was beyond the legal framework of the alliance. To prevent similar problems in the future, both sides started negotiations on the revision of the 1978 guidelines (Przystup 2015: 6-10). The second guidelines were announced in September 1997. They stipulated three variants of cooperation: 1) “under normal circumstances;” 2) “in response to an armed attack against Japan;” as well as 3) “in situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an important influence on Japan’s peace and security” (MOD 1997). Regarding the first point, both governments admitted that their aim was not only to defend Japan, but also to strive for creating “a more stable international security environment” (MOD 1997). To achieve this goal, they agreed to enhance cooperation in such areas as information sharing, policy consultations, international arms control, United Nations peacekeeping and humanitarian relief operations, defense planning, or bilateral training and exercises. Regarding the second point, Tokyo and Washington reconfirmed their respective obligations in case of attack against Japan and established bilateral coordination mechanism to synchronize logistic support and intelligence activities. The most controversial was the third point that was stipulated in Article 5 of the agreement. Both governments stressed that the concept of “situations in areas surrounding Japan” was “not geographic but situational” (MOD 1997). Among the types of cooperation in such situations the document enumerated “relief activities and measures to deal with refugees,” “search and rescue,” “noncombatant evacuation operations,” “activities for ensuring the effectiveness of economic sanctions for the maintenance of international peace and stability,” the usage of Japanese facilities by US
Army, rear area support in Japan and “on the high seas and international airspace around Japan which are distinguished from areas where combat operations are being conducted,” as well as operational cooperation such as “intelligence gathering, surveillance and minesweeping” (MOD 1997).

As outlined above, the Japan–US alliance evolved in conformity with major shifts in international situation. While the 1978 guidelines had purely defensive character, their 1997 version broadened the scope of potential joint activities to the “areas surrounding Japan,” which enabled Japan to provide rear support to US forces even on high seas. Nevertheless, while vague, this area was still limited to Japan’s immediate proximity and excluded combat zones. For that reason, the revised guidelines did not exceed the domestic hurdles of the pacifist Constitution.

**External Stimuli for the Revision of the Guidelines**

While the revision of security guidelines in 1997 to some extent adapted Japan–US alliance to new international situation after the end of Cold War, it did not respond to all external pressures. The partnership between both countries was still unequal, as Tokyo maintained its official interpretation of the Constitution that denied Japan the right to collective self-defense. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the 21st century new threats for global and regional security appeared. They included the development of international terrorism, the construction of nuclear weapons by North Korea, as well as a further rise in China’s military power and Beijing’s assertiveness vis-à-vis other countries. These external factors constituted powerful stimuli for Tokyo to seek the strengthening of an alliance with Washington.

Despite the limitations of the 1960 treaty and 1997 guidelines, the Koizumi administration felt obliged to respond decisively to terrorist attacks in New York and Washington on September 11, 2001. While the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) swiftly admitted that the attacks fell within the scope of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty that stipulates “that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all” (NATO 1949), Tokyo could not do the same due to the unequal nature of the Japan–US alliance. Instead, the Koizumi cabinet had to prepare a separate Anti-Terrorism Law and have it passed by the Diet. The bill authorized the provision of rear-area support to the American forces during their operation against Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. As the Indian Ocean, to which Maritime SDF was dispatched, could be hardly considered as part of “areas surrounding Japan,” the decision clearly exceeded the legal framework of the 1997
guidelines. Similarly, in 2003 the Diet passed the Iraq Special Measures Law that approved dispatch of SDF personnel to an even more remote place – the Samawah region in the US-occupied Iraq. The mission in Samawah, which lasted from 2004 to 2006, was Japan’s first peacekeeping operation outside of the United Nations system. The fact that Japan’s contribution to the war against international terrorism could not be conducted within the legal framework of the US–Japan alliance revealed gaps in the 1997 guidelines only four years after their announcement.

Moreover, it quickly turned out that the agreement from 1994, under which North Korea renounced its nuclear armaments program in exchange for the construction of two light-water reactor power plants, would not last long. In January 2003 Pyongyang once more withdrew from the NPT regime, and in October 2006 North Korea conducted its first atomic bomb test, followed by tests in May 2009 and February 2013. In parallel, Pyongyang provoked Tokyo by launching ballistic missiles in Japan’s direction in 1998, 2006, 2009, 2012-2014, or 2016-2017. Tensions on the Korean Peninsula peaked in March 2013, when North Korea withdrew from the Panmunjeom agreement that ended the Korean War in 1953. Responding to these provocations, Japan consistently advocated strict economic sanctions against Pyongyang. It is also worth mentioning that in December 2001 Japanese Coast Guard sank a North Korean spy vessel in an encounter in the East China Sea that became the first “battle” of Japanese armed forces since the Second World War. Though the exchange of fire was on a limited scale, the incident made many ordinary Japanese aware of new dangers in the post-Cold War era.

Growing assertiveness of China on the international scene constituted yet another threat for Japan’s security. Japan had two territorial disputes with the PRC – over sovereignty of the Senkaku Islands (Chinese name: Diaoyu), as well as over delimitation of the waters of the East China Sea. Both disputes started after discovery of large deposits of energy resources under the seabed of the East China Sea at the end of the 1960s, but they remained suspended until late 1990s. The announcement of the 1997 guidelines almost coincided with increased presence in the disputed waters of Chinese maritime survey ships. Bilateral tensions became more severe in 2003, when the PRC started constructing an oil rig situated very close to the line that Japan considers a border between exclusive economic zones of both countries. Japan protested, as it suspected that the rig would suck up oil from the Japanese side. In 2005 China not only sent a fleet of navy ships to protect the rig, but also one of Chinese destroyers trained its guns at the nearby Japanese Maritime SDF P-3C patrol aircraft (Manicom 2008:}
462-463). Even greater diplomatic crises were caused by the dispute over the Senkaku Islands. In September 2010, a Chinese fishing vessel rammed a Japanese Coast Guard ship near this uninhabited archipelago. In order to force Tokyo to release the Chinese captain, Beijing employed a range of controversial measures such as halting the export of rare earth metals to Japan. Two years later, the Noda administration nationalized three of the Senkaku Islands, which met with protests from Beijing. Both diplomatic clashes were accompanied by violent anti-Japanese demonstrations in major Chinese cities, which raised questions about the security of Japanese citizens abroad (Zakowski 2015: 134-193). What is important, in the autumn of 2012 Chinese military ships started regularly advancing into Japanese waters, and in November 2013 Beijing established the Air Defense Identification Zone that extended over the disputed areas.

Tensions over the North Korean nuclear armaments and the territorial dispute with China showed that Japan should more effectively respond to emergency situations unlikely to escalate into full wars. In the National Defense Program Guidelines of December 2010, Tokyo recognized the growing number of such “gray-zone” disputes and introduced the concept of the “dynamic defense force” to cope with them. The new strategy relied on the notions of “readiness, mobility, flexibility, sustainability, and versatility (...) reinforced by advanced technology based on the trends of levels of military technology and intelligence capabilities” (MOD 2010: 7).

All the abovementioned external factors propelled Tokyo towards revising once more the guidelines of alliance with the US. Most importantly, Japan–US security cooperation already exceeded its legal framework after the dispatch of SDF to the Indian Ocean and Iraq, so there was necessity for creating a more stable institutional foundation for the new dimensions of cooperation. In addition, the provocative actions by North Korea and China created the need to supplement the description of “situations in areas surrounding Japan” with the concept of “gray-zone” disputes. As such, further strengthening of the alliance seemed instrumental in deterring Pyongyang and Beijing from displaying even more assertive posture in the region.

**Domestic Factors Behind the Guidelines’ Revision**

While international situation favored a revision of Japan–US security guidelines, as proved by the evolution of the alliance in the 20th century, external pressures never easily translated into foreign policy decisions in Japan due to the strength of domestic-level intervening variables. This article argues, however, that the second Abe administration was more fit
than most of previous governments to strictly adhere to a realistic approach
to foreign policy making. The strength of the Abe cabinet resulted from its
ideological cohesion and relatively high popularity among the public, as
well as from institutional reforms and weakening of opposition parties.
Abe Shinzō had been an eager supporter of Japan’s participation in
collective self-defense pacts and revision of the pacifist Constitution long
before returning to the post of prime minister in December 2012. He
inherited his political convictions from his grandfather, Prime Minister
Kishi Nobusuke. In the bestseller *Towards a Beautiful Country*, published
in 2006, Abe expressed his respect towards Kishi who thanks to revision of
the security treaty changed Japan’s position in the alliance from one of
“vassalage” to partnership. As stressed by Abe, however, the unilateral
dumping of responsibility for protecting Japan on US forces still
constituted a grave obstacle in building a bilateral relationship based on
mutual trust. He reminded that Article 51 of the Charter of the United
Nations clearly treated both individual and collective self-defense as an
inherent right of all independent states. According to Abe, due to the fact
that the Japanese Constitution was promulgated after the Charter, Japan in
a natural way was entitled to participate in collective self-defense pacts. He
claimed that the official interpretation of Article 9, based on the
assumption that Japan possessed the right of self-defense but could not
exercise it, was unprecedented on the international arena and should be
changed (Abe 2006: 23-24, 130-134). During his first term in office in
2006-2007, Abe managed to pass a bill that clarified procedures for
holding a referendum on constitutional revision, upgraded the Japan
Defense Agency to the Ministry of Defense, and started research on the
legalization of collective self-defense. Nevertheless, Abe’s hastiness in
implementing right-wing policies exposed him to criticism from the
opposition parties, which contributed to LDP’s defeat in the House of
Councilors election in July 2007 and Abe’s resignation two months later.
The initial failure to some extent explains why, when Abe returned to the
office, he first strengthened his institutional backing before proceeding to
realize his bold agenda. In order to change the *status quo*, the prime
minister had to cope with resistance by two kinds of veto players
characteristic of the Japanese political system: influential LDP
backbenchers who called for prudence in planning a revision of the
Constitution, and bureaucrats from the Cabinet Legislation Bureau who
were *de facto* in charge of interpreting the Constitution. The former group
was pacified thanks to the fact that the government remained highly
popular, while the latter was weakened from within by the use of Ministry
Revision of the Guidelines...

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of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) bureaucrats. Similar strategies had been employed by Prime Minister Koizumi to dispatch the SDF to the Indian Ocean and Iraq (Shinoda 2007).

Abe exploited the fact that the liberal camp in the LDP had lost in influence by the December 2012 election. Main senior LDP politicians of moderate orientation, such as a former LDP leader Kōno Yōhei, a former Chief Cabinet Secretary Katō Kōichi, a former LDP Secretary-General Koga Makoto, or a former Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo, had already retired. The lawmakers of the younger generation, in turn, felt less attached to the pacifist Constitution. By putting emphasis on economic policy (the so-called Abenomics – Abe’s economics) aimed at overcoming deflation, Abe managed to maintain a high rate of popular support that enhanced his position in the ruling party even further. In addition, due to a series of defections in 2012, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), LDP’s main contender for power, became severely weakened. As a result, after the election in July 2013 the LDP together with its coalition partner Kōmeitō regained control over the House of Councilors, which greatly facilitated decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the amendment of Article 9 of the Constitution still posed a grave problem. Constitutional revision required not only the passage in the Diet by two-thirds of members of both houses, but also an approval in a national referendum. Taking into account the fact that Kōmeitō was strongly attached to pacifist ideals, it was unlikely that LDP’s coalition partner would easily concede to Abe’s plans. Instead of resolving the problem, Abe decided to bypass it. It is the Cabinet Legislation Bureau that enjoys a considerable autonomy in judging whether bill proposals or cabinet decisions conform with the Constitution or not (Iio 2008: 61-62). Once the official interpretation of Article 9 had been formulated in the 1950s, the bureaucrats from this organ consistently claimed that exercise of the right to collective self-defense would violate the Constitution. On the other hand, at least since the Operation Desert Storm shock in 1991, MOFA bureaucrats have generally been eager to allow collective self-defense in order to strengthen Japan’s position in the United Nations and in the alliance with the US. Instead of dispatching the military, Japan provided 13 billion USD to the coalition forces that liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation, but this financial contribution was not sufficiently appreciated on the international scene.

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Minister Abe’s political base of support was too weak to challenge the status quo, but he increased his political capital after the ruling coalition regained a majority in both houses of the Diet. Only several days following the House of Councilors election, in August 2013, he announced his decision to nominate a former MOFA bureaucrat, Komatsu Ichirō, for this prestigious post. As expected, the new Cabinet Legislation Bureau director-general was much more willing to overhaul the official interpretation of Article 9 than his predecessors (Asahi Shinbun Seijibu Shuzai Han 2015: 42-49).

Meanwhile, the public opinion was divided over the need for acknowledging Japan’s right to collective self-defense. According to Asahi Shinbun’s opinion poll from June 2014, 56% of respondents were opposed to the change of interpretation of the Constitution, while 28% supported the prime minister’s decision. Moreover, 67% claimed that it was improper to amend the interpretation instead of the Constitution itself, 76% felt that the debate on the policy change was insufficient, and 65% disagreed with the need for Japan to use force within the United Nations collective security system. As a result, the cabinet support rate fell to 43% from 49% recorded one month earlier (Asahi Shinbun 2014: 3). On the other hand, thanks to the economic credentials the Abe administration was popular enough to trade a few points of support in exchange for the shift in the interpretation of the Constitution.

Additionally, the government exploited the fact that the concept of collective self-defense did not seem to be clearly understood by a large part of the society. According to the opinion poll published by Yomiuri Shinbun at the beginning of June 2014, as many as 60% of respondents were willing to accept a “limited” collective self-defense, while 11% supported “full” collective self-defense, and only 24% did not feel the need for exercising any form of collective self-defense. Asked in more detail, 75% of respondents acknowledged the necessity for protection by Maritime SDF of US ships transporting Japanese refugees, 74% approved of Maritime SDF’s participation in minesweeping operations, but only 44% would authorize shooting down missiles launched against American Guam or Hawaii (Yomiuri Shinbun 2014: 1). It was obvious that the public would support only a fraction of the types of operations envisaged by Abe, but due to the complexity of the problem, people were confused over the nature of the promoted change. Once the new Japan–US security guidelines were announced, their evaluation turned rather positive. According to Asahi Shinbun’s opinion poll from May 2015, 45% of respondents appreciated the new guidelines (32% did not), and 61%
welcomed (20% did not) the fact that Washington reconfirmed it would protect all Japanese islands, including the Senkaku archipelago. However, 53% of respondents still opposed, and only 29% approved of, broadening the scope of logistic support for the US forces from the territories in Japan’s nearest vicinity to other regions (Asahi Shinbun 2015: 4).

The abovementioned domestic factors facilitated the decision making process on the revision of the interpretation of the Constitution. As early as February 2013, the prime minister resumed the meetings of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, chaired by former administrative Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Yanai Shunji, that had been established under the first Abe cabinet in 2007. Since the end of 2013, the government has been promoting the concept of “Proactive Contribution to Peace” (sekkyokuteki heiwashugi) as Japan’s new basic stance in the security field. In order to streamline the decision-making process concerning long-term policies and in case of sudden international crises, the National Security Council, composed of the prime minister, chief cabinet secretary, and the ministers of foreign affairs and defense, was established at the turn of 2013 and 2014. All these new institutions prepared the ground for the change of the interpretation of the Constitution. Eventually, in July 2014 the cabinet issued a revolutionary decision that became the first step towards the legalization of collective self-defense.

Based on the report of the Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for Security, it was announced that due to the changes in international security environment, Tokyo no longer considered a direct armed attack against Japan as a necessary prerequisite for the use of force. Instead, the Abe administration declared that “an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan” which “threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn people’s right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness,” would permit Japan to use force, if only “there is no other appropriate means available to repel the attack and ensure Japan’s survival and protect its people” (Cabinet Secretariat 2014: 7-8). This new interpretation of the Constitution paved the way to permit SDF to provide direct military assistance to US forces if they were assaulted in Japan’s vicinity or to the soldiers of other countries participating together with Japan in peacekeeping operations. The American factor played a crucial role in issuing the cabinet decision. As explained by Prime Minister Abe:

“For example, suppose a conflict suddenly arose overseas. And suppose that in the conflict, the United States, which is
our ally and has capability, came under attack in the sea near Japan when rescuing and transporting Japanese nationals trying to escape from where the conflict had occurred. Although this would not be an attack on Japan itself, the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) would protect the U.S. vessel in order to protect the lives of the Japanese nationals. What makes this possible is the Cabinet Decision made today.” (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2014)

While the new interpretation of the Constitution had to be confirmed by the passage of security bills in the parliament (which happened in the summer of 2015), it enabled pushing forward negotiations on amending Japan–US security guidelines.

**Japan–US Negotiations on New Guidelines**

As domestic factors under the second Abe administration favored swift response to external pressures, the revision of Japan–US guidelines in 2015 went further than those from 1978 and 1997. Using his extensive power resources in the government and ruling party, the prime minister was able to achieve what had been unthinkable for his predecessors – change the official interpretation of the Constitution and legalize Japan’s participation in collective self-defense pacts. This revolutionary move, in turn, enabled profound amendments of the security guidelines.

While American pressure for the remilitarization of Japan never really eased since 1950, a growing convergence between security policies of both countries has been noticeable since the beginning of the 2010s. In October 2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced her “Pivot to Asia” strategy, which became a cornerstone of the Obama administration’s approach to the region. As stressed by Clinton, the new vision encompassed such elements as “strengthening bilateral security alliances,” ensuring that “alliances are nimble and adaptive so that they can successfully address new challenges and seize new opportunities,” guaranteeing “that the defense capabilities and communications infrastructure of our alliances are operationally and materially capable of deterring provocation from the full spectrum of state and nonstate actors,” or “ensuring freedom of navigation” (Clinton 2011). Similarly, the US Department of Defense’s Quadrennial Defense Review from March 2014 called for an upgrade and modernization of alliances with Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, and Thailand. In addition, it drew attention to new threats arising from the rapidity and lack of transparency of the
Chinese military growth or the unpredictability of the North Korean regime (US Department of State 2014). All these points were fully consistent with the perception of international reality by Prime Minister Abe. Negotiations on new guidelines were conducted on the forum of the US–Japan Security Consultative Committee (the so-called 2+2), a crucial decision-making body of the alliance, composed of US secretaries of state and defense, as well as of Japanese ministers of foreign affairs and defense. At the 2+2 meeting in October 2013, which was held for the first time in Tokyo, John Kerry, Chuck Hagel, Kishida Fumio, and Onodera Itsunori issued a joint statement “Toward a More Robust Alliance and Greater Shared Responsibilities.” In the document the American side welcomed Japan’s intention to increase contribution to regional and world peace. Tokyo and Washington expressed their determination to upgrade the alliance and adapt its capabilities to new international circumstances. For that end, the four decision-makers agreed to expand “the scope of cooperation, to reflect the global nature of the U.S.–Japan Alliance, encompassing such areas as counter-terrorism, counter-piracy, peacekeeping, capacity building, humanitarian assistance/disaster relief, and equipment and technology enhancement;” to promote “deeper security cooperation with other regional partners to advance shared objectives and values;” to enhance “Alliance mechanisms for consultation and coordination to make them more flexible, timely, and responsive and to enable seamless bilateral cooperation in all situations” as well as to specify “appropriate role-sharing of bilateral defense cooperation based on the enhancement of mutual capabilities” (MOD 2013).

The new Guidelines for Japan–US Defense Cooperation were issued at the end of April 2015. The document enumerated several fields of cooperation: 1) “strengthened alliance coordination;” 2) “seamlessly ensuring Japan’s peace and security;” 3) “cooperation for regional and global peace and security;” 4) “space and cyberspace cooperation;” as well as 5) “bilateral enterprise” (MOD 2015). Regarding the first point, it was decided that a new alliance coordination mechanism and an upgraded bilateral planning mechanism would be established to enhance communication between the relevant agencies of both countries (MOD 2015). While it was not specified explicitly, this passage reflected Tokyo’s intention to facilitate coordination between the US National Security Council and its newly established Japanese counterpart.

The second point answered the need for introducing the concept of “gray-zone” disputes and “dynamic defense force” into the guidelines. Both sides admitted that in the “increasingly complex security environment” there
was a need to “take measures to ensure Japan’s peace and security in all phases, seamlessly, from peacetime to contingencies, including situations when an armed attack against Japan is not involved” (MOD 2015). Tokyo and Washington reconfirmed their determination to cooperate in a wide array of fields during peacetime, such as “intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance;” “air and missile defense;” “maritime security;” “asset protection;” “training and exercises;” “logistic support;” or the “use of facilities” (MOD 2015). As for the “responses to emerging threats to Japan’s peace and security,” they omitted the notion of “situations in areas surrounding Japan” from the 1997 guidelines and simply stated that “such situations cannot be defined geographically” (MOD 2015). The most controversial regulations concerned “actions in response to an armed attack against a country other than Japan.” In the spirit of the new interpretation of the Constitution, Tokyo authorized the SDF to “conduct appropriate operations involving the use of force” in case “an armed attack against a foreign country that is in a close relationship with Japan occurs and as a result, threatens Japan’s survival and poses a clear danger to overturn fundamentally its people’s right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness, to ensure Japan’s survival, and to protect its people” (MOD 2015). Among the examples of such cooperation, the document enumerated “asset protection;” “search and rescue;” “maritime cooperation;” “operations to counter ballistic missile attacks;” as well as “logistic support” (MOD 2015). In addition, both sides agreed to coordinate their activities “in response to a large-scale disaster in Japan” (MOD 2015).

Regarding the third point, Tokyo and Washington expressed their determination to cooperate bilaterally and with other partners in the United Nations peacekeeping operations, disaster relief and humanitarian assistance activities, counterterrorism, minesweeping and counter-piracy, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, partner capacity building, evacuation of noncombatants, surveillance, intelligence and reconnaissance, logistic support, or exercises and training. Addition of the fourth point, in turn, reflected the technological development made since announcement of the 1997 guidelines. Both sides decided to “maintain and strengthen their partnership to secure the responsible, peaceful, and safe use of space,” as well as to “share information on threats and vulnerabilities in cyberspace in a timely and routine manner” (MOD 2015). The last point described “defense equipment and technology cooperation;” “intelligence cooperation and information security;” as well as “educational and research exchanges” (MOD 2015).
While the alliance was still focused on the protection of Japan, the new guidelines were much less unilateral than their previous two incarnations. For the first time Tokyo considerably overcame its constitutional constraints, which paved the way for the Abe cabinet to fully respond to Washington’s expectations and conform with external pressures.

**Conclusions**
The main aim of the article was to show the salience of internal determinants in Japan’s response to external stimuli regarding the evolution of the alliance with the US. As the scope of the alliance was intimately related to the limitations imposed by Article 9 of the Constitution, domestic politics constituted a crucial factor influencing foreign and security policy of Japan. Due to a lack of two thirds of seats in both houses of the Diet, the ruling parties have never seriously tried to initiate the process of constitutional revision. Moreover, the existence of powerful veto players – moderate factions in the LDP and Cabinet Legislation Bureau bureaucrats – stabilized the status quo based on the principle that Japan could not exercise its right of collective self-defense. As a result, despite constant pressure from Washington, Tokyo was unable to conform with external stimuli. While the security guidelines from 1978 and 1997 to some extent responded to the evolution of international environment, they failed to transform the alliance into a more equal form. Yet, the revision of the interpretation of the Constitution by the Abe cabinet showed that domestic hurdles were not insurmountable. Thanks to the fragmentation of opposition parties, institutional reforms, and maintenance of high popular support, the prime minister considerably strengthened his position vis-à-vis veto players, which in turn enabled him to go much further in revising Japan–US security guidelines than his predecessors. Responding to new threats from North Korea and China, Japan legalized collective self-defense. Although there are still some constraints on SDF’s military assistance to American forces in case of an armed attack against the US, the new regulations redefined the alliance and enabled Japan to play a more active role in maintaining regional and global peace and security.

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