THE ALLIANCE DILEMMA: A STRONGER JAPAN AND REGIONAL STABILITY

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Asian Studies

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Washington, DC
December 5, 2014
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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to explain the United States's puzzling silence on Japan's potential development of autonomous strike capability. It argues that this is due to the U.S.'s fear of entrapment vis-à-vis Japan, which is the first time in the history of the U.S.-Japan alliance that the United States has ever had this type of fear. In particular, the United States fears the risk of entrapment into insecurity spiral in Northeast Asia caused by Japan's more proactive security policies, including its development of autonomous strike capability, as well as Japan's assertive actions over controversial history issues such as prime ministers' visits to Yasukuni Shrine. After introducing previous alliance theories on how a state responds to the risk of entrapment, the paper develops a theory that before a state chooses either a distancing strategy--moving away from the ally--or an adhesion strategy--moving closer to the ally--in order to avoid entrapment, it first engages in a strategy of inaction or what I call a "waffling strategy". The United States has yet to decide its official stance on Japan's development of autonomous strike capability, and the ongoing silence on this issue proves the proposed theory.
This thesis is dedicated to everyone who supported me along my journey.

To my parents, who always supported my intellectual curiosity and pushed me to pursue my dreams.

To my brothers, whose pursuit of their own dreams inspired mine.

To my friends, both in Japan and the United States, who were there for me when I struggled.

To my mentor, Michael J. Green, who has always inspired me to become a better Japan expert.

To my academic advisor, Victor D. Cha, whose scholarship sparked my interest in alliance theories.

To my colleagues who were not only understanding, but also encouraging.

To the many experts who shared time and their insights on this complex and challenging issue.

To all of those strategic thinkers whose years of hard work and unflagging commitment contributed for maintaining and strengthening U.S.-Japan relations.

To the dream of eternal peace in the Pacific.
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INTRODUCTION: THE PUZZLING SILENCE

"Japan is back. Keep counting on my country."¹ This was the key message Prime
Minister Shinzo Abe delivered in April 2013 to an audience in Washington, the capital of
Japan's sole and long-time ally, when he first visited the United States during his second term in
office. As if trying to prove his words, the Government of Japan has been engaging in a series of
efforts to strengthen its defense posture: it established its first ever National Security Council
(NSC) and published a National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2013, replacing the 1957
Basic Policy for National Defense; replaced the ban on arms export with the new “Three
Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology” the following April, allowing
Japan to export its arms with much fewer restrictions; and reinterpreted the Constitution to allow
for its exercise of the right to collective defense — a right that the Cabinet Legislation Bureau
had long interpreted Japan as possessing under the United Nations Charter, just like other
countries, but was not able to exercise due to its Constitution’s unique and pacifist Article IX.
These initiatives are not new, but the culmination of the last two decades of continuous
incremental efforts: for Japan to become a normal country [futsu no kuni]. Behind this gradual
but significant change in Japan, there is a rising fear of regional threats posed by China and
North Korea that directly impact Japan's security concerns.

"The United States welcomed these efforts and reiterated its commitment to collaborate
closely with Japan," read the Joint Statement at the annual U.S.-Japan Security Consultative
Committee (2+2) in 2013.² Nonetheless, the list of Japan’s “efforts” specified in the Statement
did not include one particular issue that the Japanese side pushed to be included in the
statement—the matter of Japan’s potential development of autonomous strike capabilities.³ This
is striking since this development would mark one of the most significant shifts in the more than six-decades-long history of the U.S.-Japan alliance. A Japan with autonomous strike capabilities—the ability to strike enemy bases [tekikichi] or “bases of operations [sakugenchiti]”—means that it will not only focus on its traditional role as a “shield” in the alliance with the United States, but also hold a role as a “spear,” capabilities that Japan has long depended on its ally to provide. Yet, given that the United States was suspiciously silent on this matter, this discussion has been significantly toned down. Consequently, Japan’s newly established National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) published in December 17, 2013 only vaguely stated:

Based on appropriate role and mission sharing between Japan and the U.S., in order to strengthen the deterrent of the Japan-U.S. Alliance as a whole through enhancement of Japan’s own deterrent and response capability, Japan will study a potential form of response capability to address the means of ballistic missile launches and related facilities, and take means as necessary.4

The U.S. decision to remain silent on this critical matter, which could be a major turning point of the alliance, is particularly puzzling, if placed in a historical context. The United States has long pursued a stronger, more capable, and more dependable Japan as an ally in the Asia-Pacific region. Such a Japan would contribute more to regional stability through more burden-sharing and less free-riding of the alliance. As a principle, the United States also recognizes that “Japan has a sovereign responsibility and right to defend itself and must prepare for the possibility that in some cases its interests will not always fully coincide with those of the United States.”5

Why, then, did the United States decide to remain silent? Why is it waffling on this particular matter, despite its determined support for Japan’s other normalization efforts, such as
the replacement of self-restrictions for arms export and its exercise of the right to collective self-defense? If the United States simply has not yet decided its stance on the issue, what is stopping them from doing so? This paper argues that their indecision is driven by the U.S. fear of entrapment—the fear of being dragged into an insecurity spiral in Northeast Asia, which may potentially lead to an unwanted war between China and Japan. This is a fear that the United States is encountering for the first time in the history of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

The paper is divided into four sections. In the first section, it discusses the historical significance of this new dynamism. Then, it introduces existing alliance theories, particularly on how a state responds to the fear of entrapment, and proposes a new theory that better explains the U.S. silence on Japan’s strike capability. Third, it presents cases of the United State’s recent behavior vis-à-vis Japan that demonstrate the proposed theory and its applicability to the issue of strike capability. Lastly, the fourth section addresses possible counterarguments.

I. Historical Significance: Abandonment and Entrapment during the Cold War

Alliances form among states that share similar security interests. Yet oftentimes, allies develop interests that are not necessarily shared with each other, leading them to develop fears of abandonment and entrapment. Michael Mandelbaum first termed these two concepts, defining abandonment as the fear that an ally “will be abandoned in his hour of need,” and entrapment as the fear that “he will be entrapped in a war he does not wish to fight.”7 Glenn H. Snyder further developed this concept in 1984, defining abandonment as “defection” and entrapment as "being dragged into a conflict over an ally’s interests that one does not share, or shared only partially."8
If all alliances involve, to a certain extent, fears of entrapment and abandonment, one has to wonder why this development in the context of the U.S.-Japan alliance today matters in the first place. The following section examines the historical significance of this supposed development of U.S. fear of entrapment vis-à-vis Japan.

A. Abandonment

Historically, the fear of abandonment was a less significant variable than entrapment in alliances during the Cold War. As Snyder reveals, the Cold War polarized the world into two camps, and made it hard for group members to realign with the opposite camp, and therefore, alleviated fears of abandonment. This was true in the case of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The strictly bipolar international system made it impossible for Japan to normalize its relations with the Soviet Union and China prior to U.S. reconciliation with those nations. The attempts for normalization with the Soviet Union under prime ministers Ichiro Hatoyama and Tanzan Ishibashi in the 1950s were blocked by the United States.

Despite such inflexibility in regards to realignment, the United States and Japan were not completely free from abandonment fears. Both countries faced abandonment fears due to mutual dependency on the alliance, but their fears were not necessarily asymmetric either. Nixon’s surprise visit to China in 1972 and the secretive manner in which Nixon and Kissinger carried it out surely raised questions about the reliability of the United States as an ally, which naturally translated into abandonment fears. Yet the United States’ strategic dependence on Japan, especially compared to the Republic of Korea (ROK), meant that Japan’s abandonment fear after Nixon’s announcement to withdraw troops from Asia was not as intense as the ROK’s. In fact,
the Japanese entrapment fear from the Cold War was alleviated by America’s disengagement from Vietnam.\textsuperscript{11}

Meanwhile, the United States also held a fear of abandonment by Japan albeit limited: the fear, not simply of Japan’s possible defection should the United States be attacked, but of Japan possibly falling into the Communist bloc and then not coming to help—directly or indirectly—the United States when it is attacked. The “Domino Theory,” —the concern that if the United States lost one state to the Communist bloc, the rest would fall like dominos—was a U.S. abandonment fear. The intense yet limited wars in Asia, such as the Korean War in 1950-1953 and the Vietnam War in 1956-1975, were viewed within the “Domino” context: if the United States lost these countries, it would eventually lose Japan. Kenneth Pyle explained that the United States viewed the Korean War as a “Soviet invasion...to approach Japan,” and that Japan was “the most desired prize” for the Communists and their “natural target for the desire to dominate the Far East.”\textsuperscript{12} John Foster Dulles, prior to taking his position as the Secretary of State, wrote in \textit{Foreign Affairs} in 1952:

We heard the Soviet Delegation at San Francisco brazenly demand that Japan should be kept virtually disarmed, that all Western power should be permanently withdrawn, and that Japan’s surrounding waters and the straits which divide her own home islands should be open, for all times, only to warship based on the Sea of Japan, which means the Red Pacific fleet at Vladivostok.\textsuperscript{13}

In addition, George Kennan, who created the famous U.S. “Containment” strategy against the Soviet Union, wrote in his memoirs in 1967 that:

Japan, as we saw it, was more important than China as a potential factor in world-political developments. It was, as I have already observed, the sole great potential military-industrial arsenal of the Far East. ...Worse still would be a hostile China \textit{and} a hostile Japan. Yet the triumph of communism in most of China would be bound to enhance communist pressures on Japan and should these pressures triumph, as Moscow obviously hoped they would, then the Japan we would have before us would be
obviously be a hostile one.\textsuperscript{14}

Losing Japan to the Communists would mean that the United States would lose the cornerstone of U.S. strategy in Asia. Numerous declassified U.S. documents on Japan’s domestic political situations in the 1950s and the 1960s indicate how carefully the United States watched the discourse of communists and socialists influence in Japan out of such a fear. Japan’s geostrategic importance in U.S. Cold War strategy not only created an abandonment fear on the U.S. side, but also provided Japan leverage over its bigger ally and thus helped alleviate Japan’s fear of abandonment.

\textbf{B. Entrapment}

In contrast, the dynamics of entrapment fear in the U.S.-Japan alliance were completely asymmetrical during the Cold War. The United States, in fact, never felt fear of entrapment vis-à-vis Japan, while Japan was fraught with it. This is not simply because Japan was smaller and lacked the capability to entrap its much larger ally; the history of the U.S.-ROK and the U.S.-Republic of China (ROC) relationships shows that this is a possibility.\textsuperscript{15} Rather, the key factor was that Japan possessed neither intentions nor reasons to entrap the United States. First, Japan’s focus on its economic growth and grudging resistance to rearm made it almost impossible for the Japanese to entrap the United States in any unwanted wars. Second, any direct attack on Japan was considered an attack on the United States itself in the context of the Cold War, and therefore any war that Japan dragged the United States into would never be an unwanted or unrelated war.

Meanwhile, Japan has always been fraught with the fear of entrapment over global conflicts that the United States engage in. Despite U.S. efforts to get Japan more involved,
Japan’s fierce entrapment fears had it shrewdly reject such pressure. During the Cold War era, the United States wanted Japan to normalize—free itself from the restrictions imposed upon it both directly and indirectly by Article IX—so that it could play a bigger role in countering the Soviet threats that were increasingly aggregating in Asia. This is apparent from the fact that by the beginning of the 1950s, the United States was already regretting having created the pacifist Constitution for Japan during the occupation; then Vice-President Richard Nixon explicitly called it “a mistake” in his speech at the America-Japan Society in Washington in 1953.16 However, Shigeru Yoshida, the post-war Prime Minister of Japan who signed the 1953 San Francisco Treaty, successfully rejected U.S. pressure to normalize so that his war-torn country could focus on its economic recovery. Pyle noted that rather than the “wartime trauma” or the discrediting efforts of pre-war militaristic policies, it was “the product of the pragmatism” and “an opportunistic adaptation to the international political-economic environment” of conservative politicians that founded Japan’s postwar pacifist orientation.17 Henry Kissinger also praised this diplomatic maneuver of Japan as “the most farsighted and intelligent of any major nation in the postwar era.”18 Yoshida’s conversation with Kiichi Miyazawa, later to become the 78th Prime Minister, well-illustrates Japan’s post-war strategy:

> The day [for rearmament] will come naturally when our livelihood recovers. It may sound devious, but let the Americans handle [our security] until then. It is indeed our Heaven-bestowed good fortune that the Constitution bans arms. If the Americans complain, the Constitution gives us a perfect justification.19

Of course, Japan has not been entirely free from concessions throughout the sixty years of the alliance. Faced with the difficulty of continuously free-riding under the U.S. security umbrella, Japan accepted U.S. demands to upgrade the National Police Reserve, today’s Self Defense Forces (SDF), and gradually increased the scope of their engagement. Beginning with
the acceptance of the “Far East clause” in 1960 that allowed U.S. troops in Japan to “contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East,” Japan also accepted the “Korea clause” in 1969, which explicitly acknowledged Korea’s importance to Japan’s security. Then-Prime Minister Eisaku Sato clarified that Japan would decide its position “positively and promptly,” which essentially meant that Japan would grant the United States unconditional access to the Okinawan bases in the event of renewed hostilities against the ROK. Furthermore, upon revisiting the Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense in 1995, Japan agreed to engage in “situations in areas surrounding Japan.” This incremental yet slight increase in scope shows the reluctance of the Japanese side to be entrapped. In addition, due to increasing criticism in the United States that Japan was free-riding in the alliance despite its rapid economic growth, Japan began providing host-nation support in the late 1970s.

Nonetheless, with its continuous struggle not to be entrapped by the United States, the Japanese side maintained some entrapment protections. First, the scope of the alliance application was limited due in part to Japanese efforts. For instance, during the discussion for the “Far East clause,” the Japanese side continued to reject the U.S. proposal to change the term “the Far East” to the “Pacific” even though it would not have caused any concrete differences. Later, then-Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi limited the scope of the “Far East” by defining it as “the region roughly about northern from the Philippines as well as the areas surrounding Japan and it includes the regions under the control by South Korea as well as the Republic of China.” This definition was an indicator of Japan’s reluctance to be entrapped in the war against the Communists, and it still applies today to Japan’s “areas surrounding Japan.” Second, though with some exceptions, the Japanese side imposed the condition of prior consultations on the
United States. In the so called “Kishi-Herter notes” in 1960, the Japanese side was able to make it a condition that the United States would be required to consult with Japan when it wished to use bases in Japan for combat or when making any critical changes in the formation of troops. Such efforts have allowed Japan to continuously reject some actions to this day: the dispatch of SDF abroad to be a part of collective security schemes; becoming a nuclear power; and defense spending exceeding one percent of the GNP. Japan’s SDF does not have a joint command with the United States, unlike members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the ROK do, a legacy of Japan’s entrapment fear from the Cold War.

II. Theory: “A Fear of Entrapment Leads a State to Waffle First.”

Previous alliance theories hold that when a state fears abandonment, there are a few relatively simple expected behaviors. The state will either move closer to the ally by showing its loyalty, currying the ally’s favor through actions such as strengthening one’s general commitment, or supporting the ally in specific conflicts. Or, it can also try to gain support by threatening to defect, presuming that its defection will be more costly to the ally than providing support. Overall, a state with fear of abandonment will do anything to increase its self-value in the alliance, thereby gaining more leverage over the ally and reducing the risk of being abandoned.

On the other hand, as Snyder noted, a state response to the risk of entrapment can be more complicated. One school of thought makes the case that a state responds to the risk of entrapment by distancing from the ally through a weak or vague commitment, such as failing to support the ally in specific conflicts.” Various alliance theories argue that a state generally responds to such situation by “distancing” or “hedging” strategies vis-à-vis the ally by strategies
such as (1) withholding material support for the ally, (2) castigating the ally’s overzealousness, (3) appeasing the adversary, or (4) abrogating the alliance.\textsuperscript{29} The other school of thought makes the case that under certain conditions, states choose “adhesion” strategies over “distancing” strategies. Victor D. Cha argues that those conditions are, for example, “when entrapment fears (1) are intensely held, (2) are accompanied by power asymmetries (i.e., the larger power seeks control over the smaller one), or (3) when the smaller power has a revisionist agenda.”\textsuperscript{30} Snyder also argues that in some cases, a firm commitment or “adhesion” strategy is “a better safeguard against entrapment,” as it increases deterrence against the adversary, and also provides a needed assurance to the ally so that “it could feel safer in conciliating its opponent.”\textsuperscript{31}

Both theories supporting “distancing” strategy and “adhesion” strategy are compelling. Nonetheless, this paper argues that there is an unexamined dimension of states’ behaviors when facing the risk of entrapment. Before a state makes a decision on whether to distance or adhere to the ally, or until it is pushed to do so, a state with fear of entrapment will engage in a “waffling” strategy, or in other words, it simply maintains a state of strategic inaction. It does not criticize nor support the ally in certain conflicts or on certain issues. A state will employ this strategy as they calculate cost-benefit of each option among distancing, adhering, and waffling. By distancing, it may undermine deterrence against the adversary and can provide incentives for the adversary to engage in a “wedge” or de-coupling strategy.\textsuperscript{32} By adhering, it may also embolden the ally to provoke the opponent and increase the risk of entrapment. On the other hand, the waffling strategy will give a state room to convince the ally of its continuing loyalty and commitment to the alliance, show solidarity, and thereby maintain credible deterrence against the adversary, while simultaneously preventing the advent of an unnecessarily emboldened ally. One
may say that such strategic inaction, rather than providing a clear support, would still undermine its credibility and loyalty and commitment to alliance, but the ambiguity could indeed help enhance deterrence. The paper argues that when a state faces the risk of entrapment, it responds first by waffling—it does not either attempt to distance from or adhere to the ally—until it determines whether distancing or adhering would be more preferable over maintaining a waffling strategy. The following section provides several case studies that demonstrate U.S. behavioral transitions from waffling to distancing or adhesion. The U.S. waffling on Japan’s potential strike capability today is only a demonstration of its initial reaction to the fear of entrapment.

III. Case Studies: Distancing, Adhering, and Waffling

The United States has recently employed all three options in response to the risk of entrapment. The first part of the following section demonstrates U.S. distancing behaviors over Japan’s unilateral decisions that exacerbated regional tensions, such as Japan’s nationalization of the disputed Senkaku islands and Prime Minister Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine. Particularly on the issue of Yasukuni, there was a transition of U.S. behaviors from waffling to distancing, which well demonstrates my theory. Additionally, the United States having a closer relationship with China can also be seen as a way of distancing from traditional allies, like Japan. In the second part, the paper turns to U.S. behavioral change from waffling to adhesion over the defense of the Senkaku islands, using their officials’ changing statements until the unprecedented presidential statement in April 2014. In the final part, it tackles the U.S. silence on Japan’s potential development of offensive capability, which demonstrates its waffling strategy.
A. Distancing

_Castigating Japan for Creating Unnecessary Regional Tensions_

In the last several years, the United States exhibited a few distancing behaviors vis-à-vis Japan. The most apparent case was its public castigation over Abe’s visit to Yasukuni Shrine, and another one was its reported frustration over Japan’s nationalization of the Senkaku islands.

The first distinct U.S. behavior of distancing by “castigating the ally’s overzealousness,” as Snyder posits, can be seen in its intervention in the historical animosity of the region. Prime Minister Abe paid a visit to the controversial Yasukuni shrine on December 26, 2013, where 14 class-A war criminals are enshrined. This occurred despite relentless opposition by neighboring countries to visits by Japanese state leaders, and active U.S. efforts to dissuade the Prime Minister from going. After that visit, the United States, for the first time, made a public statement that they were “disappointed” by the visit. This negative public statement by the United States indicated a clear change from its reaction during the Bush administration. When then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August 2006, his counterpart George W. Bush decided not to publicly criticize this action. After “intense debates,” stated Michael J. Green who served as special assistant to the president for national security affairs during the Bush Administration, “President Bush decided that one of the worst things the United States can do would be to publicly threaten or criticize such a trusted ally as Japan, given the expanding confidence of China in Asia and its efforts to delegitimize and isolate Japan.” While Bush determined that it would be best not to publicly criticize the ally in order to undermine China’s wedging strategy, the Obama administration saw the benefits of distancing as more effective than
that of strategic silence. Over several years, there has been a clear transition from “waffling” to “distancing” by the United States towards Japan on this contentious issue of history.

Another case of distancing was not a matter of public castigation, but did illustrate an internal U.S. criticism towards Japan. It was not well-received in the United States when Abe’s predecessor, Yoshihiko Noda, decided to purchase three of the disputed eight islands of the Senkaku islands, which China calls Diaoyu islands, from a private Japanese owner in September 2012. In the consultation process, the U.S. side explicitly told the Japanese side “not to go into this direction” because it could “trigger a crisis” with China. Although the United States did not publicly denounce its ally after the decision was announced, this report indicates that they were not satisfied with what they perceived as Japan’s move to create unnecessary tensions in the region, and delivered the Japanese side a clear message of their frustration.

These U.S. responses to Abe’s visit to Yasukuni and Japan’s nationalization of the islets clearly indicates an increasing U.S. concern over the regional tensions and the fear of possible entrapment into a regional insecurity spiral caused by Japan. There is a definite change in perception of Japan, diverging from the old perception of Japan as America’s “favorite son” in Asia.

Moving closer to the adversary

There has also been a continuous U.S. effort to engage with China and an increasing emphasis on the importance of U.S.-China relations, which is another possible way of distancing from an ally.

A good example is U.S. officials’ use of the term “new model of great power relations,”
which was originally proposed by Xi Jinping, then China’s vice president. This term was coined to define the future of Sino-U.S. bilateral relations in which the two countries respect each other’s “core interests.” Originally starting with Taiwan, this term “core interests” then gradually expanded to include Tibet and the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and in April 2013, Chinese officials started to refer to the Senkaku/Diaoyu islands as being in the same category. National Security Advisor Susan Rice’s proposal to operationalize this term in November 2013, despite her effort to redefine it, still caused great concerns for the ally.

Second, with China’s sudden establishment of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) that overlapped the Senkakus in November 2013, the conflicting responses of U.S. officials can be perceived as “appeasing the adversary.” While Vice President Joe Biden agreed with Abe not to accept China’s ADIZ, the next day then Secretary of State Chuck Hagel and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey stated that the problem was not the fact that China set up the ADIZ, but rather “how it was done so unilaterally and so immediately without any consultation or international consultation.” Unlike the general rule of ADIZ that other states set, the Chinese ADIZ had required any pilot—both military and civilian—flying through to submit a flight plan prior to entering. Although the United States demonstrated its objection to such rule by sending two B-52 planes into the ADIZ without submitting a flight plan, it had allowed commercial airlines to submit their flight schedules. The mixed messages were represented in reports in Japan as a cautious U.S. stance.
The Risk of Distancing Behaviors

These U.S. distancing behaviors vis-à-vis the ally involve fundamental risks, as they can be used in the adversary’s wedging strategy. As Mandelbaum explains with a classic example, “the Corinthians, the enemies of Corcyra, warn the Athenians that accepting the Corcyrians as allies will lead to entrapment: You will force us to hold you equally responsible with them, although you took no part in their misdeed.”39 In the context of Chinese strategic culture, words by the ancient Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, illustrates China’s wedging strategy. Sun Tzu stated, “When [an enemy] is united, divide him. Sometimes drive a wedge between a sovereign and his ministers; on other occasions separate his allies from him. Make them mutually suspicious so that they drift apart.”40

As if they are proving their loyalty to Sun Tzu, Chinese ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai, along with other Chinese ambassadors around the globe, engaged in a series of negative campaigns against Japan after Abe’s 2013 visit to Yasukuni Shrine.41 Later in May 2014, Cui pointed out “The U.S. side should stay alert against the recent provocative actions taken by Japanese political leaders.”42 Chinese Minister of Defense Chang Wanquan told then-Secretary of Defense Hagel on April 8, 2014 that, “We hope that the U.S. could stay vigilant against Japan's action and keep it within bounds and not to be permissive and supportive.”43 Exacerbating the entrapment fear of the enemy’s friend/partner/ally is a classic strategy in international politics and also fits into Chinese strategic culture. In addition to the Chinese campaign, there was also a rising negative perceptions in international media towards Prime Minister Abe upon his return to power. The U.S. media, not to mention the ROK and China, has long presented Abe as a revisionist who would bring an old militarist Japan back.
These perceptions matter in the alliance game because it shifts the United States’ understanding of Japan’s culpability in rising regional tensions, and that heavily affects the United States’ behavior towards Japan.\textsuperscript{44}

B. Waffling to Adhesion: A Path to Presidential Defense Commitment over the Senkakus

In 24 April 2014, President Obama made history as the first U.S. President to publicly announce U.S. defense commitment over the Senkakus, stating that “our treaty commitment to Japan’s security is absolute, and Article V covers all territories under Japan’s administration, including the Senkaku Islands.”\textsuperscript{45} This adhesion strategy that the United States employed was brought about after almost two decades of pursuit by Japan for a clearer and stronger defense commitment from the United States. It is also telling that the administration was reluctant to make any statements on the issue of the Senkakus until several months after taking office despite Japanese efforts to bring affirmative statements through public media and official routes. This silence occurred as when the popular narrative of the “Group of 2”—the bipolar condominium model between the United States and China—was on a rise, and further increased Japan’s fear of abandonment.\textsuperscript{46} Obama’s presidential statement, which marked a significant transition in U.S. commitment over the Senkakus or territorial disputes in general, shows how a state with entrapment fear waffles first to make its decision on their stance.

The conflict of the two Asian tigers over these islands has long existed but has significantly intensified since the trawler collision incident in September 2010. In order to measure U.S. commitment in defending its ally over this conflict, the paper analyzed the statements made both publicly and reportedly by top U.S. government and military officials over this issue between
1996-2014. Four main elements can be found in the U.S. statements on its stance over the
Senkaku Islands—(1) the United States does not take a stance on sovereignty, (2) as the
Senkakus are under Japan’s administrative controls, the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty’s Article V
applies,\(^{47}\) (3) the United States objects to any unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo
by force, and (4) the United States urges reduction of tensions and seek for peaceful solutions to
the disputes. Statements like (1) and (4) made Japan wary as they make the U.S. stance sound
rather neutral. On the other hand, (2) and (3) were assuring statements for the ally,\(^{48}\) especially
since the state quo is that Japan does have administrative control over the Senkaku Islands.

Ever since then-Assistant Deputy Secretary of Defense Kurt M. Campbell corrected the
statement made by then-U.S. ambassador to Japan, Walter Mondale, who was quoted in the \textit{New
York Times}; stating that the United States would not fight over the conflict of Senkakus in
1996,\(^{49}\) the U.S. official stance has never changed: Article V of the U.S.-Japan Security Mutual
Cooperation and Security Treaty applies to the Senkaku islands, as they are under the
administrative control of Japan. Nonetheless, this study proves that there has been an
inconsistency in U.S. government officials’ statements as to where the United States stood in this
conflict. The inconsistency of which aspects among the four main points were included in
statements illustrates a lack of clear top-down communication of the issue, which is far from
assuring to an ally. As the appendix shows, some top government officials made statements that
only included (4), which in the eyes of Japan implies that the United States is only “castigating
the ally’s overzealousness” and trying to maintain a neutral stance, thereby distancing itself from
Japan.

The way these statements were made is also telling. Until Hillary Clinton’s explicit
statement in 2010, U.S. government officials have only made them passively in the Q&A sessions. Making statements voluntarily or passively is an indication how willing they are to make statements of commitment.\(^{50}\) Despite the assurance given by Obama’s statement, the fact that it took two decades for any U.S. president to make such a statement, despite rising tensions, indicates long years of U.S. waffling behavior on this issue. Also, that the U.S. president himself had to publicly assure the ally of U.S. commitment shows that they were aware of the extent that Japan worried over U.S. waffling. In addition to the official level of U.S. waffling, there has been an unofficial level of waffling as well. Pundits in Washington, including former top U.S. government officials, have made statements that overlooked the importance of U.S. commitment over these territorial conflicts. For example, former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley analyzed in October 2013 that one should be “cautiously optimistic” about the future of the Sino-U.S. relations because “there are no competing territorial claims between China and the United States today.”\(^{51}\) Although this is technically true, this type of analysis reduces the credibility of U.S. commitment to the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Pat Buchanan, a former Republican Congressman and a pundit, also warned the U.S. public that, “The commonest error in politics is sticking to the carcass of dead policies,” and posed the question of why the dispute over the Senkakus should be “America’s quarrel.”\(^{52}\) As for Obama’s firm commitment to the Senkakus, some articles said they were “thankful” that “both Obama's language and the language of Article V itself are relatively cautious” and that “it's not entirely clear what exactly would be required if a conflict broke out.”\(^{53}\) Furthermore, there are numerous articles quoting anonymous U.S. veterans, who state that the United States “would not be exited to go to war over a bunch of rocks.”\(^{54}\)
C. Waffling: Japan’s Potential Development of Autonomous Strike Capability

*Developments of the Discussion*

The discussion of autonomous strike capabilities occasionally appeared starting from the 1950s, but North Korea’s Taepodong missiles launches in 1998 was a major catalyst in drawing more attention to this issue. In 2003, a Parliamentary member Seiji Maehara, who later became a Minister of Foreign Affairs, asked a question in the Diet to then-Minister of State for National Defense (Today’s Minister of Defense) Shigeru Ishiba that:

[There is a question] whether Japan need not have capabilities of ‘spear’ and whether it is okay to depend everything on the United States or not. Some argue that if Japan does not help the United States in Iraq, it would not gain U.S. cooperation in the case of North [Korean attacks]. There also is another argument that even if we support them [this time in Iraq], it is uncertain if we will get support from the United States.\(^55\)

Ishiba responded that he shared the same concern as Maehara of the need to prepare in case the United States and Japan do not share that interest, and that strike capabilities should be “considered from numerous perspectives.”\(^56\)

As such interactions make clear, the development of offensive capability originated as a way to alleviate the fear of abandonment on Japan’s side. Green analyzed in 1995 that since the beginning of the 1990s, Japan started to see its autonomous defense productions “as a hedge against abandonment by the United States.”\(^57\) This development may also have put more pressure on the United States to reciprocate, for as Snyder argued, a state with a fear of abandonment may build up internal capabilities or bolster its commitment to the alliance “in order to get the ally to reciprocate.”\(^58\)

A recent move that added fuel to this discussion was a report published on 4 June 2014 by the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)’s Committee on National Defense. The report
proposed that “with a view to further solidifying the credibility of alliance extended deterrence, the Government should launch a study on the Self Defense Forces’ capabilities to strike enemy bases (which has been regarded as legally admissible) and immediately draw a conclusion, while taking into consideration neighboring countries’ development and deployment of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.” Then-Minister of Defense of Japan, Itsunori Onodera, in a media interview on 17 July 2014, said he would consider that option.

Contrary to the active discussions held in Japan, the U.S. responded to this issue with silence. Not only it was not referred to in the joint statement in the 2013 two-plus-two meeting, there also have not been any official comments on the United States’ stance. Whenever the issue was raised in Q&A sessions in press briefings at the Department of State (DOD), officials have answered ambiguously. For example, a senior official from DOD in the press conference on 27 September 2013, skillfully deferred by saying:

At the core of the defense guidelines is a discussion about both the current and the future roles, missions and capabilities of the U.S.-Japan alliance. And that's a discussion that we have yet to have, that we will have as part of the defense guidelines review process. Where we talk about what type of capabilities that the U.S. needs to bring, and what type of capabilities that Japan needs to bring, and then fundamentally what type of capabilities we need to bring into the alliance as allies to insure the purposes and objectives of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which is defending Japan.

On 2 October 2013, Lt. Gen. Salvatore Angelella, Commander of U.S. Forces Japan, also wavered on the possibility that both sides would exchange views on Japan’s potential autonomous strike capability:

I know that the Japanese government is -- is considering, you know, re-evaluating the constitution and to -- to decide what capabilities they need. That’s up to the Japanese citizens and the government to decide. And, you know, as we work through the guidelines, issues like that could come up. I don’t know if they’ll get into those specifics tomorrow.
In addition to these ambiguous statements, my conversation on 8 October 2014 with an anonymous official from the Department of State revealed that the United States has "not made its stance yet." It is clear that the United States is in the stage of waffling on this particular issue. The following section addresses the reasons for the U.S. hesitation to neither support nor criticize such development but to employ a waffling strategy.

Why Not Distance

Unlike the issue of visits to Yasukuni or nationalization of the Senkakus, the United States certainly is not distancing from their ally on the issue of Japan possessing autonomous strike capability by opposing or castigating the idea. As Bradley Roberts, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Nuclear and Missile Defense Policy during the first Obama administration, acknowledged in his report, from a purely military aspect, Japan’s acquiring offensive capabilities is a positive for the United States, as it enhances deterrence and capabilities of the U.S.-Japan alliance as a whole. Roberts elaborated that Japan’s development of offensive capabilities would strengthen deterrence, especially in gray zone conflicts, address the gap in prompt conventional strikes, and add protection in case of deterrence failure. The positive effects of Japan gaining strike capability would eliminate the possibility that the United States would simply distance from their ally by criticizing this development.

Why Not Adhere

An adhesion strategy, on the other hand, is not suitable either. One reason is the lack of strategy to simultaneously reassure China and other key actors in the region. Although the
presidential statement of defense commitment over the Senkakus was certainly an adhesion strategy that assured the ally, it also had the effect of reassuring the adversary; by reiterating the scope of the U.S.-Japan mutual security treaty, which is essentially defensive, the United States was able to ensure that the ally would not become overly risk-tolerant. Snyder makes a point that "one way to restrain an ally from aggressive initiatives is to point out that alliance is defensive only."64 In fact, Article V of the U.S.-Japan Security Mutual Cooperation and Security Treaty only indicates a U.S. defense commitment in the case of "an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan."65 Given the defensive nature of the treaty, the presidential statement served two purposes: assuring the ally that the United States will help defend the Senkakus from China as well as reassuring the adversary—in this case, China—that the U.S. commitment will not embolden Japan to become overly aggressive.

Yet, the same logic cannot simply be applied to the issue of strike capability. To one's surprise, the current interpretation of Japan's Constitution, which calls for an exclusively defense-oriented military posture [sensyu boei], has never eliminated the option of preemptive strike. As then-Prime Minister Ichiro Hatoyama once said, "if no other suitable means are available, Japan is not obligated to merely sit and wait to die but can engage in offensive action within certain limits."66 Yet even with physical capability to actually initiate preemptive strikes, there still has to be discussion on how Article V applies in such cases. Given that the line between preemptive strikes and preventative strikes remain ambiguous, the nature of the defensive Article V means there will not be as simple of an answer as there was for the Senkaku islands.

Other key differences are the scopes of the issues and the potentiality of escalation. As
Richard C. Bush III, a senior fellow at Brookings Institution analyzed, the presidential statement over the Senkakus was made possible due to the limited scope of the issue: the United States either pledges to defend the islands or it doesn’t. On the other hand, “the issue of offensive strike capabilities is more general and ambiguous,” which means there is a great amount of uncertainty as to what impact it will have on “escalation.”67

Waffling Strategy and Fear of Entrapment

Many other experts also link the United States’ suspicious silence on the issue with its fear of entrapment into a regional insecurity spiral. To start with, a long-term career official of the Japanese Ministry of Defense and former Assistant Chief Cabinet Secretary Kyoji Yanagisawa explained:

> The United States would not welcome any change [of the role that] that the U.S. forces assume responsibility of strike capabilities, because it means that Japan would be militarily independent from the United States and that would trigger security dilemma by provoking China and the ROK.68

According to media coverage in September 2014, anonymous Japanese officials also reportedly said that their U.S. counterparts were cautious to the idea [of acquiring strike capabilities], partly because it could outrage China.69 In fact, Japan’s potential development of strike capabilities has raised concerns in the ROK and China. In 2006, Korean President Roh Moo-hyun commented that “[such] development is a symbol of Japanese aggressive policy tendency and we cannot help but be strongly concerned.”70 In China, the recent development of the issue was perceived as part of Abe’s larger goal, which is to become “war-ready” by “stripping a nation of its pacifist identity.”71 Hua Chunying, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, publicly reiterated the
point, "We again urge Japan to earnestly reflect on and learn the lessons of history, respect the security concerns of countries in the region and go down the path of peaceful development."\textsuperscript{72}

Roberts, who acknowledged the positive impact in regards to the military if Japan were to possess strike capability, also raised negative regional reactions as one of the likely costs and risks of the issue.\textsuperscript{73} The anonymous State Department official also explained that while there were various reasons for U.S. indecision on its official stance, if he were to pick one, it would be because of U.S. concern of its impact on regional stability.\textsuperscript{74} Richard Bush adds that the most likely reason for U.S. non-response would be its concerns about "escalation-control," stating that, "If the U.S. had a problem with this, it would be because we would worry that Japan would be too prone to escalate if there were some kind of a danger of attack or threat of attack.\textsuperscript{75}

The views of these experts support my argument that the United States is waffling over officially stating their position on Japan's development of strike capabilities, due to the U.S. fear of entrapment into a regional insecurity spiral in Northeast Asia. For the time being, this waffling strategy is a more suitable strategy for the United States than distancing the ally by opposing the idea of Japan's strike capability, or adhering to the ally by openly welcoming such development. Distancing would not only damage deterrence against the adversary while also creating room for China's wedge strategy, but also could exacerbate Japan's fear of abandonment and encourage them to speed up military development, which could provoke an arms race in the region. Adhering would also embolden the ally and allow it to take more risks against China, which may lead Japan to become more inclined to actually use their strike capability. Another key U.S. ally, the ROK, has exhibited concern over this possible development, which further complicates the potential repercussion effects in the region. Based on this calculus, this paper makes the case
United States so far has determined that it is not yet time for them to distance or adhere, but rather waffling is the best possible strategy in regards to Japanese development of strike capabilities.

IV. Alternative Counterarguments

This section addresses possible counterarguments. Some may say the U.S. silence on Japan's strike capability is due to 1) U.S. indifference, 2) financial concerns and opportunity-costs, and 3) concerns for proliferation. These are all plausible arguments, but fail to capture the whole picture.

A. U.S. Indifference

Some may argue that U.S. silence regarding Japan's development of autonomous strike capabilities is simply due to Washington's indifference and lack of understanding of the issue. Previous studies on this issue suggests that even with such capabilities, Japan will still depend on U.S. satellite systems to detect and target enemy bases, especially for missiles launched from mobile launchers. Consequently, Japan will not be technically independent unless it develops as capable a satellite system as the United States. This logic illuminates the possibility that if the United States better understood the issue, then they would naturally declare their support because Japan will be unlikely to attack China autonomously.

This argument is plausible, considering the fact that it was only with the return of the LDP to power in December 2012 that this discussion on autonomous strike capability was allowed to resurface. During the three years when the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was in power, there was little, if any, media coverage on the issue. Indeed, Reuters also quoted an
anonymous U.S. official, who stated that Washington's lack of stance on the issue was "in part because the Japanese have not developed a specific concept or come to us with a specific request." This indicates that the discussion is in too early of a stage to draw U.S. attention. In addition, the lack of understanding of the issue may well be because the United States has been distracted by other international issues, such as Libya and Syria, and its own recent domestic deadlock which brought about a 2013 government shut-down and consequently led to Obama cancelling his attendance at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum.

This explanation, however, is clearly flawed, as it does not clearly explain what exactly constitutes a lack of understanding on the part of the United States. Obama's "Rebalance to Asia" strategy directly counters the possibility that the U.S. leadership is indifferent to Asia. If the United States regards Japan having a "spear" capability as a positive development that serves U.S. national interest, there is no reason not to support the issue, much as it did on the issue of the right to collective self-defense and Japan's increasing defense budget. U.S. indifference only on Japan's offensive capability itself would be a puzzle when placed in the context of the U.S. rebalance to Asia.

B. Financial Concerns and Opportunity-Costs

Another alternative argument is financial concerns and opportunity-costs of the issue. As sequestration will force the U.S. Department of Defense to continuously cut its defense budget by almost 1 trillion dollars over the next ten years, the U.S. side may be concerned about their potential cost increase if Japan were to develop such a capability. Due to Japan's limited discussion of how far it would develop their strike capability, including the enhancement of its
satellite systems to strike mobile launchers, the U.S. side may be uncertain of the potential burden-sharing breakdown. Green explained the U.S. reluctance on this issue, that “even if Japan possessed the capability to attack enemy bases, it would be limited so it would be the United States that would have to deal with any counterattack.” The United States may also have been concerned of the opportunity-costs. Roberts states that the United States is concerned that “investments in these capabilities would come at the expense of investments in other capabilities important to the alliance, perhaps of higher priority.” This concern is plausible as Japan has had a self-imposed regulatory cap to limit its defense budget for decades, and an increase to the national defense budget was not proposed together with the discussion of strike capability.

These alternative arguments, however, do not offer a complete explanation for the U.S. silence either. Such severe financial constraints, in fact, could give the U.S. side an incentive to support Japan’s autonomous strike capability development; by supporting or even pushing it further, the United States could acquire more financial or technical support from Japan to aid in U.S. satellite programs, as it would boost both sides’ military strike capability. As for opportunity-cost concerns, there are many possible ways that the United States could negotiate with Japan to invest in other capabilities the alliance needs, while also developing Japan’s autonomous strike capability. After all, the one percent cap of Japan’s defense spending is not a law but a Cabinet resolution, and therefore can be changed, depending on circumstances. These arguments do not explain why the United States did not approach this issue in a way that serves their financial and opportunity-cost interests.

*Concerns for Proliferation*
Some may also argue that the United States remained silent because of their concerns about proliferation. It is true that any technological transfer of weapons system would need to go through the Department of Non-proliferation inside the U.S. Department of State, and it is no easy task to simply show its support on the subject of Japan developing strike capabilities. Roberts also raised one potential risk, that it would negatively affect “the Treaty on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF), especially if officials and experts in Moscow renew calls for Russian withdrawal so that it [Russia] is at liberty to field counter-balancing systems.”

The U.S. concerns about proliferation might be involved to some extent, but this aspect is secondary to their concern over regional stability. In fact, the United States has taken several contradictory actions. For example, in 2012, the United States allowed the ROK to extend the range of their missiles up to 800 km from the current cap of 300 km. This example shows that its concerns for proliferation can alter depending on the situation and should not be considered as the sole factor that is standing in the way of supporting Japan’s offensive capability despite the potential enhancement of deterrence.

V. Conclusion

Two decades have passed since the end of the U.S.-USSR bipolar system, which alleviated the fear of abandonment in alliances. In this time of increasing security threats, Japan can no longer afford to remain a passive country, fraught with a fear of entrapment. With an autonomous strike capability, Japan would clearly depart from the old Japan that endeavored to remain only as a “shield” of the alliance, and therefore unable to entrap the United States in any
possible way. Given the current changing nature of their long-time ally, it is only natural that the United States is developing a fear of entrapment in regards to Japan.

Campbell’s statement in July 2013 well depicted the United States’ cautious approach to maintaining the stability of the region, particularly with the handling of the China’s rise while avoiding the Thucydides Trap.

Here I think as many Japanese friends know, the United States is trying to walk a very careful line. We are trying to be very clear of the importance of the maintenance of peace and stability, send a very clear signal with respect to our security responsibilities and Article V, but at the same time underscore that it is in the best interests of nations of Northeast Asia for cooler heads to prevail and to remember the larger endeavor that we are engaged in which is that the Northeast Asia is the cockpit of global economy and that has to be sustained going forward.81

Alliances are live creatures. They needs meticulous care from both sides to be maintained, just as any type of relationship would. Without proper care, it will not only stop growing, but also start to decay and eventually die, fraught with the fear of abandonment and entrapment. As Mandelbaum stated, entrapment and abandonment fears are “the heart of any alliance.”82 The peculiar absence of U.S. entrapment fear towards Japan during the Cold War indicated the asymmetries of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Indeed, throughout the decades, Japan possessed neither the willingness nor the intent to entrap its counterpart. Today, with the increased abandonment fear on the Japanese side and the increased entrapment fear on the U.S. side, the U.S.-Japan alliance needs to pay careful attention to the double layers of the alliance dilemma. The discussion of Japan’s autonomous strike capability as well as the U.S. silence on the issue derived from this dynamic alliance dilemma. A Japan with “spear” capability in the alliance will not be realized successfully unless both sides succeed in assuaging each side’s fear towards the other. At the same time, it is worth noting that this development of symmetric fears in the U.S.-
Japan alliance indicates a high degree of maturity, one that has developed over more than six decades of friendship across the Pacific.


9 Snyder, 483-484.

10 Michael Schaller, Altered states the United States and Japan since the occupation, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 113-126.

11 Victor D. Cha, Alignment despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999), 70. Some experts also argue that while being “shocked” by Nixon’s visit to China, the détente it brought certainly helped reduce the abandonment fear as the adversary game became less intense.


17 Pyle, 232.

18 Quoted in Pyle, 232.


20 Cha, Alignment despite Antagonism, 76.


22 Kazuya Sakamoto, Nichibei domei no kizuna [The Japan-U.S. Alliance Nexus], 237-249.
23 Quoted in Sakamoto, 251.
25 Sakamoto.
26 Pyle, 240.
29 Cha, “Powerplay,” 195. Note that Cha adds that accommodating the adversary and nullifying the alliance are too risky to be realistic options, and therefore, the weaker commitment is the most plausible actions for a state with entrapment fear.
30 Cha, “Powerplay,” 195
31 Snyder, Alliance Politics, 185.
33 Michael J. Green, Press Conference with Kurt M. Campbell, Japan National Press Club, July 16, 2013.
35 This term comes from Cha, “Powerplay,” 194.
39 Mandelbaum, 151.
44 For example, Brett Benson analyzes that “states choose ambiguous defense commitment to their allies when “it is simply not possible for the third party to determine whether a conflict occurred because the protégé was aggressive or because the adversary was aggressive.” Brett V. Benson, Constructing International Security: Alliances, Deterrence, and Moral Hazard. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

47 TREATY OF MUTUAL COOPERATION AND SECURITY BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA's Article V reads as "Each Party recognizes that an armed attack against either Party in the territories under the administration of Japan would be dangerous to its own peace and safety and declares that it would act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional provisions and processes. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council of the United Nations in accordance with the provisions of Article 51 of the Charter. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security." "TREATY OF MUTUAL COOPERATION AND SECURITY BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Accessed on April 12, 2014. http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/q&a/rcl/f1.html.


56 Ibid.


Roberts.

Snyder, Alliance Politics, 323.


“Tekikichi kougeki nooryoku hoyuuron, kokunaiga ni hamon—Kankoku daiouryou jitai akka wo yuuryo [The possession of enemy bases strike capability resonates abroad—the President of the Republic of Korea is concerned for further exacerbation of situation],” Nihon Keizai Shimbun, July 12, 2006.


Kubo.

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Kubo.

“ANALYSIS.”

Roberts.

Kubo.

Kurt M. Campbell, Press Conference with Michael J. Green, Japan National Press Club, July 16, 2013.

Mandalbaum, 151.

Ibid.
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**No Responses to the Inquiries made by the Government of Japan and other Japanese Media on the U.S. Status of the Senkaku islands**

1. Don't take a stance on sovereignty
2. Permits with Japanese unilateral actions to change status quo
3. Imperialoled of's resolution to change status quo
4.browser action to change status quo
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**November 23, 2013:**

China announces its new Air Defense Identification Zone.
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core-interest.


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