The Evolving Japan-U.S. Alliance
-Keeping Asia-Pacific peaceful and prosperous-

[Introduction]
Thank you very much, Dr. Green, for your kind introduction. And thank you all for gathering here today. I spoke from this podium in September 2015 as the Chair of the Policy Affairs Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan. It is a distinct honor and great pleasure to speak again at CSIS today.

I am delighted to see many familiar faces in the audience today, who, I would imagine, did not expect me to come back to this podium in less than a year as Japan’s Defense Minister. If you are lamenting your lack of foresight, let me reassure you: I myself at that time did not know that this would happen. I must also tell you, though, that I was always prepared to take on this job.

Today, I would like to talk about the Japan-U.S. Alliance
and the Asia-Pacific region, the chief operating backdrop of the Alliance.

[Japan-U.S. Alliance: Recent Developments]
For over half a century, the Japan-U.S. Alliance has served the strategic interests of the United States and Japan, two sea-faring nations of the Asia-Pacific and the world’s largest and the third-largest economies. Equally important is the fact that this is an alliance based on the shared values of two liberal democracies. Japan and the United States both share and uphold such universal values as democracy, freedom, the rule of law, and respect for human rights. Still to this day, liberal democratic values are facing various challenges in many parts of the world. The vitality of our values-based alliance continues to matter.

Throughout my political career, I have always been, and
always will be, a staunch advocate of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. I thank all the people on the U.S. side who work for the Alliance. And I am particularly grateful to all the men and women of the U.S. forces stationed in Japan, both uniform and civilian, as well as their family members. I salute their dedication to the defense of Japan and to the peace and stability of the region.

Japan-U.S. security cooperation encompasses a wide range of activities such as policy consultations, bilateral mission planning, joint training & exercises, intelligence cooperation, joint research & development, and various day-to-day activities of Japan’s Self-Defense Forces and the U.S. armed forces. Over the years, the scope of such security cooperation has steadily broadened and deepened. Building on these achievements, the Japan-U.S. Alliance in the past few years has made further strides.

In April 2015, Defense and Foreign Ministers of the two
countries approved the new Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation Guidelines. The 2015 Guidelines replaced the previous Guidelines, which were adopted in 1997. Like the 1997 Defense Guidelines, the 2015 Defense Guidelines serve as a capstone document for bilateral cooperation by providing a general framework and guidance in two areas. First, what roles the two countries play and what missions they fulfill in various situations. And second, how the two countries should engage in policy and operational coordination.

Let me briefly discuss some key characteristics of the 2015 Guidelines.

First, reflecting the expanding scope of alliance cooperation as well as persistent and emerging security threats, the new Defense Guidelines cover a whole spectrum of situations from steady-state to gray zones to various contingencies, including large-scale disasters in
Japan as well as an armed attack against a country other than Japan.

Second, the 2015 Defense Guidelines emphasize the importance of the two countries’ acting *seamlessly* across the whole spectrum of security situations that may require an Alliance response. To ensure such a seamless Alliance response, the 2015 Defense Guidelines, for example, call for establishing a standing policy and operational coordination body called the Alliance Coordination Mechanism, or ACM. The ACM provides both for military-to-military operational coordination and government-to-government policy coordination between the two governments. Because the ACM is a “standing” mechanism, it can be activated whenever need arises. The 1997 Guidelines had a similar coordination mechanism, but its utility was limited because the mechanism could be activated only in response to an armed attack against Japan and a certain type of regional
contingency.

Third, the 2015 Defense Guidelines outline bilateral security cooperation in emerging strategic domains such as space and cyberspace. The 2015 Defense Guidelines also emphasize the global nature of the Alliance: they specify various activities that contribute to regional and global peace and stability such as maritime security, international humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, and partner capacity building.

By “operationalizing” the new Defense Guidelines, Japan and the United States are well-positioned to elevate the Alliance to a whole new level.

In fact, this “operationalization” is already happening: for example, the newly established Alliance Coordination Mechanism, which I spoke about earlier, was fully leveraged when the two countries dealt with a series of
North Korean ballistic missile launches as well as the Kumamoto earthquake, in response to which U.S. forces provided airlift support to the Japanese Government’s relief efforts. On this U.S. support, let me say that the selfless, generous relief assistance by U.S. forces spoke volumes to the Japanese public about the importance of the Alliance. We will continue to leverage the ACM as we deal with a wide range of security developments.

Based on the new Guidelines, we also established a bilateral planning body, which is called the Bilateral Planning Mechanism, or BPM. The BPM is the focal point of bilateral mission planning efforts to best prepare the two countries for various contingencies. The work under the BPM is already underway, building upon the achievements of years of bilateral planning efforts under the 1997 Guidelines.

On Japan’s domestic front, in March this year, the Abe
administration enacted the Legislation for Peace & Security. It was a landmark legislative undertaking that significantly expanded the SDF’s mission portfolio and its ability to execute those missions. The legislative package encompasses, among other things, limited exercise of the right of collective self-defense, the SDF’s protection of U.S. forces’ assets in a situation that does not amount to an armed attack against Japan, and also new missions in the realm of international peace activities such as U.N. peacekeeping operations.

The Special Secrets Act of 2013 is also an important legislative initiative in the context of our Alliance. The Act has introduced a robust, government-wide information security regime. By ensuring improved protection of classified information throughout the Japanese government, the Special Secrets Act serves to further promote information sharing between the national security authorities of Japan and the United States.
I would like to underscore that it was the administration of Prime Minister Abe that forged ahead with these legislative initiatives, all of which required a significant amount of political capital.

Together with the new Defense Guidelines, Japan’s recent legislative measures go a long way to further upgrading the SDF’s ability to work with U.S. forces seamlessly in dealing with the whole spectrum of security situations.

The Japan-U.S. Alliance is a long-standing, successful institution. I have always believed that creativity and tradition must go hand in hand, and any successful and enduring institution is capable of transforming itself while at the same time preserving its core traditions. To make sure that the Japan-U.S. Alliance will remain successful well into the future, I will work toward a creative evolution of our Alliance which builds upon its
fine traditions.

Now, I would like to turn and talk about the Asia-Pacific, challenges we face in the region, and how we are trying to address them.

[The Asia-Pacific Region]
The Asia-Pacific is a place of great opportunities. The region is increasingly becoming the world’s economic powerhouse. The 21 member economies of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, account for about 60% of global economic output and 50% of global trade. The Asia-Pacific is home to the world’s fastest growing economies with a burgeoning middle-class consumer base. The Asia-Pacific is expected to remain a vibrant region where culturally diverse actors cooperate to promote prosperity.

On the other hand, security challenges abound in the
Asia-Pacific. Let me discuss some of those challenges and how we are addressing them.

[North Korea]
First, North Korea presents serious security threats, as it continues to actively advance its nuclear and missile programs. In the year 2016 alone, the world witnessed two nuclear tests and scores of ballistic missile launches. Earlier this month, three ballistic missiles launched by North Korea fell into Japan’s Exclusive Economic Zone. In recent years, North Korea’s road-mobile ballistic missile forces have increasingly demonstrated their ability to mount an attack at a place and time of their choosing. North Korea’s ballistic missile forces are now poised to include an undersea component. Last month, North Korea fired a submarine-launched ballistic missile, which likely yielded some technological gain. If and when it achieves operational status, North Korea’s SLBM system would bring improved survivability and a new mode of
attack to its already formidable ballistic missile forces.

To address the security threats North Korea poses, Japan has worked closely with the United States to strengthen multi-layer ballistic missile defense systems. Along with bilateral efforts, trilateral cooperation among Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea is increasingly important in addressing our common threats.

In 2014, defense ministries of the three countries concluded the Trilateral Information Sharing Arrangement. This arrangement, also called the TISA, aims at facilitating trilateral exchange of classified information related to North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats.

In June this year, Japan, the United States and the Republic of Korea conducted the first-ever missile warning exercise called “Pacific Dragon 2016” in Hawaii. Aegis destroyers of the three countries took part in the
exercise, which featured live target tracking and information sharing in accordance with the TISA. The three countries in the past have held search & rescue as well as counter-piracy exercises. As a trilateral exercise aimed at addressing North Korea’s missile threats, Pacific Dragon 2016 was the first of its kind. We will continue to endeavor to expand the horizon of trilateral security cooperation.

For Japan, deepening bilateral relations with the Republic of Korea is also of great importance. The Republic of Korea is Japan’s most important neighbor. The two countries share a range of strategic interests that reach beyond the confines of Northeast Asia. Japan and the Republic of Korea share interests in broader areas such as maritime security, cyber, as well as space. At this very moment, Japan’s SDF and the ROK armed forces are both engaged in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and peace-keeping operations in South Sudan. I am
convinced that stronger bilateral cooperation between Japan and the Republic of Korea in the international security arena will serve to promote regional and global peace and stability and be welcomed by the international community.

[China]
Let me move on to discuss China.

China is a country that epitomizes the economic dynamism of the Asia-Pacific. Over the past three decades, China has achieved stunning economic growth. In the course of becoming the world’s second largest economy and a major engine of regional as well as global economic growth, China has lifted hundreds of millions of its people out of poverty, which is a remarkable feat in its own right. The Asia-Pacific and the world will stand to benefit from China’s continued pursuit of prosperity.
It must be remembered, on the other hand, China’s economic rise has been made possible by the rules-based international order that has undergirded stable inter-state relations and provided for the free flow of goods and services among nations.

Coercive attempts to change the facts on the ground and upend the prevailing norms do not serve anybody’s interest. Unfortunately, what China has been doing recently in the East China Sea and South China Sea is just that, and it is raising serious concern in the Asia-Pacific and beyond.

In the East China Sea, Chinese maritime law enforcement forces have maintained a sustained presence in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands, an inherent part of the territory of Japan. Their incursions into Japanese territorial waters around the Senkakus have become “routinized” in recent years.
Last month, Chinese law enforcement ships intruded into the Japanese territorial waters around the Senkakus along with Chinese fishing boats. This was an unprecedented move. Chinese law enforcement ships subsequently made multiple incursions over many days. In June this year, a surface combatant of the Chinese Navy for the first time entered into the Japanese contiguous zones around the Senkakus.

These moves clearly represent China’s unprovoked escalation in the waters surrounding Japan and its attempt to change the status quo.

In November 2013, China announced the East China Sea Air Defense Identification Zone, or ADIZ. This ADIZ was declared over a large swath of international airspace over the East China Sea. The Chinese announcement was also made in a way that suggested that the airspace
over the Senkaku islands was a part of China’s territorial airspace.

According to China’s announcement, aircraft flying in China’s ADIZ must abide by the rules devised by China’s Defense Ministry. And if aircraft does not follow China’s instructions, the Chinese armed forces will respond by taking “defensive emergency measures.”

This is a serious infringement upon the freedom of flight in international airspace. The Japanese government swiftly lodged protests against China and demanded that China revoke these measures. Japan remains steadfast in both words and deeds: After China’s ADIZ announcement, SDF aircraft have continued to fly in the airspace over the East China Sea to engage in aerial surveillance, patrols, and interceptions, just as they had done before the announcement.
I would like to underline my government’s resolve to protect our territorial integrity and sovereignty. To this end, we will continue our own defense efforts and also maintain and enhance the Japan-U.S. Alliance. The U.S. Government has repeatedly and clearly stated that the Senkaku Islands are under the administration of the Japanese government and fall under the scope of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. I am grateful for this U.S. reassurance, which is a critical strategic message on the Alliance’s behalf.

In the South China Sea, China has engaged in large-scale reclamation at multiple maritime features to build man-made islands. On these man-made islands, China is building facilities of military utility such as runways, hangars, berthing facilities, and radars. The Chinese position against the recent rulings by the Permanent Arbitration Court at the Hague does not correspond with Japan’s position, where we respect and uphold the rule of
law. These Chinese actions constitute its deliberate attempt to unilaterally change the status quo, achieve a fait accompli, and undermine the prevailing norms.

If the world condones coercive attempts to change the rules of the road in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, and allow rule-bending to succeed in their waters and airspace, its consequences could become global, not to be confined in the Western Pacific.

In this context, I strongly support the U.S. Navy’s Freedom of Navigation operations, which go a long way to upholding the rules-based international maritime order. Japan on its part will increase its engagement in the South China Sea through, for example, Maritime Self-Defense Force joint training cruises with the U.S. Navy, bilateral and multi-lateral exercises with regional navies, as well as providing capacity building assistance to coastal nations.

As my final note on China, I would like to make it clear
that hedging against security risks presented by China is but one aspect of Japan’s defense and security policy vis-à-vis China: We will continue to engage China to encourage her to act as an agent of stability and prosperity, not their spoiler. My ministry will continue to keep the door open for constructive dialogue with China. As Japanese Defense Minister, I would like to seek opportunities to engage in candid discussions with Chinese counterparts.

Last week in Hangzhou, China, Prime Minister Abe and President Xi concurred that they would accelerate Japan-China negotiations over the establishment of a Maritime & Air communication mechanism between the two countries’ defense authorities. The purpose of this mechanism is to prevent unexpected collisions and undue escalations at sea and in the air. My ministry is committed to engaging in expedited negotiations with our Chinese counterpart.
In addressing security challenges in the Asia-Pacific, Japan needs to forge security partnerships with the region’s like-minded nations.

[Australia]
In this context, Australia is a very important partner for Japan. Japan and Australia have a range of overlapping strategic interests. Our two countries share common universal values just as Japan and the United States do. Japan has been actively promoting defense cooperation with Australia. During his meeting in 2014 with then-Australian Prime Minister Abbot, Prime Minister Abe framed the Japan-Australia relationship as the “Special Strategic Partnership for the 21st Century.” Three weeks after I was appointed Defense Minister, I held a defense ministerial meeting in Tokyo with my Australian counterpart, Ms. Marise Payne. Minister Payne and I confirmed our commitment to further enhance both
Japan-Australia bilateral and Japan-U.S.-Australia trilateral defense cooperation.

In July 2015, Japan’s Ground Self-Defense Force participated for the first time in Talisman Saber, a U.S.-Australia joint exercise. In January and April this year, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force ships participated in trilateral joint training cruises in the waters around Southeast Asia. Such trilateral training opportunities greatly contribute to improving interoperability among the three countries. These activities also visibly demonstrate to the world the three countries’ resolve to promote the peace and stability of the region, as well as our ample capabilities to back up such resolve. Japan will continue to work closely with the United States to improve this important trilateral security cooperation.

[India]
Another important strategic partner is India. India is the world’s largest democracy with an enormous economic potential. The country is a geostrategic heavyweight that straddles the critical sea lines of communication in the Indo-Pacific. Trilateral security cooperation among Japan, the United States, and India has seen progress in recent years. One such example is Japan’s participation in the “Malabar” naval exercise. The Malabar exercise was originally a U.S.-India led event to which the Japanese MSDF had been invited. In December 2015, there was a decision to make the MSDF a permanent participant in the exercise. In June this year, the Malabar 2016 exercise was staged in the waters east of Okinawa. And from 2017 on, the Malabar exercise will be hosted trilaterally by Japan, the United States, and India.

While recognizing India’s history of non-alignment, Japan will capitalize on the recent deepening of bilateral defense cooperation with India to further promote trilateral
security cooperation. In doing so, we will continue to work closely with the United States.

[The U.S. Rebalance]

In discussing the Asia-Pacific, I would be remiss if I did not talk about the U.S. Rebalance to Asia.

Let me say this upfront: Japan welcomes and supports the U.S. Rebalance to Asia.

As part of the Rebalance to Asia, the United States intends to allocate 60% of its Navy and Air Force assets to the Asia-Pacific region by 2020. In accordance with this policy, the United States has deployed advanced military platforms to the region: they include the P-8 patrol aircraft and BMD-capable Aegis destroyers. The Rebalance policy also manifests in U.S. efforts to bolster existing alliances as well as to enhance partnership with Southeast Asian countries through such means as capacity building
assistance in maritime security.

U.S. force presence in Asia has long played a critical role in maintaining a stable regional security environment. Given the region’s ever-increasing strategic weight for the United States and its growing stake in the stability of the region, even for U.S. interests alone, the Rebalance to Asia makes perfect sense. And needless to say, Japan and the whole region stand to benefit from the U.S. Rebalance, for which I am grateful.

[Closing]

Whether or not the Asia-Pacific region can remain peaceful and prosperous is now a matter of global consequence. To that end, all stakeholders must act in accordance with prevailing norms, refrain from parochial pursuit of self-interest, and promote mutual trust. In accordance with our policy of Proactive Contribution to Peace based on the principle of international cooperation,
Japan will work closely with the United States as well as with partners in the Asia-Pacific and beyond to actively promote the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific.

In closing, let me quote the great American baseball legend, the late Yogi Berra. He once quipped: It is difficult to make predictions, especially about the future. The future is indeed inherently uncertain. But I am quite certain that the Japan-U.S. Alliance will best prepare the two nations for the future. Let me finally say yet again that I am committed to work hard to make the Alliance even stronger.

Thank you for your attention.