U.S. Policy Toward Japanese Military Normalization
Sean Boldt, Joey Cheng, Wesley Collins, Dean Ensley, and Matthew Seeley

Executive Summary
This paper examines potential U.S. policy options in response to Japan’s recent military normalization, covering international partnerships and the maritime, air, ballistic missile defense, and space domains. Our purpose is to either encourage or discourage the recent efforts in these areas initiated by Japanese officials in order to improve U.S.-Japan and regional defense cooperation. In the future, those Japanese efforts will have a significant effect on regional security dynamics and the Japanese-American defense relationship, while increased capabilities will additionally affect other U.S. regional partners.

Through a literature review and approximately 25 interviews with Japanese and U.S. defense officials, academic experts, and policymakers, we assessed specific programs within the aforementioned domains against metrics based on regional security risks, benefits to the U.S.-Japan alliance and other partnerships, and the feasibility of the programs.

Through this analysis, we recommend that the U.S. move in three broad areas: Promote intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance information sharing; support new doctrine, platforms and programs; and strengthen Japan-Australia-U.S. security partnerships. These are thematic principles for improving the U.S.-Japan alliance in the context of Japanese military normalization and the U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific. Each principle is supported by several specific, actionable policy recommendations. We also highlight areas in which expanded efforts are less feasible to demonstrate inherent challenges.

Our specific recommendations for individual programs include:
- Agree to 2-way information sharing for space situational awareness
- Ensure GPS/QZSS interoperability
- Support technology sharing and joint development of drones
- Lease Aegis technology for additional upgrades to existing destroyers
- Expand maritime gray zone exercises
- Encourage Japanese competition in Australia’s submarine tender
- Promote JSDF to full partner in Talisman Saber/Sabre exercises
- Plan trilateral F-35 interoperability training

Despite potential risks involved with these recommendations, these policies will improve U.S.-Japan defense posture, ties with other partners -- namely Australia, and overall regional capabilities.