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**Re-assessing the Organizational  
Characteristics of  
Japan's Intelligence Community  
and Its Social and Political  
Backgrounds<sup>1</sup>**

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## Abstract

This study aims to identify the unique organizational features of Japan's current intelligence community (IC) and examine its social and political backgrounds. The research questions are as follows. First, in an international comparison, what are Japan's current IC characteristics in terms of organizational structure? Second, what are the social and political factors influencing these IC characteristics? Based on comparative analysis with other major democratic countries, the study revealed that while Japan's IC system is similar to the US system, it has unique organizational characteristics: (1) small organizational size and weak legal powers; (2) limited authority for community integration and coordination; and (3) weak democratic control over the IC. Moreover, the study observed (1) a lack of opportunities for national security decision-making and (2) public concern about state authorities as political and social factors behind the IC's organizational features. This study's conclusions may appear to merely reaffirm what previous studies have already demonstrated. However, this study has a certain novelty, as it considers more recent situations that previous studies have not sufficiently covered. Second, this study attempted to base its analysis on international comparisons. Third, this study used data objectively to establish its examination.

**Keywords:** Japan, intelligence community, Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office

## 1. Introduction

This study aims to identify the organizational features of Japan's intelligence community (IC) and examine its social and political backgrounds. The following questions will be explored: First, in an international comparison, what are Japan's current IC characteristics in terms of organizational structure? Second, what are the social and political factors influencing these IC characteristics?

### 1.1. Background

It may not be an exaggeration to say that an objective assessment and understanding of Japan's IC characteristics have become a critical issue for the national security of not only Japan, but also the United States and other Western allies and partners.

Japan has been a member of the purported Group of Seven (G7) Western industrialized countries from its foundation in 1975, and has long been one of the United States' most essential allies in East Asia. In recent years, Japan as a member of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue framework, has also aimed to realize a Free and Open Indo-Pacific. As the recent confrontation between the United States and China has deepened, Japan's national security capabilities for its alliance partners have become increasingly important.

Japan's intelligence capability is no exception, as it is a critical element in its national security. Japan has promoted cooperative intelligence with its allies and partners from many angles in recent years. For example, Japan signed the General Security of Military Information

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Agreement with the United States (2007) as well as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, in 2010), France (2011), Australia (2012), the United Kingdom (2013), India (2015), Italy (2016), and Germany (2021). Moreover, some critics have recently debated whether Japan can participate in the “Five Eyes” framework<sup>2</sup>.

## 1.2. Previous Studies

Despite the importance of the issue, objective and in-depth academic studies on Japan's IC are sporadic, especially those published in English and other non-Japanese languages. Studies by Kotani (2013), Kobayashi (2015), Samuels (2019), and Kotani (2022) are the rare exception<sup>3</sup>. While the first two have primarily analyzed Japan's IC reform since the late 2000s, they do not effectively cover more recent developments, such as creating the Board of Oversight and Review of Specially Designated Secrets (BOR) in Japan's Diet in 2014.

Samuels (2019) and Kotani (2022) are the most current and valuable studies, as they are based on numerous interviews with many Japanese politicians and government officials involved in intelligence operations. However, Samuels' study also has some limitations. It argued that inefficient communications due to Japan's unique bureaucratic culture — both within the IC and between the intelligence and policy sectors — are a persistent challenge to Japan's IC (Samuels, 2019, p. 193; p. 239; p. 241; p. 254; p. 255). Samuels' research also argues that public distrust of intelligence agencies and lack of proper political leadership in postwar Japanese society, such as political leaders' lack of interest, are significant political and social factors that prevent the IC's strengthening or reformation (Samuels, 2019, pp. 238–9; p. 246; p. 255; p. 257). As such, although Samuels' study intensely scrutinized Japan's IC culture, it did not examine the characteristics of Japan's IC in terms of its organizational structure. Additionally, while Samuels' view on the political and social context appears intuitively correct, this analysis relies primarily on personal interviews, with little objective support. Kotani (2022) presents a more positive conclusion than Samuels' study regarding recent IC developments in Japan, especially IC integration (Kotani, 2022, pp. 237–238). However, Kotani's research, like Samuels', mainly relies on qualitative methods based on personal interviews and needs to be verified with more objective data.

Therefore, the current study attempts to objectively clarify the characteristics of Japan's current IC in terms of organizational structure, primarily based on an international comparative analysis. This study also reexamines Samuels' discussion of the Japanese IC's social and political background as objectively as possible.

## 1.3. Research Approaches

This study primarily approaches these issues through a comparative analysis of major Western developed countries (e.g., G7 members and Australia). It uses objective data, such as

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2 Richard Armitage and Zack Cooper, *Nikkei Asia*, November 14, 2021, “Japan should be Admitted to the Five Eyes Network,” <https://asia.nikkei.com/Opinion/Japan-should-be-admitted-to-the-Five-Eyes-network>; Ken Kotani, *East Asia Forum*, August 26, 2021, “Japan's Five Eyes Chance and Challenge,” <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/08/26/japans-five-eyes-chance-and-challenge/>; Philip Citowicki, *The Diplomat*, April 22, 2021, “Integrating Japan Into an Expanded ‘Five Eyes’ Alliance,” <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/integrating-japan-into-an-expanded-five-eyes-alliance/>.

3 Other similar studies include Kobayashi (2020) and Samuels (2022) .

public opinion poll data, as much as possible, although some of the analysis remains descriptive<sup>4</sup>.

#### 1.4. Definitions

Regarding definitions of critical terms, this study adopts Lowenthal's definition of intelligence as "the process by which specific types of information important to national security are requested, collected, analyzed, and provided to policymakers; and the products of these processes" (Lowenthal, 2022, p. 9). The IC is defined in this study as follows: "the collection of organizations within the government that are involved in intelligence operations" (Kobayashi, 2021, p. 104).

#### 1.5. Structure

This study is structured as follows: The second part briefly reviews the structure and organization of Japan's current IC. The third part examines the history of Japan's IC in the post-war era, including its major threats. The fourth part explores (1) the organizational characteristics of Japan's current IC and (2) its social and political backgrounds. Additionally, based on these analyses, this part explores possible future measures to reform Japan's IC. The final part summarizes our discussions and concludes.

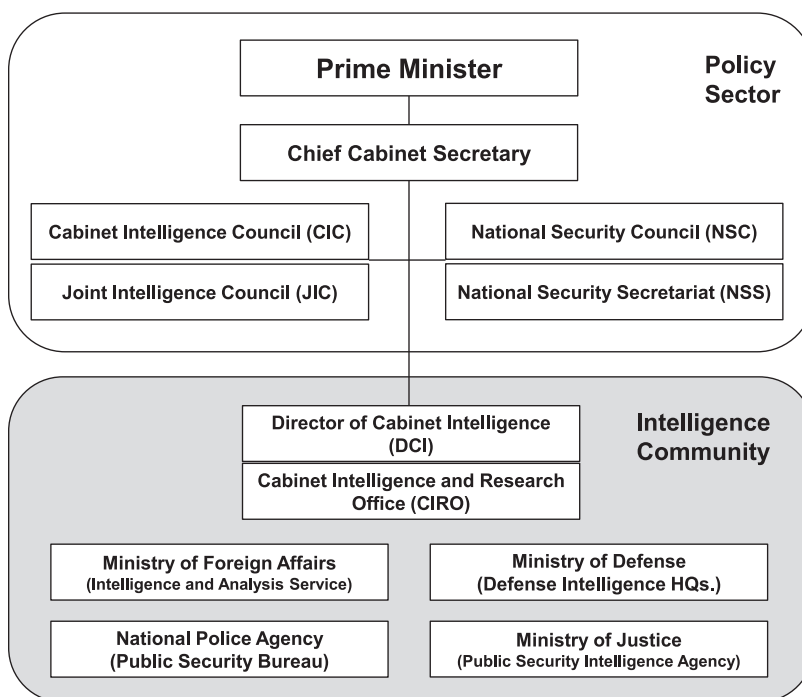
## 2. Overview of Japan's Current Intelligence Community

### 2.1. Mission and Basic Organizational Structure

Japan's current intelligence system is similar to that in the United States in terms of its primary mission and relationship to the policy sector (Figure 1). However, one significant difference between the Japanese and US systems is each system's legal basis. On the one hand, the United States' National Security Act of 1947 provides a clear legal basis for the IC's organization, missions, and authority. On the other hand, Japan has no laws and regulations that clearly define the IC's mission, organization, and authority, although laws and regulations governing individual IC member organizations do exist. However, in February 2008, the Japanese government announced its policy document to strengthen the IC, titled "*Kantei ni okeru jyohou-kinou no Kyoka no Housin*" (Policy on strengthening the intelligence function in the Prime

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<sup>4</sup> Regarding an analytical framework for international comparison, De Graaff proposes the following criteria (De Graaff, 2020, p. 4): (1) the IC's structure and mission; (2) the IC's system of accountability; (3) international intelligence's cooperation; (4) the country's security threats; and (5) the IC's history, including any remarkable events. The first two items relate to the IC's organizational structure, while the remaining three relate to political and historical backgrounds. The current study also considers these criteria but does not follow all of them. This is because, although this criterion is ideal, it is difficult to apply in reality, given data availability and other factors. De Graaff notes that the second criterion (accountability, e.g., institutions of democratic control and oversight) can be relatively helpful (De Graaff & Nyce, 2016, pp. xxix–xlvi).

**Figure 1 Simplified Organizational Structure of Japan's Intelligence Community**

Source: The author prepared this table based on publicly available information from the CIRO website<sup>5</sup>.

Minister's office')” or “the 2008 Report” hereafter<sup>6</sup>. As nearly the sole official government document on the IC in postwar Japan, this paper defines the IC's mission and organizational direction.

The 2008 Report indicates that Japan's current intelligence system is similar to that in the United States in many respects. First, the document identifies the mission of Japan's IC: to support the Prime Minister's office in making national security-related policy decisions. Consequently, this paper emphasizes an intelligence cycle established starting from the prime minister's office as the primary intelligence customer. Second, the 2008 Report, as will be discussed, identifies the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO) in the Cabinet Secretariat — which directly reports to the Prime Minister's office — as the nexus between the IC and the policy sector; the report also encourages IC integration with CIRO at its core. This mechanism is similar to how the United States established the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) to enhance IC integration after the United States was attacked on September 11, 2001. Moreover, Japan's IC also includes civilian and military intelligence agencies, with the civilian agency responsible for community integration and coordination.

As will be discussed, these similarities occurred because Japan became one of the United States' allies after World War II, and the United States has influenced much of Japan's postwar national security system, including its intelligence functions. At the same time, however, some

<sup>5</sup> CIRO website; <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jyouhoutyousa/en/community.html>.

<sup>6</sup> The document is available at the following website of Japan's National Diet Library; <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/pid/3531459/1/1>.

aspects of Japan's IC significantly differ from the US system. For example, the Japanese IC has conducted no covert operations. Additionally, their organizations and activities are much smaller in scale. The latter part of this study further addresses these issues.

## 2.2. IC Member Organizations

As a practical convention, a generally accepted perspective indicates that the Japanese IC consists of five leading member agencies: the CIRO of the Cabinet Secretariat, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), the Ministry of Defense (MOD), the National Police Agency (NPA), and the Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA). Although no clear legal basis exists, the 2008 Report recognizes that these five organizations are critical members of Japan's IC.

### 2.2.1. CIRO

The CIRO is located in the Cabinet Secretariat and is effectively an intelligence organization under the direct control of the Prime Minister's office<sup>7</sup>. The CIRO reports directly to the highest levels of government leadership and is responsible for the integration and coordination of the IC, as will be described. Thus, its role and status are roughly equivalent to those of the ODNI in the United States and the Office of National Intelligence in Australia. Similarly, the head of the CIRO, or the Director of the Cabinet Intelligence (DCI), is also the equivalent of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in the United States and the Director-General of National Intelligence in Australia. However, the authorities granted to the CIRO and the DCI are weak compared to their American counterparts.

The CIRO originated from the Cabinet Research Chamber, which was created in April 1952 as part of the Prime Minister's office. Subsequently, the organization has experienced several reorganizations and re-namings, eventually leading to its current structure. As will be detailed, the CIRO's role and status have substantially changed with IC-wide reforms since 2008<sup>8</sup>.

The current tasks of the CIRO and DCI are as follows<sup>9</sup>. First, they provide intelligence products to the IC's primary customers: the highest-level policymakers, including the Prime Minister and Chief Cabinet Secretary; and critical policy-making units, including the National Security Council (NSC) and the National Security Secretariat (NSS), which is the secretariat organization of the NSC. For example, the DCI conducts regular intelligence briefings for the Prime Minister. This task is the equivalent of the DNI's Presidential Daily Briefing in the United States. The DCI also customarily and regularly attends NSC meetings to represent the entire IC, equivalent to the NSC in the United States. At a lower level, other CIRO officials also regularly provide intelligence briefings to their counterparts in the policy sector, including the NSC. These DCIs' activities serve as a nexus (hub) between the policy sector and the IC. While the CIRO receives its necessary intelligence from other IC members, it also has some capabilities to collect, analyze, and evaluate intelligence independently<sup>10</sup>.

The second of CIRO's primary tasks involve facilitating appropriate communications between the IC and the policy sector as a nexus (hub) between them. Both sides hold regular

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7 CIRO website; <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jyouhoutyousa/en/role.html>.

8 CIRO website; <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jyouhoutyousa/en/history.html>.

9 CIRO website; <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jyouhoutyousa/en/role.html>.

10 CIRO website; <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/gaiyou/jimu/jyouhoutyousa/en/role.html>.



liaison and coordination meetings at multiple levels, and the CIRO is responsible for facilitating these meetings<sup>11</sup>. For instance, the higher-level meetings include the Cabinet Intelligence Council (CIC) and its subordinate body, the Joint Intelligence Council (JIC). The former is a liaison meeting mechanism among the vice-ministerial-level officials in the relevant ministries and agencies, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary chairs the council. The latter is a similar body of bureau director-general-level officials chaired by the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary. The NSS and IC also regularly hold liaison meetings among division chief-level officials (PHP Policy Institute, 2015, p. 40).

The third of CIRO's primary tasks is to integrate and coordinate various policies related to overall IC activities. For example, the Cabinet Satellite Intelligence Center (CSIC), the Counterterrorism Unit of Japan (CTUJ), and the Counter-Intelligence Center are all affiliated with the CIRO. The CSIC is responsible for government-owned intelligence satellites' integrated operation and imagery intelligence (IMINT). The CIRO is simultaneously accountable for managing the development and operation of intelligence satellite systems in the Cabinet<sup>12</sup>. The CTUJ integrates the collection of international terrorism-related intelligence throughout the IC. As the Counter-Intelligence Center is headed by the DCI, it coordinates, communicates, and implements essential counterintelligence policies throughout the government<sup>13</sup>.

The fourth of CIRO's primary tasks is the purported "all-source" analysis, or comprehensive evaluations to aggregate intelligence within the IC. A group of Cabinet Intelligence Officers assigned to the CIRO aggregate necessary intelligence within the IC regarding specific issues as required by the JIC; these officers also prepare the Intelligence Assessment Report to convey perspectives from the entire IC. This system is equivalent to the US system under which the National Intelligence Officers assigned to the ODNI's National Intelligence Council prepare the National Intelligence Estimate, or intelligence reports from all sources.

### 2.2.2. MOFA

At the MOFA, the Intelligence and Analysis Service (IAS) is responsible for intelligence. The IAS is roughly equivalent to the Bureau of Intelligence and Research (INR) of the Department of State in the United States. The IAS is responsible for analyzing information related to international affairs based on information reported by diplomatic missions abroad<sup>14</sup>.

The MOFA is one of the few Japanese administrative agencies that has continuously existed since prewar times. However, it was not until 1984 that the MOFA created an organization dedicated to intelligence affairs at the bureau level (the origin of the current IAS). After subsequent reorganizations, the structure of the IAS has remained relatively unchanged since 2004.

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11 "Naikaku Jyoho Kaigi no Setchi ni Tsuite" [Establishment of Cabinet Intelligence Council], Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, October 27, 1998; "Naikaku Jyoho Kaigi no Uneito ni Tsuite" [Administration of Cabinet Intelligence Council], Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, March 28, 2008.

12 "Naikaku Jyoho Kaigi no Uneito ni Tsuite" [Administration of Cabinet Intelligence Council], Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, March 28, 2008.

13 "Kaunta interijensu senta no setchi ni kansuru kisoku" [Regulations on the Establishment of Counter Intelligence Centers], Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, June 7, 2016.

14 MOFA website; <https://www.mofa.go.jp/about/hq/org.html>.

### 2.2.3. MOD

The Defense Intelligence Headquarters (DIH) is responsible for the intelligence function in the MOD, and is roughly equivalent to the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) of the United States Department of Defense. The DIH is responsible for collecting and analyzing information related to national defense. However, unlike the US DIA, Japan's DIH is also in charge of both signals-related and imaginary intelligence<sup>15</sup>.

The MOD was established in July 1954 as an administrative authority responsible for managing the Self-Defense Forces (SDF), which was also created simultaneously. The MOD was initially the Defense Agency at its creation in 1954. Subsequently, amendments to the relevant legislation passed in January 2007 upgraded the Defense Agency from an Agency to a Ministry. The DHI was created in January 1997 by integrating several intelligence-related units previously dispersed within the Defense Agency and the SDF.

The MOD and SDF both originated with the National Police Reserve, created in August 1950 after the Korean War began in June of the same year. No legal continuity exists between the MOD, SDF, and National Police Reserve with Japan's former Imperial Forces or the military authorities before and during World War II.

### 2.2.4. NPA

The Security Bureau (SB) is responsible for the intelligence function within the NPA, and is roughly equivalent to the National Security Branch within the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The SB is responsible for domestic intelligence, including counterterrorism and counterintelligence. However, unlike the FBI, the NPA is not directly involved in law enforcement or operations. Local police forces in Japan's 47 prefectures conduct field operations, and the NPA is responsible for supervising and coordinating with these local police forces and formulating policies on police management.

### 2.2.5. PSIA

The PSIA is affiliated with the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) and is responsible for investigations required under the Subversive Activities Prevention Act and the Group Regulation Act<sup>16</sup>. For example, the successor organization to the Aum Shinrikyo, which committed the 1995 terrorist attacks against the subway system in the central part of Tokyo, is under the supervision of the PSIA. The PSIA and the police (the NPA's SB) serve as de facto domestic intelligence agencies in Japan.

The MOJ and the MOFA are both administrative organizations that have existed since prewar times. However, the former had no predecessor organization to the current PSIA before and during the war. The PSIA was established in August 1952 in response to the implementation of the Subversive Activities Prevention Act, and originated within the Special Review Bureau of the former Government Judicial Office, established in August 1950.

## 2.3. The IC's Budget and Personnel

It is challenging in most countries to accurately determine the size of the budgets and

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15 DIH website; <https://www.mod.go.jp/dih/index.html>.

16 PSIA website; <https://www.moj.go.jp/psia/English.html>.

quantity of personnel within IC member institutions. In Japan, the budgets and personnel of government ministries and agencies are, in principle, disclosed to the public. However, when an intelligence agency is an internal organization of another ministry or agency, it is difficult to extract only those items related to intelligence work from the entire budget and personnel of the “parent” ministry or agency. Given these challenges, Table 1 best summarizes the budgets and personnel of the IC’s major agencies for the 2020 fiscal year.

**Table 1 Budget and Personnel of Japan’s Major IC Institutions (Fiscal 2020)**

Organization	Budget	Personnel
<b>CIRO (Main Office)</b>	3.5 billion yen (31.8 million USD)	* 194 (2018 Fiscal Year)
<b>CIRO (CSIC)</b>	62.5 billion yen (568.2 million USD)	* 221 (2018 Fiscal Year)
<b>PSIA</b>	15.4 billion yen (140.0 million USD)	1,697
<b>MOFA’s IAS</b>	600 million yen (5.5 million USD)	* 81 (2012 Fiscal Year)
<b>MOD’s DIH</b>	67.2 billion yen (611.0 million USD)	1,932

Source: The author prepared this table based on publicly available information. For more details on the source of the information, see Kobayashi (2021), p. 111.

\* The author calculated the US dollar equivalent values assuming that one US dollar equals 110 yen.

The total budgeted amount for each institution in Table 1 is equivalent to approximately US\$1.4 billion, although the total publicly available appropriated budget of the United States IC for nearly the same period was US\$85.8 billion<sup>17</sup>. Given that the gap in nominal GDP between the two countries is roughly a one-to-four ratio, this indicates that Japan’s IC budget is far smaller than that of the United States.

Meanwhile, it is noteworthy that Table 1 does not accurately present the Japanese IC’s overall budget and personnel size. First, this table does not include data on police intelligence units. The general police budget for the 2019 fiscal year is approximately 3.7 trillion yen, or 33.9 billion US dollars; of the total budget, nearly 92% is allocated for prefectural police, with the remaining 8% for the NPA. In the 2020 fiscal year, 296,412 police personnel were budgeted, and approximately 97% of these are prefectural police, with the remaining 3% are within the NPA (The National Public Safety Committee and the National Police Agency, 2020, pp.190–192). However, it is difficult to isolate and extract only those related to intelligence activities from the overall police budget and personnel. Second, regarding military intelligence in addition to the DIH, each of the nation’s ground, maritime, and air self-defense forces is also involved in intelligence affairs. Table 1 does not account for the budgets and personnel of these units other than those within the DIH.

### 3. Overview of Japan’s IC History and Major Threats

#### 3.1. Origin: Disconnection from Prewar and Wartime Intelligence Organizations

Four of the five prominent members of Japan’s current IC — excluding the MOFA — were created after World War II. Before and during the war, the intelligence units of the former

<sup>17</sup> U.S. ODNl website; <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/what-we-do/ic-budget>.

Imperial Military and the Special Higher Police under the former Ministry of Home Affairs primarily conducted Japanese intelligence functions. However, immediately after Japan's defeat, the occupying forces dismantled these organizations. Neither Japan's current self-defense forces nor police has maintained direct legal continuity with these prewar intelligence organizations. Hence, Japan's current IC was created after the war, and lacked continuity with the prewar intelligence system. However, it is difficult to identify the specific date of the IC's creation since Japan has no law to provide a clear basis for the IC. It could be fair to say that various practical governmental customs in the postwar period have gradually combined within Japan's current IC system.

### **3.2. From the End of World War II until the Cold War Period:**

#### **Low-Profile and Domestic Intelligence-centric Activities**

After World War II, Japan became an ally of the United States. Thus, from the end of the war through the Cold War period, Japan's primary national security issue was the military threat posed by the former Soviet Union in northeast Asia. However, the critical mission for Japan's IC during this period was domestic intelligence, and especially counterintelligence against the Soviets and security intelligence against leftist anti-government movements in Japan. Regarding Japan's foreign intelligence capabilities, the Japanese government primarily relied on the United States and its allies as needed.

Japan's IC remained essentially in its original form, with few significant reforms during this period.

### **3.3. After the Cold War:**

#### **Significant Reforms Responding to the New National Security Environment**

After the Cold War ended, Japan's IC experienced an unprecedented reorganization in the 2000s and 2010s, responding to changes in Japan's national security environment in East Asia since the mid-1990s. The most important factors were North Korea's repeated missile launches and nuclear tests and the rise of China (Kobayashi, 2021, pp. 151–152; 249). The global trend of strengthening international counterterrorism measures since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, in the United States also enhanced the Japanese IC reform momentum. The United States has also begun to call on Japan to strengthen its independent national security capabilities as the former's capabilities as a global superpower gradually diminish (Armitage & Nye, 2020; Samuels, 2019, pp. 160–161).

In response to this international environment, Japan's government prepared and released its previously mentioned report in February 2008. While acknowledging the existence of the IC as practically established, the report noted the existing community's weaknesses. It also made recommendations for IC reform to adapt to the new national security environment. Various subsequent IC reform measures (although not all) have been based primarily on the report's recommendations. The following measures were implemented by the Japanese government during this period.

The first involves strengthening coordination between the policy sector and the IC. Previously, the role and status of each Cabinet intelligence-related body, including the CIRO, DCI, CIC, and JIC, was ambiguous. A series of reforms have confirmed that the CIRO and the DCI are

the primary nexus (hub) between the IC and the policy sector and are responsible for IC integration. The government also reorganized two councils (CIC and JIC) in the Cabinet as nexuses of the two sectors. Moreover, the NSC and its secretariat, the NSS, were created from 2013 to 2014 to coordinate national security-related policies. This event confirmed the CIRO's appropriate counterpart in the policy sector and further strengthened the coordination between the two sectors.

The second involves strengthening intelligence-gathering capabilities. For example, a series of IC reforms further spurred the development of Japan's indigenous intelligence satellite operation system, which began in the late 1990s in response to North Korean missile launches. In December 2015, the government also created its counterterrorism unit to prepare for hosting the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

The third involves promoting information-sharing within the community and strengthening the IC's analytical capabilities. For example, the government has enhanced the CIRO's all-source analysis functions since April 2008.

The fourth involves the development of a counterintelligence system. For example, the government established a Counterintelligence Center at the CIRO in April 2008, which was responsible for planning, coordinating, and implementing government-wide CI policies. It is also noteworthy that in December 2013, the Japanese Diet passed its State Secret Protection Law drafted by the government. This new law made it possible for the Japanese government to introduce new systems to preserve secrecy and security clearances at a level similar to that of other major Western industrialized countries. These new systems have facilitated enhanced cooperation between Japan's IC and its primary foreign counterparts.

## **4. Examining Characteristics of Japan's Current IC and its Social and Historical Backgrounds**

### **4.1. Organizational Characteristics of Japan's Current IC<sup>18</sup>**

#### **4.1.1. Small Organizational Size and Weak Legal Authority for Activities**

As previously noted, the budgets and personnel sizes of each country's intelligence agencies are sometimes unclear. However, focusing on IC organizational structures and their authorities reveals apparent differences between Japan's IC and those of the other G7 countries and Australia.

The first is the lack of organizations responsible for several essential intelligence functions. Japan's IC does not have an agency exclusively dedicated to external Human intelligence (HUMINT) operations, equivalent to the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in the United States or the Secret Intelligence Service in the United Kingdom. Further, Japan's IC does not have an exclusively dedicated domestic intelligence agency equivalent to the United Kingdom's Security Service or Australian Security Intelligence Organization. Regarding domestic intelligence, the NPA and the PSIA perform this function as a mission secondary to their original mandate. As Table 2 indicates, this situation is unusual among G7 countries and Australia.

Second, the legal authorities granted to intelligence agencies for information-gathering are

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18 Kobayashi, 2020, pp. 154–155; Kobayashi, 2021, pp. 121–123.

weaker in Japan than in other G7 countries and Australian organizations (Kobayashi, 2019, pp. 147–148; The National Public Safety Committee and the National Police Agency, 2016, pp. 30–35). For example, the various legal rules that enable the concealment of identities, an essential element of HUMINT activities, are hardly accepted in Japan. Thus, even when the police — responsible for counterterrorism and counterintelligence — conduct undercover or “sting” operations, their activities are minimal. Signal-based intelligence authorities are also severely restricted in Japan. According to a survey by the NPA, the number of legal communications interceptions for investigative purposes in Japan during 2012 was less than one-hundredths that of the United Kingdom, and less than four-hundredths that of Australia (The National Public Safety Committee and the National Police Agency, 2014, p. 36). Additionally, an assessment of various countries’ cybersecurity capabilities published by the United Kingdom’s International Institute for Strategic Studies in June 2021 ranked Japan’s abilities at the lowest of three levels. The report also noted that the government’s authority to collect cyber intelligence is severely

**Table 2 International Comparison of IC Organizational Characteristics**

	Japan	Australia	Canada	France	Germany	U.K.	U.S.
Organizations dedicated to IC integration and Coordination	DCI CIRO	DGNI ONI	NSIA	×	×	JIC	DNI ODNI
Organizations dedicated to external HUMINT activities	×	ASIS	×	DGSE	BND	SIS	CIA
Organizations dedicated to domestic intelligence	×	ASIO	CSIS*	DGSI	BfV	SS	×
Parliamentary bodies dedicated to IC oversight	×	PJCIS	NSICOP**	DPR	PKGr	ISCP	Senate SCI HR PSCI

Source: The author prepared this table based on publicly available information.

\* This study considers Canada’s CSIS as a domestic intelligence agency given its historical background.

\*\* Canada’s NSICOP is not precisely a parliamentary organization, although it is composed of parliamentarians.

ASIS: Australian Secret Intelligence Service (Australia)

ASIO: Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (Australia)

BfV: Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (Germany)

BND: Bundesnachrichtendienst (Germany)

CIA: Central Intelligence Agency (U.S.)

CIRO: Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (Japan)

CSIS: Canadian Security Intelligence Service (Canada)

DCI: Director of Cabinet Intelligence (Japan)

DGNI: Director-General of National Intelligence (Australia)

DGSE: Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (France)

DGSI: Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure (France)

DNI: Director of National Intelligence (U.S.)

DPR: Délégation Parlementaire au Renseignement (France)

HR PSCI: House of Representatives, Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (U.S.)

ISCP: Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament (U.K.)

JIC: Joint Intelligence Committee (U.K.)

NSIA: National Security and Intelligence Advisor (Canada)

NSICOP: National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (Canada)

ODNI: Office of the Director of National Intelligence (U.S.)

ONI: Office of National Intelligence (Australia)

PJCIS: Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (Australia)

Senate SCI: Senate, Select Committee on Intelligence (U.S.)

PKGr: Parlamentarisches Kontrollgremium (Germany)

SIS: Secret Intelligence Service (U.K.)

SS: Security Service (U.K.)

restricted due to constitutional restrictions that emphasize the secrecy of communications (International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2021, pp. 79–88).

#### **4.1.2. Limited, Weak Authority Granted to the Organization Responsible for IC Integration and Coordination**

Japan's IC has traditionally suffered from a lack of cooperation and coordination among its member institutions. Samuels (2019) observed that this situation is due to the “stove-pipe” phenomenon common in Japanese administrative structures (Samuels, 2019, p. 241). As previously noted, Japan's CIRO and the DCI are responsible for IC integration and coordination. Since the IC's reform began in 2008, the CIRO and the DCI functions have been gradually recognized and strengthened. However, the legal authorities granted to the CIRO and DCI for conducting these tasks remain inadequate.

Some critics argue that the ODNI and the DNI in the United States have faced a similar problem with the “mission and authority gap” (Kobayashi, 2021, pp. 165–166). Nevertheless, the DNI is legally empowered to engage to a certain extent in IC member institutions' budgeting and personnel affairs to ensure the effectiveness of its integration and coordination function. On the contrary, Japan's DCI and the CIRO have no such legal authority over budgeting and personnel matters, and their situation seems more fragile than that of their American counterparts. Therefore, Japan's DCI must sometimes rely on political power based on its relationships with the Prime Minister and other high-level government officials to fulfill its integration and coordination function. While the United States' DNI has a cabinet-level status, Japan's DCI is only equivalent to an assistant chief cabinet secretary; thus, their use of political power is also limited<sup>19</sup>.

#### **4.1.3. Weak Democratic Control Systems Over the IC**

Western democracies commonly have organizations dedicated to the democratic oversight of ICs. These oversight bodies can take various forms, including congressional or parliamentary bodies and administrative bodies within the government. In recent years, legislatures (i.e., elected representatives) have trended toward greater oversight rather than administrative agencies. Edward Snowden's scandal in 2013 may have spurred this trend.

For example, the status of the United Kingdom's Intelligence and Security Committee, which is responsible for IC oversight, was previously ambiguous. However, 2013 reforms have positioned the organization as a parliamentary IC oversight body. In Canada, in addition to the Security Intelligence Review Committee (SIRC), which was an independent administrative IC oversight body, the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians (NSICOP) was established in 2018 as another IC oversight body. The NSICOP is not precisely a parliamentary entity. Still, its members are parliamentarians, so its association with the parliament may be more profound than the SIRC and the National Security and Intelligence Review Agency (NSIRA), which was a newly established administrative IC oversight body replacing the SIRC in 2019.

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19 Juneau and Carvin (2021) noted the weak authorities and low status of Canada's National Security and Intelligence Advisor (NSIA), which is found within the Privy Council and performs similar functions (Juneau & Carvin, 2021, pp. 13–19). It is noteworthy, however, that Canada's NSIA differs somewhat from Japan's DCI and the United States' DNI, in that the NSIA handles both intelligence and policy matters.

Despite this global trend, Japan is the only country in the G7 and Australia without an exclusively dedicated body, whether parliamentary or administrative, responsible for democratic oversight of the IC (Table 2). As a bureau within its respective “parent organization,” each member organization in Japan’s IC is subject only to the same level of administrative and parliamentary oversight as other non-intelligence bureaus. Such ordinary oversight lacks expertise in intelligence affairs and has no access to confidential IC information. Thus, it is highly likely that their effectiveness is limited. It is also noteworthy that in 2014, both chambers of Japan’s Diet created the Board of Oversight and Review of Specially Designated Secrets (BOR). Initially, there were some expectations that the BOR could play a role similar to that of a parliamentary body dedicated to IC oversight in other countries. However, in reality, the BOR’s primary function is to oversee the government’s implementation of the State Secret Law, and it does not have a mandate for comprehensive IC oversight. Judging from its operational history from its creation to the present, the BOR is not comparable to parliamentary bodies in other countries dedicated to IC oversight (Kobayashi, 2022).

## **4.2. Social and Political Backgrounds**

Japan’s IC characteristics as previously described may reflect the country’s unique postwar social and political backgrounds. The following section elaborates on these backgrounds.

### **4.2.1. Lack of Opportunities for National Security Decision-Making**

For a long time in the postwar period, leadership in the Japanese government had few opportunities to make crucial national security decisions independently. This may have contributed to the Japanese IC’s first and second characteristics, as previously mentioned.

An essential function of intelligence is to assist policymakers in their national security decisions. If few opportunities exist for the highest leaders to make decisions, political and social momentum cannot be built toward developing vital intelligence functions. Moreover, under such circumstances, policymakers tend to be unable to inform the IC of their precise intelligence requirements. This situation also might discourage effective IC integration (Kaneko, 2011, p. 332).

The Japanese government’s lack of opportunity for proactive national security decision-making may pertain to Japan’s unique postwar history. After World War II, the occupying forces dismantled or weakened most of Japan’s prewar national security functions, including its military and intelligence agencies. For example, under the constraints of the current Constitution, which renounces war, Japan’s postwar defense spending has remained roughly within one percent of its GDP. This number is considerably lower than those from other G7 countries and Australia. World Bank data indicates that the average figures for each country from 1960 to 2020 are as follows:<sup>20</sup> Australia, 2.2%; Canada, 1.8%; Germany, 2.3%; France, 2.9%; the United Kingdom, 4.0%; Italy, 1.9%; Japan, 0.9%; and the United States, 5.4%<sup>21</sup>.

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20 World Bank, “World Bank Open Data”, [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?most\\_recent\\_value\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true).

21 It should be noted that at the end of 2022, the Kishida administration decided to increase Japan’s defense spending to 2% of GDP by FY2027. However, a full-fledged study of the necessary financial resources remains a challenge.



Consequently, Japan has depended on the United States for many of its national security functions. In particular, when Japan needed to make crucial decisions related to national security, the United States made substantive decisions on Japan's behalf. Moreover, the United States and its allies have met much of Japan's foreign intelligence needs (Samuels, 2019, p. 246; Kaneko, 2011, 308).

#### 4.2.2. Public Concerns About the State's Authority

Second, public concern exists regarding state authorities' potential human rights violations, especially within their intelligence and security apparatuses. As will be discussed, opinion surveys indicate that these feelings have deeply permeated postwar Japanese society. These societal concerns may also impede the government's ability to significantly strengthen its intelligence function, such as creating new intelligence agencies or granting them strong intelligence-gathering powers. This phenomenon has contributed to the Japanese IC's first and second characteristics, as previously mentioned.

The data from the World Value Survey, which has compared various international public opinion polls for many years, demonstrates that the public's tolerance of "intervention by a state power" is significantly lower in Japan than in Western industrialized countries (Table 3). The survey data also indicates that public trust in the police (the leading member of the IC) is lower in Japan than in these other countries (Table 4). It is compelling that Japan has faced relatively lower public trust in the police, although its overall postwar security and safety situation is better than in other Western industrialized countries. This general wariness of the authorities may be partially due to historical wartime experiences. Before and during World War II, the Special Higher Police and military police suppressed anti-government and anti-war speeches and activities in Japan. It is possible that postwar Japanese society has not entirely forgotten these negative historical experiences (Samuels, 2019, p. 80; Kaneko, 2011, p. 330).

**Table 3 International Comparison of Public Concerns about the State's Authority**

Question:

Here is a list of various changes in our way of life that might occur in the near future. Please tell us, for each one, if ["a greater respect for authority"] were to happen, would you think it would be a good thing, a bad thing, or would you be indifferent? (The author calculated the average score for each country for each survey period, with "good" receiving two points, "indifferent" receiving one point, and "bad" receiving zero points.)

	1981- 1984	1989- 1993	1994- 1998	1999- 2004	2005- 2009	2010- 2014	2017- 2022	Average
<b>Australia</b>	1.59	n/a	1.64	n/a	1.51	1.53	1.43	<b>1.54</b>
<b>Canada</b>	1.68	1.42	n/a	1.57	1.57	n/a	1.31	<b>1.51</b>
<b>France</b>	1.35	1.29	n/a	1.53	1.74	n/a	1.66	<b>1.51</b>
<b>Germany</b>	1.10	0.94	0.79	1.07	1.18	1.41	1.21	<b>1.10</b>
<b>Italy</b>	1.56	1.35	n/a	1.35	1.43	n/a	1.49	<b>1.44</b>
<b>Japan</b>	0.25	0.27	0.94	0.25	0.20	0.27	0.21	<b>0.34</b>
<b>U.K.</b>	1.67	1.62	1.68	1.57	1.68	n/a	1.58	<b>1.63</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	1.78	1.61	1.72	1.63	1.49	1.46	1.48	<b>1.60</b>

Source: The author prepared this table based on publicly available information provided by the World Value Survey<sup>22</sup>.

22 World Value Survey <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

**Table 4 International Comparison of Public Trust in the Police**

Question:

I am going to name several [police] organizations. For each, could you tell me your confidence in them? Is it “highly confident,” “quite confident,” “not very confident,” or “none at all”? (The author calculated the average score for each country for each survey period, with “highly” receiving three points, “quite” receiving two points, “not very” receiving one point, and “none at all” receiving zero points.)

	1981– 1984	1989– 1993	1994– 1998	1999– 2004	2005– 2009	2010– 2014	2017– 2022	Average
<b>Australia</b>	2.04	n/a	1.88	n/a	2.03	2.08	2.04	<b>2.01</b>
<b>Canada</b>	2.09	2.05	n/a	1.99	1.99	n/a	1.80	<b>1.98</b>
<b>France</b>	1.61	1.62	n/a	1.68	1.79	n/a	1.91	<b>1.72</b>
<b>Germany</b>	1.83	1.70	1.62	1.78	1.80	1.98	2.02	<b>1.82</b>
<b>Italy</b>	1.78	1.72	n/a	1.73	1.85	n/a	1.99	<b>1.81</b>
<b>Japan</b>	1.72	1.63	1.84	1.41	1.66	1.69	1.90	<b>1.69</b>
<b>U.K.</b>	2.21	1.97	n/a	1.77	1.81	n/a	1.96	<b>1.94</b>
<b>U.S.</b>	1.98	1.91	1.77	1.83	1.77	1.76	1.81	<b>1.83</b>

Source: The author prepared this table based on publicly available information provided by the World Value Survey<sup>23</sup>.

These trends in Japanese society have also affected the actual political climate. For example, one remarkable event for Japan's postwar IC was the sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system on March 20, 1995. In this terrorist attack, the Aum Shinrikyo religious cult used sarin gas, a weapon of mass destruction, to attack the subway network in central Tokyo. The damage was severe: the attack killed 14 people and injured more than 6,000. The failure to prevent this attack is perhaps one of the most severe “intelligence failures” in postwar Japan. One innate factor is that despite several prior suspicions, IC officials and policymakers at the time were cautious in their proactive intelligence activities against the Aum cult due to the freedom of religion guaranteed by Japan's Constitution (Samuels, 2019, p. 144). The aftermath of the attack was even more striking. Despite the attack, the Aum cult escaped forced dissolution, and public opinion did not call for a significant empowerment or fundamental overhaul of the IC. These episodes demonstrate the intense societal wariness against state authorities at the time.

These social and political trends also affected the legislative process for bills important to national security and public safety. When Japan's National Diet debated the 2013 State Secrets Bill, a key instrument for counterintelligence, the government faced unprecedented public opposition. Although the Diet eventually passed the bill, the administration consumed significant political resources to address the public's resistance during the legislative process (Samuels, 2019, p. 207). Concerning the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime, an essential framework for countering international terrorism, the Japanese government prepared to join the Convention immediately after the UN General Assembly adopted it in December 2000. Creating a new domestic law to punish preparatory acts for terrorism was indispensable to joining the Convention; however, public criticism arose that the bill was a de-facto anti-conspiracy bill with a high possibility of human rights violations. It was not until August 2017, after long parliamentary debates, that Japan finally joined the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime following the bill's passage in the Diet. Ultimately, more than 15 years passed to achieve this goal.

23 World Value Survey <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

It is noteworthy that such public concern about state authorities may inherently promote democratic control over the IC. However, and as previously stated, Japan's current democratic intelligence oversight system in reality is lagging. This seemingly contradictory phenomenon may be due to the relatively small size and weak authority of Japan's current IC. In other words, since Japan's current intelligence function is more inactive than that in other countries, intelligence oversight has not attracted public attention as a significant political issue. Such oversight has remained intact (Kaneko, 2011, p.332). For example, expanding intelligence activities uncovered various scandals in the United States in the 1970s and the United Kingdom in the 2010s. Consequently, this triggered political momentum to strengthen the democratic intelligence oversight system. Japan's intelligence function may remain too inactive to reach such a level.

### 4.3. Examining Proposed IC Reforms

This final subsection briefly discusses the direction of practical reforms in Japan's IC, based on the discussion thus far. Shigeru Kitamura, who served as the DCI, head of Japan's IC, from December 2011 to September 2019, offered a personal proposal for the future direction of IC reform in his post-retirement memoir. He served as the DCI for the most extended period (about eight years) in postwar Japanese history. After retiring from the DCI, he also served for nearly two years as the Director of the NSS, the IC's main counterpart in the policy sector. Given his career and extensive practical experience, his views on IC reform deserve careful examination. The following is a summary of his IC reform plan (Kitamura, 2021, pp. 14-40):

- (1) Enhance further IC integration and coordination under the leadership of cabinet bodies.
  - Establish a new agency in the Cabinet (or Cabinet Secretariat) in charge of the IC integration, or reorganize and strengthen the existing CIRO's functions and authorities.
  - Ensure the separation of policy and intelligence.
  - Strengthen the authority of the head of the IC (e.g., the head of the new Cabinet's intelligence agency or the existing DCI) to integrate the community and their access to information held by each IC member institution.
- (2) Enhance intelligence-collection capabilities, and primarily the external HUMINT function.
  - Expand the functions of the existing counterterrorism unit (CTUJ).
- (3) Develop and enhance a comprehensive human resource-development system to address the entire IC's interests.
- (4) Develop and enhance a democratic control system over the IC.
  - Create a new cabinet-minister-level post (or assistant to the prime minister) in charge of intelligence affairs held by a Diet member.
  - Reorganize the mandate of the existing CIC. Specifically, institutionalize the Council's regular policy evaluation toward the IC and its report to the Diet.

Kitamura's proposal reflects well on the three organizational characteristics of Japanese ICs previously mentioned. The first proposed point corresponds to the second characteristic (limited, weak authority has been granted to the organization responsible for IC integration and coordination). The second and third proposed points address the first feature (small organizational size and weak legal authority in conducting activities). The fourth proposal

corresponds to the third feature (weak democratic control systems over the IC).

Simultaneously, it is noteworthy that Kitamura's recommendations are not necessarily drastic. For example, while Kitamura points to the current IC's inadequate intelligence-gathering capabilities, his recommendations do not go so far as to create a new dedicated external HUMINT agency (a purported "Japanese CIA") or a dedicated domestic intelligence agency (a "Japanese MI5"). Moreover, while Kitamura observes the poor democratic control over the IC, his recommendations do not involve creating new parliamentary IC oversight. Although Kitamura's true intentions are unclear, it is possible that he recognized that drastic reform could be unfeasible unless the social and political circumstances behind the current IC structure change significantly.

## 5. Conclusion

This study aimed to identify the unique organizational features of Japan's current intelligence community and examine its social and political backgrounds. This study also attempted to compare institutional and social conditions between Japan and other G7 countries and Australia to examine these issues based on the analytical framework presented by De Graaff, with the following conclusions.

The first conclusion concerns the unique organizational features of Japan's current IC. This study revealed that Japan's current IC system and organizational structure are similar in many respects (albeit on a smaller scale) to the intelligence system in the United States for the following reasons: (1) the IC's most important mission is to assist policymakers in implementing national security decisions; (2) a civilian intelligence organization (CIRO), which reports directly to the Prime Minister's office, is responsible for integrating and coordinating the IC; and (3) key members of the IC include both civilian and military intelligence agencies.

However, this study simultaneously argued that, in comparison with other G7 countries and Australia, Japan's current IC has the following three organizational characteristics: (1) small organizational size and weak legal authority to conduct activities; (2) limited and weak authorities granted to the organization responsible for IC integration and coordination; and (3) weak democratic control systems over the IC.

The second conclusion concerns the social and political backgrounds behind Japan's current IC organizational characteristics. This study noted two factors behind the IC's organizational features: (1) a lack of opportunities for national security decision-making, and (2) public concern about state authority. These factors could relate to Japan's contemporary history, namely, its defeat in World War II and its strong dependence on the United States for national security in the postwar period.

Academic and logical considerations suggest the need to improve these IC characteristics (i.e., weaknesses) for Japan to respond adequately to changes in the national security environment. However, for this to happen, the innate social and political factors must first change to some extent. As these factors appear to have firm roots in contemporary postwar Japanese society, it is unclear whether they can change quickly. Exploring these points is beyond the scope of this study and remains an issue for the future.

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