
Transformation of the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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Junichiro Koizumi's final term as president of Japan's Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and thus his stint as the country's prime minister, ended in September 2006. Koizumi was Japan's third-longest serving post-war prime minister (nearly five and a half years), and had the longest tenure since Eisaku Sato in 1972. The fact that Koizumi's long run immediately followed a particularly unstable period in Japan's political history (10 different prime ministers in thirteen and a half years) underscores his own accomplishments, as well as the importance many place on the choice of his relatively young successor, Shinzo Abe.¹ Not surprisingly, this change of leadership has prompted intense scrutiny of Japan's future security policy in the wake of significant strategic challenges—most notably North Korea's October 2006 nuclear weapon test and its ballistic missile tests three months earlier.

The focus on the milestone of the Koizumi-to-Abe transition also obscures the reality that Japan's regional and global strategic perspectives have been steadily (though unevenly) evolving for many years and for a variety of reasons and that this is not just a post-Koizumi phenomenon or a response to recent events. This evolution of strategic perspective (and the contentious domestic debates surrounding it) is perhaps most clearly evident in Japan's changing approach to managing its security alliance with the United States and the accompanying political, legal, and budgetary machinations involved therein. In short, Japan has placed a primacy on this bilateral alliance at the expense of other foreign policy initiatives and is allowing the alliance to expand internationally. Still, Tokyo's motivations for doing so are rooted in a preoccupation with regional security concerns,

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which has led it to resist Washington's efforts to lobby for a wider international role for the Japanese military. This paradox, coupled with a lack of consensus among Japan's ruling elite regarding their overall security strategy and vision for the alliance, will test the bilateral relationship as it tries to adapt to today's challenges. It is worthwhile, therefore, to take a closer look at how alliance managers are trying to reshape the security relationship and, in particular, to better understand what Japanese policymakers think about these changes. This can help U.S. officials guide the transformation of the alliance in a more productive direction during this time of political transition.

THE STAKES OF U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION

The U.S.-Japan alliance is the cornerstone of America's security strategy in the Asia-Pacific area. Japan hosts the largest contingent of U.S. forces in Asia, including the region's only base for a Marine Expeditionary Force and the only forward-deployed U.S. aircraft carrier, together with many

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..... other assets that are regularly deployed for training and operations in Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, various parts of Central Asia, and elsewhere. Japan has often been flexible in accommodating America's use of its Japan-based military assets for operations within and outside the region. In addition, Japan pays for three-quarters of the total cost of stationing U.S. forces there (and over 50 percent of the total sum that twenty-six host nation allies contribute to the maintenance of U.S. forces overseas).²

Moreover, the strategic importance of the U.S.-Japan security relationship is growing for several reasons. First and foremost, rising Chinese naval power will increasingly complicate America's plans to protect Taiwan's political and economic space from possible intimidation and aggression (and thereby require more direct assistance from Japan to help dissuade and deter Beijing). Taiwan's protection is a critically important, shared strategic interest of the allies, particularly as it pertains to sea-lane protection. Other factors include a relative weakening of U.S.-South Korea military ties; the greater role that Asia plays in world trade, financial, and energy markets; the ongoing nuclear weapons and long-range missile programs of North Korea; Japan's robust participation in ballistic missile defense (BMD) development; and Japan's stated objective of playing a more proactive role in

a wider variety of international missions (mostly related to humanitarian assistance) that involve military forces.

All of these issues were on the table when, in late 2004, the United States and Japan began a formal dialogue on transforming the alliance to meet common strategic objectives. The ambitious results of this process were outlined in late October 2005 and finalized in May 2006.³ Among the key transformation initiatives are: 1) advancing bilateral contingency planning; 2) improving interoperability and intelligence/information sharing; 3) shared use of facilities by U.S. forces and Japan's Self Defense Forces (SDF), including co-location of air command and control; 4) coordinating improvements in their respective BMD capabilities; and 5) force posture realignment, including the replacement of the Marine air base at Futenma (in Okinawa) and the relocation of a carrier air wing from Atsugi Air Facility to Iwakuni Air Station, among other adjustments.

In addition, Japan aims to improve its ability to work with the United States throughout the region and further abroad for such missions as counter-proliferation, counter-terrorism, maritime interdiction, humanitarian relief, reconstruction assistance, and peacekeeping. Under Koizumi, Japan already demonstrated a willingness to move in this direction in Iraq, in support of the allied operation in Afghanistan, and through participation in a multilateral counter-proliferation initiative.

Though the alliance transformation initiatives are more evolutionary than revolutionary, they nonetheless represent some of the most potentially significant adjustments to their relationship since the two countries revised the U.S.-Japan security treaty in 1960. If guided effectively, alliance transformation can cross important operational, situational, and psychological thresholds in the next few years that, if combined with concomitant Japanese legal reforms, will allow the alliance to function in ways more similar to today's U.S.-NATO or U.S.-Australia style of cooperation. This is the ostensible goal of alliance managers on both sides of the Pacific.

There is a distinct lack of clarity, however, with regard to how security roles should be divided and capabilities developed, which is primarily the result of subtle but important differences in strategic priorities (between the allies and within Japan) and some key perception gaps that need to be bridged. Put simply, America considers itself a nation at war while Japan does not.⁴ Recent bilateral security documents mention both "new threats"—i.e., Islamic extremism, terrorism, and proliferation of weapons of mass destruc-

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tion (WMD)—and regional “persistent threats”—i.e., North Korea, the China-Taiwan dilemma, and China itself. The United States gives priority to the former while Japan dwells more on the latter. In addition, the bilateral dialogue that was designed to clarify roles and missions has been routinely diverted by lengthy negotiations over logistical, political, and financial issues.

If priorities in Washington and Tokyo are not better understood and aligned, the alliance risks being transformed into a collection of military capabilities held together loosely by platitudes and vague notions of common purpose, able to mobilize under only the most clearly threatening circumstances and sub-optimally prepared even then. It could also lead to disillusionment in the U.S. defense community if current expectations are not met in either the short or long term. This would be a great tragedy given the strategic importance of alliance transformation to both countries, and it could leave U.S. officials with fewer options when preparing for a wide range of security-related contingencies.

BILATERAL DIALOGUE AS A BASIS FOR ALLIANCE TRANSFORMATION

Throughout its nearly 55-year history, the U.S.-Japan alliance has consistently evolved, often incrementally, but also through periods of intense bilateral negotiation seeking more significant (and sometimes controversial) adjustments to burden-sharing arrangements that aim to maximize Japanese security contributions. It began with a revision of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in 1960, followed by the development of bilateral Guidelines for Defense Cooperation (Defense Guidelines) in the 1970s, a revision of the Defense Guidelines in the 1990s, and today's experience of so-called alliance transformation. The pattern of alliance evolution has taken the shape of steps in a staircase, steadily leading upward to a vaguely understood destination.

Generally speaking, the result of each flurry of dialogue often failed to meet the initial optimistic expectations of U.S. policymakers. This was certainly true after the 1990s episode, as the ink had barely dried on Japanese implementing legislation, when incoming U.S. officials emphasized that “The Defense Guidelines are the floor, not the ceiling, for determining U.S. and Japanese roles and missions.”⁵ In 2004, expectations were even higher. The United States was in the process of transforming and repositioning its forces around the world, which coincided with Japan's development of a new blueprint for its defense infrastructure, the “National Defense Program Guideline (NDPG), FY 2005.”

In the fall of 2004, defense and foreign ministry officials from both countries began a focused, strategic dialogue to discuss in detail how the alliance was going to adapt to the changes taking place within each country and around the region. The allies planned to develop and articulate a set of common strategic objectives, from which they could then discuss the appropriate delegation of roles and missions for their forces, followed by a conversation about the operational requirements in support of those missions. It was a logical and well-intentioned approach, and at least a few U.S. officials expressed hope that the consultations could be completed within six months to one year. What fed this optimism? Among the bureaucrats and policy specialists involved in the process, there seemed to be as much (if not more) interest in Tokyo as there was in Washington about taking advantage of this opportunity and making needed adjustments to the alliance.

At the start, the overall direction of alliance transformation was generally well understood, thanks to past negotiations and the many joint studies and dialogues conducted over the last several years. The so-called "Armitage report" in 2000, for example, called for the relationship to evolve from "burden-sharing" into "power-sharing."⁶ Former White House advisor Michael Green has talked about confronting (and reducing) the "separateness" that was built into the original alliance, and former Japan Defense Chief Ishiba Shigeru has described the need to go beyond a "Far East-only alliance" and cooperate at a "global strategic level."⁷ There are many other examples in both countries that have helped to develop support for closer security cooperation and an expansion of the alliance's geographic and situational applicability (while still respecting Japanese constitutional boundaries, which prohibit Japan from using military force to resolve disputes or to maintain purely offensive military capabilities).⁸

More specifically, diplomats and defense planners from both countries saw opportunities to increase the SDF's legal and physical ability to carry out a wider range of regional and international non-combat missions (e.g., mine-sweeping, search and rescue, supply and logistics, and peacekeeping) for the purposes of promoting not only Japan's security, but also broader economic and political stability, human rights protections, and democratic development. In addition, it was believed that closer bilateral planning, command, and operational relationships were needed to enhance effectiveness and to elevate Japan's role to that of a more equal or "normal" security partner. Based on this broad understanding, the strategic dialogue proceeded relatively smoothly (though slowly) at first, culminating in the announcement of a set of common strategic objectives at a high-level bilateral meeting on February 19, 2005.⁹

The apparent initial success of the strategic dialogue led many U.S. officials to believe that this round of talks was a new beginning for a more equal security relationship and that Japan was looking to become a partner in a wider range of non-offensive military activities. The dialogue moved forward to discuss roles and missions, but that conversation revealed a number of underlying misperceptions, mostly caused by an unresolved debate in Japan that would make it difficult to achieve quickly the promise of the strategic dialogue. The strong desire by the U.S. side to move quickly made it difficult to reconcile these differences before the framework for transformation was outlined.

DIFFERENT PRIORITIES IN JAPAN UNDERCUT THE PROCESS

From an American perspective, the most significant change from the mid-1990s to today is the fact that America and its allies are in the midst of a multi-front war against terrorist groups and the states that harbor them. Despite the controversial war in Iraq, overall the democratic and free-market nations of the world have been united in their battle against terrorist networks and the conditions that allow them to operate, not only in the Middle East, but also in the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, and other parts of Asia (a struggle now often referred to in the United States as the “Long War”).

Japan has been a partner in this effort, recognizing that its own national interests are involved, and U.S. officials have taken note. Judging from Japan’s contributions in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan, the reconstruction effort in Iraq, and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), among other contributions, U.S. officials had high expectations that this round of bilateral consultations would result in an even more sophisticated and integrated security relationship. After all, Japan stated in its NDPG that “the peace and stability of Japan is inextricably linked to that of the international community,” and that “Japan will, on its own initiative, actively participate in international peace cooperation activities.”

But here was a good example of how misunderstandings can lead to inconsistent expectations. Many U.S. officials understood these remarks to mean that Japan might not always require a UN mandate to join other nations in helping struggling democracies like Afghanistan or to help stop piracy or illicit trade (i.e., Japan as a more flexible and willing partner of the United States). Many Japanese, however, thought this phraseology demonstrated their country’s independence from the United States by underscoring the concept of self-determination.¹⁰ Moreover, these American views did not take full account of the various domestic political factions

within Japan that shape and constrain its foreign-policy decision-making.

As one Japan-side negotiator described it, "There are at least five different factions in Japan that must be navigated when deciding what can be worked out [with the United States] and how to craft an implementation strategy."¹¹ These include a *capability-oriented faction* drawn largely from the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) and the military services, in addition to some elements from the Diet (Japan's legislature) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), who support transformation and favor bold changes. Internal divisions regarding priorities and how the service branches will benefit exist, however, within this faction. Next, there is a *U.S.-oriented faction*, which also draws from MOFA and the Diet. Its members are generally supportive because they place high value on the alliance overall, though many favor only minor changes (i.e., enough to satisfy the Americans but not to change drastically Japan's foreign policy). In addition, different groups place emphasis on at least three other aspects of the issue such as *legal and constitutional restrictions*, *logistical and budgetary challenges*, and the *political/public opinion dynamics* associated with transformation and realignment.

Identification with one or more of these factions depends upon several factors (e.g., political and professional affiliation, ideological bent, etc.) and they are by no means mutually exclusive. Then-Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda Yasuo probably considered himself aligned with the U.S.-oriented faction, but he also believed in limits and was sensitive to public opinion and political realities. After hearing the report of America's ambitious timetable in mid-2004 for top-level political endorsement of the proposed transformation objectives, Fukuda reportedly burst out of his office to say, "We sent our troops to Iraq and introduced BMD to meet U.S. wishes. What more do they want? All Washington wants is to trouble its ally like this? People would think the Koizumi administration does nothing but security."¹²

But many in Washington underestimated this divisiveness and felt that they were getting mixed signals. They thought that Japan would be more enthusiastic about addressing global instability—because of Japan's strategic and economic vulnerability, the growing might of China, or both. After hearing from top Japanese officials in August 2004 about likely delays in Japan's response to U.S. transformation proposals, then-Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage reportedly told his visitors, "I'm surprised about this bilateral perception gap regarding the realignment issue. Despite the smooth implementation of the alliance embodied in the SDF dispatch to Iraq and the refueling operation in the Arabian Sea, why is it

that realignment can't make progress?" He then rattled off reasons why alliance cooperation should be a high priority for Japan, emphasizing its dependence on imported oil, food, and other goods, and how the alliance was so important to both countries. "We've got to stop digging this hole," he added.¹³

When the bilateral talks turned from strategic objectives after February 2005 to roles and missions, the cleavages among the policy elite in Japan became more visible to U.S. negotiators. Some Japanese did see the chance for a new beginning, but others saw it as a way to finally conclude the agreements made a decade earlier, particularly with respect to the relocation of Marines at Futenma. They understood the American hype about military transformation as a way to close or consolidate U.S. bases in Japan while still feeling protected by America's long-range strike capabilities based in Guam, Hawaii, or the U.S. mainland.

The lack of clarity and sense of purpose was all the more evident when operational arrangements were discussed, because certain adjustments require difficult political decisions to be made in Tokyo (and in the communities that host U.S.-run military facilities). U.S. officials were ready to press ahead with the development of a common operational picture for their forces and to begin bilateral contingency planning to elucidate their respective roles in missions involving North Korea, the Taiwan Strait, and Southeast Asia. Instead, the political, logistical, and financial aspects of U.S. force posture adjustments dominated the conversation. The allies worked on over one dozen detailed implementation agreements for realignment components (e.g., fielding of BMD radar, relocation of the Futenma facility, and land returns) *before* they actually figured out what equipment would be required for certain tasks. As one Japanese naval officer complained, "95 percent of the talk should be about roles and missions, but they've hardly done any of that."¹⁴ One can understand why this was the case, but it was not supposed to happen this time around.

Defense analyst Paul Giarra warned about this problem back in 2001: "Our alliance management heritage has become one of individuals or events forcing the resolution of individual issues and incremental progress...[but] this approach...is no longer sufficient during a period of significant strategic, military, and political transformation in the region and within the alliance." He added, "This so-called normalization of the alliance and transfer of responsibilities within the alliance *as an end in itself*, in the long run, will undercut and destabilize the alliance rather than shore it up."¹⁵ Unfortunately, this is where the talks were drifting. Still, the October 2005 document contained some important achievements.

THE OCTOBER 2005 AGREEMENT AND THE ENTANGLEMENT-ABANDONMENT DILEMMA

It was interesting to see how various scholars and officials in Japan highlighted different parts of the October 2005 agreement as the most important. One capability faction member said, "The most exciting element of the statement is the enhancement of joint planning at first, and later the co-location of bases and commanders."¹⁶ A defense scholar agreed that the October document was groundbreaking in those areas: "Japan has made a lot of promises [in the areas of joint planning and operations], and it is a distinct departure from the past. I wonder if Japan's policymakers know what they are doing."¹⁷ But others downplayed the significance of those components and emphasized instead the planned transfer of Marines to Guam or opportunities for joint training that would help Japan to develop its own amphibious assault capability and other skills. For some, the agreement was a sign of growing security *interdependence*, but for others it was a sign of Japanese *independence*.

Ten years ago, it was clear to most Japanese policymakers that their country's relationship to U.S. forces in the region was largely vertical and almost sub-contractual (e.g., "rear area support" such as refueling U.S. ships at sea for regional operations). But many in the United States and some in Japan today are interested in developing a more horizontal or partner-type relationship, as long as Japan's activities remain within the bounds of its constitution. They would like to see closer command relationships between the two militaries and a greater degree of joint planning for non-combat operations. They would like to train together more regularly, share certain facilities, and enhance interoperability. All of these transformations can result in a slightly smaller U.S. footprint in Japan, but the reduced U.S. presence is not the purpose for these enhancements; it is merely one outcome. These are not painless solutions for Japan, moreover, and they would mean more responsibility, larger investment requirements, difficult political judgments, and a potential for backlash from terrorist networks, rogue states, and wary neighbors.

The lack of consensus in Japan regarding the U.S.-Japan strategic dialogue and the alliance transformation talks reflects some fundamental differences within Japan's policy elite on the questions of long-term threat perceptions, prudent strategic planning, and foreign policy priorities, as well as the extent to which these mesh with U.S. priorities. The United States is looking for Japan to become a more capable and reliable partner in the Long War. Washington could also use Japan's help to augment its pres-

ence in Asia to keep pace with China's military modernization, specifically to enhance deterrence vis-à-vis the China-Taiwan problem, and to compensate for some retrenchment on the Korean Peninsula. Some in Japan are happy to oblige, but the motivations are mixed, with important implications for U.S. defense planners. Others in Japan are less anxious to stray far from the status quo, which could frustrate U.S. goals and undermine the effectiveness of current U.S. planning for regional adjustments.

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Officials in Washington have their strongest allies in Japan where the capabilities faction and the U.S.-oriented faction overlap. This group fought hard to support Operation Enduring Freedom in the Indian Ocean (and to continue to extend that mission), as well as for the dispatch of SDF person-

nel to Iraq. They embrace the expansion of geographic and situational applicability of the alliance because they readily agree that global stability has a direct, positive impact on Japan's national security, and they recognize Japan's responsibility in this area.¹⁸ This is also the group that would have been comfortable responding to a very quiet American suggestion in the summer of 2006 that Japan provide airlift support to Indonesian troops committed to help stabilize southern Lebanon after Israel's push against Hezbollah militia forces. On this issue, however, those concerned with legal or political and public opinion dynamics held greater sway, and Japan did not pursue the mission.

As Professor Watanabe Akio has pointed out, extra effort is needed to explain how the Long War is an international war that requires a large group of willing and capable participants. "To the extent that the United States tends to explain the Afghan and Iraqi wars as *American* wars," he said, "Japanese leaders will find it harder to justify contributions of the SDF before domestic opinion."¹⁹ In this way, those in Japan who advocate an "internationalist" security policy that aligns closely with the United States are, at times, limited by public perceptions of how judiciously America wields its military might around the world. The process of alliance transformation must remain cognizant of the fact that capabilities cannot be divorced from circumstances or the political decisions to engage in certain missions.

Other capabilities-oriented faction members appear less concerned with global activities than they are with regional developments, primarily as they relate to North Korea and China. There is thus some ongoing reconsideration in Japanese defense circles of the more internationalist ele-

ments of the NDPG. The potential threat to Japan stemming from those two countries, for example, are front and center in all of Japan's recent security policy documents, including the JDA's 2005 defense white paper and other reports put forward by the LDP's Policy Research Council, the Prime Minister's Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, and the National Institute for Defense Studies.²⁰ Consequently, some in the Diet have prioritized developing Japanese capabilities in this context.

As Diet member and defense specialist Nagashima Akihisa of the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has written, "In... a Taiwan emergency, we cannot say China is unlikely to land its troops on the Sakishima Islands... which are dotted between Okinawa and Taiwan. It would be necessary to take measures... to compensate for [U.S.] troop cuts."²¹ An LDP study group on these issues made similar recommendations, including the expansion of Japan's own ability to thwart Chinese incursions into Japan's exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and defending Japan's claims over disputed islets and maritime interests.²²

There is also division within the capabilities-oriented faction regarding how much faith to place in the long-term durability of the U.S.-Japan alliance and the congruence of national interests. It is rare to see such questioning of America's commitment in public (it is more readily offered in private), and it coincides with a rising sense of nationalism in sections of Japanese society, mirroring a similar rise in Korea and China. "China is working to develop its own sphere of influence," explained one Japanese defense planner, "creeping to the Indian Ocean and avoiding a chokepoint [at the Strait of Malacca] by developing a[n oil and natural gas] pipeline through Myanmar [from the port of Sittwe]. Is Washington too distracted in the Middle East to pay attention to China?"²³ Similar comments have been made with regard to China's moves to develop rail links and a port agreement with North Korea in the northeastern part of North Korea, along the Japan (East) Sea Coast.

An exchange at a private, bilateral workshop also illustrated this abandonment fear. One Japanese participant argued that Japan could be decoupled from the alliance if it doubted American credibility during a crisis involving China, for example. An American participant admitted, "There could be a possibility that the United States will lack the will and the desire to engage militarily in Asia, given what we have to go through during the next five years [in the Middle East]. I do not believe that the United States will abandon Japan, but there is the possibility that the United States will be ambivalent in responding to [certain] scenarios. We may view them as Asian problems."²⁴

For some Japanese, there is a fear that Washington might be too soft on China, placing greater weight on its bilateral trade relationship or perceiving the need for China's support at the UN on key global security issues, perhaps at the expense of Japan's concerns. Others fear the opposite, that Washington might be too confrontational with China. "Japan cannot afford a hostile China, but the United States can tolerate that for a while," said one senior military officer. Another added, "Washington does not have one view of China. We have to be prepared."²⁵

The key point is that these classic alliance fears of entanglement and abandonment, which have existed to one degree or another for decades, persist poignantly in Japan. These fears are not abstract. They are perceptions held by people in positions of power in Japan who are influencing decisions about the future of the alliance. How they view the issues of entanglement and abandonment ultimately trickles down to specific decisions about which missions to join or what independent capabilities to develop. U.S. officials will not necessarily be able to allay all of these fears or sign Japan up for its own preferred list of priorities. There should, however, be opportunities to better identify and align priorities and to optimize this process of transformation. If anything, budget realities in Japan will demand this.

CONNECTING STRATEGIC VISION TO OPERATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING

The key danger for the alliance today is that it is forging ahead, making important decisions and investments pertaining to detailed roles, missions, and operational issues without a clear agreement on strategic priorities and political or budgetary practicality. For example, in 2006, Japanese Ground SDF troops trained with U.S. Marines in California to learn amphibious assault techniques for the first time. Additionally, Japan is planning to deploy its own unmanned reconnaissance aircraft along with two new spy satellites in 2007, significantly improving its intelligence gathering (and sharing) capacity. Japan has also set 2007 as its target year for missile defense deployment and the linking of American and Japanese missile defense information networks. How interconnected and interdependent should these capabilities be? There are other capability goals as well, such as those related to international activities similar to support for Operation Enduring Freedom or to PSI (which could prove particularly important as the allies work out ways to enforce sanctions on North Korea following its nuclear test).

BMD is a good example of a versatile capability that fits well with

both countries' priorities. While tackling Japan's near-term threat (North Korea) and its longer-term threat (China), it also addresses America's goal to protect its troops in the region and to encourage Japanese technical and monetary support. Given this synergy, it is not surprising that Japan is the "largest" and "most significant international partner" for BMD development among America's allies.²⁶ But it is less clear where other capabilities fall on the list of shared priorities, such as air lift, sea lift, amphibious assault, maritime interdiction, antisubmarine warfare (ASW), or intelligence gathering. Should ASW be focused on shallow water or deep water scenarios (i.e., South and East China Sea vs. Philippine Sea and Pacific Ocean)? What are the intelligence gathering priorities? Are the two countries in agreement as to how these capabilities should be funded, trained for, or counted on? How much redundancy and independence do we want or need (or can we afford)?

With all of its deficiencies, the best current example of an "alliance transformed" is NATO. Over the last decade, it has in fact struggled with many issues similar to the U.S.-Japan case, especially in terms of broadening the situational, functional, and geographic context of its operation. Even though NATO has had to balance multiple nations' interests and politics in this process, it does have the benefit of a better-developed institutionalized capacity to reconcile their differences. This is important, because alliances do not evolve or transform in a straight line, as we can see, for example, by current NATO missions outside of Europe.

The same has been true with the United States and Japan, as they revised their defense guidelines in the 1990s with an eye on North Korea, only to apply them first in the Indian Ocean, when it became the rear area support theater for Operation Enduring Freedom. In light of the challenges ahead for the United States and Japan, one post-Cold War NATO debate that might be instructive asked how the members could become "separable, but not separate." The allies will want to develop joint capabilities that can work efficiently together, but that can still function effectively on their own if the political environment makes cooperation difficult (e.g., a regional territorial dispute that Washington wants to avoid or an international operation to which Japan cannot contribute). As in the NATO case, sorting this out will take time and a considerable amount of effort, but it can be done.

JAPAN'S APPROACH UNDER ABE

With all of this as background, an important question is how current events will intersect with the new leadership in Tokyo as it tries to move

forward with alliance transformation and shape the country's foreign policies. Japan's fundamental national security priorities have not changed for many years: regional peace and stability, open markets and transport routes (particularly when national resources are concerned), and an appropriate international voice (i.e., an ability to influence relevant international debates of national consequence). What has changed in recent years is the international and regional security environment, as well as the domestic political landscape.

In terms of Japan's current approach to achieve its foreign policy objectives in this environment, a few observations can be made. Most strikingly, in the post-9/11 world, Prime Minister Koizumi pursued a policy of more tightly embracing the United States and of incrementally trying to break domestic taboos in the process, while keeping overall defense spending steady. A little entanglement, therefore, was considered better than a little abandonment, especially if international organizations like the United Nations or the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) were proving unable to protect nations or to stop proliferation. It was also a less expensive approach, which was important for a Japanese government desperate to get its budget deficits under control. That said, a little down payment on national security independence via improving capabilities and expanding regional reach was advisable as an insurance policy for the future, and this could be done in cooperation with the United States.

China's rise is foremost in the minds of Japan's defense community (followed closely by North Korea) and the short-term approach to hedging against a breakdown in international or regional order is to balance China through its alliance with the United States. In the longer term, the Abe administration appears to be striving for a continuation of this policy, but it will try to supplement this by reaching out more proactively to relatively strong, democratic, and capitalist countries in the region (namely Australia and India). South Korea is a notable exception in this case, but this has more to do with historical legacies and the current South Korean government than with a misalignment of national interests.

So far, under Abe's leadership, Japanese politicians and diplomats have been promoting more noticeably the cause of democracy and human rights in the region as key components of the nation's foreign policy. This is motivated largely by a desire to isolate North Korea and to pressure China into becoming a more responsible stakeholder in the regional and international communities. One Japanese diplomat described it as building a "house of freedom" in East Asia, which China, North Korea, and perhaps Russia were welcome to join, as long as they enhanced transparency and expanded the

rights of their citizens. Despite the resonance with Japan's rhetoric in the 1930s regarding a regional "co-prosperity sphere," there is attractiveness to this diplomatic approach, since (in contrast to the 1930s) it aligns well with America's diplomatic strategy in the region and, perhaps more importantly, these ideals have broad public support in a democratic Japan.

A key challenge for Japan, however, will be management of its regional relationships, since China, Korea, and Russia may come to see this "house of freedom" strategy, and U.S.-Japan alliance transformation, as a *de facto* policy of containment. To counteract this, Prime Minister Abe scored a great achievement by overcoming the ossification of relations with Beijing and Seoul under Koizumi by reaching out immediately after his election and traveling to both capitals. The value of this approach was underscored by its coincidence with North Korea's nuclear test and the fact that they responded to those tests with far greater harmony than was the case with the North's missile tests just three months earlier (under Koizumi). But the warming of Japan-China and Japan-South Korea relations will be severely tested by Tokyo's hedging strategies and Abe's inclination to break through more political taboos and drift toward greater security independence (via his stated goals of constitutional revision, turning the defense agency into a ministry, and expanding the SDF's international reach). Japan will not make these moves to provoke its neighbors or to threaten them, but Japan's neighbors may choose to respond as if that were the case.

As already noted, such policy views are not monolithic in Japan. There is an active group of not only opposition politicians but also LDP members who would rather steer away from the tight embrace of the United States and instead reach out more humbly and flexibly to Japan's neighbors. Former LDP Secretary General Koichi Kato has become the public face of this contrarian view of foreign policy, leading an LDP study group on Asian diplomacy and security that emphasizes a more conciliatory approach to China and Korea, especially when it comes to historical revisionism and nationalist causes. Kato and his supporters tend to view Japan's security in broader economic and diplomatic terms, rather than with more narrow strategic or military measurements, which accords well with many in Japan's powerful business community. Such thinking among the general public in Japan, not to mention opposition political parties, is also significant.

The United States has limited influence in all of this, but what influence it does have should be wielded judiciously. U.S. officials must recognize that Washington does not necessarily benefit from an unbridled ascension of pro-alliance politicians and diplomats in Tokyo. This could

further fuel a sense of containment or competition vis-à-vis China and Korea, and the fact is that Washington can benefit at times from well-positioned Japanese officials with high-level connections in Beijing, Seoul, and Moscow.

The United States will benefit most from seeking the middle ground in this evolution. Its alliance with Japan is paramount. America needs Japan as a strong ally in the Long War, and its military presence in Japan is still extremely important for both countries' security and for regional stability, given the lack of effective security structures in the region. Still, the United States and Japan should also allow China, South Korea, and Russia to have a larger say in how that stability is maintained in the region in the future, as long as it is constructive. They should avoid a U.S.-Japan alliance relationship that seeks only to balance against the other regional powers. Greater Japanese independence within the alliance context can also be useful, as long as coordination remains strong and neither the United States nor Japan loses sight of the value that this bilateral alliance has delivered for 50-plus years and counting. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 Abe was born September 21, 1954, and is the youngest post-war prime minister, as well as the first born after the end of World War II.
- 2 U.S. Department of Defense, "2004 Statistical Compendium on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense," Washington, D.C., December 2005, E-4. The value of Japan's host nation support is approximately \$4 billion per year.
- 3 U.S. Department of State, "U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation," May 1, 2006, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/65517.htm> (accessed December 15, 2006).
- 4 The U.S. government's view that the country is at war is clearly stated in the opening lines of both the March 2006 U.S. National Security Strategy and the Pentagon's February 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report. U.S. officials regularly refer to Japan as a key ally in the so-called Long War against global terrorist networks.
- 5 Michael J. Green and Robin Sakoda, "Agenda for the U.S.-Japan Alliance," in *United States-Japan Strategic Dialogue: Beyond the Defense Guidelines* (Honolulu: Pacific Forum CSIS, May 2001).
- 6 Richard Armitage, et al., *The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership*, Institute for National Strategic Studies Special Report (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University, October 2000).
- 7 See Michael Green, "Balance of Power," in *U.S.-Japan Relations in a Changing World*, ed. Steven K. Vogel (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 2002); and Ishiba Shigeru, *Boei Senraku wa dare ga kimeteiru no ka?* [Who is Going to Decide Japan's Defense Strategy?], in *Nihon No Boei: Nanatsu No Ronten* [Japan's Defense: Seven Points at Issue], ed. Buntaro Kuroi (Tokyo: Takarajima-sha, 2005).
- 8 Some examples include Charles M. Perry and Toshi Yoshihara, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Preparing for Korean Reconciliation and Beyond* (Virginia: Brassey's, Inc., 2003); and G. John Ikenberry and Inoguchi Takashi, eds., *Reinventing the Alliance: U.S.-Japan Security Partnership in an Era of Change* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003).

- 9 U.S. Department of State, "Joint Statement of the U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee," February 19, 2005, <www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2005/42490.htm> (accessed December 15, 2005).
- 10 The phrase "on its own initiative" in the original Japanese is *shutaiteki*, which is translated into English in various ways, such as "on its own initiative," "proactively," "independently," or "autonomously." In Japan, the term often has the latter meanings in these kinds of documents to demonstrate that it is not obsequiously following the United States. Since the rise of some so-called anti-U.S. conservatives in Japan in the 1990s, Japanese policy documents began using *shutaiteki* more frequently (e.g., appearing four times in the most recent NDPG, but never before).
- 11 Senior Japan Defense Agency official, interviewed by the author, November 2004.
- 12 Hisae Masahiko, *Beigun Saihen: Nichibei "Himitsu Koushou" de Nani ga Atta ka* [U.S. Force Realignment: What Happened in the U.S.-Japan "Secret Negotiations?"] (Tokyo: Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2005), 99.
- 13 *Ibid.*, 116.
- 14 Rear Admiral Kawano Katsutoshi, interviewed by the author, December 9, 2005.
- 15 Paul S. Giarra, "American Bases in Japan: Strategic Importance, Local Treatment," in *United States-Japan Strategic Dialogue* (Honolulu: Pacific Forum CSIS, May 2001).
- 16 Senior Japan Defense Agency official, interviewed by the author, December 6, 2005.
- 17 Dr. Watanabe Akio (President of the Research Institute for Peace and Security), interviewed by the author, December 14, 2006.
- 18 In a speech at the International Institute for Strategic Studies Asia Security Conference in Singapore on June 5, 2004, then-Defense Chief Ishiba Shigeru said, "I do not agree that Japan cannot bear its responsibility in the international community because it cannot exercise the right of collective self-defense. In today's world, where terrorist attacks and the act of war are more difficult to distinguish, we should further contemplate the possibility of utilizing military power for a policing purpose. Japan...wishes to actively speak out and take action as mentioned above, without simply becoming a financial contributor."
- 19 Dr. Watanabe Akio, summary of presentation at 10th Annual U.S.-Japan Security Seminar, Washington, DC, March 22, 2004, provided to the author.
- 20 Policy Research Council of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, "Recommendation on Japan's New Defense Policy," Defense Policy Studies Subcommittee, National Defense Division, March 30, 2004; The Council on Security and Defense Capabilities (Japan), "The Council on Security and Defense Capabilities Report: Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities," October 2004, <www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/library/news/japan/2004/041000-csdc-report.pdf> (accessed December 15, 2005); and *East Asian Strategic Review 2006*, National Institute for Defense Studies, March 2006.
- 21 Nagashima Akihisa, *Nichibei Doumei no Atarashii Sekeizu* [A New Blueprint for the U.S.-Japan Alliance] (Tokyo: Nippon-Hyoron Sha, 2004).
- 22 Working Team for Studying Maritime Interest of the Liberal Democratic Party in Japan, "Nine Proposals to Secure Japan's Maritime Interest," June 14, 2004, provided to the author by the office of Takemi Keizo, Member of the House of Councilors.
- 23 Japanese defense planner, interviewed by the author, December 7, 2005.
- 24 *U.S.-Japan Workshop Report on Northeast Asia Security Cooperation*, Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, February 2005, 14.
- 25 Senior Japanese defense planners, interviewed by the author, December 7, 2005.
- 26 U.S. House of Representatives, Armed Services Committee, *Fiscal Year 2007 National Defense Authorization Budget Request for the Missile Defense Agency and Ballistic Missile Defense Programs: Testimony before the Subcommittee on Strategic Forces*, Lt. Gen. Henry "Trey" Obering, Director, Missile Defense Agency, and Peter Flory, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy, March 9, 2006.

