

Past its Prime? The Future of the US-Japan Alliance

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Early on the morning of 31 March 2003, a five-man medical team from Japan—the sole Japanese contingent on the ground near Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom—was ordered by Tokyo to pack up and move back to Damascus to avoid potential harm.¹ In December, the killing of two Japanese diplomats in Iraq caused over 80 percent of Japan's public to demand a slow-down or outright halt in Tokyo's commitment to send troops to Iraq.² Similar sentiments rose during the Japanese hostage crisis of early April 2004. Some Japanese commentators even predict the downfall of Prime Minister Koizumi should any ground forces deployed to Iraq be killed—a potentiality that has made Tokyo extremely cautious with the use of those troops.³

Contrast this tormented intransigence with the Japanese Diet's rapid passage of anti-terrorism legislation in November 2001 and the dispatch of destroyers and tankers to refuel Coalition forces in the Indian Ocean. Consider also the sight of Japanese and American naval special forces fast-roping from an Australian helicopter to the deck of a freighter in the Coral Sea to check for potential ballistic missiles in September 2003. This training exercise, the first within the new Proliferation Security Initiative, is indicative of Tokyo's warm embrace of this particular collective security enterprise.

These examples highlight the strange dichotomy that the US-Japan Security Alliance represents. On one hand, the Japanese are reluctant to share substantive risk in ventures in Southwest Asia, even though they receive more than 91 percent of their oil from that region. On the other hand, the Japanese are readily embracing other initiatives with their increasingly capable military forces which might improve their security.

Over the next two to three decades, Japan will present an increasing paradox to the United States. Japan will liberalize and expand its security posture in broad ways long sought by the United States, but at the same time will

increasingly desire to chart its own course in foreign policy.⁴ In terms of reliability as a security partner across a range of issues, Japan will tend to become more Gaullist than Thatcherite, more French than British in its response to American pressure for concerted action. Current alliance closeness (which has caused a good deal of euphoria among normally pessimistic alliance managers on both sides) may be an illusion that highlights the crossing of strategic vectors, not the convergence of them.

In the future, the United States should not expect enhanced congruence in interests and methods with Japan, especially after the resolution of the North Korean nuclear crisis. Because of the coming strategic divergence, the United States should hedge and pursue a two-pronged grand strategy of attempting to buttress the alliance with Japan while seeking alternative means to maintain a forward presence and power-projection basing in the East Asian littorals. The American vital interest in East Asia is the maintenance of a stable, liberal balance of power in the region, not any particular alliance orientation.⁵ The alliance with Japan has been a highly convenient and effective means for achieving this balance. However, as interests diverge in coming decades, the pact may not offer the same benefits. As Rajan Menon notes, the age of formal alliances in East Asia may be coming to an end.⁶

In order to present the argument for the United States to adopt a strategic hedge in Northeast Asia, this article will set the foundation by examining the notion of alliance reliability and the competing values that dominate, and obfuscate, Japanese strategic intentions. Next, the trends both enhancing and reducing alliance reliability between the two partners will be outlined. This discussion will lead to specific predictions about the next two decades in the alliance relationship and policy recommendations for the United States.

Differing Connotations of Alliance Reliability

States create security alliances with other states for a variety reasons.⁷ In the case of the United States and Japan, the original purpose of the 1951 and 1960 treaties was an exchange of asymmetrical security guarantees that both partners valued. The United States gained basing rights in exchange for securing the Japanese homeland. As the alliance has matured over the past five decades and the threat of direct invasion of the archipelago has all but evaporated,

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the focus of the partnership has lost its clarity. As a result, expectations of what is meant by reliability on the part of both partners have begun to diverge.

Alliance reliability in this instance has two connotations—formal and informal. The Japanese observe the more formal definition that ties reliability to the letter of the agreement. The 1960 revision of the treaty, modified by the 1997 Revised Guidelines, specifies clearly the responsibilities of the Japanese to provide basing, logistical support, force protection to bases, and use of infrastructure.⁸ In this regard, the Japanese are upholding the treaty provisions extremely well. However, the United States tends to view long-standing alliances in a more informal manner. In this view, alliances this old and established are commitments that states make to one another which go beyond the mere letter of the treaty.

After years of providing the protection that Japan has used to build its economic strength, the United States expects the Japanese to shoulder more of the risk involved in maintaining security in regions vital to both countries. Even though the Japanese have never reneged on a formal alliance commitment, many informed Americans—who view alliances more informally—tend to think Japan is not doing all it can or should as an American security partner. This represents a fundamental divergence of alliance presumptions. While this state of alliance expectations and unfulfilled demands is worrisome for Americans, it is deeply troubling to the Japanese as they attempt to shape their strategic future and manage the conflict between their grand strategic goals.

Japan's Security Policy Dilemma

Within Japan today there exists a growing debate about the future direction of its security policy. The angst of this fundamental and increasingly public confrontation between hawks and doves, nationalists and internationalists, and the young and old grows daily. On the grand scale, three competing interests tend to cloud the desired path for Japan into the 21st century. The older and more pacifist segments of Japanese society desire to avoid entrapment in a war that may come about if they drift too far toward an active military role in the alliance with the United States or take on too much international leadership. The younger and more realist of politicians, academics, and the public want to prevent abandonment by the United States, especially with respect to North Korea, if they are seen as not supportive enough of US policies. Finally, those in the growing nationalist movement are increasingly interested in the pursuit of self-interest and advancing Japan's own specific goals, although, as a society, such national interests continue to elude broad-based articulation and acceptance. The common perception that Japan will either remain pacifist or veer to the extreme of its 1930s militarism is simply wrong—a middle ground may be difficult to achieve but is nonetheless avail-

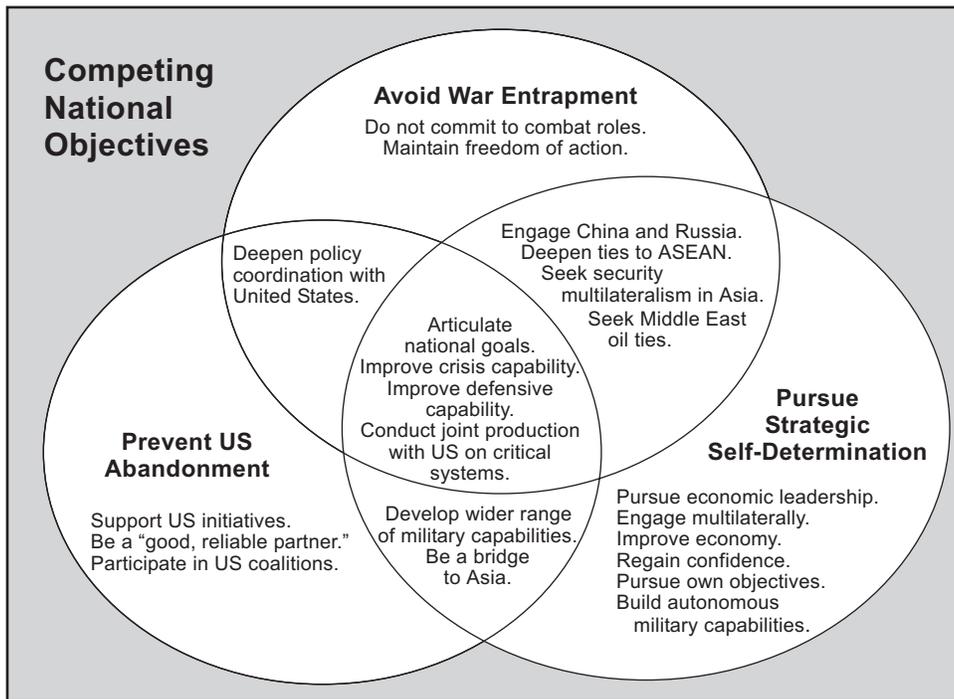


Figure 1. Japan's three competing national security objectives.

able to the Japanese. Trying to determine a future strategy in security policy amid these often competing imperatives continues to pose difficulties for Tokyo and results in Janus-like responses to security issues.

The diagram in Figure 1 describes these three competing national security objectives and offers potential policy choices at the various intersections. The volatile situation in North Korea restrains Japanese security independence at the same time the growing insurgency in Iraq focuses public attention on the hazards of entrapment by the United States in a conflict away from Japanese shores. As a sense of nationalism continues to develop within Japan, the dilemma may be resolved through the development of critical military capabilities and the resulting potential for greater independence of security policy.

In the past decade, Japan has made significant strides to build a more independent military capable of defending the home islands against 21st-century threats and projecting Japanese power abroad. It will be at least 10 to 15 years before Japan will have a basic missile defense system; full-package, precision-strike capability; integrated and responsive command, control, and intelligence structures; and power-projection platforms, but those capabilities are currently under construction.⁹ As Japan develops those capabilities, and loosens its domestic controls on the use of military force, its strategic options for achieving basic national security goals will increase.

The increase in Japanese strategic options will change how the United States views the future reliability of Japan as its primary ally and partner in achieving balance and stability in East Asia. The United States is increasingly looking to Japan to assist actively in the maintenance of peace, stability, democracy, and free markets in Asia. This means substantively participating in Southwest Asian security, maintaining sea lanes of communication, countering terrorism in East Asia, and other such heretofore American-led initiatives. Given the well-documented exceptions, the Japanese response to most of these initiatives has so far been tepid. The vectors of strategic direction both the United States and Japan will follow over the next decade are not clear. Although alliance managers on both sides are highly optimistic about the closeness of the vectors at the present time, they may very likely be simply crossing on different trajectories leading to very disparate positions in the future. Therefore, it is highly useful to review some of the factors that may enhance and reduce alliance reliability between the United States and Japan in the coming decades. If the two nations do not view each other as reliable allies, they will seek security in alternative forms. By looking at these specific situations and considering their likely trend lines, we can better predict the future state of the alliance.

Factors Enhancing US-Japan Alliance Reliability

The end of the Cold War reduced the strategic clarity of purpose for the US-Japan alliance. Similar to the American relationship with Europe, a fog of uncertainty about the future has descended over the partnership. Over the past decade, however, several strategic factors have lifted some of this murkiness and provided the alliance a renewed sense of direction and mutual advantage. These situations tend to keep the vectors of national interest in close proximity and thus are critical to maintaining a sense of reliability within the alliance. Some of these situations are geostrategic, while others represent Japanese and American reactions to the changing security environment of the post-Cold War world. It is fitting to begin with the situation on the Korean Peninsula, long considered the “dagger pointed at the heart of Japan” and the epicenter of centuries of northeast Asian conflict.

- *North Korea.* Kim Jong Il and the erratic policies of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK) have been the driving force in the awakening of Japanese security concerns and military posture in the 1990s and serve to heighten cooperation within the US-Japan alliance. The Taepodong missile overflight of the Japanese islands in 1998 did more to encourage a Japanese commitment to increased military capability than did decades of American *gaiatsu* (foreign pressure). Both the United States and Japan are deeply worried about the future trajectory of a nuclear-equipped North Korean state, and

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in the long run by a unified Korea strategically tied more to its historical suzerain—China—than to the West. This convergence of threat perceptions about Korea continues to fuel vast improvements in military cooperation between the United States and Japan.¹⁰

- *Terrorism.* Mutual interests in the war on terror have brought heightened optimism to alliance managers on both sides. The sarin gas attack by Aum Shinryko on the Ginza subway line in Tokyo in 1995 brought home to the Japanese a sense of immediate vulnerability. This sense of societal exposure created the conditions that made the rapid passage of Japan’s Anti-Terrorism Special Measures legislation of November 2001 possible. This new law allowed Japan’s Self-Defense Forces (SDF) for the first time to deploy warships to the western Indian Ocean and pushed the far boundaries of the long-held prohibition against collective defense. Both terrorism and the threat of ballistic missiles have become focal points for Japan’s rejuvenation of its military force posture. The *2003 Defense of Japan White Paper* clearly outlines the need for greater military capability to confront these threats.¹¹ Attaining these capabilities—in areas such as ballistic missile defense, precision strike, and maritime interdiction—will require enhanced cooperation with the United States.

- *Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD).* Combined BMD infrastructure and mutual dependencies that will arise from this cooperation will tend to bring the two allies closer together in the near future. Because the Japanese do not have the technical capability to detect missile launches and coordinate their defense against a saturation attack from North Korea, for the next decade-plus they will be forced to rely on a missile defense system integrated with American space- and sea-based assets. Since the Japanese depend on American intelligence, and because the time span between hostile launch and necessary intercept launch precludes traditional mobilization authority rules, significant changes in Japanese military policy will likely emerge in the next decade as BMD cooperation continues.¹² The removal of the ban on collective self-defense offers the possibility of a truly integrated and risk-sharing military alliance.

• *New Weapon Systems Procurement.* The decisions by the Japanese over the past seven years and into the next decade to obtain new military capabilities also will likely improve the depth and reliability of the alliance. Direct procurement and joint production on critical systems like ballistic missile defense, the Joint Strike Fighter, and Joint Direct Attack Munitions (JDAM) will make the two militaries more interoperable and interdependent. Changes by Japan in technology export policies to facilitate actual production of these systems will be a near-term signal of this growing interdependence.

• *Maritime Freedom of Action.* At the same time the Maritime Self Defense Force destroyers escorted supply vessels toward the Persian Gulf, Japan began to participate more rigorously in naval exercises in Southeast Asia. Like the United States, Japan relies on free and open sea lanes of communication for its prosperity and attainment of vital interests. With over 90 percent of its oil transiting from the Persian Gulf region, Japan is critically concerned with maritime security and freedom of action—a ready source of congruence with the US Navy. Piracy in Indonesian and Filipino waters continues to pose a major problem for trade-dependent countries in the region and has provided a legitimate, although not fully welcomed, venue for increased Japanese naval activity beyond its coastal waters.¹³

• *Increasing Ability to Use Force Abroad.* In conjunction with new policies allowing for a more aggressive use of military assets abroad, the Japanese are developing military capabilities clearly designed to project force away from the home islands. Japan's modifications to the American F-16 aircraft, renamed the Japanese F-2 fighter, resulted in 25 percent greater fuel capacity and two additional hard points for ordnance. Combined with air-refueling training, the decision to buy B-767 refuellers, and the August 2003 decision to buy JDAM kits, the Japanese soon will have limited precision-strike capability. The commissioning of the large *Osumi* class of flat-deck, helicopter and landing-craft capable transports allowed for the deployment of Japanese troops to East Timor and Iraq. Finally, the recent design unveiling the new 16DDH class of small aircraft carriers—capable of handling VSTOL aircraft—clearly indicates a desire to be able to project force internationally.¹⁴ For the most part, the United States welcomes these developments because they give Japan the ability to share the burden of stability operations in greater East Asia.

• *Lack of Strategic Alternatives for Security.* While the factors discussed above bring the alliance closer over shared security interests, the most basic element in continued alliance closeness is a lack of alternative means of achieving this same degree of national security. Although the Japanese have expressed interest in expanding the ASEAN plus three security forum, there

is no history of multilateralism in East Asia that supports such a system as a lasting means to ensure stability in the region.¹⁵ While North Korea remains a powder keg and China's future strategic goals remain opaque, the alliance between the United States and Japan offers each the only clear and feasible security option. Because of this, the alliance will continue to be strong for the next decade or so. When external conditions and changes in military posture allow, both countries may view the alliance as an increasingly unreliable, and thus perhaps unnecessary, means of achieving security interests in the region.

Factors Reducing US-Japan Alliance Reliability

For a number of reasons, Japan will increasingly seek to chart its own course in the future and will be less likely to respond favorably and quickly to selected American requests for military and diplomatic support. Resource shortfalls, attitudinal changes, and an increased sense of self all combine to make the long-term health of the alliance questionable. As with most developed countries of the world, these concerns start with money and oil.

- *Japanese Economic Woes.* Although Japan's GDP growth is barely positive, the macro-economic situation in Japan continues to be extremely dismal. Huge budget deficits, reaching 48 percent of federal spending, have created mammoth national debt pressures. The banking and loan default crisis continues unabated as yet another bank has recently been nationalized to prevent its collapse. The future is no less bleak. The population of Japan, raised under the assumption of a generous social safety net, is increasingly aged and will face a pension crisis within decades.¹⁶ The net results of this economic situation are twofold. First, Japanese companies are forced to invest heavily in Chinese labor and resource markets, with resulting demands from the business community for policy accommodations toward China. Second, there is declining budget space for defense spending—a necessity to remain useful as an alliance partner with the United States. Although on one hand a lack of money for defense might drive the Japanese toward the Americans for protection, the failure of the Japanese to pull their weight in the alliance will further exacerbate American frustrations. The inability to fund military modernization on a large scale will only increase the capabilities gap between the two allies.

- *Oil Demand and Resource Politics.* Exceedingly energy-resource poor, Japan imports over 91 percent of its oil from the Middle East and is looking to diversify those sources.¹⁷ This need for oil will tend to increase US-Japan policy friction as Tokyo seeks separate accommodation with oil exporters.¹⁸ This has been seen clearly in Iran in recent months and will make Japan seek to accommodate Russian aspirations in the Far East. Oil needs likely will lead to Japanese divergence from American policy positions vis-à-vis a number of Asian and North African nations. While America is focused on

fighting the war against terrorism and preventing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technologies, the Japanese are focused on securing future import streams of oil and natural gas. The competing imperatives may lead to confrontations damaging to the alliance.¹⁹

- *Trade Frictions*. Although now removed, the US steel tariffs and resulting punitive reactions from Japan were emblematic of a renewed friction in trade relations between Tokyo and Washington. Quiet for most of the 1990s due to the Japanese economic downturn, the recent spike in adverse trade policies reflects competing internal pressures in Tokyo. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, long the strongest supporter of the United States, is losing the policy fight with the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) which supports policies of economic growth at the expense of the alliance relationship. As long as economic recovery is at the fore of Japanese domestic politics, METI will continue to dominate the other ministries on external policy.

- *Geopolitics in East Asia*. Despite the prominence of history and recent territorial confrontations, trade relations and a desire to make a strategic hedge for the future have led to a significant Japanese detente with China since 1997. In 2003, Japan's bilateral trade with China surpassed \$132 billion, representing a 30-percent increase from 2002 and passing the United States as Japan's top trading partner.²⁰ Given the economic woes of Japan, these ties are vital to renewed Japanese financial and budgetary solvency. The situation with Taiwan, Japan's fourth largest trading partner, is similarly causing the Japanese to hedge away from the United States. As the Bush Administration tightens political and military ties with Taipei, many Japanese have begun to fear entrapment in a US-China confrontation. Combined with increased economic interaction and a desire to find a peaceful resolution to the DPRK nuclear crisis, this has led to renewed Japanese interest in enhancing diplomatic ties with the Middle Kingdom.

- *Rebirth of Nationalism*. As Eugene Matthews noted recently in *Foreign Affairs*, the Japanese are rediscovering their sense of nationalism and desire for independence of policy.²¹ Conversations with younger Japanese politicians about the alliance with America reveal a marked and relatively uniform desire for greater strategic self-determination.²² Although many in neighboring countries are shrill in their worry about a remilitarized Japan, it is folly to believe that Japan faces a choice between continued one-country pacifism and the nationalistic militarism of the 1930s. There are choices in-between, and the tone of learned writings and political statements from Japan indicate a reasoned and determined shift toward assertiveness and policy autonomy.

- *Attitudes Among Japanese Toward American Foreign Policy*. Central to the shift in policy stance among Japanese politicians and commentators is a concern with American power and perceived unilateralist tendencies.

Like Germany, France, China, and Russia, Japan is concerned with American hegemony and the tendency of the United States to use force without international sanction. In polls of the Japanese people, North Korea and the United States are the two countries deemed most likely to involve Japan in a military conflict.²³ By asserting the right of preemption and showing disdain for certain multinational agreements like the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Accords, the Bush Administration has alienated a large percentage of the Japanese public.

- *Recent History of Timely Participation with the United States.* Central to an American conception of reliability has been the willingness of Japan to participate in ventures the United States deems vital for the maintenance of global peace. Although the Japanese rapidly passed the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Act in November 2001 following the World Trade Center attacks, they have been notably reluctant to push forward plans that would put Japanese citizens in harm's way in support of American initiatives. The 1997 Revised Guidelines arose out of American concerns with Japanese reliability following the first Gulf War and the North Korean nuclear crisis of the mid-1990s. American fears about nonresponsiveness and a Japanese unwillingness or inability to accept risk with the United States have not abated much since then. In the early summer of 2003, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi vowed to put Japanese forces on the ground in Iraq. It took nearly seven months (and numerous site surveys and public debate) for the first Japanese ground contingent to arrive at Samawah. Although the Bush Administration has been rigorous in avoiding the appearance of putting overt pressure on the Japanese, friction and frustration have risen on both sides.

- *Public Fear of Casualties.* Deep down, the past six decades of peace in Japan have resulted in an expanded conception of security that makes the safety of the individual citizen more important than overall national security. The noted commentator Seizaburo Sato poignantly described how the conception of "comprehensive security" has evolved over the last four decades in Japan, with the result being an "irrational" prioritization of the individual over the state, even if national survival would be at stake.²⁴ Debate on this topic is muted in Tokyo, because very few commentators and even fewer politicians are willing to take the side of the state over the individual. Because of that, Japan has not yet come to any semblance of consensus on what national interests are worth the life of any of its citizens. Oil from Southwest Asia, although it is without question the lifeline of Japan, is clearly not one of these interests. The machinations about finding a "safe" sector in Iraq is a case in point.²⁵ Neither, it appears, is the war on terror—as the Japanese ships supporting Operation Enduring Freedom remain well beyond the range of threats. Nor does the need to take a hard line with North Korea over poten-

tial nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles (clearly pointed at Japan) supercede the public desire to fully account for the handful of abducted Japanese citizens and their families in North Korea. At the end of the day, this fear of harm to the individual puts the reliability of the alliance between the United States and Japan in serious question.

Trend Lines

As discussed above, there are numerous factors that both support and detract from the reliability of the alliance to ensure peace and stability in East Asia. For the most part, these issue areas are snapshots that by themselves do not adequately predict the future of the alliance. It is therefore useful to discuss trends among these factors, since the effects of some are unclear, while others are clearly increasing or decreasing in salience. The end result appears to indicate that the expansive view of the alliance, as conceived of by more optimistic Americans, could be in trouble, and security alternatives should be explored.

Unclear Trend Lines

For some factors, the direction of the trend line is unknown and could either support or detract from the alliance between the United States and Japan. Given the risk-averse nature of the Japanese and the impatience of Americans, the effect of these trends is probably toward a strategic hedging behavior instead of the extremes of outright dissolution of the alliance or complete military support for American initiatives.

The most important of these is the changing Japanese attitude toward national security and Japan's defense establishment. As discussed above in the sections on North Korea, terrorism, BMD, and weapons procurement, the Japanese are awakening to the security environment of the 21st century and building markedly improved military capabilities. The *2003 Defense White Paper* and FY2004 budget submission indicate a clear recognition of the need for new military capabilities like power projection, precision-strike weaponry, and ballistic missile defense.²⁶ These capabilities dovetail well with long-standing American desires for Japan, but whether or not they indicate a shift toward or away from a tighter military alliance is unknown. Clearly they make closer military cooperation possible. However, these new capabilities also put Japan on a course toward a more autonomous security posture should it choose to take that route.

The economic future of Japan also has an unclear effect on the alliance. Achieving security autonomy from the United States would be exceedingly costly for Japan. Unless Japan is willing to increase its defense budget to three to five percent of GDP from the current cap of one percent,²⁷ it cannot buy

its way out from under the alliance without seeking alternative means of reducing regional risk through accommodation with China. Expenditures of this magnitude do not appear possible for a Japan facing continued deep recession, immense social security obligations in the coming decades, and a public deeply skeptical of a huge defense buildup. Therefore, building key military capabilities, while avoiding alliance obligations that would jeopardize its relationship with China, appears to be the prudent middle road for Japan.

Finally, Japan's energy strategy in the coming decades presents an increasingly important security factor for Tokyo that will, like the economic situation, likely cause hedging behavior by the Japanese. Currently, Japan imports more than 90 percent of its oil from the Middle East but is looking for ways to reduce this dependency. Oil and gas ventures with Russia bring Japan into direct competition with China but also will demand Japanese strategic accommodation to non-American world powers.

Trending Toward Greater Importance

Some factors are clearly increasing in importance and therefore will have a large effect on the future of the alliance. The Japanese sense of nationalism and desire for self-determination of national policy are foremost on this list. The era of deference to the United States on key issues is over, and policy accommodation by Washington is increasingly expected by the Japanese. The increased hedging behavior by the Japanese toward China is also quite clear. Although the long-term designs of the Middle Kingdom worry the Japanese greatly, increasing economic interdependence, nascent regional multilateralism, and a common desire to reduce American hegemony are slowly driving closer Sino-Japanese ties. Finally, the Bush Administration appears to be pursuing alternative basing schemes in East Asia.²⁸ This trend is more than simply a reaction to potential American hostages in Yongsan and may signal a strategic retrenchment in Asia and Europe. It is certain the Japanese have noticed the Rumsfeld initiatives, and the upcoming decision on whether or not to accept basing of the nuclear aircraft carrier USS *Carl Vinson* in Yokosuka will significantly affect the pace of those alliance reviews.²⁹

On the other hand, the willingness of the Japanese to help secure sea lanes and fight missile proliferation shows an increasing congruence of interests with the United States in these vital areas. Protection of sea lanes by naval and coast guard forces—a defensive exercise—is seen by most Japanese as a more acceptable use of military force than putting ground troops into a contested region like Iraq or Afghanistan. Adding to the likelihood of further cooperation in this endeavor is the Maritime Self Defense Force's willingness to push the boundaries of the Peace Constitution and cooperate with the US Navy when away from home ports.

Trending Toward Less Importance

Admittedly, most of the factors previously discussed are increasing in importance, although the end result on the alliance of the trends may not be readily apparent. Some do appear to be strategic speed bumps that will likely have minimal effect on the US-Japan partnership in coming years. Trade is one such area. Although much was made of the recently rescinded American steel tariffs and potential counter-tariffs from Japan, South Korea, and Europe, the Bush Administration is overwhelmingly composed of free-traders who will eventually regain policy control and work to open up markets. The alliance is not currently plagued by the economic competition that marked the 1980s and early 1990s, and which led some to label the Japanese as peer competitors ready to undermine American vital interests.

It is apparent that Japan is slowly achieving strategic freedom of action and therefore may not in the future feel bound to the asymmetrical nature of the alliance. Younger members of the Diet tend to agree with the politically powerful Shinzo Abe who remarked, “The defense relationship between [the United States and Japan] should be complementary and not dependent.”³⁰

The Alliance in 2015 and US Policy Recommendations

The overall trend for the United States is away from, rather than toward, rigid and formal alliances to obtain security in various regions of the world. The Cold War alliance structures, driven by bipolarity, are a historical aberration for the United States.³¹ Given the current asymmetrical distribution of world power, America will continue to find greater efficacy in informal coalitions than in long-term, formal alliances. By hedging with China and by dragging its feet on American initiatives in order to secure its own strategic flexibility, Japan will likely hasten the downfall of the alliance.

In 2015, the US-Japan Security Alliance still will be legally in force; however, both countries will likely have made great strides to expand their security options in the region beyond reliance on each other. Americans probably will retain considerable basing rights in Japan, though less than currently utilized, especially in Okinawa, which remains a lightning rod for nationalist complaints in Japan. The United States will be more focused on providing strategic balance in East Asia than on supporting any one particular nation, as strategic relations with China and Russia likely will be less confrontational. Japan will have a much more robust military capability and, with the exception of not having a nuclear deterrent, will be more active in East Asian security affairs and maintaining freedom of the seas. The Japanese likely will have publicly re-examined Article IX of their Constitution and legalized both the existence of a military and the ability to conduct collective defense with other nations.

Finally, the two countries will have a significant cooperative venture ongoing in ballistic missile defense that serves well the interests of both countries without necessarily obligating military cooperation in other venues. On average, in 2015 the strategic vectors of Japan and the United States will have diverged significantly in many areas.

This view of the likely strategic situation between the United States and Japan a decade from now is in no way predetermined. Three situations in particular could reinvigorate the alliance and make it more akin to the Anglo-American relationship. A rise in aggressive, anti-Japanese supernationalism in China could convince Tokyo to abandon its hedging policies. A forcible reintegration of Taiwan or assertion of exclusive navigation rights by China in the South China Sea could also push the Japanese toward a more participatory stance in the alliance. Finally, the reunification of Korea under a distinctly anti-Japanese banner would create the conditions necessary for both the United States and Japan to view the alliance as absolutely essential to their respective vital interests.

Given the issues and trends discussed above, the United States should follow a hedging strategy in Asia and adopt the following policy recommendations.

Policies to Enhance the Alliance

- Push combined ballistic missile development and fielding in a manner that requires Japan to resolve its political dilemma on collective defense without overtly applying international pressure.
- Mirror Japan's emergency legislation and increase in SDF roles with substantively increased bilateral command, control, and consultation mechanisms in Japan, US Pacific Command headquarters, and in the Pentagon.
- Continue the Bush Administration practice of frequent, high-level consultations with Japan so as to emphasize to both Japanese and other Asian audiences the importance the United States places on the relationship.
- Earnestly address Japanese concerns with the Status of Forces Agreement and make a substantive, though largely symbolic, withdrawal of some portion of the US Marine Corps presence in Okinawa. Move at least two Marine infantry battalions to alternative basing sites in Asia, possibly Darwin, upon completion of their tour in Iraq in 2005.
- If and when Japan "legalizes" its armed forces, make a highly public recognition of the legitimacy of that act for Asian audiences.

Policies to Increase Strategic Flexibility (Hedge) in Asia

- Work through or create a fabric of multilateral institutions to enhance security transparency in Asia, like the Proliferation Security Initiative, and create opportunities for collective action on regional issues.

- Seek alternative basing and military access arrangements in East and Southeast Asia. Expand island basing options in Guam and the western Pacific and explore potential basing or access options in Australia, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam.

Conclusion

The eventual demise of the US-Japan Security Alliance is not a foregone conclusion. However, the trend lines in both Japan and the United States do not guarantee the retention of the alliance in the same form as today. Within the next decade, significant changes in the partnership will have to occur for the alliance to remain viable and effective for both countries. At the current trajectory, the perceived lack of reliability of Japan as an alliance partner will likely cause the United States to seek alternative means of achieving peace and stability in the region.

As seen from Tokyo, the asymmetrical nature of the alliance and the continued demands from Washington for military support around the globe create a burden ill-suited to the emerging Japanese view of themselves and the world. It is highly likely that both the United States and Japan will pursue hedging strategies in order to obtain more flexible security options in the future. Unless China emerges as an aggressive regional superpower or a reunified Korea becomes hostile to Japan and the Pacific interests of the United States, the centrality of the alliance is likely to diminish over the next 10 to 20 years.

The clarity of the Cold War is gone, and the emerging security environment is best served by flexible access and basing rights, rather than the formal alliances of the past half-century. It is best to recognize the dimensions of the new era now and move forward, rather than to drag along an alliance that may be past its prime.

NOTES

1. "Govt. Seen Revising Iraq Aid Plan," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 7 April 2003.
2. "Many Japanese Fearful of Troop Aid to Iraq," Associated Press, 1 December 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,104433,00.html>.
3. The potential that deaths among the Japanese ground forces being placed into Iraq might bring down the Koizumi government is noted by Keizo Nabeshima, "Decision to Dispatch SDF Troops to Iraq a Watershed for Defense, Security Policy," *Japan Times*, 1 January 2004, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?nn20040101n2.htm>. In polls released in Japan in mid-January 2004, 35.9 percent of respondents thought Koizumi should resign if a Japanese soldier is killed in Iraq, while 53.2 percent thought that at the very least Japan should withdraw its forces from Iraq if a soldier is killed there. See "51.6% Oppose SDF Dispatch to Iraq but Cabinet Support Up," *Japan Times*, 19 January 2004, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/getarticle.pl5?nn20040119a1.htm>.
4. See William E. Rapp, "Diverging Paths? The Next Two Decades in the U.S.-Japan Alliance," *IIPS Blue Paper #299e* (Tokyo: Institute for International Policy Studies, December 2003), <http://www.iips.org/bp299e.pdf>.
5. Robyn Lim, *The Geopolitics of East Asia: The Search for Equilibrium* (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 163. That America is historically more concerned with balance within the quadrilateral of Northeast Asia than with any specific alliances within that quadrilateral is one of Lim's primary arguments in this superb book of Asian geopolitical history.

6. Rajan Menon, "The End of Alliances," *World Policy Journal*, 20 (Summer 2003), 1-19.
7. Ole Holsti, Terrence Hopmann, John Sullivan, *Unity and Disintegration in International Alliances* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1973). Appendix C gives an outline of the various reasons why states form alliances. For the more realist perspective, see Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1987), ch. 2.
8. The 1960 Mutual Defense Treaty is on-line at http://www.state.gov/www/global/legal_affairs/tif_01b.pdf, and the 1997 Revised Guidelines at http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Sep1997/b09231997_bt50797b.html.
9. Japan has either funded or programmed for funding a wide range of enhanced military capabilities for 2004 and beyond. The Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) has completed two *Osumi*-class through-deck helicopter and air-cushion landing craft carriers. It is funding the construction of two 16DDH through-deck "pocket" aircraft carriers to be delivered in 2008 and is a partner in the Joint Strike Fighter program—an airframe that could fly off the 16DDH ships. The Air Self Defense Force (ASDF) is buying Joint Direct Attack Munitions for its F-2 fighter-bombers to create a precision deep-strike capability as well as aerial refueling capability. The F-2 has two extra hard points and 25 percent greater internal fuel capacity than its cousin, the American F-16, which gives it greater capability as a strike aircraft. Additionally, the SDF is moving forward with both sea-based mid-course missile defense and Patriot PAC-3 terminal missile defense development. See Rapp, "Diverging Paths?" pp. 20-21, 24-25, and notes 79, 105-08, 120-23.
10. Improvements in military cooperation include the joint production of ballistic missile defense components, the increased Japanese interest and training in aerial refueling, and the preparation of detailed support plans for American forces and Japanese infrastructure in the event of war, to name only a few.
11. Foreign Press Center Japan, "Defense White Paper Calls for Country Capable of Meeting Threats," <http://www.fpcj.jp/e/shiryō/jb/0341.html>.
12. The Japanese self-restrictions tend to emanate from a narrow interpretation of Article IX of their constitution. Successive governments have reemphasized the so-called "ban on collective self-defense" so often that, however unworkable in the defense of Japan proper, it leads Japan to eschew cooperative military action abroad. The Cabinet Legislative Bureau's long-guarded interpretation of Article IX is that all nations have the right under international law to collective self-defense, but in Japan, the exercise of that right is prohibited by the constitution. See Ted Osius, *The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2002), p. 67. For details on Japanese pursuit of missile defense, see "Japan's Recent Step-up in Missile Defense," Center for Defense Information, 10 October 2003, <http://www.cdi.org/friendlyversion/printversion.cfm?documentID=1725>. The debate on the collective self-defense ban generates potential situations like the following, described in a leading Tokyo daily: "While Japanese authorities are grateful for the Dutch cooperation, there appears very little the SDF could do in return if Dutch troops came under attack. If SDF members returned fire in such a situation, that could be interpreted as an exercise of the right of collective self-defense in violation of long-standing government interpretations of the Constitution." From "Safety of Troops Still the Key Issue," *Asahi Shimbun*, 19 January 2004, <http://www.asahi.com/english/politics/TKY200401170163.html>.
13. As far as Japanese maritime patrols in Southeast Asian waters are concerned, the primary brake on increased Japanese presence comes more from ASEAN nations than from within the Japanese polity. In 2000, a Japanese offer to join a multinational effort to patrol the Straits of Malacca and neighboring waters was declined by a number of ASEAN nations. (Conversation with a ranking American officer in US Forces Japan J-5, October 2002.)
14. The *Osumi*-class "landing ship tank," although having the appearance of a through-deck aircraft carrier, has neither the elevators nor reinforced deck necessary for modern Vertical/Short Takeoff and Landing (VSTOL) fixed-wing aircraft. However, initial reports on the 16DDH design, funded in the 2004 Japanese Defense Budget, show that it will have the capability to carry 13-17 VSTOL aircraft. Japanese interest in the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter program (a VSTOL-capable design) is well documented. See Yoshitaka Sasaki, "Does Japan Need a Light Aircraft Carrier?" *Asahi Shimbun*, 3 October 2003; and Richard Halloran, "Japan Rethinks Issue of Self-Defense," *Honolulu Advertiser*, 13 July 2003.
15. See discussion of the poor likelihood of success of a multilateral approach to security in East Asia in Rapp, "Paths Diverging?" pp. 30-31.
16. In 2003, 18 percent of the Japanese population was over age 65. That figure is projected to soar to over 35 percent by 2050, putting tremendous strain on the social security system in Japan. See the population projections at <http://www.web-jpn.org/stat/stats/01CEN2C.html>.
17. Jane's Information Group, "Main Economic Indicators—Japan," <http://www4.janes.com/K2/docprint.jspK2DocKey=/content1/janesdata/sent/cnasu/japns080.html>. Japan's energy dependence on oil has been reduced from 78 percent of all energy sources to less than 51 percent at present. However, this reduction in oil dependency has come at the cost of greater dependency on liquefied natural gas (LNG) and the resulting grant of political leverage to other actors in Asia. LNG imports from Indonesia and Malaysia make up 58 percent of needs, but Japan is trying to cut a deal with Russia for LNG resources.

18. This is the policy prescription for Japan made by Tsutomu Toichi, "Energy Security in Asia and Japanese Policy," *Asia Pacific Review*, 10 (May 2003), 44-51. As of late August 2003, Japan was finalizing a \$2 billion development deal with Iran in the Azadegan oil field. Pursuit of this deal, while Washington was attempting to coordinate international pressure against Iran for nuclear openness, indicates Tokyo's willingness to pursue its own interests despite American objections. See "Japan, Iran Come Closer to Major Deal," *Stratfor Analysis*, 28 August 2003, <http://www.stratfor.biz/Story.neo?storyId=221750&showCountry=1&countryID.html>. For Japanese crude oil import statistics, see the Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry website, <http://www.meti.go.jp/english/statistics/index.html>, and select "26 December 2003 Preliminary Oil Import Statistics."

19. Oil as a divisive force within the US-Japan alliance is not new. Two examples help illuminate this point. First, former Prime Minister Nakasone, when he was MITI Minister in 1973, cut a separate deal with the Saudis during the 1973 oil embargo and ensured Japan was labeled a "friendly country" by the Arabs, while most nations of the West were targeted by OPEC as "non-friendly countries." The Japanese distanced themselves from the Americans' agreeing to the principle of Palestinian self-determination. See Yasuhiro Nakasone, *The Making of the New Japan* (Surrey, Eng.: Curzon Press, 1999), pp. 193-94. Second, Japan's separate deal with Iran over the Azadegan oil fields, made in the midst of American and IAEA negotiations on Iran's nuclear program, is addressed in note 18 above.

20. Premier Wen Jiabao, *Japan-China Summit, Bali Conference on ASEAN Plus Three, Summit Minutes*, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/asean/pmv0310/china.html>. For comparison, US-Japan bilateral trade increased from \$162 billion to \$195 billion from 1992 to 2002, only a 17-percent increase, while Sino-Japanese trade expanded 243 percent in that period. See also "Learning to Love a Growing China," *Economist*, 27 November 2003, and "Japan's Trade with China Rises to Record High," *Money*, 18 February 2004, <http://money.cnn.com/news/other/2004/02/18/351761-ap.html>. For a discussion of the Japanese hedging strategy toward China, see Eric Heginbotham and Richard Samuels, "Japan's Dual Hedge," *Foreign Affairs*, 81 (September-October 2002), 110-21.

21. Eugene Matthews, "Japan's New Nationalism," *Foreign Affairs*, 82 (November-December 2003), 74-90.

22. Author's interviews with seven members of the Japanese Diet in February-March 2003 in Tokyo. The members represented both houses of the Diet and the two major political parties, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).

23. In 1991, 55.4 percent of Japanese thought that Japan would possibly be in a war in the near future. In March 2003, that figure had risen to 80 percent. In this latter survey, conducted by the Cabinet Research Office in Tokyo, 75 percent of respondents thought North Korea was the biggest threat, while 34 percent thought that US involvement in the Middle East could also drag Japan into war. See "Poll Shows Fear of War at Highest Ever," *Asahi Shimbun*, 31 March 2003, and "Poll Reveals Rise in Public Fears over War," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, 31 March 2003. Note: *Asahi Shimbun* represents the left and *Yomiuri* the right-center in Japanese print media, thus reflecting broad agreement on how to report these polling statistics. See also similar statistics published in Samuel S. Kim and Tai Hwan Lee, eds., *North Korea and Northeast Asia* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2002), p. 21.

24. Seizaburo Sato, "Why the Shift From *Kokuba* to *Anzen Hosho*? A Study of the Basic Issues Surrounding Japan's Security," *Asia-Pacific Review*, 7 (November 2000), 29.

25. In polls taken in Japan in late November 2003, over 80 percent of the respondents held deep reservations about Ground Self Defense Force deployments to Iraq for fear of casualties. Forty percent wanted SDF troops sent only when areas were pronounced "safe," while 43 percent were against any deployments regardless of timing. See "Many Japanese Fearful of Troop Aid to Iraq," Associated Press, 1 December 2003, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,104433,00.html>.

26. "Defense White Paper Calls for 'Country Capable of Meeting Threats,'" Foreign Press Center—Japan press release, 14 August 2003, <http://www.fpcj.jp/e/shiryo/jb/0341.html>. For information on the 2004 Japanese defense budget submission, see *The Daily Yomiuri*, 18 December 2003.

27. Menon, p. 15, argues that a raise in defense spending to four percent of GDP would vastly improve Japan's ability to mount an independent defense within a decade.

28. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has ordered a comprehensive review of America's forward-presence posture. The most public of the potential changes are the consolidation of the US footprint in Korea farther south on the Peninsula. However, at least two battalions of the Marines on Okinawa are deploying to Operation Iraqi Freedom, and their return to Japan is not guaranteed. See Secretary Rumsfeld's comments during a joint press conference in Tokyo on 11 November 2003, <http://japan.usembassy.gov/e/p/tp-20031118a4.html>. See also "U.S. to Review Military Presence in Japan," *Daily Yomiuri*, 7 October 2003.

29. For a discussion of the carrier basing decision, see Dennis E. Mitchell, "Forward Deployed Naval Forces in Japan," Strategy Research Project (Carlisle, Pa.: US Army War College, 7 April 2003), pp. 12-13.

30. Quoted in James Webb, "Is America Neglecting a Good Friend?" *Parade*, 12 January 2003. His opinions were consistently echoed by members of the Diet from both major political parties in interviews conducted by the author in Tokyo in early 2003.

31. Menon, p. 1.