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Routing

Two Normal Countries Rethinking the U.S.-Japan Strategic Relationship

by Christopher Preble

Executive Summary

The U.S.-Japan strategic relationship, formalized during the depths of the Cold War and refined during the 1980s and 1990s, continues to undergo dramatic changes. Although Japan is economically capable and now seems politically motivated to assume full responsibility for defending itself from threats, it is legally constrained from doing so under the terms of the Japanese constitution, particularly Article 9. The path to defensive self-sufficiency is also impeded by Japan's continuing dependence on the United States embodied in the U.S.-Japan security alliance.

With the United States struggling to meet military commitments abroad, and with Japan increasingly asserting military autonomy, American policymakers must shape a new policy that will more equitably distribute security burdens between the two countries. Three recent instances in which the United States and Japan have worked together on matters of mutual interest—Iraq, Taiwan, and North Korea—offer useful clues as to how a cooperative strategic relationship might operate in the future.

A new U.S.-Japan strategic relationship will be crafted over a period of several years, but the process

should begin immediately. As a first step, the United States should refrain from interfering in the decisions that the Japanese people may make with respect to their own defense. Washington should remain agnostic on the question of revisions to the Japanese constitution, including the crucial Article 9. Further, while U.S. policymakers might advise the Japanese of the uncertain benefits of acquiring their own nuclear weapons relative to the high costs, the United States should not expect to be able to prevent the Japanese from developing such weapons—nor should it try. Finally, the new strategic partnership should culminate with the removal of U.S. forces from Japanese soil. The two countries could negotiate basing agreements for U.S. naval vessels and aircraft, and possibly also some prepositioning of heavy equipment in depots for rapid deployment in the region, but such agreements need not depend on the continuation of a large-scale, and effectively permanent, U.S. troop presence. The new alliance between two normal countries—as opposed to one between a patron and a de facto client—will provide a more durable foundation for addressing the most pressing security challenges in East Asia and beyond.

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Introduction

The Americans and Japanese have cooperated to address East Asian security issues for many years. The United States has retained a formal leadership role in the region through its maintenance of a sizable military garrison on Japanese territory. For their part, Japanese policymakers have grown more confident and assertive. They have increasingly pushed the envelope on the definition of “self-defense,” progressively expanding, in both philosophical and practical terms, the uses of military force that are considered legitimate under Japan’s officially pacifist constitution. The Japanese Self-Defense Force (SDF) today is one of the most capable militaries on the planet, and that will continue to be the case, even if total Japanese defense spending remains relatively modest.

Meanwhile, U.S. military power, still unmatched in absolute terms, is insufficient for maintaining a dominant position in all corners of the globe. If the United States is to focus on a few areas of particular concern related to the global war on terrorism, especially the Middle East, then U.S. policymakers must seek ways to quietly devolve security responsibilities to wealthy, stable, democratic allies in other regions of the world. That reorientation applies to Europe, where long-time NATO allies should be expected to play a much larger role in the defense of a continent that has enjoyed relative peace and security for more than 50 years. U.S. policymakers should apply the same reasoning to East Asia, a region confronting several urgent security challenges.

Chief among those challenges has been the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations’ inability to prevent the dictator of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Kim Jong-il, from developing nuclear weapons. Despite some progress in the Six-Party Talks, the future of the North Korean nuclear program remains very much in doubt. Kim’s nuclear ambitions today pose no immediate and direct threat to U.S. security. If the Six-Party Talks fail to achieve the complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement of the

North’s nuclear weapons program, such weapons will pose only a limited threat to the U.S. homeland because of the relatively limited range and poor accuracy of North Korean ballistic missiles, the absence of any other reliable long-range delivery vehicles, and the United States’ overwhelming deterrent capability. Nonetheless, with more than 30,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea and along the demilitarized zone, and with another 35,000 U.S. troops residing in Japan,¹ Kim’s weapons clearly pose a threat to U.S. interests and Americans in East Asia.

They pose an even greater threat to Kim’s neighbors. That fact, combined with Kim’s erratic behavior, has led the Japanese, in particular, to take a hard look at their defenses.² Even if the nuclear stand-off is resolved, relations between Tokyo and Pyongyang will likely remain frosty so long as the DPRK refuses to account fully for the abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.

But lingering hostility toward and suspicion of North Korea in the near term pale in comparison with Japanese concerns over the medium to long term with respect to a rising China. Beijing is exerting greater influence in the political, economic, and diplomatic realms and simultaneously threatening to use force against Taiwan if the island proceeds on its current path toward greater independence. Japan would look upon Chinese annexation of Taiwan as a national security threat, but it is less clear how it would respond to more subtle Chinese challenges to Japanese economic and security interests in and around Taiwan.

The trajectory of China’s rise to regional prominence threatens to collide with both Japanese and American interests. The open question is whether all three countries will be able to establish a new strategic balance or whether competition for influence in East Asia will lead to a clash that could threaten the lives of hundreds of millions of people on both sides of the Pacific.

According to Eugene Matthews, a former senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and now president of the interna-

tional educational firm Nintai, Japan's growing self-reliance is indicative of resurgent nationalism. Matthews urges that U.S. policy be directed at blocking such sentiments, or at least attempting to channel them in a particular direction.³ But it is hardly unreasonable for Japan to seek some measure of independence from the United States.⁴ A desire that one's country be capable of defending itself might be a sign of nationalism, but if it is, it is no different from the nationalism expressed by the United Kingdom and dozens of other countries that have maintained a robust defensive capability in spite of security assurances from the United States.

Fortunately, the Bush administration has encouraged a more assertive stance on the part of the Japanese government, even at the risk of arousing regional fears of a resurgent Japan. Although such fears cannot be dismissed entirely, both the United States and Japan should continue their efforts to establish Japan as an independent pole of power in East Asia, a "normal country" that is no longer dependent on a distant patron for its defense.

The Evolution of the U.S.-Japan Strategic Relationship

The United States has maintained a sizable troop presence in Japan since the end of World War II. For most of that time the strategic relationship has been shaped by an underlying but pervasive lack of trust on the part of the United States. Although the military occupation officially ended with the signing of the Mutual Security Treaty of September 8, 1951, that treaty formalized a security bargain in which Japan—explicitly proscribed from possessing a military under the language of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution—was guaranteed U.S. protection and the United States was allowed to maintain permanent bases on Japanese soil. Less than 10 years later, the two countries reaffirmed that strategic bargain with the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.⁵

The need for an American military presence in Japan has been a foregone conclusion in both countries' military planning ever since, although the troops themselves have often been a source of controversy and have at times engendered strong Japanese resentment. There were more than 172,000 American military personnel stationed in Japan in April 1952. The numbers have come down over the years, but the presence was maintained throughout the Cold War in response to the Soviet and Chinese threat in East Asia.⁶ In 1989, at the end of the Cold War, more than 49,000 Americans were stationed on bases in Japan, plus another 24,000 sailors with the Seventh Fleet.⁷ But, even though the rationale for keeping U.S. forces in Japan changed in the 1990s, the numbers remained quite high, particularly relative to the overall reduction of uniformed military personnel that has occurred since the end of the Cold War. As of December 31, 2005, there were 35,050 U.S. troops in Japan. The Navy maintains bases in Sasebo and Yokosuka, the headquarters of the U.S. Seventh Fleet, and the Yokota Air Base is the headquarters of the U.S. Fifth Air Force. The more than 15,000 Marines stationed in Japan are concentrated on the island of Okinawa.⁸

The security guarantee afforded by those troops, and enshrined in the 1960 treaty, does not constitute an alliance in the traditional sense, in that there is no presumption of reciprocity on the part of the Japanese. From the earliest days, many Japanese have contended that Article 9 of their constitution bars them from becoming involved militarily in regional crises. The language of Article 9, which was essentially imposed by U.S. occupation authorities, is quite explicit on that score: "Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Less clear is the extent to which Article 9 prevents Japan from defending itself when attacked. Part 2 of Article 9 stipulates that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained" and that "[t]he right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized," but that lan-

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guage has not prevented the Japanese from developing a self-defense force capable of deterring or thwarting an act of aggression against Japan.⁹

The legitimate constitutional uses of the SDF have been hotly debated over the years. In 1968 the legal scholars at the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, the office with de facto responsibility for interpreting the constitution, declared that the SDF could act only “when there is a sudden unprovoked attack on Japan and there are no other means available to protect the lives and safety of the people.” In practice, the CLB’s interpretation of the supposed constitutional ban on collective self-defense was so narrow that it would have prevented the SDF from assisting a U.S. warship under attack, even if that ship was defending Japan.¹⁰ Those attitudes persisted until the early 1980s but have since been replaced by an understanding of collective self-defense that is less constrained by Article 9.

The First Gulf War and Its Aftermath

In more recent years, the United States and Japan have cooperated on regional security issues, and occasionally on out-of-area contingencies, but the record is mixed. For example, the Japanese government balked in late 1990 when the Bush administration assembled an international force to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait. Unalterably opposed to Japanese military participation, Tokyo was initially unwilling to make even a serious financial contribution to the war effort.¹¹ U.S. congressional pressure prompted the Japanese to change course. In September 1990, during the run-up to the first Gulf War, the U.S. House of Representatives voted overwhelmingly to withdraw U.S. troops from Japan unless Tokyo greatly increased its financial support for the maintenance of those forces. Congressional sentiments accurately reflected the views of the public at large, who, according to Rust Deming, former principal deputy assistant secretary for East Asian and Pacific affairs at the State Department, had developed a “Japan-bashing mood” and were similarly annoyed by Japan’s “free ride on the back of the United States.”¹²

The Japanese responded, first by providing \$13 billion to support U.S. military operations in the Persian Gulf and later by increasing their contribution to the cost of maintaining U.S. forces in Japan from 40 to 50 percent.¹³ Since that time, Japanese contributions to the United States have expanded still further. According to Pentagon estimates, Japanese host nation support (HNS) provides more than 75 percent of the cost of stationing troops in Japan.¹⁴ But monetary compensation, even if it covered 100 percent of the costs of the troops in question, cannot account for the risks that the United States absorbs through its military presence in Japan and the security guarantee extended to the Japanese. The United States is not in the business of contracting out security services to foreign countries, nor should it be.

The diplomatic fallout from Japan’s initial reluctance to support the United States during the first Gulf War must be considered within the context of the time. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, competition from Japanese products and Japanese companies unleashed a rash of alarmist predictions that Japan would soon overtake the United States economically. With Japan bashing de rigueur, some observers went so far as to predict a “coming war with Japan.”¹⁵

On the other hand, the U.S. strategic posture in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War was vastly more advantageous than it is today. With more than two million men and women in the active-duty military, and with nearly 500 ships in the U.S. Navy, the United States had little difficulty maintaining a sizable military presence in East Asia.¹⁶ Seemingly absolved of the need to make hard decisions about which Cold War-era deployments could be substantially reduced or eliminated, policymakers from both major political parties in the United States stepped forward to reaffirm the importance of the U.S.-Japan strategic relationship. The Pentagon’s 1995 assessment of U.S. security policy in East Asia (the so-called Nye Report) asserted that “the end of the Cold War has not diminished” the importance of any of America’s regional security commitments.¹⁷

In June 1996 President Clinton and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto agreed to review

the guidelines governing U.S.-Japan security cooperation. The new agreement, which was issued in September 1997 and superceded earlier guidelines from 1978, sought to clarify some of the ambiguities surrounding the Japanese constitution's supposed prohibition on collective self-defense by delineating U.S.-Japan security cooperation "under normal circumstances" and "in response to an armed attack against Japan." The guidelines also stipulated, however, cooperation in "situations in areas surrounding Japan," language that could serve as the basis for a broader regional security partnership.¹⁸ In a joint statement to announce the completion of the guideline review process, both countries reaffirmed that "the U.S.-Japan alliance is indispensable for ensuring the security of Japan," but the statement also stressed the importance of the alliance in maintaining regional peace and stability.¹⁹

The Armitage Report

The 1997 revisions soon proved inadequate. Reductions in U.S. defense spending after the end of the Cold War, combined with Washington's propensity for intervening in places that were only tangentially related to U.S. security, placed considerable strain on the U.S. military. By the end of the decade, the Pentagon and the State Department were looking increasingly to affluent, democratic allies to help ease some of America's security burdens.²⁰

In the fall of 2000, a report prepared by a high-level panel chaired by Richard Armitage, the soon-to-be deputy secretary of state in the George W. Bush administration, expanded on the new thinking contained in the 1997 agreement. While reaffirming that "Japan remains the keystone of the U.S. involvement in Asia" and that "the U.S.-Japan alliance is central to America's global security strategy," the Armitage Report called on Washington to make clear to Tokyo that the United States welcomed "a Japan that is willing to make a greater contribution and to become a more equal alliance partner." The Armitage Report did not ignore the potentially difficult tradeoffs that would have to be made under such an arrangement. "U.S. Government officials, and lawmakers," the pan-

elists explained, "will have to recognize that Japanese policy will not be identical to American policy in every instance. It is time for burden-sharing to evolve into power-sharing."²¹

Drawing explicit parallels to the U.S. special relationship with United Kingdom, the Armitage panelists recognized that Japan had responded in the past to American encouragement that Japan "play a larger international role." Accordingly, the Armitage Report declared it to be "imperative to nurture popular support in the United States and Japan to sustain current cooperation and to open the door to new bilateral endeavors."²²

Although the Armitage Report called on the Japanese to do more, it has proved difficult to resolve the inequities of the relationship. That is partly explained by the attitudes of the Japanese public, a sizable number of whom remain staunchly anti-militaristic and a majority of whom are hesitant to deploy Japanese SDF abroad.²³ In practice, U.S. troops have been sent into harm's way while the Japanese have provided only financial assistance. Although some Americans scorned such so-called checkbook diplomacy, that approach to foreign affairs was consistent with the wishes of the Japanese public. For example, a poll taken by the *Asahi Shimbun* in September 1990 found that 67 percent of respondents opposed sending Japanese forces to the Persian Gulf, even in noncombat roles. Not surprisingly, the Diet rejected Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu's proposal to send Japanese personnel to the Gulf.²⁴

These attitudes have softened somewhat over time; nonetheless, questions about the willingness of the Japanese public to support a larger role within the U.S.-Japan strategic relationship persist, particularly when it comes to the dispatch of Japanese troops. While the Japanese public remains skeptical about the deployment of military forces outside Japan, they are more amenable to their country's participation in postconflict reconstruction and peacekeeping than they were at the time of the first Gulf War. In the past 13 years, units from the Japanese SDF have been deployed to Cambodia, Mozambique, Rwanda, the Golan Heights, and East Timor. Soon after 9/11, the Japanese deployed naval forces to the Indian

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Ocean in support of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan.

The Iraq deployment was a watershed event, however, because most Japanese recognized Iraq as a conflict zone. In this respect, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi deserves most of the credit for carrying Japan over a symbolic threshold so that Japan might begin to play a geostrategic role commensurate with its economic power.

Koizumi and Japanese Domestic Politics

Indeed, Koizumi has played a very important role in the evolving U.S.-Japan strategic relationship. The prime minister has been one of the Bush administration's most enthusiastic supporters. In the most recent Iraq war, Japan sent 560 members of the Ground SDF (plus 200 members of the Maritime SDF and 200 members of the Air SDF, the latter stationed in Kuwait)²⁵—the first such deployment of Japanese personnel to a conflict zone since the end of World War II. Although some observers warned that Koizumi was getting too far ahead of Japanese public opinion, he remains popular, and under his leadership the Liberal Democratic Party increased its position within the lower house during the September 2005 elections. By all indications, Koizumi's success was tied primarily to his domestic reform initiatives, particularly his plan for privatizing portions of Japan's bloated postal system. Nonetheless, his popularity has provided latitude in defining Japan's new security role.

Tokyo has been even more active in Japan's immediate strategic neighborhood than it has been in Iraq. Shared concerns over the North Korean nuclear crisis and China's rising power offer both the United States and Japan opportunities for evolving the strategic relationship still further. Japanese diplomats have participated in the Six-Party Talks with North Korea, and in February 2005 Japan publicly affirmed for the first time that it shared with the United States a "common strategic objective," to "encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Straits."²⁶ The Japanese people have shown an increased willingness to

assume the burdens of defense, but there is some concern that out-of-area operations are drawing attention and resources away from more urgent regional security challenges.

Domestic political factors in Japan will not, alone, lead to a major reorientation of the U.S.-Japan strategic relationship. Washington has encouraged the Japanese to depart from their Cold War-era dependence on the United States, but this process should be accelerated. In particular, a new partnership should be constructed on the presumption that the United States will not be Japan's guardian indefinitely. By easing Japan into a posture of strategic self-sufficiency, the United States will aid in the development of a more capable and more reliable long-term strategic partner in the region, while simultaneously reducing the burdens on U.S. taxpayers.

An Audit of U.S. and Japanese Forces in East Asia

The more than 35,000 U.S. military personnel in Japan are approximately 12 percent of all U.S. military troops stationed abroad. Many Japanese welcome the U.S. troop presence and the security guarantee that goes with it. But anti-American sentiment lingers on the island of Okinawa, which is less than 1 percent of Japan's territory but hosts over half of all U.S. troops in Japan. U.S. military facilities take up about 20 percent of the land in the Okinawa prefecture.²⁷

As the total number of U.S. military personnel in Japan has remained relatively stable since the end of the Cold War, Japan's defensive capabilities have expanded. Japan is already an active player in East Asia, and it possesses the resources necessary for it to contribute to global security using a wide range of political, economic, and military means. Indeed, Japan's total economic output ranks second only to that of the United States. Japan has used a small portion of its great economic strength to upgrade its military capabilities, focusing particularly on qualitative improvements, as opposed to the number

of troops, ships, or planes.²⁸ So even as Tokyo continued to brandish its pacifist constitutional principles, and while total military spending as a share of GDP has remained at or just below 1 percent, the SDF has become a formidable, technologically advanced, and tactically diverse force whose ground, maritime, and air components boast nearly 240,000 active-duty personnel. The Maritime SDF includes 44 destroyers, 9 frigates, and 16 submarines, and the combined air power of the SDF includes 380 combat-capable aircraft plus other fixed-wing and helicopter assets.²⁹

Japan's defense expenditures are much smaller than those of the United States but are comparable to those of all other advanced industrial economies in real terms. In the mid-1980s, Japan had the world's sixth-largest defense budget behind the Soviet Union, the United States, France, West Germany, and the United Kingdom; by the end of the decade, Japan trailed only the Soviet Union and the

United States. Military spending continued to rise throughout the 1990s, and expenditures have remained stable since then. According to official statistics compiled by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Japan's defense expenditures in 2004 were exceeded only by those of the United States and the United Kingdom. It seems likely, however, that Japan's defense budget was also less than that of China (Table 1).³⁰ Chinese defense figures are widely disputed, and are likely 40 to 70 percent higher than the Chinese government's official statistics. Leaving those three countries aside, however, Japan almost certainly spends more than the other two permanent members of the UN Security Council (France and Russia) but also more than Germany and almost three times as much as India, two other countries that aspire to permanent membership on the Security Council.

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Table 1
Defense Expenditures in 2004

Country	Defense Budget (billions of dollars)	Per Capita Defense Spending (dollars and rank)
United States	490 ⁺	1,672 (1)
China	50 (est.)*	38 (est.) (10)
United Kingdom	49	811 (2)
Japan	45	354 (6)
France	40	660 (4)
Germany	30	360 (5)
Saudi Arabia	19	731 (3)
India	19	18 (11)
Italy	17	299 (8)
South Korea	16	335 (7)
Russia	14	98 (9)

Sources: IISS, *The Military Balance, 2005–2006*; and Keith Crane et al., *Modernizing China's Military: Opportunities and Constraints* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2005).

⁺ Includes \$66.1 billion supplemental funding for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

* The official defense budget of the PRC (\$25 billion for 2004) is widely believed to understate total Chinese military spending, but experts disagree on the extent of the disparity between stated and actual spending. The RAND Corporation estimated that total military spending in the PRC was 1.4 to 1.7 times the official amount, and the Pentagon's 2005 report estimated that the total could be two to three times greater, perhaps as much as \$90 billion.

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South Korea. This hardly constitutes a crushing burden on Japanese taxpayers, and it could easily be expanded if changing strategic circumstances so dictated. Citizens in the United Kingdom pay more than twice as much per person to maintain their highly effective military, and the French spend almost twice as much per capita as do the Japanese.

Although Japan's defense spending is comparable to that of other advanced industrial democracies, it might still be insufficient relative to the threats Japan faces. Tokyo's allocation of approximately 1 percent of its GDP to defense in 2004 contrasts with the 2.4 percent spent by the South Koreans, for example, and the more than 4 percent spent by the United States during the same period, and yet Japan is operating within the same strategic environment and is concerned about similar threats. It is logical to conclude, therefore, that the U.S. security guarantee has enabled the Japanese to refrain from spending more on their defense.³¹

On the other hand, military spending is hardly the only measure of a country's international engagement. Japan remains a leading provider of foreign aid, contributing more than \$6.7 billion in Official Development Assistance in 2003, more than any other country with the exception of the United States.³²

These numbers make clear that Japan already plays an active role in world affairs, in spite of the constitutional restrictions on the use of military force. What Japan has lacked for much of its history since the end of World War II is the incentive and the will to take responsibility for its own security—and for regional security—to a degree commensurate with its economic power and interests. The U.S. security guarantee serves as a disincentive for change, and U.S. policy has therefore impeded the development of Japan's indigenous military capabilities, capabilities that might prove useful to both countries in the future. The best way to break this cycle of dependence is to phase out the American security guarantee and replace it with a more equitable mutual defense pact. It is unlikely that Japan can assume its place among the community of great nations—despite its consider-

able wealth and foreign policy activism through financial aid—without a fundamental reorientation of the current patron-client security relationship with the United States.

The legal prohibitions contained in the Japanese constitution pose a barrier to change. Therefore, a change in the wording of that document, particularly Article 9, is likely required, as well as gentle pressure from the United States for the Japanese to assume a greater role in regional security.

Proposed Revisions to the Japanese Constitution

As noted above, Tokyo's military spending and the size of the Japanese SDF has increased markedly since the mid-1970s, even as the wording of the peace constitution has remained unchanged. The subject of constitutional revision, long a taboo in Japanese political discourse, has been at the center of public debate in recent years. While the details remain very much up in the air, many analysts believe that the trend may be irreversible and that it is just a question of time until the constitution will be revised. The current public debate would have been unthinkable just 10 years ago.³³

The constitutional reform process began in earnest in the mid-1990s with private revision proposals put forward by journalists as well as business and political leaders. Each legislative chamber established a Research Commission on the Constitution in January 2000.³⁴ The commissions issued their final reports in April 2005.³⁵

Notably, however, while a survey from September 2004 found that nearly 85 percent of the members of the Diet support a revision of Article 9, sharp divisions exist between the political parties on the nature and extent of the revisions.³⁶ Although the commission reports from April 2005 were adopted with support from the ruling LDP, its ally, the New Komeito, and the principal opposition party, the Democratic Party of Japan, the three parties follow very different agendas.³⁷ The LDP seeks

a comprehensive modification of the constitution, including Article 9. In November the LDP issued its proposed draft constitution, which is supported by Prime Minister Koizumi. The LDP draft includes a reference to the SDF as a formal military force and recognition of its international role but also suggests changes to other parts of the constitution dealing with domestic issues such as the distribution of power between local and central governments and changes to amendment procedures.³⁸

Although constitutional revision is a major topic in Japan, partisan divisions could seriously delay the amendment process. This is true even after the impressive gains made by reform-minded LDP candidates in the September 2005 elections. A two-thirds majority in each chamber is required before changes can be presented as a nationwide referendum for ratification; accordingly, the parties are expected to try to work together to create a revision proposal that can win broad support.³⁹

The mere suggestion that Japan might revisit its constitution has excited anti-Japanese sentiments in Asia and elsewhere. During an Asian Cup soccer match between China and Japan in August 2004, angry Chinese fans burned Japanese flags and chanted “Kill! Kill! Kill!” “Echoing a patriotic song from another era,” the *New York Times* reported, the soccer fans shouted words that translate, roughly, as “May a big sword chop off the Japanese heads.”⁴⁰ But such sentiments do not flow so much from the debate over constitutional revision as they do from concern that such reform will release incipient Japanese nationalism that has been kept largely under wraps since the end of World War II.

Take, for example, the complaints by some Asian editorialists that the constitutional debate is having a harmful effect on Japan’s relations with its neighbors. China’s *Chengdu Shangbao* newspaper declared that “Japan’s abandonment of its peace constitution can only intensify the mistrust that the countries and peoples of Asia have towards Japan.” Editors at South Korea’s *Chungang Ilbo* explained that they were watching Japan’s moves to revise its constitution “with unease” and predicted, “It is highly likely that a change and expansion of the role of the Self-

Defence Forces would aggravate the regional situation if the military situation in Northeast Asia turns bad.”⁴¹

Ayako Doi and Kim Willenson, former editor and publisher, respectively, of the *Daily Japan Digest*, warned that Japan’s embrace of pacifism in the aftermath of World War II might not persist long into the 21st century. Doi and Willenson found it ironic “that the United States, which wrote the no-war Constitution, is now the chief foreign prod for actions that can be read as violations of it.”⁴²

But constitutional revision would not lead inexorably to an embrace of militarism or, worse, Japanese imperialism. A careful reading of Japanese public opinion reveals that many Japanese do not want to abandon the pacifist principles enshrined in Article 9.

For example, although a January 2004 poll by the *Japan Times* found that the Japanese increasingly believe that the constitution is “out of touch with the transformed international situation as well as the realities of Japanese society,” and more than 80 percent support reform in some fashion,⁴³ a more recent *Asahi Shimbun* poll from May 2005 revealed a split over the fate of Article 9. While 58 percent of Japanese believe that a revised constitution should explicitly recognize the existence of the SDF, and 12 percent wish to see the SDF become a traditional military force, 51 percent of respondents prefer that Article 9 remain unchanged. Such apparent inconsistency shows that Japanese political leaders must facilitate a public debate, not only to rally supporters, but also to educate a public that seems both concerned and confused by the issue.⁴⁴ More important, those sentiments might reflect a continued strong aversion to the aggressive use of force as proscribed by Article 9 and also a desire to maintain, and even expand, autonomous military capabilities for self-defense.

Regional Hopes and Fears

As the Japanese debate their interests and obligations with respect to both their own defense and security in East Asia, other coun-

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tries are doing the same. Throughout the course of the U.S.-Japanese strategic relationship, some Americans have been reluctant to allow the Japanese to assume a more significant role in world affairs. Unfortunately, fundamental change is impossible so long as America's policy toward Japan is based on anachronistic assessments of Japanese intentions and abilities. A Japan capable of defending itself, and also capable of contributing to security in East Asia, would reduce the need for U.S. forces in the region. The very concept of the United States shedding some of its Cold War-era obligations is anathema to those who celebrate the supposed benefits of American unipolarity. For example, in 2000 the Project for a New American Century worried that "a retreat" from Cold War-era obligations in East Asia, including in South Korea and Japan, "would call America's status as the world's leading power into question."⁴⁵

Not all opposition, however, stems from a desire to perpetuate American global dominance; some people fear the supposed innately militaristic nature of Japanese society. Eugene Matthews, formerly with the Council on Foreign Relations, warned in 2003 that "Japan's new nationalism" could lead to "the rise of a militarized, assertive, and nuclear-armed Japan, which would be a nightmare for the country's neighbors."⁴⁶

Matthews's comments do not appear to reflect widespread sentiment within the United States, judging from some of the responses that the article elicited,⁴⁷ but it is clear that many people in Asian nations that were occupied by the Japanese Imperial Army in the 1930s and 1940s remain deeply concerned about the possible resurgence of Japanese nationalism. Those fears contribute to objections to any alteration of the current U.S.-Japanese relationship, especially if such a change would make it easier for the Japanese to deploy their forces abroad. The Chinese, in particular, worry that any revision, either to the Japanese constitution or to the U.S.-Japan alliance, would automatically constitute a renunciation of the peaceful foreign policy currently enshrined within Article 9 and would inevitably lead to Japanese rearmament.⁴⁸

That argument essentially ignores that Japanese rearmament has been going on for many years. Indeed, the very term "rearmament" is inappropriate, given that Japan is already well armed.

Confronting the Past

Japanese armies terrorized East Asia in the first half of the 20th century, and it would be unwise to ignore the psychological impact that their actions had on the occupied nations. Of particular concern have been Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine where 2.5 million Japanese war dead—including 14 leaders convicted of war crimes—are memorialized. Those visits seem to fit a pattern in which Japanese tend to play down the gravity of the Imperial Army's wartime abuses. Some demagogic politicians have gone so far as to suggest that the war crimes charges were trumped up by the victors.⁴⁹

In another well-publicized instance, a controversy over several Japanese textbooks that overlook Japan's wartime abuses has contributed to a sense in Asia, particularly Korea and China, that some Japanese have not fully accepted guilt for the war. When the Ministry of Education approved several new textbooks for use in Japanese schools in April 2005, the decision prompted angry protests in China and South Korea. Wang Yi, the Chinese ambassador to Japan, claimed that one book "has distorted history and hurt the feelings of people in Asia, including China."⁵⁰ A South Korean paper declared that the approval of the texts revealed that "those who are leading Japan are lacking in historical and philosophy understanding and are stuck in their own closed obstinacy."⁵¹

But criticism of the controversial texts has not been limited to Koreans or Chinese; many Japanese also had problems with the language and tone of the books. Editors at the *Asahi Shimbun* criticized the Japanese government for approving a history text that "is still not of a standard to be used in schools." In a spirited critique, the editorial concluded: "It is only natural for adults to wish their children to be proud of their own country. If they have a high

regard for their own country, however, they should respect the feelings of people overseas who hold a high regard for their own homelands, too.”⁵² By at least one measure, many Japanese appear to share those sentiments: a Kyodo News study found that only 16,300 students at 77 junior high schools, 0.44 percent of the total student population, will be using the textbooks beginning this April.⁵³

The textbook controversy should not be taken as evidence of a widespread resurgence of Japanese nationalism. Although there may be a nationalist fringe within Japan pining for a return to martial glory, such individuals remain on the margins of Japanese society. It would be unwise to allow the ghosts of World War II to forever dictate the conduct of U.S. policy toward Japan. The United States can continue to move forward with its new strategic relationship in which Japan emerges from its subordinate role while at the same time quietly urging the Japanese to show an appreciation for the special concerns voiced by some of their neighbors.

Japan’s Regional Activism

The Japanese, for their part, are already mindful of the continuing anxiety of the nations of the Pacific Rim. Perhaps that is one reason why such a large portion of Japan’s foreign aid budget has been given to the countries occupied by Japanese forces during World War II—Thailand, Korea, the Philippines, and China. Japanese aid in 2003 constituted approximately 50 percent of the total foreign aid received by Indonesia, Vietnam, and Laos; about 60 percent of the aid received by the Philippines, Malaysia, and Myanmar; and about 70 percent of aid to China.⁵⁴ Japanese businesses have also developed extensive economic ties in those nations. These spending and investment patterns suggest that the Japanese government, and Japanese citizens and businesses, place great value on friendly, peaceful relations with their Asian neighbors.

At the same time, a series of urgent security challenges has prompted a reassessment throughout Japanese society of the utility of military power. While it is conceivable that a

few Japanese might wish to remain dependent on America for their security, either out of a desire to avoid paying more for defense or for fear of the risks associated with a change from the status quo, many more are now willing to embrace a new strategic relationship with the United States in which the Japanese take full responsibility for their own security and also accept additional responsibilities in East Asia and the western Pacific.

The Bush administration is encouraging such new thinking on the part of the Japanese. The president and his senior advisers appear to appreciate that fears of a new Japanese empire are both irrational and anachronistic. “There is no fear of Japan,” an unnamed administration official told *National Review*’s Richard Lowry. “The old cork-in-the-bottle theory is dead.”⁵⁵ The Bush administration should combine this recognition of Japan’s legitimate security interests with a willingness to devolve security responsibilities to Japan, thereby easing the military and economic burden on American taxpayers. In other words, the Bush administration should view Japanese military capabilities not only as additive to, but also as a partial replacement for, U.S. military forces in the region.

The agreements announced in late October 2005 suggest that the process of strategic devolution may already be taking place. As discussed above, Japanese military forces are already extremely capable of both defending the territory of Japan and confronting would-be regional threats. Japan possesses advanced anti-submarine warfare capabilities, which are particularly important in the East Asian theater, and it also is capable of conducting mine-clearing activities.⁵⁶ Those assets are geared primarily to regional contingencies, but the vessels in Japan’s Maritime SDF constitute the second or third most capable fleet in the world. A shift in Japanese defense posture would not necessarily require a substantial expansion of current military spending.⁵⁷ Given Japan’s tight integration into the global economy, and its continued reliance on raw materials and energy resources from outside the Asia-Pacific region, the Japanese want to be in a position to safeguard the flow of such strategic resources, as well as

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finished goods, to and from their country, and this might require a new approach to the deployment and disposition of their existing military, especially naval, assets.

Ultimately, however, Washington must prompt such a shift by continuing to stress its new vision for U.S.-Japan strategic cooperation. The Japanese government must decide the size and composition of Japan's military, consistent with the wishes of the Japanese people. Americans must be willing to allow the Japanese to assert a measure of independence from their former patron; it serves neither U.S. nor Japanese long-term interests to expect Tokyo to merely toe Washington's line.

Three Case Studies—Iraq, Taiwan, and North Korea

How would a new strategic partnership between the United States and Japan—one founded on a genuine sharing of strategic responsibilities as opposed to the current patron-client relationship—deal with crises, both in East Asia and beyond? It is impossible to predict the future, but the evolving U.S.-Japan relationship is already being put to the test in at least three places—Iraq, Taiwan, and North Korea. The U.S. and Japanese responses to these crises offer clues about how Japanese foreign policy might operate, were it not for the fear of abandonment that contributes to Tokyo's inordinate concern for pleasing Washington.⁵⁸

Iraq

As discussed above, Japan refused to send combat troops to expel Saddam Hussein from Kuwait in 1991. Tokyo's position was primarily based on the restrictions that the constitution places on such deployments, but it is also true that Japan's national security was not seriously threatened by what was happening in a region many thousands of miles away from its shores.

Twelve years later, Saddam Hussein's Iraq posed no greater threat to Japan than it had in the earlier period. But the second time around, Japan's leaders—particularly Prime Minister

Koizumi—were anxious to prove their loyalty to the United States. Equally important, there were fewer legal prohibitions on military participation in 2003 than in 1991, given that the Japanese had passed legislation following the first Gulf War that made it somewhat easier to deploy SDF personnel abroad. "When the United States, an absolutely invaluable ally of our country, is sacrificing itself," the prime minister explained, "it is natural for our country to back the move as much as possible."⁵⁹

In short, the deployment of Japanese forces to Iraq in 2003 was more a reflection of Japan's continued dependence on the United States than it was an expression of independence. Indeed, this is essentially how the Bush administration framed the deployment. As a follow-on to his comment that it was essential that Japan be seen as standing side by side with the United States in the war on terrorism, former deputy secretary of state Armitage in June 2003 expressed his hopes that Japan would decide to put "boots on the ground" in Iraq.⁶⁰ Tokyo's primary interest, it could easily be interpreted, was not in bringing stability to Iraq, per se, but rather in maintaining good relations with the United States. If the Japanese public was genuinely supportive of the mission, if the deployment revealed a sense of shared strategic purpose or was seen as advancing genuine Japanese national interests, then the Japanese forces in Iraq today would be both useful and significant. As it is, they are merely symbolic.

As of the end of March 2006, there were approximately 600 Japanese ground troops operating in the relatively peaceful city of Samawa in southern Iraq, with another 200 stationed in Kuwait in a supporting role. The deployment was first approved in December 2003, and Koizumi renewed this mandate in two successive years. It now seems likely that the SDF mission in Iraq will end some time in mid to late 2006, when the British and Australian troops that are providing security for the Japanese forces are scheduled to leave the country.⁶¹

Koizumi's ability to sustain the mission for as long as he did reflects a delicate political balancing act. The SDF troops have been posted in

a relatively peaceful region, and their assignment, the Japan Defense Agency explains, focuses on “humanitarian and reconstruction assistance” and is “designed solely to help the people of Iraq in their attempt to rebuild their own country.”⁶²The Japanese safe haven essentially has been carved out by Dutch, and later British and Australian, combat forces, none of which are proscribed from operating in a combat setting.⁶³

A majority of Japanese disapproved of the U.S. attack on Iraq, but opposition to their government’s support of postwar reconstruction has been far more muted. Most recognize Japan’s dependence on the United States for security and are therefore willing to put aside their qualms about the use of force in order to reaffirm their solidarity with their powerful patron.

The Japanese public’s ambivalence has enabled the Koizumi government to circumvent pockets of strong public opposition. “Maintenance of the U.S.-Japan alliance will now be given priority,” according to the prime minister, even if America’s actions are not considered legitimate by many Japanese. Koizumi stresses: “There are times when we make mistakes following the public opinion.”⁶⁴

That statement, far from being an expression of blatant disregard for public opinion, instead reflects Koizumi’s sense that satisfying the United States, even if it means risking the lives of Japanese soldiers, is a fair bargain just so long as those risks don’t materialize into actual casualties. It would be far harder for Koizumi to maintain such a stance if Japanese troops were subjected to the chaos and violence that confront American forces every day.

The prime minister’s advocacy of the SDF mission in Iraq did not hurt him politically, as the LDP’s strong showing in the September elections demonstrated; simply put, the Iraq deployment was not a major factor in the minds of most Japanese voters. But that does not mean that the public isn’t concerned about issues pertaining to foreign policy and defense; the *Mainichi Shimbun* opined in April 2005 that the public does “not think the

prime minister is making sufficient effort to improve Tokyo’s relations with Beijing and Seoul.”⁶⁵ In other words, Koizumi has invested his attention, and Japan’s military resources, in a distant operation in Iraq, even as the Japanese public remains focused on genuine security issues much closer to home.

Taiwan

It is not surprising that the Japanese public is concerned about relations with China and South Korea. Relations with those two countries are closely tied to the two most prominent flashpoints in East Asia—Taiwan and North Korea. Taiwan is an important security concern for Japan. The island is less than 175 miles west of Ishigaki, the southernmost island in the Japanese island chain, and it sits astride crucial sea-lanes. Military conflict there would disrupt the free flow of raw materials and goods to and from Japan. A Chinese takeover of Taiwan would likely alter the strategic balance in East Asia. Thus, it is not surprising that Japan takes a great interest in the ongoing dispute between the PRC and Taiwan.

U.S. policies should aim at burden shifting, not simply burden sharing, whenever possible. The object of a new strategic relationship is to more equitably distribute the burdens of defense between the two allies, with each assuming primary responsibility for its most urgent security interests. That may be difficult in those ambiguous cases that do not clearly fall within either the United States’ or Japan’s direct interests. Taiwan is in that category.

Prime Minister Koizumi’s government has become more involved in the China-Taiwan dispute within the past year. It is difficult to know how much of this reflects a careful calculation of Japan’s own national interest and how much is a reflection of Koizumi’s desire to show support for Japan’s American patron. There is no question, however, that the future of Taiwan is far more important for Japan than is the future of Iraq.

Like the vast majority of countries around the world, Japan does not officially recognize Taiwan as an independent sovereign country.

Koizumi has invested his attention, and Japan’s military resources, in a distant operation in Iraq, even as the Japanese public remains focused on genuine security issues much closer to home.

Tokyo's decision to show support for Taipei goes beyond narrow security concerns, and also beyond a desire to please Washington.

According to the Japanese Foreign Ministry, the two countries have “maintained working relations on a non-governmental basis” since 1972, the time of the signing of the Japan-China Joint Communiqué.⁶⁶ In March 2006 Japanese foreign minister Taro Aso hailed Taiwan as a law-abiding “country,” prompting an angry rebuke from Beijing. Aso was unapologetic. “Although I know there will be a problem with calling [Taiwan] a country,” he said, “firm relations between Japan and Taiwan should be maintained” within the framework of the 1972 treaty.⁶⁷

Beyond the semantic debate, however, the Koizumi government has also taken more deliberate steps to show its support for Taiwan. On February 19, 2005, in a joint declaration with the United States, Japan described Taiwan for the first time as a “security challenge” of concern and further called for “the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue.”⁶⁸ The *New York Times* noted that Japan’s mention of Taiwan constituted a new development, given that Tokyo had previously “been leery of publicly inserting itself into the Taiwan issue.”⁶⁹ Shi Yinhong, a professor of international relations at the People’s University of Beijing, characterized the Japanese announcement as “really an important development.” The mere hint of Japanese support for Taiwan drew a sharp response from the Chinese Foreign Ministry, which expressed “displeasure and grave concern” because the statement “interferes with China’s sovereignty, territorial integrity and state security.”⁷⁰

In March 2005 Japan weighed in on the Taiwan issue once again. Reacting to China’s passing of the Anti-Secession Law, whereby China formally asserted its authority to use “nonpeaceful means” against Taiwan if the island were to declare independence, the Japanese government expressed concern about the legislation and reiterated its view that “a peaceful solution through dialogues between the parties concerned” was needed.⁷¹ To underscore its solidarity with Taipei, Tokyo has quietly sent its first military attaché to the Interchange Association, Japan’s de facto embassy in Taiwan. Summing up U.S. and Japanese atti-

tudes, Tadashi Ikeda, Japan’s leading diplomat on the island explained, “There has always been a question of what Japan would do” in the event of Chinese aggression against Taiwan. “Now the Taiwanese can say that both the U.S. and Japan are on their side.”⁷²

The Japanese public appears to be generally sympathetic to the Taiwanese cause, suggesting that Tokyo’s decision to show support for Taipei goes beyond narrow security concerns, and also beyond a desire to please Washington. An estimated 2.3 million tourists travel between Taiwan and Japan each year, and Japan is Taiwan’s largest trading partner.⁷³ Favorable sentiment does not necessarily translate into support for independence among Japanese, however. In a September 2002 *Japan Times* survey, 71 percent of Japanese declared they were satisfied with the status quo on Taiwan; in other words, they favored neither reunification with the PRC nor independence from it.⁷⁴ This may reflect a recognition on the part of the Japanese public that Taiwanese independence may provoke the Chinese to military action, which would certainly prove detrimental to Japanese security.

But doubts and fears about the PRC do not completely overwhelm Japanese affinity for Taiwan and the Taiwanese. A *Mainichi* poll taken in 2001 asked Japanese citizens to identify countries and regions friendly to Japan. Taiwan ranked third, behind the United States and South Korea.⁷⁵ On balance, the Japanese like Taiwan and the feeling is apparently mutual. “The Japanese built universities, roads, and other infrastructure. They educated us, they turned us into a more modern society,” said Hwang Kuan-hu, a national policy adviser to Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian, “We welcome Japan becoming more involved again with Taiwan.”⁷⁶

Whether this mutual appreciation would translate into a formal Japanese pledge to assist Taiwan in the event of Chinese aggression remains to be seen, but that should ultimately be a decision for the Japanese government, and the Japanese public, consistent with their own security concerns. The presumed wishes or desires of the United States should not be the

determining factor. Given Taiwan's strategic location across crucial Japanese lines of communication, the Japanese would view PRC control over the island as a security threat. Although Japan currently has only a limited capacity for blocking military annexation, a strong statement, building on the February 2005 joint declaration, may help deter Chinese military action against Taiwan. Even a position of deliberate ambiguity, holding out the possibility that Japan *might* employ military means to repel Chinese aggression, would likely be more credible coming from a regional military power than is the current ambiguous pledge originating with a United States that is struggling to sustain a host of commitments around the globe.

North Korea

Japan's support for U.S. policy in Iraq reflects its dependence on the United States, and its interest in the ongoing dispute between the PRC and Taiwan illustrates a general concern for regional security as well as sympathy for the continued independence of a fragile democracy. In contrast, Tokyo's policy toward North Korea is grounded primarily in a concern for Japanese security; specifically, the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear program.

The DPRK's reckless behavior, and the continued unpredictability of the North Korean regime, perhaps served as the single greatest impetus to the acceleration of Japanese self-defense efforts in the late 1990s. In a move that was both unnecessary and counterproductive, the Clinton administration essentially excluded Japan and South Korea from the negotiations that led to the Agreed Framework of 1994.

North Korea's test launch of a Taepodong ballistic missile over Japanese territory in August 1998 greatly increased Japanese anxiety about the DPRK's nuclear program, and about Pyongyang's potentially hostile designs. According to Andrew Oros, an assistant professor of political science at Washington College and an expert in U.S.-Japan security issues, the North Korean missile test "cemented public

support for the long-simmering question of developing indigenous surveillance satellites" that might be capable of detecting preparations for a North Korean military attack or providing early warning of a missile launch. The satellites may also prove instrumental in the deployment of a national missile defense system.⁷⁷ The first of these satellites was launched in 2003. Before that time the Japanese were generally dependent on the United States for aerial and space reconnaissance.

More recently, in the wake of the revelations that the DPRK had been pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program in violation of the 1994 agreement, the Japanese have been in the forefront of attempting to resolve the crisis. Some voices in Japan have complained both about the lack of urgency exhibited by the United States and about the extent to which U.S. policies have increased tensions throughout the region. An editorial in the *Asahi Shimbun* worried that the Bush administration "does not seem in any hurry to strike a bargain as long as Pyongyang does not export nuclear arms to a third party or pose a direct threat to the United States itself." However, given that the North's nuclear program was an "urgent" matter for Tokyo, the editors advised Prime Minister Koizumi to "figure out a way to make some headway."⁷⁸

Koizumi, for his part, has pledged to be a "staunch ally of Bush" and America's most "solid" partner on the question of halting North Korea's nuclear ambitions. The prime minister has repeatedly endorsed the U.S.-backed Six-Party Talks and has taken the additional step of personally engaging North Korea's leader on the subject, urging Kim Jong-il to "abandon his bid for nuclear weapons and accept international inspections under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty."⁷⁹ By contrast, President Bush has refused to allow U.S. negotiators to participate in bilateral talks.

But Japanese concerns about North Korea go beyond fears about nuclear proliferation. Although the prospects for warm relations between the DPRK and Japan were never good, relations have been further impeded by the revelation of North Korean kidnappings of

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Japanese citizens.⁸⁰ When North Korea admitted to some of the abductions in September 2002, tensions between the two countries increased. Koizumi's second trip to Pyongyang, in May 2004, was largely aimed at resolving the abductee issue. Hopefulness gave way to recrimination by the end of 2004, when Tokyo demanded a full accounting from the DPRK. North Korean officials admit to only 17 abductees, but there may be as many as 400.⁸¹ The enormous disparity between these figures plays into wider doubts in Japan about the veracity of North Korean claims with respect to weapons development and regional security.

One tangible manifestation of growing dissatisfaction with North Korea is declining financial support from individual Japanese citizens for the impoverished country. Charitable donations to nongovernmental organizations that help North Koreans have declined fivefold, from 50 million yen to under 10 million yen, within the past 10 years. Michiya Kumaoka, head of the Japan International Volunteer Center, estimates that the amount of aid that Japanese people donate to the 10 or 15 food agencies active in North Korea has also declined sharply since 1998.⁸²

Opposition to the Jong-il regime is particularly strong in some circles. Some of Japan's most famous and respected citizens participated in a three-day "sit-in" in June 2005 in front of the prime minister's office, demanding that Koizumi impose economic sanctions against North Korea.⁸³

Koizumi is now caught between "intense domestic political pressure" to sanction North Korea, explains East Asia specialist Gavan McCormack of the Australian National University, and "intense external pressure, notably from the government of the United States, for which nuclear matters far outweigh the abductions."⁸⁴ Koizumi must react to the twin crises without provoking the North Koreans, while addressing demands for toughness on the part of his constituents and from his strategic patron, the United States.

North Korea warns that any economic sanctions imposed by Japan would be regarded as a "declaration of war."⁸⁵ So far, Koizumi

has resisted calls for such penalties against North Korea, yet he retains the ability to impose them, a power explicitly granted to him by the Japanese Diet in early 2004.⁸⁶ On the other hand, Koizumi did halt 250,000 tons of food aid to North Korea in December 2004.⁸⁷ Other legislation cut off an estimated \$38 million in yearly remittances sent to North Korea by Koreans living in Japan. A new shipping law passed in March 2005 indirectly penalizes North Korea because it blocks foreign ships of 100 tons or more from entering Japanese ports unless the ships are insured against oil spills and other damages, and few North Korean ships meet the requirements. Although the shipping regulation did not specifically mention North Korea, Japanese officials said it was "drawn up with the hermit state in mind."⁸⁸

North Korea is a leading foreign policy issue for most Japanese, who have increasingly negative views of their neighbor. The problems are twofold. On the one hand, the military threat, particularly the nuclear threat, creates growing apprehension.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the highly emotional issue of the abductees is omnipresent in the Japanese media.

Without question, U.S.-Japanese relations have been shaped in the post-9/11 world by Prime Minister Koizumi's strong and growing personal friendship with President Bush. In each of the three cases discussed above, Koizumi strove to align Toyko's policies with those emanating from Washington. But this has not always been easy and he was anxious not to get too far ahead of (or fall behind) public opinion. Although Koizumi reasserted and consolidated political power in the most recent elections, and his standing remains high both within the LDP and within Japan as a whole, the fragility of the political process requires that policy be based on more than personal friendships. In each of the three crises discussed above, a Japanese prime minister less closely aligned with the United States might well have behaved in a different fashion. Indeed, the opposition DPJ has long advocated a more independent posture vis-à-vis the United States.⁹⁰ The key to understanding the

evolution of the U.S.-Japan strategic relationship depends, therefore, on more than the words and actions of a few individuals at the top; one must consider broader Japanese and American interests and domestic public opinion in both countries.

Assessing Japanese Attitudes toward Future Security Challenges

A U.S.-Japan strategic relationship that more closely resembles an alliance in the traditional sense of the term, as opposed to the current patron-client relationship, is likely to be an enduring model for U.S.-Japanese security cooperation in the future, especially if it is based on popular support. Fortunately, popular sentiment within Japan offers still more clues about how the three cases discussed above might play out in a future in which Japan behaves as a normal country, that is, as a country responsible for defending its interests, and not dependent on the United States.

Of the three cases discussed above, popular support for an active role by Japanese military forces is weakest with respect to Iraq. Japanese elites place great importance on retaining the favor of their security patron. It is unlikely that there would be Japanese forces operating in Iraq today were it not for U.S. pressure, and the Japanese may be reluctant to become involved in similar military missions in the future. However, lingering anti-militarism within Japan does not proscribe the SDF from serving in the more ambiguous role of security provider in postconflict settings, with or without U.S. encouragement. If the pattern of SDF peacekeeping established in the 1990s were to continue, or even expand, that should not be seen as a manifestation of resurgent Japanese militarism. On the other hand, it seems more likely that, in the absence of U.S. pressure to become more actively involved around the world, a more independent Japan would use its military forces to deal with issues more directly relevant to its own national security.

That would be beneficial to both the United States and Japan. To be sure, an equitable strategic partnership could make things more difficult for U.S. policymakers in certain instances, but that is a chance worth taking in the interest of devolving security responsibilities away from the United States and lowering U.S. risk exposure. Reducing the global U.S. military presence is essential to alleviating the considerable burdens on U.S. taxpayers, who collectively spend more than 10 times as much on defense as do the Japanese. U.S. policy should seek to accelerate Japan's emergence as a more effective military ally in the region.

Within the context of a more equitable U.S.-Japan alliance, if Japanese forces were deployed to any country far outside the East Asian region, their dispatch would be dependent on Tokyo's assessment of Japanese security interests and therefore would be far more likely to enjoy the support of the Japanese public. Under the current patron-client relationship, Japanese and American officials alike have bent over backwards to place the small number of SDF troops in a location where they are unlikely to be exposed to harm; by extension, this small number of troops is not measurably contributing to the completion of the mission in Iraq; nor are they substantially reducing the threat to other Coalition forces. In short, their presence is almost entirely symbolic and has little, if any, strategic value.

Nonetheless, Prime Minister Koizumi risked some political capital, as well as time and attention, rallying a modicum of public support for an exceedingly modest, even token, military deployment. And while the Japanese agonized over the dispatch of a few hundred troops to a country thousands of miles away, China ratcheted up its threats against a democratic entity a few hundred miles away from Japan and North Korea continued to process nuclear material. At best, Japan's conduct seems a case of misplaced priorities and confusion over Japan's strategic interests; at worst, Japan has subordinated its own interests to those of its distant patron.

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exhibits a genuine sympathy for and interest in the plight of Taiwan, and the Taiwanese people harbor fewer resentments toward the Japanese than do other states in the region that experienced Japanese colonialism firsthand. Taiwan's continued relative autonomy from China is of immediate strategic interest for Japan. Over time, as Japan continues to develop its military capabilities, China and other states in the region should not discount the possibility that Japan would come to Taiwan's assistance in the event that the PRC made good on its threat to use "nonpeaceful means" to reclaim the breakaway republic.

That does not mean that Tokyo wishes to antagonize Beijing. The Japanese clearly are concerned about recent Chinese pressure on Taiwan, but they have stopped short of pledging to come to Taiwan's aid in the event of a conflict. Continued free and unfettered passage through the sea-lanes that surround the island is vital to Japanese interests; it is therefore implausible to assume that the Japanese would inevitably accede to PRC aggression against Taiwan. Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian misconstrued Japanese pledges to Taiwan when he told the *Washington Post's* Anthony Faiola that "Japan has a requirement and an obligation to come to the defense of Taiwan."⁹¹ Nonetheless, even the mere possibility that China could face a retaliatory response from either or both of two powerful states, one of which is located only a few hundred miles off the coast of China, might serve as a more credible deterrent than that which is posed today solely by the United States, with Japan serving in a supporting role.

Finally, with respect to the ongoing crisis on the Korean peninsula, the danger of nuclear proliferation in East Asia, combined with continued ill-will engendered by the abductee controversy, suggests that the Japanese would likely be dealing far more harshly with the North Koreans than they are now were it not for the United States. At least one recent poll suggest that the Japanese are less concerned about the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons than are many Americans,⁹² but, objectively, Kim Jong-il does pose a more urgent security

threat to Japan than he does to the United States.

The North Korean crisis may have provided the catalyst for a fundamental shift in Japanese strategy and policy, but it cannot be viewed in a vacuum. Although the steps thus far taken by Koizumi against North Korea have not satisfied a segment of the Japanese population, many of whom remain more concerned about the emotional abductee issue than about the objective security threat, China's rise poses a more important challenge to Japan's security over the medium to long term.⁹³ For now, given the urgency of the North Korean threat to Japan, and befitting Japan's emergence as a normal power, it would be natural for Japan to take a leading role in attempting to end North Korea's nuclear program.

As other regional threats become more serious, however, many Japanese may come to resent U.S. policies that appear to impede their reasonable efforts to defend themselves. Continued strong opposition within Japan to the use of the military for offensive ends suggests that unilateral preemptive action by Japan against North Korea is highly unlikely. On the other hand, it is unrealistic to expect that Tokyo would wait for U.S. permission to respond to a direct attack. It is only slightly more plausible that the Japanese would refrain from using force in response to credible evidence of an imminent threat.

Military action against North Korea, even if it were found to be a legitimate exercise of the right of self-defense, would certainly stir regional animosity. That is a reflection of the difficult balancing act that Japan must play vis-à-vis other potential allies in the region, chief among them South Korea. North and South Koreans alike harbor deep resentment toward the Japanese. Koreans were the victims of horrible crimes at the hands of the Japanese, of which the notorious abuses inflicted on Korean "comfort women" were only the most infamous. Although U.S. policymakers should rightly be concerned about regional hostility toward Japan, such concerns are not more worrisome than the crisis in the here and now, when an impoverished and increasingly des-

perate North Korea might be tempted to sell nuclear materials to terrorists.

Short of offensive military operations against Pyongyang, Japan has other means for defending itself from North Korean nuclear weapons independent of the United States. Japan has cooperated with the United States in the construction of an anti-ballistic missile system, but the further development and deployment of such a system need not depend on U.S. support. If active countermeasures for dealing with regional security threats were deemed insufficient, the Japanese might even take the fateful step of developing their own nuclear deterrent.⁹⁴

In short, a Japanese military, operating independent of the United States but still constrained by the pacifist impulses of the Japanese public, could prove a credible deterrent to offensive actions by North Korea against Japan proper and might also succeed in convincing the DPRK to abandon its nuclear ambitions, in contrast to U.S. economic and diplomatic pressure, which has been completely ineffective. Beyond the North Korean crisis, Japanese military power might prove instrumental for dealing with future serious challenges to the regional security order.

Conclusion

The decades-long U.S.-Japan strategic partnership is changing. Americans are becoming increasingly anxious about the costs and risks of our permanent global military presence and are looking for ways to devolve security responsibilities and reduce our risk exposure. The Japanese, although retaining a strong anti-militarist disposition, are willing to play a more assertive role. The Japanese SDF is already highly capable, and Japanese military capabilities could quickly expand if the security environment grows more threatening.

Americans and Japanese should welcome a transition from a patron-client relationship to one of mutual trust and understanding based on shared interests. The renowned international relations scholar Hans Morgenthau

theorized years ago that “alliances are typically of temporary duration” because they rely on a fragile “community of interests.” The “traditionally separate and frequently incompatible interests of the individual nations” tend to erode support for the alliance over time.⁹⁵ But such arguments do not account for the possibility that states, particularly states that share a commitment to political and economic liberalism, might similarly share a broad conception of common strategic interests.

Today, Japan and the United States certainly do share many common interests, and it is worth pausing briefly to marvel at this remarkable transformation over the past 60 years. President Bush is particularly effusive in his praise of Prime Minister Koizumi. The two men share a genuine friendship, but U.S. and Japanese policymakers should seek to craft a strategic partnership that will endure long after Koizumi and Bush have passed from the scene. Under the current arrangement, the United States pledges to defend Japan in exchange for basing rights. In addition, however, Japan’s security dependence has led the Japanese to defer to the United States on regional security issues. More recently, Japan has sent a token force to a far-off land in order to curry favor with its benevolent patron, but not necessarily out of a sense of shared strategic objectives. This is not a sustainable model over the long term.

Defending Japan with Japanese Forces

The Bush administration is contemplating a shift in the U.S. military’s global posture in many other places around the globe, including Europe and South Korea. Those changes are long overdue, and they should be accelerated. The presence of U.S. troops in stable, democratic countries that are capable of playing a larger regional role might inhibit such countries from assuming responsibilities commensurate with their political, military, and economic strength. Although the United States spends far more on its military than any other country in the world, policymakers must still make difficult choices about where U.S. forces should or should not be deployed. But the

U.S. and Japanese policymakers should seek to craft a strategic partnership that will endure long after Koizumi and Bush have passed from the scene.

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decision on whether to leave U.S. forces in Japan should be an easy one.

Under the terms of the current security treaty, Japanese forces have primary responsibility for defending Japan. Those forces, although configured for self-defense, also possess the capability to play a wider role in the region, but they have been discouraged from doing so by the presence of U.S. forces in the region, particularly on the island of Okinawa. Accordingly, the Bush administration should clearly outline U.S. plans for shifting security responsibilities to the Japanese, a process that would culminate with the removal of U.S. forces from Japan. The announcement that 8,000 Marines will be moved from Okinawa to Guam by 2012 does not go nearly far enough fast enough⁹⁶ and implies that U.S. forces will forever remain on Japanese soil in some capacity. Instead of assuming an indefinite troop presence, the final security agreements between the two countries should include provisions for port access for the United States, and the agreements might also include some prepositioning of heavy equipment, in the event that other U.S. facilities in the western Pacific (for example at Guam, Hawaii, and Wake Island) prove inadequate to deal with future security emergencies.⁹⁷

Continued consultations would allow the Japanese to take prudent steps to address their own security needs and possibly also to assume broader security responsibilities in East Asia. But consultations might not be enough to assuage Japanese concerns about their security over the long term. The Japanese are already considering changes to their constitution, most important Article 9, and the push for such modifications may take on added urgency as the U.S.-Japan security relationship changes. The Japanese might also contemplate the need for an indigenous nuclear deterrent. Japan has long possessed the ability to develop nuclear weapons. It is unrealistic to expect that Japan would permanently eschew such weapons if, in the end, they were seen as essential for Japanese security, but there are many reasons to believe that the Japanese will weigh such considerations very carefully.

The United States, reflecting the realities of a new relationship predicated on equity and trust, should not presume to dictate to Japan what it should or should not do in order to safeguard its security. The proper U.S. policy is one of studied ambivalence. The Armitage Report specifically held out the U.S.-U.K. relationship as a model for the U.S.-Japan alliance. But just as U.S. policymakers do not presume to dictate to the United Kingdom how it should structure its defense, they should not expect to do so with respect to Japan. U.S. policymakers should make clear that the United States will neither offer the protection of our extended nuclear deterrent indefinitely nor object to a Japanese decision to develop a deterrent force. Likewise, while many in Washington believe that a revision to Article 9 of the Japanese constitution is long overdue, that decision should and must be left exclusively to the Japanese people.

Addressing Regional Concerns

Americans and East Asians alike must overcome their latent fears of Japan, albeit perhaps for different reasons. Americans must appreciate that a commitment to the status quo, which has the effect of inhibiting the emergence of independent Japanese military power, unnecessarily increases America's own security burdens in the present and well into the future. On a deeper level, however, people in the United States who remain unalterably opposed to a fundamental reorientation of the current U.S.-Japan relationship must understand that reflexive obstructionism could do irreparable harm to the relationship of trust and cooperation so carefully cultivated since the end of World War II. Obstruction implies mistrust, and it is hard to envision how the entire range of U.S.-Japanese relationships, military and diplomatic as well as political and economic, could continue to flourish in such an environment.

Meanwhile, Japan's neighbors should welcome a potential counterweight to a rising China. Many already do. Attitudes toward Japan vary widely, with Taiwanese, Singapore-

ans, Filipinos, and Malays much more favorably disposed than are Koreans. The Chinese are not eager to see the emergence of a strategic competitor in Asia. From the perspective of political and military leaders in Beijing, a “proper” role for the Japanese SDF would have little if any impact on the regional balance of power.

China’s path over the past 30 years has been marked by increased economic liberalization combined with some (albeit halting) political reform. But there is still a long way to go. Common economic interests within Asia may lead to China’s peaceful integration into the region. Or China could turn away from its current course of political and economic liberalization and revert to economic autarchy imposed by military force. It is even possible that China could become a revisionist power, no longer content to accept regional security configurations in their present form. That could occur even if the PRC holds to a course of economic reform. Against those unlikely but dangerous possibilities, East Asian countries might wish to adopt a hedging strategy that would allow for the emergence, in the meantime, of other regional powers capable of balancing against a rising China.

Japan is the one regional power best suited to play this role. Japan is a stable and mature democracy. The pre-World War II era, when an imperial Japan attempted to secure an exclusive economic sphere for itself, is long past. The Japanese people have demonstrated a consistent aversion to the use of force and an equally strong determination to maintain firm civilian control over the nation’s military. It is highly unlikely that a new strategic relationship between the United States and Japan, one that affords Japan a place within the international community consistent with its economic, political, and military strength, would open the door to Japanese militarism that has remained dormant for nearly 60 years.

The Danger of U.S. Obstructionism

Christopher Hughes, an analyst at Warwick University’s Center for the Study of Globali-

zation and Regionalization, warns that Japanese anxiety over security is shaped by Japan’s dependence on the United States and that Japan is thereby trapped in the “dilemma of abandonment.”⁹⁸ It would be neither moral nor wise for the United States to precipitously abandon Japan, but no one is advocating such a course. Rather, the time has come for a realistic assessment of both countries’ core strategic aims, and this reassessment will facilitate progress toward an equitable alliance and away from the patron-client relationship.

American taxpayers have obligingly assumed the considerable costs and risks of defending Japanese interests, but the United States should not continue to subsidize Japan’s defense indefinitely, as it did throughout the Cold War. Even before the events of 9/11, the U.S. military was straining under the burdens of global obligations that did not match its capabilities. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have only exacerbated those pressures. Both Tokyo and Washington must recognize the new strategic environment and begin planning for the substitution of Japanese for U.S. military power where appropriate.

U.S. policymakers must take an accurate accounting of the strategic realities in East Asia, and the political developments within Japan, and recognize that the United States need not indefinitely sustain its dominant position in the region. Given the clear and present danger posed to Japan by the North Korea nuclear program, and in the medium to long term by China’s rising power, now is the time for Washington to encourage Japan’s departure from an obsolete posture of dependence.

Meanwhile, latent American and East Asian fears of a resurgent Japan should be calmed by the commitment of the Japanese to the principles enshrined in their constitution—even a constitution modified to reflect Japan’s emergence as a full-fledged sovereign state. Although there is a remote possibility that Japan’s transition to “normal” country status could eventually lead to resurgent nationalism, or even revanchism, Japan’s underlying democratic values and a tradition of anti-militarism cultivated since the end of World War II point strongly in the opposite

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direction. There is little reason to believe that the domestic political forces that have constrained Japanese national security policy for decades would collapse and be superseded by rampant imperialism of the kind that was practiced in the 1930s. To the contrary, domestic sentiments in Japan suggest that the use of Japanese military power will be restricted to the resolution of specific crises that threaten vital Japanese interests.

The Japanese inclination to play a global role commensurate with Japan's political and economic power may grow, irrespective of a formal and coordinated effort to reshape the alliance. In the near term, however, Japan will be focused on regional security threats, where its power and influence are likely to be decisive. Therefore, the creation of a new strategic partnership between the United States and Japan that is far less burdensome and risky for Americans could provide an effective framework for addressing regional security challenges in East Asia well into the future.

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