

Avoiding Cold War II

Upgrading the US-Japan Alliance and Bridging Regional Divides

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Issues and Insights, Vol. 6, No. 6 (March 2006), pp. 63-68.

The US-Japan alliance is well known for its Cold War purposes: providing the United States a military foothold in East Asia and facilitating Japan's effective and efficient defense posture. In the post-Cold War, both sides committed to maintaining the alliance as a cornerstone of regional stability and expanding its constructive role in dealing with regional and global contingencies. A recent statement by the foreign and defense ministers of both countries went further by outlining common strategic objectives, including peace on the Korean Peninsula and across the Taiwan Strait, countering WMD and terrorist threats, encouraging China to be a responsible international player, and promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law.¹ Realizing the alliance's potential for meeting these objectives requires sustained and coordinated efforts by Japan and the United States. Means for these ends involve two complementary processes: upgrading US-Japan security cooperation and working to bridge regional divides in East Asia. This essay argues that while developments have been made in the former, greater progress is required in the latter, as both processes are necessary for regional peace and avoiding a second Cold War. Recommendations will be made for US policy and issues for further study will be suggested, in light of discussion at the 12th annual Japan-US Security Seminar.

A More Active, Versatile Alliance

Much has been invested in the US-Japan alliance, yielding great strategic benefits for both sides. Further investment promises significant returns, given the breadth of US-Japan shared interests and the advantages of expanded security cooperation. The alliance is capable of doing more than its Cold War deterrence functions, rising to the challenges of the current international security environment. These challenges most notably include the spread of WMD and related technologies, the threat of international terrorism, and the uncertainties of global power shifts and military modernization. To realize the potential of US-Japan security cooperation, the alliance is adapting to its new global context, and this means becoming more active and more versatile.

Rather than simply deterring military conflicts by maintaining the strength to counter aggression, today's US-Japan alliance looks to actively shape and improve the security landscape. In other words, instead of primarily providing for stability via a favorable balance of power, the US-Japan alliance intends to engage in "efforts to improve the international security environment,

¹ Joint Statement of the US-Japan Security Consultative Committee, February 19, 2005; <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html>.

such as participation in international peace cooperation activities."² Recent efforts include: support of international activities in Afghanistan and Iraq; cooperation on Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) and the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI); and assistance to areas affected by the 2004 tsunami and 2005 South Asia earthquake. The alliance has also witnessed various doctrinal advances stemming from the 1997 Revised Guidelines; Japan's National Defense Program Outlines published in 1995 and 2004; new laws passed by the Japanese Diet for security contingencies; the US global posture review; and joint statements by the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) on shared objectives, coordinated roles and complementary capabilities.

These developments notably involve Japan adjusting its security policies to operate as a more equal and involved security partner. But such adjustments are not without controversy in Japanese domestic politics and regional diplomacy. It is thus important for the United States to be aware of these difficulties and take concrete steps to support bilateral upgrading of the alliance. For US policy, the following are recommended:

- Facilitate Japan's greater international security role by helping Tokyo attain political recognition commensurate with its economic standing and postwar record as a responsible and contributing member of the international community. Washington can keep US-Japan cooperation in the spotlight at high level meetings and press conferences, and more actively support Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council.
- Maintain good high-level working relations – the Bush-Koizumi relationship has provided impetus for strengthening security cooperation; it will benefit the alliance if such a close relationship between principles continues between their political successors.
- Coordinate military capabilities by encouraging expedited implementation of the SCC agreements. This includes upgrading military hardware and technologies such as missile defense, but especially the "software" of the alliance concerning interoperability, information sharing, and contingency planning. The US can also support implementation of Japan's new National Defense Program Guidelines by encouraging command-control reform and inter-service cooperation among Japanese GSDF, MSDF and ASDF via enhanced joint training and mutual use of facilities with USFJ.
- Closely consult with Japan regarding changes in US global security posture and plans for further troop realignments, not just involving US troops based on Japanese soil, but also regional and global realignments that will affect strategic possibilities for US-Japan cooperation.
- Be sensitive to local concerns about military bases. This is mostly a NIMBY (not in my backyard) politics issue for the Japanese government, but Washington should confirm it is allowing room for local consultations while encouraging Tokyo to expend the political capital necessary for good public relations for the alliance. Agreements on modifying the US footprint in Japan need to be quickly modified, if necessary, and implemented without delay. The United States can help this process by not publicly appearing heavy-handed on basing issues, and

² "US-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future," US-Japan Security Consultative Committee, October 29, 2005; <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/doc0510.html>.

strictly following the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) and related understandings in dealing with incidents and accidents involving US personnel on Japanese soil.

- Be aware of Japan's legal (especially constitutional) concerns regarding upgrading the US-Japan alliance, and coordinate with Japan accordingly in the articulation of roles and missions.
- Show flexibility on Host Nation Support (HNS) and understanding of Japanese budgetary challenges, encouraging mutual use of facilities, close coordination of military capabilities and lower cost US solutions to weapons needs to avoid any future crisis in defense spending.

Regional Community Building

While the process of upgrading the US-Japan alliance has witnessed much progress, and the way forward, while not easy, is clear and well charted by Japanese and American strategic planners, the process of bridging regional divides in East Asia lags behind, and the way forward remains uncertain. The first step in making the alliance more supportive of regional community building is better recognizing this process as essential to peace and stability. If the US-Japan alliance were to strengthen further and as planned, without progress on bridging regional divides, the result could be unnecessary military build-up and a new Cold War.

Deepening economic interdependence among the US, Japan and China makes a hot war in the region unlikely, as all sides share high cost-perceptions for outright military conflict. But while interdependence among these powers might be a source of optimism when historically compared to the US-Soviet case, the seeds for a Cold War II are evident: territorial disputes, historical rivalries, resource competition, nationalist politics, ideological conflict, regime type differences, disparities in development, lack of regional integration and institutions to minimize misperception, and so on. The US-Japan alliance thus needs to take up the role of expanding the sphere of US-Japan security cooperation and promoting a greater sense of common destiny among the nations of East Asia.

Certainly the US-Japan alliance will not be the primary force for regional integration; that is the role of economic incentives and trade. But the alliance should not be against or hamper identity building in East Asia. Rather, the alliance should encourage shared goals and understandings of regional stability. This is possible by enhancing the "attractive power" of the alliance, making other states want to join Japan and the US in security cooperation. For US policy, the following are recommended:

- Emphasize the alliance as a mechanism for stipulating policies for the common good in East Asia, its role in reassuring all countries in the region, and its welcoming of multilateral cooperation. Broaden active subscribers to US-Japan "common strategic objectives" and make clear what the alliance is for rather than letting others assume what it is against.
- Increase multinational training operations and include the participation of China when possible. In particular, regional disaster relief exercises for environmental (e.g. chemical spills) or natural disasters would be useful not only for preparing for future contingencies, but also for building

confidence and mil-mil relationships. A medium term goal could be a US-Japan led rapid reaction force for regional catastrophes.

- Invite representatives from other countries to join a series of US-Japan hosted strategic talks in Tokyo. Use the alliance to help insulate security cooperation from nationalist tendencies by keeping concerned parties talking via multiple channels. In particular, strengthen trilateral US-Japan-ROK coordination so as to increase security dialogue between Tokyo and Seoul.
- Assist Japan in any ways possible with a compromise on the Yasukuni issue. While Prime Ministerial visits to the Shrine are arguably a Japanese domestic matter, the regional implications are too costly for the alliance to ignore: if Japan's relations with its neighbors deteriorate, so too will the reassurance capacity of the alliance. Resolution or at least positive developments on the Yasukuni issue are needed to repair Japan's regional image and dispel myths that the US favors Asian rivalries in order to play countries off each other.
- Further consult with Tokyo on how the United States can help Japan take on a constructive leadership role on security issues through the alliance. Possibilities include a greater leadership role for Japan on nonproliferation concerns, providing technical assistance to other countries on export controls, assuming regional leadership of PSI, advancing joint and coordinated explorations of energy sources, and hosting a dialogue on codes of conduct in East Asian waters. For the latter possibility, if Japan is willing, the United States could signal Tokyo's flexibility to South Korea on Dokdo/Takeshima and to China on Senkaku/Diaoyu to bring them to the table.
- Encourage the establishment of an anti-terrorism regional hub in Japan, where Japanese self-defense forces and administration would host anti-terrorism experts from China, Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and elsewhere to jointly monitor and analyze terrorist activity in the region.
- Make joint US-Japan presentations on security issues at regional fora such as ARF and APEC meetings. This will put the US and Japan shoulder to shoulder in advocating dialogue on hard security issues, and also signal the alliance's support for East Asian community building by working with developing regional institutions.

Conclusions and Further Research

The US-Japan alliance came to be based on shared values, mutual interest and a common vision. This is why the alliance outlasted the Cold War; by the time the Soviet threat dissolved, there was much more to the relationship than shared threat perception. A similar progression, from threat-based to value-based cohesion, now needs to develop among all states of the region. Extending the sphere of US-Japan cooperation will be an important component of the process. But while strengthening the US-Japan alliance alone may contribute to stability, it could be a cold peace in East Asia. To fully realize the alliance's potential to achieve Japanese and American shared strategic objectives, both processes – upgrading the alliance and bridging regional divides – are necessary and require sustained and concerted effort.

At the Japan-US security seminar (admittedly a pro-alliance gathering) the suggestions above received broad support. Several additional issues were raised that I found vital for strengthening the alliance and promoting regional community building. I summarize these in four points:

- Japan's role as an active long-term ally requires more international openness.

Numerous participants at the Japan-US security seminar voiced concerns about Japan's stamina as a US ally because of demographic issues. Japan's aging society will intensify the already serious challenges of funding social security, managing the national debt, and retaining a highly productive labor force. These challenges must be met not only for the welfare of Japanese, but for the future capacity of the alliance. As I see it, this calls for greater international openness via trade liberalization and increasing immigration. Conference participants proposed investigating the possibility of a Japan-US Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and building an economic alliance.

- Both Japan and the US need to implement "transformational diplomacy."³

Conference participants contrasted the bad press received by the US on Iraq and by Japan on Yasukuni to diplomatic inroads achieved by China in Southeast Asia and Africa. While PRC diplomatic efforts are buttressed by the draw of the Chinese economy, participants noted the increased sophistication – in terms of both substance and style – of a new generation of Chinese diplomats. These comments made me realize that in order to facilitate greater international support for US-Japan shared objectives, both governments need to expedite localization of diplomatic missions, enhance foreign service officer training in language, history and culture, and increase public diplomacy employing IT solutions.

- Broader ally cooperation: from hub and spokes to coalitional network.

Major US-Japan shared interests (counter-terrorism, Middle East political and energy stability, economic development in Africa, etc.) require broader international cooperation. Japanese delegates at the conference surprisingly asked why the United States has not involved Japan in US-EU efforts to deal with Iran's nuclear program. American delegates spent more time than expected speaking on India's importance for Asian regional stability. It became clear that both sides need to think more about how to link US-Japan efforts to multilateral cooperation in East Asia and globally. My recommendation is that Japan participate more with other US allies, not just in military training operations, but in diplomatic efforts as well. At the top of this agenda should be channeling Chinese foreign policy in the direction of "responsible stakeholder."⁴

- Value-informed vision for regional community building.

This paper argues the necessity of bridging regional divides, but it is important that the process of community building not be hollow or value-free. Burma was frequently mentioned at the conference as an obstacle to a more effective ASEAN. The East Asian Summit was criticized as "clutter in the room," a meeting without a purpose, a rudderless institution. Populations become frustrated with political systems and institutions that do not meet their needs and expectations. Lack of progress leads to fundamentalism and anti-Western sentiment, leading to further lack of progress. Robust community building thus needs to include shared values for freedom and

³ Fact Sheet on Transformational Diplomacy, US Department of State, January 18, 2006; <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2006/59339.htm>.

⁴ Robert B. Zoellick (US Deputy Secretary of State), "Whither China: From Membership to Responsibility?" September 21, 2005; <http://www.state.gov/s/d/rem/53682.htm>.

individual economic empowerment, and a common vision for regional progress. The Six Party Talks could achieve the early steps for bringing North Korea into international society and demonstrating China's constructive role, but much greater progress is necessary to close the door on a possible second Cold War in Asia.