

Background

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Japan's New Security Outlook: Implications for the United States

Balbina Y. Hwang

Japan has recently begun a process to transform its security strategy and envision a new role for itself that accepts larger regional and global responsibilities, a bold change from its insular self-defense security posture of the past half-century. Security cooperation and strategic coordination on a variety of issues—including North Korea, the Taiwan Strait, Iraq, and the war on terrorism—are potent examples of Japan's new security outlook.

Major disputes over trade and economic issues no longer dominate the bilateral discourse as they have in the past, and President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi seem to have forged a closer personal relationship than have previous leaders of the two countries. The conventional wisdom among observers of U.S.–Japan relations on both sides of the Pacific is that the bilateral relationship today is the best that it has been since the alliance was created in 1954.¹

Yet, while the United States and Japan have embarked on a new alliance interaction, unhindered by many of the difficulties and tensions of previous eras, it would be a mistake for either country to become complacent about the present positive dynamic. The two countries have yet to fully address and resolve important issues—such as the strategic and practical ramifications of Japan's new security outlook in the region—that pose significant challenges to the present harmonious relationship.

Both the United States and Japan need to continue to strengthen the alliance and to utilize the current

Talking Points

- Japan's security strategy is undergoing a transformation toward one in which Japan will assume greater regional and global responsibilities, which in turn will enhance U.S. interests in the region.
- Among the factors driving this transformation are the threat of international terrorism, China's increasingly aggressive behavior, and Japan's desire to regain its status as a "normal" nation.
- Japan's new foreign policy outlook signals that the country is ready to move from a purely self-defense security strategy toward regional concerns, particularly challenges posed by China and North Korea.
- The United States and Japan should not allow expectations for the alliance and future cooperation to outpace current realities and challenges.

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atmosphere of good will to tackle upcoming challenges. Doing so will ensure the development of a genuine global partnership that will endure well into this century.

Japan's Evolving Security Role

Since the end of World War II, Japan has maintained a limited and insular defense strategy within the confines of the U.S.–Japan alliance. During the Cold War, Japan's security priorities became focused on deterring and defending against a "limited or small-scale invasion" by the Soviet Union while relying on the United States for nuclear deterrence and maintenance of broader regional stability, such as in the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean peninsula.

With the end of the Cold War, Japan's relationship with the United States began to change as skepticism grew on both sides of the Pacific about the viability of, and even the need for, the U.S.–Japan alliance. In Japan, public support for the alliance began to wane as the perceived costs of hosting U.S. forces increased and as security threats to Japan declined with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

In the United States, after a decade of wariness created by bilateral trade and economic disputes in the 1980s that contributed to mistrust and suspicion in both countries, questions were raised about the utility of the alliance in the face of growing and increasingly vocal opposition to the U.S. military presence in Japan. American skepticism about Japan's value as an ally was reinforced by its lackluster response to the 1991 Gulf War, to which Japan contributed \$13 billion but no troops.

Further doubts were raised by Japan's unwillingness in 1994 to support United Nations sanctions in the face of North Korean threats to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and Tokyo expressed even greater reluctance to discuss potential military cooperation with the United States in the event of conflict with North Korea. This cautious Japanese response to contingency

military planning in the face of a potentially serious crisis called into question the very viability of the alliance in the post–Cold War era.

Largely as a response to the difficulties and disappointments encountered during this period, and at the urging of the United States, Japan took initial steps in the mid-1990s to transform its security relationship with the United States. In 1995, Japan revised its National Defense Program Outline to include "situations in areas surrounding Japan" and contributions to international peacekeeping as integral parts of its defense strategy. In 1997, a revised Guidelines for the U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation was a well-intentioned attempt to rejuvenate the alliance, but it lacked details on how Japan might support U.S. forces in the context of military operations. This omission was due largely to Japanese reluctance to approach the sensitive issues of constraints under Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, as well as public trepidation about a more active security role for Japan beyond its own shores.

Japanese optimism for a period of post–Cold War peace and stability gave way after September 11, 2001, to new fears about unconventional threats such as terrorism. This new threat, combined with North Korea's test launch of a Taepo Dong missile over Japan in 1998 and the re-emergence of a North Korean nuclear weapons program in 2002, acutely increased Japan's sense of vulnerability.

In addition, anxieties about China's rapidly expanding economic, military, and political power and its aggressive incursions into Japan's territory increased Japan's sense of urgency in re-evaluating its defense strategy and addressing these new security realities. Finally, due to the bitter experience of receiving little recognition but much criticism for its "checkbox diplomacy" in the 1991 Gulf War, Japan desired a stronger and more proactive response to the American-led global war on terrorism and in the Iraq War.

Thus, in the months after September 11, Japan took bold and concrete measures to show strong

1. The Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States was signed on April 28, 1952, and revised on January 19, 1960. See Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States of America, January 19, 1960, at www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f_work/anpo_.htm (June 27, 2005).

support for its ally and to contribute more actively to international security. Significant milestones in the transformation of Japan's security strategy were the decision in 2001 to send naval support to the Arabian Sea to assist coalition forces in the war in Afghanistan² and the historic decision in 2003 to deploy 1,000 Self Defense Forces (SDF) to Iraq to aid in reconstruction—Japan's most ambitious military operation since World War II. In December 2003, Japan also decided to cooperate with the United States on missile defense.³

Two significant reports released in 2004 were additional important developments in Japan's evolving security identity. The ruling Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) Defense Policy Studies Subcommittee and the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities (the Araki Commission)⁴ both released reports that recommended a fundamental overhaul of Japanese defense policies.

These recommendations provided the basis for the 2005 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG),⁵ which addressed issues such as the new security environment, counterterrorism, and more active roles for Japan in international peacekeeping operations. It also identified North Korea and, for the first time, China as specific security concerns, emphasizing Japan's need to deal effectively with ballistic missile and terrorist attacks, along with maintaining the ability to respond to invasions of Japanese islands and intrusions into its airspace and territorial waters.

In order to carry out these newly defined roles effectively, the NDPG recommends the creation of a multifunctional military capability by streamlining the SDF under a centralized command structure, upgrading intelligence and communications functions, and creating a rapid reaction force capable of responding to new threats such as terrorism. Finally, a key component of the NDPG is the emphasis on strengthening the U.S.–Japan alliance, including the joint development of a missile defense system and greater intelligence gathering and sharing.

While groundbreaking in its scope, the NDPG is deficient in some areas. For example, it does not provide a specific road map for conducting joint operations, either among the three Japanese military services or with the United States. Nor does it detail specific strategies, such as how to address terrorist threats. Furthermore, the report's continued emphasis on an “exclusively defense oriented defense” (*senshu boei*) continues the ambiguity that makes it difficult to address evolving security threats in the region squarely.

Ultimately, the NDPG stops short of fully addressing the politically sensitive issue of collective self-defense. As long as Japan continues to interpret Article 9 as prohibiting collective self-defense actions, especially with the United States, it impedes Japan's ability to participate fully in regional and global operations and missions.

2. Japan deployed ships to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea to provide fuel and logistical support to U.S. and international forces on antiterrorism missions in Afghanistan and surrounding areas. Japan was able to dispatch these vessels under a special Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law passed by the Diet in October 2001.
3. The Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) has announced that Japan will move to the development stage of the joint sea-based defense project during the fiscal year 2006–2007. (Japan's fiscal year runs from April 1 to March 31.) “Japan to Push Missile Defense Plan to Development Stage Next Year,” *Kyodo News*, June 5, 2005.
4. Liberal Democratic Party, National Defense Division and Policy Research Council, Defense Policy Studies Subcommittee, “Recommendations on Japan's New Defense Policy: Toward a Safer and More Secure Japan and the World,” March 30, 2004, at www.jimin.jp/jimin/saishin04/pdf/seisaku-006E.pdf (June 30, 2005), and Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, “Japan's Visions for Future Security and Defense Capabilities,” October 2004, at www.jiaponline.org/resources/japan/security/Japan%20CSDC%20Report.pdf (June 30, 2005). The Council on Security and Defense Capabilities is a private advisory panel that reports to the prime minister.
5. The National Defense Program Outline was changed to the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) in 2004. For the full text, see Japan Defense Agency, “National Defense Program Guideline, FY 2005–,” provisional translation, December 10, 2004, at www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f_work/taikou05/fy20050101.pdf (June 27, 2005).

Regional Concerns

The NDPG clearly signals that Japan is ready to move away from a purely self-defense security strategy, but regional concerns pose challenges to achieving a smooth transformation. Both China and North Korea have rejected being characterized as security concerns, despite pursuing aggressive and threatening actions.⁶ Given such developments, it is not surprising that Japan's restraint has given way to a pragmatic evolution of its defense policy.

Yet it would be wrong to portray Japan's new stance as confrontational or as a return to the country's militaristic past. Japanese reactions to incidents involving China and North Korea actually reveal that Japan's responses have not been particularly tough by international standards. In fact, Japan's efforts to address these regional threats are part of its overall goal to regain its status as a "normal" nation and to protect its national security and interests.

Regrettably, more than a half-century after the end of World War II, Japan's historical legacy remains an unresolved and nettlesome issue. The issue erupted recently in violent anti-Japanese demonstrations throughout China, ostensibly over the publication of a new Japanese history textbook that critics claim glorifies Japan's colonial and wartime activities. However, the Chinese demonstrations were clearly politically motivated and directed by the leadership in Beijing to exploit Japan's wartime guilt to block Japan's bid for a seat on the U.N. Security Council.

Nor is the scope of this issue limited just to China. Similar anti-Japan protests erupted in South Korea over the textbook issue and a recent vote by a Japanese prefecture to claim Tokdo/Takeshima,⁷ a historically symbolic island located halfway

between the two countries in the Sea of Japan/East Sea.⁸ While demonstrations in a free and open society such as South Korea differ from those in communist China, the implications for the United States may actually be more serious.

Tension between two of America's most important Asian allies comes at a time of increasing uncertainty in U.S.–South Korean relations. In the near term, this has grave implications for finding a diplomatic solution to the North Korean nuclear issue, occurring at precisely the time when regional cooperation is needed more than ever with the ongoing six-party talks. In the long term, a growing sense of alienation from Japan and misplaced suspicions about Japanese motives for a stronger defense posture among South Koreans could drive a wedge in the U.S.–Korea alliance. Such a development would only benefit the strategic interests of North Korea and China, further threatening U.S., South Korean, and Japanese interests.

Ultimately, without a thorough domestic debate in Japan that once and for all confronts its past, the evolution of Japan's security outlook toward a normal status will continue to be challenged by regional neighbors. If Japan can address its historical legacy in a responsible and transparent fashion, then it will effectively eliminate the ability of governments in Beijing, Pyongyang, Seoul, and elsewhere to manipulate the history issue for their own domestic and international political purposes. Furthermore, it will allay suspicion that a more robust Japanese security strategy poses a threat to countries that share the same interests in promoting peace and stability in the region.

Challenges for the United States and the Alliance

Despite these obstacles, Japan's new security outlook is a positive contribution to the bilateral

6. North Korea's recent provocative actions include pursuit of nuclear weapons programs in clear violation of several international treaties and agreements, missile development and proliferation, and illegal activities such as drug trafficking and counterfeiting. In November 2004, a Chinese nuclear submarine violated Japanese territorial waters, and Chinese companies have begun drilling for gas in the Chunxiao Field in the East China Sea, an area claimed by Japan. In addition, China has adopted an increasingly aggressive stance toward Taiwan, including passage of the Anti-Secession Law in March 2005.
7. The island's South Korean name is "Tokdo." Its Japanese name is "Takeshima."
8. The sea's official South Korean name is "East Sea." Its Japanese name is "Sea of Japan."

relationship. This was reiterated in the February 2005 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee (SCC) or “2 + 2 Meeting,”⁹ which produced a joint declaration that went further than any previous statements by articulating a direction for the alliance and a set of common strategic goals. These goals range from supporting peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula and ensuring stability in the Taiwan Strait to maintaining and enhancing the stability of global energy supplies.

Much attention was focused on the declaration’s call for both countries to take steps to “encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue.” While incorrectly interpreted by many in Asia and the United States as a Japanese commitment to contribute actively to the defense of Taiwan, the statement did go further than any previous joint statement on this issue. The statement does not necessarily ensure U.S.–Japan regional security cooperation, but it does signal a new willingness by Tokyo to align itself more closely and openly with Washington on regional issues.

Nevertheless, certain obstacles pose challenges to the continuation of the alliance in its present positive condition. Many will be encountered during the next and crucial stage of development of Japan’s new security outlook: the implementation and operational phase. For example, a true test of Japan’s willingness to support regional military operations will come in future commitments to specific shared roles and missions, such as operations to enforce the Proliferation Security Initiative, to deal with North Korean aggression, or to handle a Taiwan contingency. Without concrete commitments on how to carry out the common strategic objectives articulated in the 2005 SCC joint declaration, the impetus for adopting a new defense strategy under Japan’s new NDPG could lose momentum and meaning.

Other obstacles are political. Japan’s dramatic shift in security strategy was driven largely by the leadership of Prime Minister Koizumi, his partner-

ship with President Bush, and their coordinated response to September 11. As the momentum for a concerted and sustained response to terrorism fades, other political pressures in both countries may dilute popular support for bold new security initiatives. In addition, both Koizumi and Bush will be battling lame-duck status. Koizumi’s term will end in September 2006, when he will step down as chairman of the LDP, effectively resigning as prime minister. While Bush’s term will last three more years, Iraq, the Middle East, and China will likely draw attention away from strengthening the U.S.–Japan relationship, which was a priority during the first Bush Administration.

In addition, both leaders face domestic political battles, with Koizumi’s promise to overhaul the postal system and Bush’s goals of reforming Social Security and the tax system. Their focus on these domestic issues will likely divert public attention and focus away from security issues. For Prime Minister Koizumi, expending his wealth of political capital on domestic issues makes significant movement on controversial security issues even more challenging.

With Japan’s leadership unknown after Koizumi steps down, Japan’s ability to continue evolving its security outlook at the current pace is uncertain. What is certain is that the U.S.–Japan alliance will be a central political issue in the Japanese elections next September. The U.S. military presence in Okinawa has been and will continue to be a political lightning rod. Governor Shigefumi Matsuzawa has already expressed strong opposition to the U.S. Army’s plans to relocate 1st Corps headquarters from Fort Lewis in Washington State to Camp Zama in the Kanegawa Prefecture. Replacing the U.S.S. *Kitty Hawk* with a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier will also be a flash point for public opposition.

Given the uncertainty over Japan’s future political leadership, it is also unclear whether or not the momentum to address the highly sensitive issue of reinterpreting the constitution’s Article 9 will continue. To date, significant changes in

9. The U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee is often referred to as the “2 + 2 Meeting” because it includes the U.S. Secretaries of Defense and State and the Japanese Ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs.

Japan's security policy, such as the SDF deployment to Iraq, have been on an ad hoc basis. As Japan begins to ponder action that confronts collective self-defense issues, the debates will become far more political, and implementation of new actions will become more entangled in legislative and technical procedures.

Finally, a significant challenge for both the United States and Japan is not to allow expectations to outpace realities. The current atmosphere of unprecedented positive support for the alliance should not eclipse the realization that long-term goals cannot be achieved in the short term.

For example, some in Washington may be under the unrealistic assumption that, because of the relatively rapid pace of changes adopted by the Japanese defense establishment, activist policies such as shoulder-to-shoulder combat operations will be embraced as quickly after remaining political obstacles such as the ban on collective security defense are removed. Yet without established rules of engagement for hostile actions, the relative immaturity and lack of combat experience of the Japanese Defense Agency and the SDF will make active engagement almost impossible in the short term. If such unrealistic expectations are not managed properly, the resulting disappointment could damage the alliance, particularly during a time of crisis.

What the United States Should Do

Asia is undergoing rapid change, and recent developments command careful attention by the United States. Japan has begun the challenging task of reassessing its position and status in the region and transforming its security posture to meet emerging threats more effectively.

The United States should do all that it can to support the process of "normalizing" Japanese security policy within the framework of the U.S.–Japan alliance while ensuring that Japan's evolving role in Asia continues to contribute to peace and stability in the region. Specifically, the United States should:

- **Prioritize the revision of the Guidelines for U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation** scheduled for later this year. One of the most important tasks in the guidelines should be the building of joint,

bilateral interoperability with a focus on improving command and control systems and information sharing to allow the U.S. military and the SDF to work together more closely.

Tokyo has already targeted intelligence sharing, technology and equipment exchanges, and operational coordination as goals for enhanced cooperation over the next 10 years, but the details on how Japan and the United States will carry out operational cooperation, particularly in "areas surrounding Japan," need to be specified. The future of U.S. bases, particularly in Okinawa, in the context of the Pentagon's Global Posture Review should also be addressed.

- **Encourage Japan to continue strengthening the operational capabilities of the Japanese Self Defense Forces** as part of the new Guidelines for U.S.–Japan Defense Cooperation, including developing and deploying an integrated missile defense architecture with the U.S. These should include expansion of regional air and sea power capabilities. Transparency in this process should be encouraged to instill confidence and minimize suspicions in neighbors such as China and South Korea.
- **Pursue an expanded strategic dialogue with Japan that goes beyond the Pentagon's relationship with the Japanese Defense Agency.** The bilateral security alliance will remain incomplete until both sides actively engage the non-defense scientific community and industry in Japan to further the application of science and technologies to national defense programs. Efforts to link the civilian and military sectors in Japan can be encouraged through concerted efforts by U.S. defense officials and industry counterparts, and their cooperation can also serve as a productive model for Japan.

One way to do so is to recommend that U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff travel to Japan to discuss with his Japanese counterparts methods of improving international cooperation to strengthen homeland

security for both the United States and Japan. Secretary Chertoff has already spearheaded a multifaceted approach to security, integrating intelligence, technology, and law enforcement activities overseas, as evidenced in his successful trip to Europe in May. Active engagement on these issues can take the security alliance with Japan to new levels of cooperation and coordination.

- **Express support for Japan's initiative to re-examine Article 9 of its constitution to allow for collective self-defense.** Reinterpreting the constitution to permit Japan to come directly to the aid of its ally will contribute to American and international security. However, Washington should also make clear that any constitutional reinterpretation is a Japanese domestic issue and should be initiated, conducted, and achieved through Japanese leadership. The leadership should also be urged to proceed with this process transparently through public debate so as to allay regional misperceptions about Japanese motives.
- **Urge the Japanese leadership to address Japan's historical legacy.** While the United States should not become involved in historical disagreements between Japan and its neighbors, it is in Washington's interests to promote a resolution of this issue that is led by Japan. Doing so in a responsible fashion will remove obstacles to improving relations and promoting cooperation between Japan and South Korea, two of America's most critical allies in Asia.
- **Revive and expand the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) to address issues of alliance building and maintenance.** The TCOG was established in the mid-1990s initially to bring the United States, Japan, and South Korea together in regular meetings to coordinate policy toward North Korea. This process can be used to begin exploring the long-term goal of possibly expanding America's bilateral alliances into a formal trilateral alliance. In the short term, the TCOG process should focus on developing common strategies on how to address China's rise and to promote stability on the Korean peninsula and in the Taiwan Strait.

Conclusion

Japan's defense posture, like America's, is undergoing a fundamental transformation. This is a positive development in the maturation and evolution of the U.S.–Japan alliance and is long overdue given the profound changes in the international security environment. Yet many challenges lie ahead.

As the two countries move forward, it is important that they not be carried away by lofty ambitions and unrealistic expectations that could lead them to ignore the daily challenges and difficulties of implementing these policies. Patience on both sides of the Pacific will be required in achieving the goal of transforming the U.S.–Japan alliance into a strategic partnership that can contribute to peace and stability beyond the Asia–Pacific region.

—*Balbina Y. Hwang is Policy Analyst for North-east Asia in the Asian Studies Center at The Heritage Foundation.*