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The U.S.–Japan Ministerial Talks: Focus on a New Security Relationship

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On February 19, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will meet with their Japanese counterparts in the first “two plus two” meeting since December 2002. The need for such a meeting has never been more urgent. For the United States, changes in the global security environment mean that a strict regional definition of security threats is outdated. In response, the Pentagon has begun to redefine its global defense posture by bringing home some 70,000 troops from Europe and Asia within a decade. Washington is turning increasingly to its allies to assume greater roles in promoting regional peace and stability.

Accordingly, the U.S. should encourage Japan to continue strengthening the operational capabilities of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF), initiate a formal bilateral process with Japan to realign U.S. forces in the region and address basing issues, and encourage Members of Congress to engage their Japanese Diet counterparts to pursue increased dialogue and exchanges.

Japan’s New Guidelines. Japan, for its part, has conducted a dramatic review of its own military posture and appears willing to accept a larger international security role. This is largely a function of an increased sense of urgency about the country’s ability to defend itself in the face of a rapidly chang-

ing security environment in Northeast Asia. In addition to terrorism and North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs and ballistic missile capabilities, there are growing concerns about China and its rapidly growing political, economic, and military power. China’s naval expansion and regional

ambitions were shockingly evident when a Chinese nuclear submarine intruded into the waters around Japan’s southernmost islands last November.

Thus, in December, the Japanese cabinet adopted a new set of defense policy guidelines that establish Japan’s defense policies for the next 10 years. The guide-

lines, revised to account for changes in the security environment, also reflect Japan’s determination to further strengthen its alliance with the United States, although they also mention for the first time the need to reduce the burden on Japanese citizens of hosting U.S. forces while maintaining the U.S. deterrence. Also for the first time, the guidelines specifically cite China and North Korea as concerns

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- The U.S.–Japan two-plus-two meetings will focus on changes in the regional and global security environment and how to address them.
 - A key issue will be Japan’s review of its military posture and willingness to accept a greater international security role.
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and introduce major policy shifts, such as calling for a more active role for the SDF in international peacekeeping activities. They also relax Japan's arms export ban to enable the sale of missile defense components to the United States.

U.S.–Japan Alliance. Other recent changes in Japanese law promote a more conducive environment for interoperability with U.S. defense capabilities, including a missile defense system. For example, on February 16, the Japanese cabinet approved a revision in the current SDF Law that enables the Japanese Defense Agency Director General to order missile interception with the consent of the prime minister while dispensing with the sanction of the cabinet and Japan's Security Council. The bill also seeks to reorganize the SDF under a unified command by setting up a Joint Staff to oversee all three branches of the SDF.

While such changes reflect much-needed examination and articulation of Japan's defense and security strategy, more work is required to transform Japan's military into one with greater response capabilities that can benefit both alliance partners. The existing U.S.–Japan mutual defense treaty, enacted in 1947, is a solid agreement that provides a reasonable degree of flexibility, but a more formal approach to defining common goals and strategies is warranted if new and emerging security concerns are to be addressed. The two-plus-two talks are the ideal forum to develop concrete plans to strengthen the alliance proactively.

What the United States Should Do. During the two-plus-two talks, Secretaries Rumsfeld and Rice should:

- **Encourage Japan to continue strengthening the operational capabilities of the SDF**—including missile defense and power projection systems—and make greater contributions to international security.
- **Initiate a formal bilateral process with Japan**—in the form of bilateral subcommittees—to conduct an ongoing dialogue to realign U.S. forces in Japan and address basing issues. The process should be institutionalized

along the lines of the Security Policy Initiative (SPI), which replaced the Future of the Alliance with South Korea. The SPI serves as the mechanism both for finalizing the restructuring and relocation of troops and for the enhancement of and joint studies on combined force capabilities. The most imminent basing issues with Japan include: (1) proposed joint civilian–military use of the U.S. Air Force's Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo; (2) reducing the burden of the U.S. military presence in Okinawa by 2,600 Marines, including transferring artillery and infantry units to mainland Japan sometime after 2008; (3) possible transfer of the U.S. Army I Corps headquarters, currently based in Fort Lewis, Washington, to Camp Zama in Kanagawa Prefecture; and (4) integrating the bulk of 5th Air Force headquarters at the Yokota base with the 13th Air Force headquarters in Guam.

- **Begin a serious dialogue with Japan** about whether U.S. force realignment in the region (including the possible transfer of the U.S. Army I Corps to Japan) would require Japan to expand its role beyond the scope of the bilateral security treaty.
- **Develop strategies with Japan** about how to address China's military and economic rise, including stability in the Taiwan Strait and China's new defense posture, and its implications for the alliance.
- **Encourage Members of Congress to engage their counterparts** in the Japanese Diet to pursue increased dialogue and exchanges.

Conclusion. Emerging security concerns in the Asia–Pacific region and beyond pose new challenges to the U.S.–Japan alliance. Both countries must begin work now to forge a new security relationship built on a stronger alliance partnership.

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