

Background

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Forging a New Era in the U.S.–Japan Alliance

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The U.S. security alliances with Japan and South Korea are critical to maintaining peace, stability, and prosperity in Asia, as well as to promoting liberty, democracy, and free-market principles. These relationships are growing in importance in light of China's increasing military capabilities, economic weight, and political influence.

The bilateral U.S.–Japan security ties have expanded significantly during the past 10 years, resulting in more closely integrated military¹ operations and a broader international role for the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF). To accomplish this, Tokyo removed or adapted several of its self-imposed post-World War II restrictions.²

Japan hosts the largest contingent of U.S. military forces in Asia, including the only forward-deployed aircraft carrier and Marine Expeditionary Force. Ballistic missile defense integration is a bright spot in the relationship and joint operations are becoming more coordinated. Tokyo has been moving inexorably toward military reform during the past decade, albeit at a glacial pace and only in response to repeated prodding by the United States.

Adjusting to a more durable alliance structure, the U.S. and Japan have already established a blueprint for transforming their alliance. Successful implementation will require sustained and energetic involvement by the senior leadership of both countries. Leadership is not always in evidence, particularly on the Japanese side, but if this is accomplished, it could provide the basis for defining a new strategic vision for the alliance in 2010 and beyond.

Talking Points

- Bilateral U.S.–Japan security ties have expanded significantly during the past 10 years, resulting in more integrated military operations and a broader international role for the Japan Self-Defense Force.
- Despite the solid, strengthened U.S.–Japanese security relationship, uncertainties remain for the future of the bilateral alliance. Washington must continually urge Japan to take greater responsibility for its own defense and regional security to a degree commensurate with its economic power and global interests.
- Japan's willingness to alter the comfortable status quo is unclear. Implementing existing plans for transforming the alliance will require sustained and energetic involvement by the senior leadership of both countries. This is unlikely in Japan's consensus-driven political system.
- There are serious consequences to Japanese inaction. Tokyo's unwillingness or inability to make tough decisions can lead to Japan's loss of influence, even irrelevance, in a region increasingly dominated by an ascendant China.

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Yet, despite the solid bedrock of a strengthened U.S.–Japanese security relationship, uncertainties remain over the future parameters of the bilateral alliance. The degree to which Japan is willing to alter the comfortable alliance status quo is unclear. There are serious consequences to Japanese inaction. Long-term Japanese policy stagnation is not in the United States strategic interest and risks increasing U.S. frustration with its ally. Tokyo’s unwillingness or inability to make tough decisions can lead to Japan’s losing influence and even relevance in a region increasingly dominated by an ascendant China. As a Chinese proverb cautions, “Two tigers cannot share the same mountain.”

The U.S. should urge Japan to take greater responsibility for its own defense as well as an expanded regional and global security role. Much can be accomplished within existing parameters by fully implementing previous bilateral agreements. Washington should call on Tokyo to remain engaged in coalition operations in Afghanistan and Iraq while replacing *ad hoc* deployment approvals with permanent enabling legislation. The U.S. should also advocate an expansion of the alliance and request that Japan increase its defense spending to fulfill its obligations and achieve broader security objectives. Although newly elected Prime Minister Taro Aso will be more amenable to U.S. requests, political and societal constraints will hinder rapid progress in transforming the bilateral security relationship.

The Ever-Evolving Alliance

The bilateral U.S.–Japanese military alliance is not stagnant and has already undergone consider-

able evolution. The concept of transforming the alliance from its initial mission of defending Japan to a broader regional and global focus also has a long history. In 1992, President George H. W. Bush and Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa affirmed the alliance as a “global partnership.” In 1996, President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto emphasized that the mutual defense agreement constituted the foundation for bilateral cooperation on global issues.³

In 2002, the Security Consultative Committee (SCC), composed of the U.S. Secretaries of State and Defense and the Japanese Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense, initiated a Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) to analyze the global security environment; define both nations’ roles, missions, capabilities, forces, and force structure; and cooperate in missile defense and global security challenges.⁴ The 2004 Japanese Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) called on Japan to become more engaged militarily in the Indian Ocean region from the Middle East to Southeast Asia, permit military exports to the U.S. to facilitate development of joint missile defense, and increase the size of rapid-reaction forces.⁵

In 2005, the SCC agreed to bold revisions to expand the parameters of the defense alliance. In February, the two countries produced the Common Strategic Objectives which provided a common assessment of strategy and threats. In October, the SCC completed the U.S.–Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future (ATARA) which delineated bilateral roles, missions, and capabilities and defined 15 areas for defense cooperation and seven measures to improve policy and operational

1. The Japanese Self-Defense Forces are technically not *military* forces since Japan is precluded by its constitution from having a military. For ease of readership, however, the terms “security” and “military” will be used interchangeably.
2. These restrictions include: no overseas deployments, no participation in collective self-defense arrangements, no nuclear weapons, no arms exports, no sharing of defense technology, no more than 1 percent of GDP devoted to defense spending, and no military use of space. As defined by Kenneth Pyle, University of Washington, on May 22, 2007, at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
3. Brad Glasserman and Katsu Furukawa, “A New U.S.–Japan Agenda,” *Issues and Insights*, Volume 8, No. 4 (March 2008), p. 5.
4. Bruce A. Wright and Mark O. Hague, “The U.S.–Japan Alliance: Sustaining the Transformation,” *Joint Defense Quarterly*, Issue 44 (First Quarter 2007), at http://www.ndu.edu/inss/Press/jfq_pages/editions/i44/17.pdf (October 3, 2008).
5. Emma Chanlett-Avery, “Japan-US Relations: Issues for Congress,” Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, March 28, 2007.

Achievements in U.S.–Japan Alliance Transformation

Greater interoperability:

- Forward deploy I Corps headquarters from Ft. Lewis to collocate with the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force Central Readiness Force headquarters at Camp Zama in 2012.
- Establish a Bilateral Air Operations Coordination Center established at Yokota Air Force Base with integrated air and missile defense.

Realignment and consolidation of U.S. forces

- Relocate Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma to a new facility at Camp Schwab.
- Redeploy 8,000 U.S. Marines of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force from Okinawa to Guam. Japan to pay \$6.1 billion or 75 percent of the cost.
- Relocate elements of Carrier Air Wing 5 from Naval Air Station Atsugi to MCAS Iwakuni.

Expanded role for Japan Self-Defense Force

- Elevate the Japan Defense Agency to cabinet-level Ministry of Defense.
- Participate in international peacekeeping operations and disaster relief operations.

Enhanced cooperation on ballistic missile defense

- U.S.-built X-band radar system at Japanese Air Self-Defense Force's (JASDF) Shariki air base, which shares data with the Japanese.
- Expedite deployment of U.S. Patriot PAC-3 units at Kadena, Okinawa.
- Provide Standard Missile (SM-3) capabilities to U.S. forward-deployed naval forces.
- Accelerate modification of Japanese Aegis ships with SM-3 capabilities.
- Japanese Aegis-equipped destroyer intercepted a medium-range target missile near Hawaii.¹

1. Bruce A. Wright and Mark O. Hague, "Japan—Aiming for Broader, Deeper Regional Security Cooperation," *East Asian Strategic Review*, 2008, at <http://www.nids.go.jp/english/dissemination/east-asian/e2008.html>.

coordination. As a result of these decisions, bilateral military and intelligence operations have improved, becoming more coordinated and integrated.

Japan has also been more willing during the past decade to deploy its defense forces overseas. The SDF deployed disaster relief teams to Burma and China and participated in U.N. peacekeeping operations in Afghanistan, Cambodia, East Timor, the Golan Heights, Honduras, Indonesia, Iraq, Mozambique, Pakistan, and Rwanda. General Bruce Wright, former commander of U.S. Forces Japan,

commented that Japan routinely agrees that U.S. forces in Japan should deploy elsewhere (in contrast with U.S. units in Korea which do not deploy off the peninsula).⁶

Tokyo pays \$4.4 billion annually to support the presence of U.S. troops, equivalent to half of the total cost-sharing assistance that the U.S. receives from all NATO nations. Every year, Japan buys \$1 billion worth of U.S. military equipment, with \$8 billion of military sales cases currently open.⁷

6. John Tirpak, "Air Force Alliance for the US and Japan," *Air Force Magazine*, Vol. 90, No. 6 (June 2007).

7. Bruce A. Wright and Mark O. Hague, "Japan—Aiming for Broader, Deeper Regional Security Cooperation," *East Asian Strategic Review*, 2008, at <http://www.nids.go.jp/english/dissemination/east-asian/e2008.html>.

Japan *has* expanded its role, pushing the envelope of acceptable practices, albeit gradually, minimally, and with token forces. Much more needs to be done. Foreign Minister Masahiko Koumura commented that “compared to Japan’s capabilities and strengths as a country, there is more room to make an effort in peacekeeping operations.”⁸ When Japan does send troops overseas, it does so with such restrictive rules of engagement that it undermines their effectiveness. The 600 Japanese troops in southern Iraq in 2005 were in an enclave that had to be protected by Dutch, and later British, troops.

Military-to-military coordination is good, though difficult due to senior political inattention. As one two-star general of the U.S. Forces Japan remarked, “Every inch of progress is an uphill battle.” There are no Ministry of Defense champions within Japan’s Diet, nor Japanese champions within the U.S. Congress.

Riding the Waves: Japanese Leaders’ Conflicting Views on the Alliance. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (2001–2006) responded to the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the U.S. by passing the Anti-Terror Special Measures Law. The legislation permitted Japan to deploy ground troops to Iraq, transport aircraft to Kuwait, and refuel supply ships heading to the Indian Ocean in support of coalition operations. Koizumi’s motivation for expanding Japan’s global role was primarily grounded in strengthening the U.S. alliance, though couched in terms of common global strategic objectives.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe (2006–2007) advocated a more assertive Japanese foreign policy that involved further strengthening of the “Japan-U.S. alliance while steadily upgrading our country’s national security platform.”⁹ In order to allow Tokyo to assume an expanded security role, Abe pressed for a revision to Japan’s constitution and an expanded role for the SDF.

Abe perceived the inherent long-term strategic benefit for Japan, but his prioritization of security policy over domestic economic issues was rejected

by the electorate during the upper house election. U.S. expectations for what could be accomplished in alliance transformation under Abe were raised unrealistically. There are also questions referring to the level to which Abe could have delivered had he remained in office.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda (2007–2008) had a different foreign policy perspective from his predecessors. Although he wanted to maintain the alliance with Washington as the bedrock of Japanese security, he placed less priority on security issues. Fukuda placed greater emphasis on maintaining regional harmony by improving relations with Japan’s neighbors and balancing its relationships with the U.S. and China more evenly. He commented privately to a Japanese journalist that he did not think Japan should always say “yes” to the United States. Fukuda had less interest than his predecessors in pursuing constitutional revision to attain “normal nation” status and a stronger regional security role for Japan.

The most tangible manifestation of Fukuda’s softer security policy was his view on reinterpreting Japan’s self-imposed restrictions on the role of its defense forces. Prime Minister Abe had established an advisory panel to review the restrictive interpretation of Japan’s right to exercise collective self-defense. The group was to make recommendations on four scenarios:

1. Protecting U.S. naval vessels under attack in international waters;
2. Intercepting ballistic missiles that may be targeted at the U.S.;
3. Defending foreign troops that come under attack during a U.N. peacekeeping operation; and
4. Providing logistical support in overseas countries.

Chairman Shunji Yanai, former Japanese ambassador to the U.S., commented in July 2007 that “we should bring an end to the interpretation of the [Japanese] Constitution that does not match reality.” In light of the increasing North Korean and Chinese military threats, Yanai remarked that the panel believed

8. David Pilling and Victor Mallet, “Japan Weighs Bigger Role as Peacekeeper,” *The Financial Times*, February 25, 2008.

9. David Pilling, “Japan Prepares for a More Assertive Foreign Role,” *The Financial Times*, March 29, 2007.

in an expanded role for the SDF.¹⁰ However, Fukuda did not accept the panel's recommendations, indicating that he had no intention of altering the current interpretation, which prohibits Japan from defending an ally under attack, even though it is entitled to do so under international law.¹¹

Fukuda's policy strategy reflected both personal convictions as well as an assessment of the domestic political landscape. Yasuo Fukuda believed in the "Fukuda Doctrine" of his father, Takeo Fukuda, who was prime minister of Japan from 1976 to 1978. Takeo pledged in 1977 that Japan would never become a military power again and was committed to improving relations with all Southeast Asian nations. Yasuo sought to apply this pledge to Japanese foreign policy in Northeast Asia as well.

The political lesson of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) loss of the upper house in the 2007 election, as well as Abe's subsequent abrupt departure from office, was that the electorate was more focused on domestic economic issues than on security reorientation. There was thus no advantage for Fukuda to spend his and the LDP's limited political capital on an issue that did not resonate strongly with the populace. This is particularly true as the LDP tries to recapture public support in the run-up to a lower-house election which must take place by September 2009.

Fukuda issued no grand strategy nor undertook any bold steps in security policy. Instead, he stalled on reinterpreting collective self-defense, creating a national security council, and revising Article 9 of the constitution. Even Fukuda's decision to use the LDP's two-thirds majority in the lower house to override the upper-house veto in order to renew refueling operations was interpreted differently in Japan and the U.S. Officials and analysts in Japan raved about the speed with which Fukuda was able

to restart operations; most had expected a delay until mid-2008. Washington, however, saw Tokyo's inability to make important decisions expeditiously as reflective of a third-rate country.

Prime Minister Taro Aso's conservative foreign and security policies will be a return to those espoused by Koizumi and Abe. He will be more receptive to expanding Tokyo's role in the bilateral alliance with the U.S. and loosening restrictions on the SDF. Aso will push for a reinterpretation of the concept of collective self-defense. His policies will be more similar to Washington's than those of Fukuda. As a result, Aso's election offers the hope of closer coordination on U.S.-Japanese strategic interests. But Aso's policy focus will be primarily domestic, due to the need to recapture strong public support.

Challenges to a Stronger Security Relationship

Lack of National Consensus. Japan remains conflicted over its niche in the post-Cold War environment and the proper role of its military forces. Overcoming the pacifism of the past 50 years is clearly a factor. But beyond this is the complacency attributed to the Yoshido strategy in which Japan relied on the U.S. for its security guarantee while it devoted itself to a singular pursuit to build economic power.¹²

Abe's bold blueprint for Japan to assume a broader security role did not gain favor with an electorate bore-sighted on pocketbook issues. Abe's security vision was rejected, and not replaced by an alternative policy. There has not been substantial public debate on Japan's security paradigm and its international role. Concern over the intentions and implications of China's growing military capabilities has not overcome national complacency and an inherent preference for the status quo.

10. "No surprise: Abe Panel to Urge Right to Exercise Collective Self-Defense," *Asahi Shimbun*, July 11, 2007.

11. "Panel Urges Government to Allow Collective Self-Defense, Fukuda Unwilling," *Kyodo News*, June 24, 2008.

12. The three fundamental tenets of the Yoshido doctrine: 1) Economic rehabilitation was Japan's prime national goal. Political-economic cooperation with the U.S. was necessary for this purpose; 2) Japan should remain lightly armed and avoid involvement in international political-strategic issues. A low military posture would facilitate productive industrial development; and 3) In order to gain a long-term guarantee for its own security, Japan would provide bases for U.S. military forces. Kenneth Pyle, *Japan Rising* (New York: The Century Foundation, 2007), p. 242.

Tokyo has been resistant to U.S. requests to assume a larger security role. Domestic angst arising from perceived inequities in the military alliance with the U.S. conflict with a reluctance to undertake budgetary increases. There has been a greater willingness to deploy troops overseas in recent years but only on narrowly defined missions with no risk of being involved in combat. The task is further constrained by the lack of dynamic leaders who are willing and able to transform and direct public opinion. In that sense, the charismatic Koizumi was truly an anomaly.

Overcoming Japanese inertia will be difficult and will require a sea change in thinking by both politicians and public, neither of which are particularly attuned to international security affairs. Though formidable, the task is not impossible. But it will require sustained U.S. efforts, beginning with a clear articulation of the future form of the alliance as well as Japan's roles, missions, and capabilities.

Constitutional Limits. Article 9 of the Japanese constitution specifies that Japan forever "renounces war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized." There was declining public support during 2006-2007 for the constitutional changes that Abe was advocating.

Underfunding Defense Requirements. Japanese defense spending has now declined for five consecutive years. The Ministry of Defense requested an increase but was rejected by the Ministry of Finance. Tokyo needs to increase defense spending not only to assume a greater security role but to simply remain at the same level. Following a procurement holiday, Japan now needs to purchase several systems to replace those it acquired in the 1980s, including F-15 and P-3 aircraft.

If Japan does not increase defense spending over its unofficial ceiling of 1 percent of GDP, and with missile defense consuming a larger portion of its defense budget, Japan will be forced to make additional force cuts. Some cuts to ground forces are

acceptable, but extensive reductions would hinder Japan's ability to engage in or transport troops for overseas peacekeeping operations.

Political Constraints. The prime minister is hampered in implementing any security policy changes due to government gridlock brought on by a "twisted parliament" in which the two legislative houses are controlled by opposing parties. The opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), which controls the upper house, remains committed to obstructionist tactics to force an early election of the more powerful lower house of the Diet.

The DPJ refused to approve a special-measures agreement renewing host-nation support for U.S. forces in Japan, marking the first refusal of an international agreement by the upper house under the current constitution. The Fukuda administration was forced to use the constitutional provision which allows a two-thirds majority of the lower house to overrule the upper house.

Emboldened by Fukuda's low public approval ratings, the DPJ passed a symbolic "no confidence" censure of the prime minister. Though non-binding, it reflected the extent to which the opposition will go to undermine the current government. The DPJ will continue to obstruct Japan's security missions as a means to position itself for a legislative victory. Although differences between the ruling and opposition parties are smaller than often perceived, the DPJ's tactics are disruptive to common alliance objectives.

Transforming the Alliance: Key Concerns

Does the Political Will Exist? The U.S. sees troublesome delays in the implementation of the SCC decisions, most notably the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. These delays have a domino effect on other moves, including that of the U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam. Former Deputy Undersecretary of Defense Richard Lawless, a key figure in transforming the bilateral relationship, expressed concern over a "state of drift" in the alliance ever since Fukuda took office. He warned that if the U.S. perceives Japan as not taking the agreements seriously, the alliance will lose momentum and relevance, causing a degradation in military capability in the region.¹³

Is Japan Putting Strategic Objectives First?

Japan has allowed strategic national objectives to take a back seat to arbitrary budget limits and industrial policy. Japan's security objectives are inconsistent with current government funding decisions. Tokyo has undertaken new missions—including missile defense, expanded overseas operations, and paying a significant portion of the cost of the realignment of U.S. forces without a commensurate increase in defense expenditures. Yet, the government continues to maintain a historical cap on defense spending of 1 percent of GDP, in essence allowing the finance ministry to determine Japan's national security strategy and objectives.

Beyond Alliance Housekeeping? Troop relocation, base transformation, and burden-sharing issues are contentious, time-consuming, and, if handled poorly, potentially disastrous to the well-being of the alliance. Even when handled adeptly, they run the risk of sucking all the air out of the room by becoming an end in themselves rather than a means to achieving an objective. Yet, as important as these issues are, they are merely alliance management issues, a national-level equivalent to rearranging the furniture.

Redeploying U.S. military forces to lessen their exposure to the Japanese populace serves the commendable goal of maintaining public support by reducing potential flashpoints. But, all of this does not provide clarity on the current and future roles, missions, and necessary capabilities of the U.S. and Japanese defense forces. It is critical to redefine the alliance beyond the North Korean threat, emphasizing either the need for Japanese involvement in redressing global security issues or the potential threat that a rising China represents—the “dragon behind the North Korean tree,” as a Japanese defense expert characterized it.

Pursuing Incremental Transformation. Washington will need to manage its own expectations; in this Japanese political environment a new Japanese national consensus on alliance transformation will come slowly. The goal of transformation will be ill

served by a pace that reminds the Japanese public of its inability to make the choice on its own. Japan's citizens need the pressure,¹⁴ but they also need to buy into the idea fully.

In 2005 and 2006, large advances were made on the political level in broadening the parameters of the alliance. With no similar advances expected for 2008 and 2009, the focus should be on military-level implementation of the earlier SCC decisions. Consolidating progress can lay the groundwork in anticipation of future breakthroughs under a more conducive political environment.

In the near term, the U.S. should strive to expand Japan's security role within existing parameters even as it advocates longer-term expansion of the alliance. To the degree possible, changes to the alliance should be made out of view of the public eye to avoid controversy or creating anti-American sentiment.

Much can be done within the existing constitutional and legal framework to accomplish goals such as expanding the SDF rules of engagement for overseas operations. Tokyo should replace *ad hoc* overseas deployment approvals with permanent legislation to eliminate the need for recurrent Diet involvement.

While Japan Sleeps

Japan is at a strategic crossroads. It can continue its status quo thinking by citing “fiscal difficulties” to continue to fend off calls for it to fully fund its defense requirements. Though it is the more comfortable choice in the short term, it has the effect of ceding Asia's leadership role to China. Though militarily strong in absolute terms, Japan is in decline relative to Beijing.

A debate has already begun as to whether Japan has become complacent about devolving to a middle-status power. Such a development would be welcomed by China which is vying with Japan for preeminence in Asia and even by South Korea, which remains conspiratorially worried about a resurgent militaristic Japan. Chinese preeminence

13. Yoichi Kato, “Japan-U.S. Alliance Faces ‘Priority Gap,’” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 6, 2008.

14. Pyle, *Japan Rising*, p. 353.

would be a disaster, however, for U.S. national interests in Asia.

Bold leadership is needed but unlikely in Japan's consensus-driven political system. In this sense, Koizumi was an aberration the likes of which is unlikely to appear in the foreseeable future. Indeed, Fukuda shied away from expanding Japan's role through security and diplomatic initiatives, such as reinterpreting the collective self-defense theory or values-based alliance with democratic neighbors. Polls that show Japanese frustration with perceived inequities in the military relationship and the irritants of U.S. troop presence do not stimulate a strong national consensus to raise Japan's security role.

It is unlikely that there will be significant forward movement on security issues at the political level. The glacial pace of Japanese decision making has become, if possible, even slower. There will be little Japanese stimulus for highlighting security issues due to lack of interest by the electorate, few in the Diet are military experts, and the Ministry of Defense is a surprisingly minor bureaucracy—the “MoD doesn't cast a long shadow in the Diet.” Alliance transformation will therefore be a gradual, incremental process that will be frustrating to U.S. officials.

Tokyo's repeated deflections to appeals for greater security contributions could lead to “Japan fatigue” in Washington. U.S. officials have expressed frustration with Japan's citing of the Ministry of Finance's opposition as justification for its failure to increase the country's defense spending beyond 1 percent of GDP.

Richard Lawless, former deputy undersecretary of defense, commented in a May 2008 *Asahi Shimbun* interview that Japan's cumbersome decision-making cycle averages seven to nine years as compared with other countries in the region which are able to make and execute three different decisions in the same time. Military tacticians describe this repetitive decision-making process as observe-orient-decide-act (OODA) with the goal to be faster

than one's opponent, or “getting inside their OODA loop.” A slow OODA process leads to defeat.

Lawless warned that Japan must find a way to increase the pace of its tempo of decision making, deployment, integration, and “operationalizing” the alliance with the U.S.¹⁵ A failure to do so risks Japan's losing influence and even relevance in a region increasingly dominated by an ascendant China.

Japanese inertia, coupled with a new conservative South Korean president determined to improve Seoul's relations with Washington, could lead South Korea to supplanting Japan as the more important U.S. ally in Asia. South Korea has chafed at repeated U.S. policy references to the importance of Washington's alliance with Tokyo, while neglecting Seoul's significant contributions to peace and stability, including deploying 300,000 troops to the Vietnamese War. Nor is South Korea constrained by Japan's historical legacy, constitutional provisions, or societal apathy toward security objectives.

A fundamental question for Washington, including the next U.S. President, will be how to respond to Japan's tendency for slow, incremental changes. The U.S. options will be to accept the status quo, push harder for quicker alliance transformation, look to Tokyo for contributions in other “soft security” areas,¹⁶ or look elsewhere for more reliable allies, such as South Korea.

What the U.S. Should Do

Washington must continually urge Japan to take greater responsibility for its own defense and regional security to a degree commensurate with its economic power and global interests. Constitutional revision and assuming a greater security role are a means not an ends. They are part of broader strategic objectives to strengthen alliance with the U.S. while assuming greater responsibility for security in Asia. To this end, Washington should:

- Urge Tokyo to increase its spending above the historical constraint of 1 percent GDP in order to fulfill its obligations and achieve its broader strategic objectives.

15. Kato, “Japan-U.S. Alliance Faces ‘Priority Gap.’”

16. For example, increasing Overseas Development Assistance, assuming responsibility for reconstructing sectors in Afghanistan (e.g. hospitals, judicial system), mine clearing, sea lift, or air lift are possible “soft security” areas.

- Continue efforts to broaden the responsibilities of Japanese forces and integrate the Japanese forces with U.S. military and intelligence operations more closely.
- Continue joint ballistic missile defense development and urge Tokyo to modify export controls to allow indigenous component production.
- Begin laying the groundwork with the Japanese to convince their public of the need for constitutional revision as well as engaging in peacekeeping, stability-building, anti-piracy efforts, and securing lines of sea communication. Encourage Japan to continue providing support to coalition military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq.
- Encourage Japan to use its economic resources, including U.S. government aid, to alleviate societal problems overseas, including those that can foster seeds of terrorism. Tokyo could assume responsibility for sectoral infrastructure improvements in Afghanistan, such as health care or the judiciary.
- Improve congressional outreach to legislative counterparts, including the opposition DPJ, to facilitate understanding of alliance strategic objectives and gain support for enhanced Japanese security responsibilities. The Congressional Study Group on Japan has been relatively inactive and should be energized to provide stronger leadership on critical alliance transformation topics.
- Encourage Japan to implement procurement reform to gain greater fiscal efficiency, eliminate some arms export restrictions on military-related components to allow greater cooperation

between the U.S. and Japan on missile defense programs, and remove constraints on Japanese defense capabilities, including restrictions on overseas deployments.

Conclusion

The U.S. has critical national interests in Asia and must remain fully and energetically engaged in the region. Washington must employ all of the instruments of national power—diplomatic, informational, military, and economic—to attain its strategic objectives. The U.S. cannot do it alone; it relies on its indispensable allies Japan and South Korea to achieve mutually beneficial goals.

The U.S. must convince these two allies that the U.S.–South Korea and U.S.–Japan alliances are not a zero-sum equation. Both are critically important to achieving U.S. strategic objectives. Washington should make clear we stand shoulder to shoulder with both allies since we share common values.

Strong trilateral cooperation between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul is critically important. Periodic political or societal flare-ups that strain relations between Japan and South Korea must not be allowed to detract from steady long-term progress in strengthening the military partnership among the three countries. While the U.S.–Japanese security alliance is in a far better position to address the 21st century threat environment than it was five years ago, much work remains.

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