

Background

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How to Save the U.S.–Japan Alliance

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Countless official statements by the U.S. and Japan have highlighted the two countries' bilateral alliance as the linchpin or cornerstone of stability in Asia and indispensable to achieving the strategic objectives of both countries. Although true, such assertions are faulty on two counts: (1) they overlook the parallel criticality of the U.S.–South Korean alliance, and (2) they presume the existing paradigm with Tokyo will continue to meet U.S. security needs.

In 1980, The Heritage Foundation sponsored a major conference in Tokyo titled “U.S.–Japan Mutual Security: The Next Twenty Years,” headlined by former President Gerald R. Ford. The introduction to the volume commemorating the proceedings sets the stage by noting that Japan is “aware that it must assume a larger role and greater responsibilities in world affairs, but without a clear perception of what it must do.”¹ The truth is that nearly 30 years later, Japan's perspective on security issues has not moved from these crossroads, and as a result, cracks are emerging in its alliance with the U.S.

U.S. national security leaders, including congressional committees, should take appropriate steps in the framework of a review of both U.S. and Japanese commitments. In 1960, the United States made a promise to guarantee the long-term security of a former enemy. Such a commitment brings with it the enduring responsibility of the U.S. government to stand by its word. Similarly, Japan took a long-range view of the importance of its relationship with the United States, and the rest of the world continues to

Talking Points

- Cracks are emerging in the U.S.–Japan alliance. Unless redressed, these cracks could easily lead to a stagnant alliance unable to adapt to a rapidly changing Asian security environment.
- Washington must continue to press Tokyo to go beyond token contributions to international security missions and create a partnership that is more global in scope.
- Japan's regional and global influence and relevance are diminishing due to a faltering economy, paralyzed political system, and constrained armed forces.
- The U.S.–Japan alliance remains crucial, but it is underperforming and weaker than generally perceived. A failure by America's leaders to understand, appreciate, and take necessary transformative measures raises the risk of crises in Asia and around the world.

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assess Japan on its reliability as a security partner and credibility as a pillar of international security.

Although severing the military partnership is neither likely nor in the interests of either country, growing disenchantment could exacerbate existing tensions and lead to greater fissures in the relationship or a stagnant alliance that is unable to adapt to a rapidly changing Asian security environment.

U.S. policymakers are weary of Tokyo's long-standing complaints of being treated as a junior partner despite Washington's repeated entreaties for Japan to assume a larger security role. For its part, Japanese trust of the U.S. security commitment has eroded as a result of the Bush Administration's premature removal of North Korea from the terrorist list and fears that President Obama will acquiesce to accepting Pyongyang as a nuclear weapons state.

Neither country is well served by endlessly repeated bromides of the strength of the alliance as it becomes increasingly apparent that Japan will not fulfill the security role required to address increasing global security threats. Alliance discussions must go beyond rehashing tactical details of U.S. force realignment. Instead, U.S. and Japanese policymakers should conduct a realistic assessment of the needs of the alliance, particularly fully delineating roles, missions, and capabilities, including a timetable for Tokyo to fulfill its commitments.

Washington must continue to press Tokyo to go beyond token contributions to international security missions and create a partnership that is more global in scope, even as the U.S. acknowledges that other allies, particularly South Korea, are more likely to be reliable partners. Papering over differences in order to maintain cordial relations while failing to address growing strategic shortfalls not only defers necessary remedial actions, but also provides a dangerously false sense of security and potentially undermines U.S. abilities to achieve its strategic objectives. Sweeping deficiencies in the relationship under the rug also threatens the long-term health of the alliance.

The Alliance: Still Important

Despite its shortcomings, the alliance is critical to fulfilling current U.S. strategic objectives, including maintaining peace in the region. The forward deployment of a large U.S. military force in Japan deters military aggression by North Korea, signals Washington's resolve in defending U.S. allies, and provides an irreplaceable staging area should military action be necessary. Japan hosts the largest contingent of U.S. forces in Asia, including the only aircraft carrier home-ported outside the United States and one of three Marine Expeditionary Forces, as well as paying for a major portion of the cost of stationing U.S. forces there. Japan is America's principal missile defense partner in the world.

Washington and Tokyo have made significant progress in recent years in evolving the role of Japan's Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Alliance managers and military personnel should be commended for achieving considerable accomplishments despite often seemingly insurmountable political obstacles. The two militaries now have enhanced and integrated their joint training, intelligence sharing, and interoperability.

The military leaderships of both countries are engaged in a massive redeployment of U.S. forces in Japan, including relocating a Marine Corps air station on Okinawa, and transferring 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam. The U.S. Army is deploying the headquarters for I Corps from Fort Lewis, Washington, to Camp Zama, Japan, and the U.S. and Japanese Air Forces are integrating air defense functions in a joint center on Yokota Air Base.

Japan has also been moving further from the flagpole by venturing into new security roles. The Japanese Maritime SDF performed refueling operations in the Indian Ocean, Air SDF units provided logistical support in Iraq, and 5,600 Ground SDF personnel assisted with restoring public services in Iraq. All of these missions represented progress and should be acknowledged, particularly since they were attained despite considerable Japanese political opposition and public uncertainty.

1. *U.S.-Japan Mutual Security: The Next Twenty Years*, edited by Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., and Hideaki Kase (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1981), p. v.

The Little Engine that Won't

Japan's economic capacity and growing military capabilities enable it to be a strong alliance partner and a significant force to pursue global objectives. Yet, Japan is a powerful nation that punches below its weight and exerts little international influence. Rather than implementing a strategic policy, Japan has followed a minimalist, cost-effective, and reactive approach designed to derive maximum security and economic benefits from its alliance with the U.S. while providing the minimal necessary reciprocal gestures.

Tokyo seeks to fly under the radar of world attention by carving out a less contentious economic lane in the road to avoid confrontation and potential pushback overseas. The 2005 agreement on Common Strategic Objectives between the U.S. and Japan delineated roles, missions, missile defense objectives, and U.S. force realignment. However, "this level of organization, integration, and volume of agreements notwithstanding, implementation has been incomplete and often grudging."²

In the absence of bold and effective political leadership, the Japanese public has shown little enthusiasm for assuming a larger role and there are few incentives for disturbing the comfortable status quo. The combination of "constitutionally imposed constraints, interpreted restrictions on collective self-defense, and self-imposed limitations has also provided the Japanese with a self-serving rationale to arbitrarily limit defense spending to 1% of GDP [which] has become a seemingly unshakeable article of faith with the broader Japanese body politic."³

There has been an enduring Japanese inability or unwillingness to push the envelope on redefining the role of SDF to achieve national objectives, to budget sufficient resources, or to energetically con-

vince the public and Japan's neighbors of the need for a changed paradigm. At a time when the U.S. is looking for its allies to assume a larger security role overseas, Japan has ended its ground and air missions in Iraq. Japan has even walked away from earlier efforts to reinterpret the theory of collective self-defense to allow a more expansive role for Japanese defense forces.

The Effect of Japan's Complacency

Glacial Reform. While the U.S.–Japanese alliance has been evolving, with Tokyo adopting additional security roles, it has done so at an unnecessarily slow pace that is woefully inadequate to match the changes in the Asian strategic environment. These military accomplishments "inevitably stand on a more problematic political-economic foundation...the [alliance], formidable as it may be militarily, thus has political and intellectual feet of clay."⁴

Japan has yet to define its strategic vision for maintaining and expanding its role. U.S. and Japanese alliance managers should use the 50th anniversary of the alliance in 2010 to issue a new strategic document that goes beyond past bromides to provide a detailed articulation of the roles, missions, and capabilities, vision, blueprint, and commitments. Even more important, there should be a timetable for Japanese implementation of its commitments.

Declining Defense Spending. In 2004, Japanese defense spending was 6 percent of the general account budget, lower than the 8.2 percent level of 1965.⁵ Japan's defense spending has dropped from \$46 billion in 2000 to \$45 billion in 2008, and is lower now than it was in 1996.⁶ Yet, a survey by the Japanese daily *Asahi Shimbun* showed that, despite seven consecutive years of defense cuts, 47 percent of respondents recommended further reductions to the SDF budget.⁷

2. Michael Finnegan, "Managing Unmet Expectations: The U.S.–Japan Security Alliance," unpublished workshop paper, p. 5.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
4. Kent E. Calder, *Pacific Alliance: Reviving US-Japan Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 151.
5. Japanese Defense Agency, *Defense of Japan*, 2004, as quoted in Richard J. Samuels, *Securing Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2007), p. 195.
6. James L. Schoff, "The U.S.–Japan Alliance and the Future of Extended Deterrence," Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, March 2009, pp. x, 18, at <http://www.ifpa.org/pdf/RealignPriorities.pdf> (August 13, 2009).

Limited Overseas Role. Japan's national interests extend far beyond its shores, but it is unwilling to protect them, relying on others to divert their resources for Tokyo's benefit. Japan should recognize that having global interests means having global responsibilities. Only 38 Japanese troops participate in just three U.N. peacekeeping operations around the world, compared to more than 2,000 Chinese soldiers in 11 peacekeeping operations.⁸

Japan is the only G-7 country that has not sent troops to Afghanistan, which has been officially endorsed by the U.N. Security Council. As James Shinn, former Assistant Secretary of Defense, put it: "I thought Japan was trying to get a permanent seat on the Security Council of the U.N. How can Japan seek a major role on the UNSC on one hand, but decline on the other to assume any responsibility for the SC's approved operation in Afghanistan?" The Pentagon had asked Japan to provide transport helicopters and planes as well as Japanese members for Provincial Reconstruction Teams.⁹

Overly Restrictive Rules of Engagement. A debate rages over not just *which* roles Japan should have, including boots on the ground, but also *how* Japan conducts its missions. The contentious legislative debate that precedes any Japanese deployment overseas and the ridiculously constricted rules of engagement (ROE) undermine the utility of any Japanese contributions. When Japanese ground troops went into Iraq, the risk-averse mission precluded them from providing their own force protection; this required them to be protected by other troops. As a result, the Japanese contribution was a drain on overall allied resources.

Japanese provision of naval refueling assistance required extensive and divisive legislative debate every year to renew operations. But Shinn expressed disappointment about Japan's contribution: "The

refueling mission in the Indian Ocean is a very minor contribution to the big problem of stability in the whole Middle East [and it is] very unfortunate that the Japanese government hasn't done more."¹⁰

Japan deployed Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) destroyers for a four-month tour patrolling for pirates off the Horn of Africa. The mission was constrained, however, to protect Japanese lives and property. Japanese naval forces were only allowed to escort Japanese-registered ships or foreign-flagged vessels operated by Japanese firms, were limited to using force exclusively for self-defense and firing warning shots, and not allowed to come to the defense of third-party vessels.

Even as the ships were engaged in their mission, the Japanese legislature was still debating expanding the rules of engagement to allow for a more meaningful involvement. It was not until June 2009 that legislation marginally expanded authority to escort foreign ships and fire at pirate boats that ignore warning shots.¹¹ Even the broader rules of engagement still do not allow true Japanese integration into the more comprehensive international effort.

As such, it affirms Tokyo's self-centered response to global security threats, limiting its involvement to protect only Japanese efforts or to be involved only in an as minimal and risk-averse manner possible. This is despite Prime Minister Taro Aso's declaration that Japan's involvement is due to its responsibilities as a member of the international community. Japan responded only after China and 19 other nations agreed to participate, hardly the actions of a country vying to be a leader of Asia.

Conflicting Security Priorities. The U.S. strategic threat environment changed considerably after 9/11, as well as due to the increasing North Korean and Chinese military capabilities. As a result, U.S.

7. Tobias Harris, "Butter over Guns," *Observing Japan*, March 19, 2009, at <http://www.observingjapan.com/2009/03/butter-over-guns.html> (August 4, 2009).

8. Richard J. Samuels, "Wing Walking: The U.S.–Japan Alliance," *Global Asia*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 2009), p. 18.

9. Yoichi Kato, "Interview/James Shinn: 'Don't Let the Tower of the Alliance Tumble,'" *Asahi Shimbun*, February 11, 2009, at <http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200902110032.html> (August 6, 2009).

10. *Ibid.*

11. "Lower House Approves Antipiracy Legislation Over Opposition," *Kyodo News*, April 23, 2009; "New Law for Antipiracy Missions," *The Japan Times*, April 28, 2009; and "Japan Expands Anti-Piracy Mission," *BBC*, June 19, 2009.

objectives and expectations of its allies have evolved. For its part, Japan remains focused on an alliance in which Tokyo relies on U.S. military presence as a low-cost defense of its country.

As a result of the Bush Administration's decision to delist North Korea as a state sponsor of terrorism, Tokyo now questions U.S. support for Japanese foreign policy priorities. Japan perceives a difference in the U.S. approach to Iran's and North Korea's nuclear programs. Although North Korea already has nuclear weapons, Tokyo perceives the U.S. as not expending the same level of effort toward Pyongyang, causing some Japanese officials to question whether Washington believes that protecting Israel is more important than protecting Japan.

Greater Political Uncertainty Ahead

The likelihood that the opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) will win the forthcoming lower house election—and thus gain control of the executive and legislative branches—may cause turmoil for Japan's security policies. The DPJ is composed of widely diverse ideological factions with sharply divergent views on the U.S. alliance, Tokyo's use of military force, and balancing Japan's relationships with the U.S. and China. The DPJ has vowed to “continue scrutinizing without interruption” Japanese plans to pay 1 trillion yen for its portion of the realignment cost. It also announced its intention to study ways of having U.S. forces in Okinawa moved overseas.¹²

Therefore, the degree to which a Japan under DPJ stewardship would veer from the security *status quo* remains uncertain, even to DPJ legislators. The conservative faction advocates maintaining a close military alliance with the U.S. and continually striving to expand Japan's security responsibilities. Another, potentially larger faction, led by former party chief Ichiro Ozawa, advocates a more independent role for Japan's SDF. This group would press for a less

constrained use of Japanese military force, but only in support of U.N.-sanctioned missions.

Although the DPJ will be constrained in its ability to significantly alter the *status quo*, the ascendancy of the DPJ may have significant and detrimental effects on the bilateral alliance and U.S. security objectives in Asia.

Japan's Self-Marginalization— a Fading Flower

Japan's regional and global influence and relevance are diminishing due to a faltering economy, paralyzed political system, and constrained armed forces. The current trajectory of Japan's future is poor, with little reason for optimism for a change in course. “The danger is that [the bilateral] alliance will, despite its strategic importance, grow ever more irrelevant to the increasingly global realities of world affairs,”¹³ warns Kent Calder of the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. As a result, the world “has likely seen the high-water mark of Japan's international presence and assertiveness.”¹⁴ Japan must realize that the result of indecision, stagnation, and attempting to merely maintain the *status quo* is devolving it to a second-tier, middle-power nation.

Left unchecked, Tokyo's influence and relevance in Asia will continue to erode. It is not a case of Japan abandoning the race, but simply that its competitors have gotten much better. It is like a ball player who continues to play the same level of game, oblivious to the fact that the other players on both his team and the opponent's are continually improving their capabilities.

If Japan is uncertain of its future regional role, China is not. China, like nature, abhors a vacuum. If democratic Tokyo is unwilling to play a leadership role, China's growing economic and military capabilities will increasingly enable it to fill the gap that Japan's declining financial strength and self-imposed security constraints have caused. That

12. “Obama and Japan/Futenma Relocation a Pressing Issue,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, November 19, 2008, at <http://two--plus--two.blogspot.com/2008/11/obama-and-japan-futenma-relocation.html> (August 4, 2009).

13. Calder, *Pacific Alliance*, p. 228.

14. Brad Glosserman and Tomoko Tsunoda, “The Guillotine: Demographics and Japan's Security Options,” *Pacnet Newsletter*, CSIS, No. 45, June 17, 2009.

could lead nations in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Middle East to increasingly see China as a more capable and reliable actor than Japan. This is certainly not good for U.S. strategic interests in the Asia-Pacific region.

Writing Checks No Substitute for Security Policy

Japanese defenders of the status quo reject assertions that their country is losing influence or relevance by pointing to Japan's significant economic contributions to addressing global needs. Japan is the second-largest contributor to, among others, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, and the International Monetary Fund. Japan pledged a \$100 billion loan to the International Monetary Fund in March 2009 to bolster the fund's resources.

Tokyo has provided hundreds of billions of dollars in overseas development assistance. In February 2009, Tokyo hosted an international aid conference to elicit aid to stabilize Pakistan and fight terrorism, to which Tokyo pledged \$1 billion over two years. Japan pledged to pay the salaries of 80,000 Afghan police officers for six months to help stabilize security in Afghanistan and to build 200 schools and 100 hospitals.¹⁵

Japanese economic contributions *are* impressive. Moreover, they outweigh those of China despite Beijing often receiving far greater media attention. But these are Japanese *economic*, not *security*, contributions; the U.S.-Japan alliance is, of course, a security relationship. One cannot substitute non-security accomplishments as compensation for Tokyo's grudging implementation of its military commitments. Tokyo has been unable to translate its economic strength into political and security influence or into an effective leadership role. And its economic power is a slowly melting iceberg.

Some Japanese scholars point to the intangible influence provided by Japan's "soft power," pointing to polls that show the country is well respected throughout Asia. "While Japan's relative economic

strength may be on the decline, smart diplomacy and soft power can supplement this loss and make sure that Japan's future remains bright,"¹⁶ believes Hitoshi Tanaka, Japan's former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Academics on both sides of the Pacific seek to justify Japan's shortcomings by advocating a more comprehensive, "non-traditional" definition of the alliance to include non-security issues. "Non-traditional security" is, in fact, *non-security*. Redefining non-security issues as "soft" security accepts passivity as a strategy and highlights non-relevant achievements to compensate for security shortcomings. Japanese efforts on global warming, energy issues, or combating pandemics do not contribute to a military alliance. Tokyo cannot substitute initiatives on these issues for fulfilling its security requirements.

Unless soft power is convertible into political influence, it is merely an oxymoron that is used as an excuse for avoiding security responsibilities. Even effective soft power can only augment, not replace, security commitments.

The Cost of Inaction

Japan may believe that there will be less need to engage overseas since there is a perception that the Obama Administration is "certain to distance itself from the widely criticized unilateral approach to diplomacy adopted by the previous U.S. administration and embrace multilateralism as it tackles global and regional challenges."¹⁷ That is missing the point. Even a multilateralist approach by the U.S. would require a larger Japanese contribution. Despite new U.S. efforts to reach out and engage its European and Asian allies in dialogue, the Obama Administration has found few countries willing to commit resources for coalition operations in Afghanistan. The lesson learned for Washington is that allied foot-dragging was not due to President Bush or his policies but, rather, allied reluctance to become involved or to expend resources.

In the absence of significant allied contributions, the U.S. will find itself either having to abandon

15. "Government to Pay Salaries for 80,000 Afghan Cops," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, February 24, 2009.

16. Hitoshi Tanaka, "A New Leadership Role for Japan," *Global Asia*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (March 2009), p. 10.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

strategic objectives, such as stabilizing Afghanistan, or again having to assume the lion's share of military responsibilities. Given constrained U.S. military resources, Congress and the American taxpayer will increasingly question the utility and cost of devoting significant military resources to defend Japan. They will easily see it as far less expensive to remove additional units from U.S. forces in Japan rather than having to grow units from scratch.

Allies would then be faced with the choice of accepting greater security risks or offsetting the decline in deterrent capability by expanding their own forces, requiring a significant increase of the defense budget beyond the current anemic level. Neither Japanese soft power nor entangling Tokyo's neighbors in an East Asian regional forum will offset growing security threats. There is a growing Japanese chorus fretting over a perceived declining U.S. commitment to Japan, yet there has been little effort by Tokyo to prepare compensatory measures.

Straight Talk Needed. The leaders and legislatures of the U.S. and Japan must forthrightly address the needs of the alliance and Japan's contributions rather than continuing to paper over the problems with positive rhetoric. Japan has called for an end to being treated as the junior partner in the alliance, which it perceives as unfair. Yet, with a proportionate share of decision-making comes a proportionate share of the responsibilities and requirements.

While the U.S. has responsibility for understanding the domestic political constraints of its allies, those allies also have a responsibility to live up to their commitments. Habitual foot-dragging leads to mistrust, fatigue, and perceptions of unreliability. Maintaining a *status quo* alliance in a changing security environment will leave the U.S. with increasingly larger military requirements that it may be unable to fulfill.

What the U.S. Should Do

- Stop referring to Japan as the only linchpin of U.S. security in Asia, instead emphasizing the parallel importance of South Korea, which has fewer constraints on the use of its military overseas. Seoul is more able and willing to commit sufficient capabilities to achieve shared political and security objectives.
- Affirm the U.S. security commitment to the defense of Japan while defining a blueprint and timetable for transferring greater responsibility to the Japanese SDF. Underscore Washington's pledge of extended deterrence—"the nuclear umbrella"—while insisting Japan expand its conventional force capabilities to fulfill regional and global responsibilities.
- Proceed with the planned transformation and relocation of U.S. forces in Japan, but condition it on full Japanese implementation of existing bilateral agreements. Washington should make clear that U.S. redeployments of Marine forces on Okinawa are contingent on Japanese fulfillment of the Guam Agreement, which stipulates that the new Marine air base must be completed on Okinawa before the third Marine Expeditionary Force departs for Guam.¹⁸
- Continue and expand values-based alliances, such as the trilateral dialogue among the U.S., Japan, and Australia, with an eye to broader supplementary diplomatic instruments like a "global freedom coalition."¹⁹ Increase multilateral security cooperation among like-minded partners, including South Korea.

The U.S. Should Urge Japan to:

- Implement the recommendations of the Yanai Commission²⁰ to adopt a less constrictive interpretation of the theory of collective self-defense.

18. The existing plan calls for the redeployment of 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam and the relocation of the Marine Corps Futenma Air Station to a more remote northeastern Okinawa location.

19. Kim R. Holmes, *Liberty's Best Hope: American Leadership for the 21st Century* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 2008).

20. Formally known as the Prime Minister's Advisory Panel on Reconstruction of the Legal Basis for National Security. The panel, convened by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, released its report in June 2008 urging Japan to adopt a less constrictive interpretation of the theory of collective self-defense. Former Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda refused to adopt the panel's recommendations.

This would allow greater Japanese participation in four scenarios: (1) protection of U.S. naval forces, (2) ballistic missile defense, (3) use of force by SDF forces deployed on peacekeeping operations, and (4) providing logistical support to other nations engaged in peacekeeping operations.

- Enact permanent legislation to allow the dispatch of Japanese forces overseas without requiring cumbersome and divisive legislative debate before each mission. This would be an important first step toward globalizing the alliance to allow Japan to address international security threats inimical to both the U.S. and Japan. Japan should increase its regional and global security role to be commensurate with its economic power and military capabilities.
- Implement rules of engagement similar to those used by other nations engaged in U.N. missions. The need for other nations' troops to defend Japanese troops in Iraq undermined the utility of the Japanese contribution. Tokyo should evolve its role beyond merely providing logistical support or funding non-military initiatives. Becoming a full member of the team requires "boots on the ground."
- Increase defense spending beyond the *status quo* of 1 percent of GDP to enable fulfilling mission objectives. Enhance public diplomacy efforts to explain the utility of an enhanced alliance to offset Japan's current acquiescence and timidity, which would lead to decreased influence in Asia.
- Assess the impact that buying expensive weapons systems, such as the F-22 fighter aircraft, which costs much more than the F-35, would have on Japan's ability to maintain critical defense systems, such as missile defense, if the Japanese continue to refuse to raise their defense budget.
- Assume a greater global role in combating proliferation. Initially extend the range of Japanese Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) operations, currently limited to the waters surrounding Japan, to assume primary responsibility for patrolling against North Korean maritime proliferation in northeast Asia.

Conclusion

Japan is important to the United States—which makes it all the more critical to improve the alliance

for mutual benefit. An Asia without the U.S.–Japanese alliance would be far worse than the status quo. The U.S. needs strong relationships with Japan and South Korea, as well as coordinated efforts among these three allies to combat current and future security challenges in Asia and around the world. Moreover, the alliances are not simply a response to threats, but are a partnership of countries that share the values of freedom and democracy. The U.S. should not shy away from emphasizing that aspect in its military partnerships with Japan, South Korea, and Australia.

Leaders in Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul have inherited responsibilities that go well beyond their borders. The sacrifices of their citizens in the 20th century should never be forgotten, and these three singularly important nations must constantly review the premise of their commitments and long-term relationships in the moral dimension that "our words are our bonds."

Japanese policymakers have not defined a strategic vision to address the evolving world environment. Such a grand strategy must be accompanied by bold, effective leadership to mobilize public support for Japan's regional and global role. A national debate must take place if Japan is to reverse its present wayward course. The election of the opposition DPJ and its commensurate search for a policy could prove to be catalyst.

The U.S.–Japan alliance is not a house of cards. But it is underperforming, and weaker than generally perceived. As one U.S. official said, "Getting Japan to do more is like pushing a string." The alliance needs shoring up, including wider understanding and public acknowledgement of its strengths, weaknesses, and limitations to allow a more robust U.S. discussion of its own defense needs. Endlessly repeating the bromide of "Japan as linchpin" is not a viable strategy and it ill serves the United States. A failure of America's leaders to understand, appreciate, and take necessary transformative measures puts Washington's ability to achieve its objectives at risk and raises dangers of crises in Asia and around the world.

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