

Background

No. 2340
November 9, 2009



Published by The Heritage Foundation

Japan's Security Policy: Navigating the Troubled Waters Ahead

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Abstract: *The U.S. relationship with Japan has just become more complicated. The recent election victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) has resulted in more resistance to a truly shared U.S.–Japanese mission. Refusing to provide troops to aid the coalition in Afghanistan, and generally uninterested in actively engaging in overseas security missions, the risk-averse DPJ is pulling back from its responsibilities in the U.S.–Japan alliance, as well as internationally. This leaves the U.S. in the position of responding to an ally who demands an equal role yet resists assuming equal responsibilities. Heritage Foundation Asia expert Bruce Klingner lays out the likely consequences of diverging U.S. and Japanese security interests, and provides a map to help the Obama Administration navigate the turbulent waters of the U.S. relationship with Japan's new government.*

The victory by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the August 2009 lower house election was a historic and revolutionary event in Japanese politics. It forced the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) to leave office for only the second time in 50 years. Of concern to the United States is the fact that the DPJ has made some remarkably provocative statements about Japan's alliance with the U.S.—which reflect both the party's traditional positions as well as those it has taken since assuming office.

Although the DPJ softened some of its more strident anti-alliance rhetoric during the election, the party's policy views have not fundamentally changed.

Talking Points

- The new Japanese government, led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), seeks to alter Japan's relationship with the U.S. The DPJ's security policies differ significantly from those supported by Washington.
- Japan will now become even more risk-averse and resistant to adopting international security responsibilities commensurate with its status as a major nation. The DPJ has demanded a more equal role in the alliance with the U.S. yet is unable to define what it wants.
- The Obama Administration should avoid alienating its newly assertive and prickly ally. But Washington's patience should not be endless when it comes to implementing previously agreed upon commitments and addressing pressing global security threats.
- While careful alliance management by both countries can mitigate further strains, Washington faces an era of greater uncertainty in its military relationship with Japan. Both partners will face greater challenges in preventing conflicting policy and strategic viewpoints from damaging the relationship.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/AsiaandthePacific/bg2340.cfm

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
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Japan's new DPJ leadership has articulated positions on several security issues, such as U.S. force realignment in Japan, that are significantly different from those of Washington. The DPJ depicts Japan's previous overseas deployments as forced concessions to U.S. demands in the name of the alliance, rather than as the contributions of a major nation to international security challenges. The DPJ has pledged to be more resistant to future security requests from the U.S.

It is clear that under the new leadership, Japan will be even more risk-averse—and more resistant to living up to its international security responsibilities.

The DPJ's strategic vision differs significantly from that of the U.S. and presages a greater potential for divergent priorities between Japan and the United States. The DPJ has demanded a more equal role in the alliance yet is unable to define what it wants. The DPJ favors redefining the alliance to include "non-traditional security" so that Japanese international monetary donations and civilian deployments overseas can count as security contributions, offsetting the need to augment Japan's defense forces or increase defense spending. These moves will only exacerbate any tensions generated during early debates over relocating U.S. forces on Okinawa, as well as Japanese support to the coalition in Afghanistan.

Public statements downplaying any concerns on the potential for additional strains in the alliance by Obama Administration officials have been strikingly different from private comments. Private remarks by U.S. officials reflected angst over possible "very serious problems" with the new government.¹ The DPJ misinterpreted the U.S. public reticence as endorsement for a re-definition of the alliance and Japan's commitments.

It is clear that under DPJ leadership, Japan will be even more risk-averse than it was under its predecessor, and more resistant to adopting interna-

tional security responsibilities commensurate with its status as a major nation. While careful alliance management by both countries can mitigate further strains, Washington faces an era of greater uncertainty in its military relationship with Japan.

The U.S. and Japan continue to share basic strategic objectives: dealing with a rising China in a way that maximizes the economic value of China's integration into the international economy while minimizing the significant political and security threats it poses; the struggle against international terrorism, whether in Afghanistan or off the coast of Somalia; and the threat from North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile programs. The U.S. and Japan also share a democratic value system with Japan that should not be discounted.

In response to political changes in Japan, the U.S. should refrain from moving the policy goalposts in the hope that the weight of shared interests and values will force the Japanese to honor their commitments. At the same time the U.S. can hedge against uncertainty by relying more on other allies and its own forces to address regional and international security threats.

A Historic Political Victory. The DPJ won a record 308 of 480 seats in the lower house of the legislature, up from the 115 it held previously. The election result was an incredible turnaround from November 2007 when then-DPJ chief Ichiro Ozawa offered to resign, stating the DPJ was "lacking in ability" and had little chance of winning the next lower house election. His comments not only caused a backlash against him personally but affirmed the widely held belief that the DPJ was amateurish and forever doomed to remain an opposition party. (See Chart 1 and Chart 2.)

In order to gain absolute majorities in both the lower and upper houses of parliament after the 2009 election, the DPJ entered into a coalition with the much smaller Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the People's New Party. The fact that the DPJ had to rely on these minor parties to form a governing coalition gives them disproportionate influence on policymaking. The DPJ hopes to oust the SDP

1. Author interview with U.S. official.

after gaining additional seats in the 2010 upper house election.

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) dropped from 300 to 119 seats, largely because the public viewed the LDP as not being able to remedy the people's economic plight, nor caring about it. The ignominy of the LDP's defeat is reflected in the election ouster of a former prime minister, finance minister, former defense minister, and faction leaders.

It was not surprising that the LDP lost but, rather, that it took so long to be thrown from office after Japanese citizens had clearly lost confidence in its leadership.² Under the LDP, Japan suffered endless political scandals, two decades of anemic economic performance, and a skyrocketing government debt.

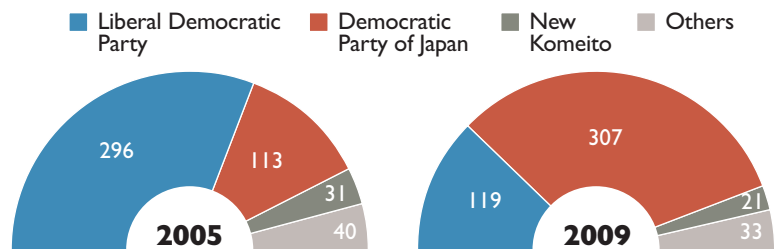
Following its defeat, the LDP now faces its time in the political wilderness. Voter alienation from the LDP is high and the party's bench is thin for potential leaders after a revolving door of disappointingly lackluster prime ministers during the past three years. The party must now adapt to an opposition role. It must decide whether it will provide sound policy alternatives or whether it resorts to the obstructionist tactics that the DPJ employed.

Foreign Policy of Little Concern to Japanese Electorate. The outcome of the lower house election was determined by domestic issues, which will remain the focus of the electorate and thus the ruling party. Japan's attention will be directed inward, seeking to resolve a faltering economic system threatened not only by the current global financial downturn but also the looming crisis of supporting an increasingly graying society. The DPJ is preoccupied with winning next year's upper house election, defined as gaining sufficient seats to oust the SDP from the coalition.

But while domestic issues dominate Japanese thinking, foreign and security policies loom larger

Japan's 2005 and 2009 Election Results

For the 480 Seats in the Lower House of Parliament

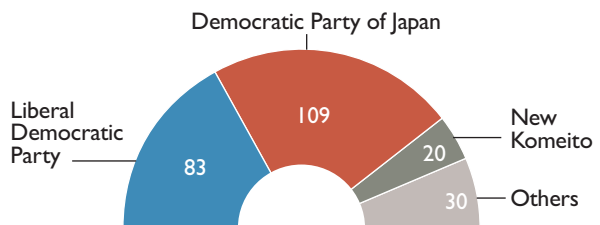


Source: *Financial Times*, "New Era for Japan as DPJ Triumphs," August 30, 2009, at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/73ed5238-9512-11de-b810-00144feabdc0.html> (November 4, 2009).

Chart 1 • B 2340 heritage.org

Japan's 2007 Election Results

For the 242 Seats in the Upper House of Parliament



Source: *Japan Times*, "Ruling Coalition Suffers Huge Defeat," July 30, 2007, at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20070730a1.html> (November 5, 2009).

Chart 2 • B 2340 heritage.org

for Washington. The U.S. is concerned that Japan is showing no intention of assuming greater security responsibilities and appears complacent, willing to cede the Asian leadership role to China.

DPJ Security Policy—Hitting a Moving Target. The DPJ will change Japanese foreign policy and alter the relationship with the U.S. How dramatic that change will be remains to be seen and is subject to American policy choices. The DPJ enters office without a clear strategic security vision or blueprint for implementing its campaign pledges

2. "Lead Over LDP Has Doubled: Poll," *The Japan Times*, August 28, 2009, at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20090828a2.html> (November 4, 2009).

for sweeping policy changes. Its campaign policy manifesto was a consensus document that softened its independent foreign policy positions of recent years in order to gain favor with the electorate and reassure the U.S.

During the election, the DPJ:

- Backed away from its previous calls for “drastic revisions of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) with the U.S.,” instead opting to “propose revisions.”³
- Dropped plans to immediately halt Japanese participation in naval refueling operations in the Indian Ocean, which supported international anti-terrorism operations in Afghanistan, instead allowing it to continue until enabling legislation expired in January 2010. Postponement allowed for greater continuity in coalition operations.
- Accepted Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces (SDF) participation in ongoing Somali anti-piracy operations as well as future missions if they exceeded Japanese coast guard capabilities and “after building a system to maintain and ensure civilian control” of the SDF.⁴ Previously, the party was unequivocally opposed to dispatching the SDF to protect Japanese ships from pirates.
- Called for implementing inspections of North Korean cargo ships under U.N. Resolution 1874 sanctions. Previously, DPJ opposition had led an LDP-initiated bill allowing inspections to be scrapped. However, after the election, the DPJ reversed itself again and decided against submitting a bill allowing for inspections of North Korean vessels as required by Resolution 1874, though this was reversed yet again one week later.⁵

The DPJ continued to temper some of its security-policy positions after the election. But although

the moderated rhetoric is reassuring to Washington, DPJ security-policy positions remain problematic for the U.S. The more that the DPJ stresses continuity in foreign policy to reassure the U.S., the more it risks alienating its liberal faction and generating politically damaging accusations of hypocrisy.

DPJ Struggling to Formulate Security Policy.

Japan’s current ambiguous foreign policy reflects internal party divisions. The DPJ is a big tent ranging from socialists to conservatives. The right side of the party has more policy similarities with the rival LDP than it does with its socialist DPJ counterparts. The conservative faction balks at the more extreme positions of its liberal DPJ members.

During post-election negotiations to form a coalition government, the SDP pressed the DPJ to return to its earlier left-of-center policy manifesto positions to revise the Status of Forces Agreement, review the presence of U.S. forces in Japan, and end Japan’s participation in refueling operations. Some claim that the DPJ was forced by the SDP to return to its left-of-center roots but will be able to pursue more centrist policies after next summer’s upper house election.⁶ But large segments of the DPJ are left of center and would resist moving further to the center.

There will continue to be a tug-of-war between those advocating moderate positions and those highlighting the need to maintain support from the SDP. Until the DPJ factions overcome their differences and define the new government’s foreign and security policies, Japan’s course will remain indeterminate and unpredictable. In the meantime, the vision articulated by the new government is disturbing from an alliance perspective.

A New Japanese Strategic Vision. The DPJ has articulated a very different vision of its relationship

3. “DPJ Relaxes Stance on Revisions to Status of Forces Agreement,” *The Mainichi Shimbun*, July 24, 2009.
4. “Election 2009—Battle for Power/DPJ U-Turn on Antipiracy Mission,” *BusinessWeek*, July 24, 2009, at <http://bx.businessweek.com/digital-rights-management/election-2009--battle-for-power--dpj-u-turn-on-antipiracy-mission/14384473021314588243-2d62325b0c7c22d4f9ddca08b6e30f3e/> (November 4, 2009).
5. “Government Won’t Submit Bill on Inspecting DPRK Cargo,” *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 15, 2009, at <http://www.yomiuri.co.jp/dy/national/20091015TDY01305.htm> (November 4, 2009), and “Extra Diet Session to Get DPRK Cargo Bill,” *The Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 23, 2009.
6. Author interviews with DPJ legislators and party officials.

DPJ Statements on the U.S.–Japan Alliance

- “Japan’s relations with the U.S. have been heavily biased toward defense. Now it’s time to shift our focus to economic ties.”¹ Prime Minister Hatoyama, August 17, 2009.
- “Until now, Japan has acted to suit U.S. convenience. But rather than doing so, Japan–U.S. relations should be on an equal footing so that our side can strongly assert Japan’s will.”² Prime Minister Hatoyama, August 31, 2009.
- “There is concern that Japan will be entangled in one-sided use of force by the U.S. in a global range.... The right of collective self defense is Japan’s right under international law, and does not mean Japan is automatically obliged to join missions with its allies.”³ Prime Minister Hatoyama, 2008.
- “[Under previous administrations, Japanese] foreign policy was excessively dependent on the U.S. I want to develop a foreign policy which will be able to convey our own thinking.”⁴ Minister of Foreign Affairs Katsuya Okada, September 17, 2009.
- “Priority should be given to Asia first, and then to the Japan-U.S. alliance... It is now necessary to discuss whether the concentration of U.S. bases on Okinawa is normal.”⁵ Minister of Foreign Affairs Katsuya Okada, July 2009.
- Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa described the current Status of Forces Agreement as “humiliating” for Japan.⁶ October 15, 2009.
- “Japan-China relations should be as close as Japan–U.S. relations to form triangular relations with two equal sides.”⁷ DPJ Secretary General Ichiro Ozawa, February 23, 2009.

1. Mari Yamaguchi, “Japan opposition head seeks economic ties with US,” *Associated Press*, August 17, 2009.
2. “Voters Turn Out Ruling Party in Japanese Election,” *The Washington Post*, August 31, 2009.
3. Yukio Hatoyama, “Kempo kaisei shian no chukan hokoku” (Interim report of my private proposal on constitutional revision), as quoted in Leif-Eric Easley, Tetsuo Kotani, and Aki Mori, “Electing a New Japanese Security Policy? Examining Foreign Policy Visions within the Democratic Party of Japan,” National Bureau of Asian Research *Asia Policy* No. 9, January 2010, at http://www.nbr.org/Publications/Asia_policy/AP9/AsiaPolicy9_DPJ_AdvanceDraft.pdf (November 4, 2009).
4. Mure Dickie and Alec Russell, “Okada Seeks to Redefine Japan–US Relations,” *Financial Times*, September 17, 2009.
5. Daniel Sneider, “A Japan that Can Say Maybe: The Foreign Policy of the DPJ,” Presentation at Woodrow Wilson International Center, July 21, 2009.
6. Kyoko Hasegawa, “Japan Minister: US Troop Agreement Humiliating,” *AFP*, October 15, 2009.
7. Ozawa comment during a meeting with CCP International liaison director Wang Jiarui, February 23, 2009, see James J. Przystup, “Japan–China Relations, New Year, Old Problems,” *Comparative Connections*, April 2009, at http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/0901qjapan_china.pdf (November 4, 2009).

with Washington. Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama advocates that Japan pursue a path to protect Japan’s political and economic independence, since he sees the country as being “caught” between the U.S. and China.⁷

A DPJ upper house legislator described the changing global environment brought on by a declining U.S. as a commensurate dispersal of power and a growing inability of the developed countries to influence rising nations such as China.

7. Yukio Hatoyama, “A New Path for Japan,” *The New York Times*, August 27, 2009, at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/27/opinion/27iht-edhatoyama.html> (November 4, 2009).

As a result, Japan must accommodate itself to this new reality, including making accommodations with China. The DPJ would therefore, the legislator explained, base its foreign policy on the recognition of this changed environment, including a U.S. shift from reliance on alliances under Bush to a more multi-lateralist approach under Obama.⁸

Defining a More Equal Alliance...on Japanese Terms. Prime Minister Hatoyama affirmed that the U.S.–Japanese alliance should “continue to be the cornerstone of Japanese diplomatic policy” but questions some of the basic assumptions of the alliance. He and other DPJ legislators have called for a more independent Japan participating in a more equal alliance with Washington that reduces the burden of hosting U.S. bases.

The Democratic Party of Japan has been unable to articulate what it means by a “more equal alliance.”

The DPJ’s 2007 manifesto called for “re-examining the role of the U.S. military in the security of the Asia-Pacific region and the significance of U.S. bases in Japan.” Some DPJ officials have suggested that the U.S.’s 47,000 troops and 90 military bases should be reduced dramatically or eliminated.⁹

The DPJ has been unable to articulate what it means by a “more equal alliance.” The bilateral alliance can never truly be equal as long as Japan remains heavily dependent on the U.S. for its defense. The DPJ should understand that overcoming inequalities requires Japan to assume additional security responsibilities—with a commensurate increase in defense spending—both of which Tokyo has long been loath to do.

Equality would also require Japan to adopt a less restrictive interpretation of collective self-defense and implement less restrictive rules of engagement for its military units overseas. But a survey of DPJ lower house legislators showed that 53 percent saw

no need to revise the current constitutional interpretation and only 19 percent advocated its revision.¹⁰

Japan remains unable or unwilling to shoulder the responsibilities of a larger security role. Instead, the new government will advocate that Japan assume larger responsibilities *outside* the security field as a compensatory measure for maintaining or reducing its current security commitment. As such, the DPJ will push to expand the definition of the military relationship to include “non-traditional security” so that non-security issues can be counted as security contributions to the military alliance.

The DPJ wants to limit Japan’s overseas role to economic donations and low-risk civilian reconstruction efforts. In essence, substituting boots on the ground with sneakers on the ground as much as possible. When Japanese defense forces are deployed, the emphasis would be on combat support units (transportation, medical, etc.) instead of security, infantry, or peacekeepers in hostile environments.

The DPJ harbors resentment over the fact that Japan feels forced by the U.S. to engage in overseas commitments. As such, the new government vows to be more resistant to future U.S. entreaties. Japan is a global nation with international interests but has been reluctant to defend them. As a major nation, it should also aspire to be actively involved in international responses to global challenges rather than being dragged into them. Japan’s aversion to security risks means the U.S. and its troops must assume the lion’s share of danger.

Contentious Operational Issues. The DPJ has articulated policies contrary to those of the U.S. on a number of security issues that will serve as friction points in the relationship. The most notable are the DPJ’s opposition to Japanese maritime refueling operations in support of coalition counterterrorism operations, Japanese support in Afghanistan, and U.S. force realignment on Okinawa.

Indian Ocean Refueling Operations. Defense Minister Toshimi Kitazawa announced on October 13 that Japan would withdraw from Indian Ocean

8. Author conversation with DPJ upper house legislator.

9. David Pilling, “Japan Shrinks from the American Embrace,” *Financial Times*, July 22 2009.

10. “DPJ Wary of SDF Missions Overseas,” *The Japan Times*, October 5, 2009.

refueling operations when enabling legislation expired on January 15, 2010. The decision came despite a plea by Pakistani Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani to extend Japanese involvement, which supports his country's anti-Taliban operations. DPJ Secretary General Ozawa had long criticized Japanese involvement in the Indian Ocean refueling as unconstitutional since it was not specifically approved by the U.N.

Nearly three-quarters of DPJ lawmakers in the lower house polled in October thought SDF overseas operations should be limited to peacekeeping or humanitarian relief. Only 12 percent support sending Japanese troops to provide assistance to multinational forces, including logistic support.¹¹ A DPJ upper house legislator privately commented that during the past eight years, Japan was forced by the U.S. to engage in more dangerous missions rather than the usually safe U.N. peacekeeping operations.¹²

Afghanistan. DPJ officials are debating what Japan should offer to the U.S. as compensation for ending the last Japanese security contribution to the Iraq–Afghanistan theater of operations. U.S. officials hope that Japan will pledge some deployment of military forces to Afghanistan, such as CH-47 heavy-lift helicopter transport units. However, Foreign Minister Okada declared that Japan has no intention of sending troops to Afghanistan, not even in a non-combat role as it did in Iraq. Furthermore, he said it would even be too dangerous to send aid workers to the area. “In the current situation we can’t guarantee the safety of our civilians, so it may be the case that we provide funding instead.”¹³

Although Japan characterizes Afghan contributions as U.S. demands, British Undersecretary of Defense Quentin Davies recommended that Japan should make further contributions to international

efforts in Afghanistan. He told Japanese Parliamentary Defense Secretary Akihisa Nagashima on October 19 that the U.K. hoped Tokyo would play a more appreciable role so that a Japanese abandonment of the refueling operations should not be seen as a retreat from Japan’s international role.¹⁴

Yet, the DPJ appears intent on going down the path of predominantly non-security contributions, which generated extensive derisive international criticism of Japanese “checkbook diplomacy” following the 1991 Persian Gulf War. Instead, the DPJ needs to provide a proper mix of security and non-security contributions.

U.S. Force Realignment on Okinawa. The U.S. and Japan signed an agreement in April 2006 to redeploy a U.S. Marine Corps air unit from Futenma Marine Corps Air Station in a heavily populated region of Okinawa to Camp Schwab in a more remote location on the island. The relocation is a precondition for the redeployment of 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam and the return of several U.S. bases to Okinawan control.

The DPJ has called for revising the existing agreement. There are a wide range of views within the party, including modifying Camp Schwab, moving the Futenma unit instead to Kadena Air Base (also on Okinawa), and redeploying the Marine air unit or all U.S. Marines from Okinawa to Guam. A DPJ study group led by Okinawa DPJ representatives recommended moving the U.S. air unit from Futenma to Kadena and limiting flight training to a civilian training airport 200 miles southwest of Okinawa.¹⁵ Such a plan would lead to a decline in U.S. flight training.¹⁶

Prime Minister Hatoyama advocates moving the U.S. Marine air unit off Okinawa. Foreign Minister Okada described the current agreement as “unac-

11. “DPJ Wary of SDF Missions Overseas,” *The Japan Times*, October 5, 2009, at <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20091005a5.html> (November 4, 2009).

12. Author interview with DPJ upper house legislator.

13. Jay Alabaster, “Japan May Provide More Aid to Afghanistan,” Associated Press, September 20, 2009.

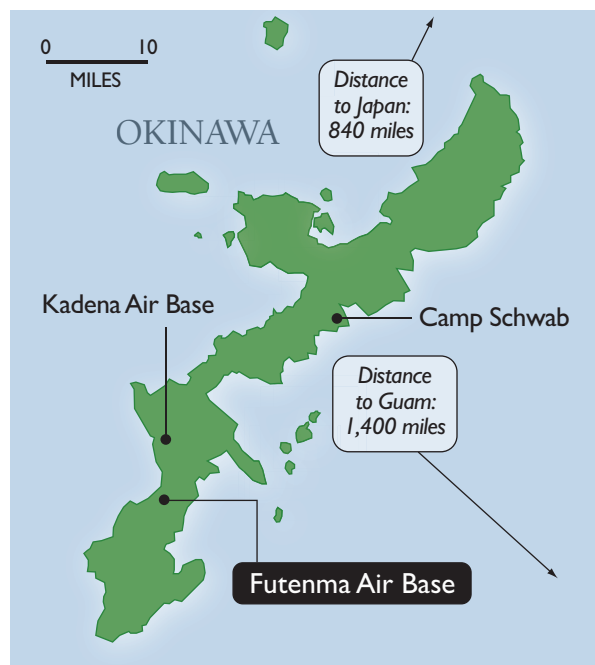
14. “UK Officials Say Japan Must Do More for Afghanistan,” NHK, October 19, 2009.

15. “Tussle Over Futenma Air Base Move Could Upset U.S. Military’s Realignment in Japan,” *Mainichi Daily News*, September 18, 2009.

16. Author interview with U.S. political and military officials.

Key U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa

The U.S. and Japan have an agreement to transfer a Marine Corps air unit from Futenma Air Base to Camp Schwab. Alternative Japanese proposals would transfer the unit to Kadena Air Base or Guam.



ceptable”¹⁷ since “considering the burden that is placed on Okinawa in terms of the over-concentration of U.S. bases, we have to be making an effort to achieve base reduction.”¹⁸ Defense Minister Kitazawa asserts that Okinawans want the U.S. bases closed. The DPJ government hopes to “end the suffering and the burden endured by the Okinawan people who have long hosted the U.S. bases.”¹⁹

Hatoyama criticized his predecessors as “irresponsible” for allowing more than 10 years to pass

without agreeing on the relocation. He said that the issue should not be left pending any longer and called for the “earliest possible conclusion.”²⁰ Of course, the issue is not pending, since Japan signed an agreement resolving it in 2006. Moreover, Hatoyama declared on October 15 that political considerations would delay his own decision. He envisioned deferring a decision until the “midpoint of the period between the Nago city mayoral election [January 2010] and the Okinawan gubernatorial election [November 2010].”

Hatoyama said the DPJ was “most concerned about the [Okinawan] citizens’ sentiments.” Yet, Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima recommended adopting the current U.S.–Japanese agreement and the mayors of the towns encompassing Futenma and Camp Schwab both urged a quicker timetable.²¹

The Obama Administration should emphasize that the existing agreement *does* address Okinawa constituent concerns by moving the Marine unit to a less populated area. The overall force realignment would also reduce the U.S. footprint on Okinawa and lead to the return of land to local authorities.

Facing the Uncertain Future of the Alliance

It will take time for the DPJ to finalize its security policies. The DPJ may prefer focusing on domestic topics and defer security issues until after the upper house election, but the world intrudes. However, it is already clear that Hatoyama’s Japan will be more hesitant to fulfill existing agreements and resistant to expanding the alliance to address global security threats. The DPJ is sure to:

- Be reluctant to remove self-imposed constraints on Japan’s ability to deploy forces overseas;
- Advocate any future overseas deployments be done in a U.N. rather than U.S. alliance context;

17. Michiyo Nakamoto, “Japan to End Afghan Refueling Mission,” *Financial Times*, October 14, 2009.

18. “Under the LDP, Foreign Policy Was Excessively Dependent on the U.S.,” *Euro2day*, September 17, 2009.

19. Kyoko Hasegawa, “Japan Minister: US Troop Agreement Humiliating,” *AFP*, October 15, 2009.

20. “Hatoyama Comments on Futenma Relocation,” *NKH World English*, October 19, 2009.

21. “Government Unlikely to Decide on US Base in Okinawa Before Summer,” *Kyodo News*, October 16, 2009; “Okinawa Elections to Delay Futenma Relocation Plan Review,” *Mainichi Shimbun*, October 16, 2009; and “Hatoyama: Futenma Decision Likely in Mid-2010,” *NHK*, October 16, 2009.

- Maintain the *status quo* of Japan's declining defense budget;
- Focus on economic and "soft" security issues, such as building an East Asian regional architecture; and
- Exert more independence in its policies and adopt a greater balance in considering both U.S. and China interests when making security decisions. A former U.S. diplomat with extensive service in Asia described Hatoyama as seeing Japan's relations with the U.S. and China as zero-sum rather than complementary.²²

Three principal factors will determine the degree of divergence between Washington and Tokyo, and thus the extent of strains in the bilateral alliance: which policies the DPJ implements and the manner in which it pushes them; the demands by the U.S.; and the condition of the global threat environment.

U.S. officials responsible for Asia policy have privately expressed much greater concern with the new Japanese government than the Obama Administration has let on publicly.

The DPJ must weigh (1) how to fulfill campaign pledges by pursuing contrarian security policies to show it is different from its predecessor and (2) how much it wants to roil the alliance with Washington. As the DPJ discovers the difference between campaigning and governing, it may end up implementing only minor policy changes. For the next year, the DPJ may choose to split the difference by gaining political points with some cosmetic changes with Washington while minimizing negative impact on the bilateral alliance.

Doing so would minimize the potential for handing the opposition LDP a campaign issue by accusing the DPJ of wrecking the important security relationship with the U.S. But even subtle changes or alterations in tone can have significant and far-

reaching implications for Japan's alliance with the United States.

Similarly, the degree to which the Obama Administration presses Tokyo to strictly adhere to previous bilateral agreements and pushes Japan to deploy SDF forces to Afghanistan will also affect the alliance. The Obama Administration has yet to indicate whether it will acquiesce to the DPJ inclination to minimize overseas risks and commitments to check-writing and civilian deployments.

U.S. officials responsible for Asia policy have privately expressed much greater concern with the new Japanese government than the Obama Administration has let on publicly.²³ The U.S. officials' concern grew after meeting with their new Japanese counterparts. While downplaying potential friction points publicly is understandable from an alliance management viewpoint, it has provided a misleading impression of the worries that Washington has over the impact of DPJ policies.

What the U.S. Should Do

The Obama Administration should tread carefully to avoid alienating its newly assertive and prickly ally. It needs to give Japan room to re-discover the two countries' many shared interests. But Washington's patience should not be endless when it comes to implementing previously agreed-upon commitments and resolving pending issues, such as Japanese participation in Afghanistan.

The U.S. should make clear that Japan cannot withdraw from global security challenges nor rely on others to defend Tokyo's overseas interests. Candidate Obama stated during the presidential campaign that he would "seek greater contributions [in Afghanistan] with fewer restrictions from NATO allies as well as our friends and allies in Asia."²⁴

The two nations should discuss areas where Japan can play a greater security role in both Afghanistan and globally. One possibility is to assume a greater leadership role in defending sea lines of communication with its naval forces. The

22. Author discussion with former U.S. official.

23. Author discussion with U.S. officials.

24. Lalit K Jha, "Situation in Afghanistan is urgent: Obama," Pajhwok Afghan News, October, 23, 2008.

shortcomings of Japan's contribution to combating Somali pirates points to the need for realistic rules of engagement.

It is critical for the U.S. to point out that disagreements in one area can pervasively poison the atmosphere of the relationship. The DPJ-led government could share characteristics with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun's strained relations with the U.S. Although Roh eventually softened his rhetoric and contentious issues were resolved, his initial gaffes left a residue of underlying tension in the relationship which made subsequent progress on other topics difficult. Strong U.S.–South Korea economic interaction was unable to compensate for strains in the security relationship.

Washington should also counsel the DPJ about the danger of unintended consequences and make clear that there *are* ramifications to its statements and policies. If the DPJ insists on moving Marine air units from Okinawa, it would degrade U.S. deterrent and warfighting capabilities, which are, after all, in place to defend Japan, maintain peace and stability in Asia, and constrain Chinese adventurism. A senior U.S. defense official warned in October that DPJ revisions to the existing U.S. force realignment agreement could cause the U.S. Congress to halt funding for the larger redeployment to Guam and well as damage the bilateral relationship of trust.²⁵

Demanding the transfer of U.S. forces from Okinawa to Guam may lead instead to their redeployment to the United States or Afghanistan, resulting in a decrease in overall levels of the U.S. Forces Japan. Japan would then be forced to augment its own forces—with an accompanying increase in defense spending—to offset the loss in U.S. capabilities.

Similarly, Foreign Minister Okada's advocacy of a northeast Asian nuclear-free zone, probing classified historic U.S.–Japan nuclear arrangements, and

pressing Washington to adopt a “no first use” policy risks undermining the U.S. extended deterrence (“nuclear umbrella”) protection of Japan. In May 2009, DPJ shadow foreign minister Yoshio Hachiro said that a nuclear-free zone was the way for Japan to “escape from the [U.S.] nuclear umbrella.”²⁶

The Obama Administration should:

- Treat the new Japanese government with respect in its public statements, and be firm in private.
- Take the lead in private discussions with Japan. Waiting until the DPJ security policy is fully formed and publicly articulated makes revision more difficult.
- Request Pakistan and those nations participating in international efforts against terrorism to implore Japan to continue its involvement in maritime refueling operations in support of U.N. missions.
- Not acquiesce to Japan's desire to make only non-security contributions to combating global security challenges. The Administration should emphasize an expectation that Japan must have a proper mix of security and non-security responsibilities. The U.S., in conjunction with allies, should recommend Japan deploy self-defense forces to Afghanistan such as heavy-lift helicopter units.
- Recommend that (1) Japan implement a less restrictive interpretation of the theory of collective self-defense to enable it to defend allies in times of crisis as well as (2) more realistic rules of engagement to enable overseas Japanese security deployments to be an effective contribution rather than a drain on allied resources.
- Recommend that Japan provide sufficient funding for security requirements, included shared missions such as missile defense.
- Insist on full implementation of the 2006 U.S. force realignment agreement but be amenable to face-saving revisions for the DPJ government,

25. “In Japan, Gates Shows a Willingness to Adjust,” *Foreign Policy*, October 20, 2009, at http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2009/10/20/in_japan_gates_shows_a_willingness_to_adjust (November 4, 2009), and “Hatoyama Won't Put Off Base Relocation,” *Yomiuri Shimbun*, October 20, 2009.

26. The Democratic Party of Japan, “Okada Meets ICNND Co-Chair Evans,” May 27, 2009, at <http://www.dpj.or.jp/english/news/?num=16114> (November 4, 2009).

such as the proposed transfer of the replacement Marine Corps air base on Okinawa an additional 50 meters offshore. Washington should emphasize that removing Marine units from Okinawa degrades the defense of Japan.

Conclusion

The overall bilateral U.S.–Japan partnership encompasses sweeping economic, political, and security topics. Within the security realm, most aspects of the alliance have and will continue to work fine with exemplary coordination between U.S. and Japanese forces. Even contentious issues, such as U.S. force realignment, are but one part of the broader alliance. As such, the two countries should engage on issues where there is convergence of perspectives on their national interests, and should not let security disagreements derail them.

The DPJ clearly is not seeking to eliminate or even damage an alliance that allows it to rely on the U.S. for a significant part of its defenses. That said, there will be strategic and operational differences as well as diverging priorities that will cause tension in the relationship.

The U.S. can be neither complacent in its watchfulness nor hesitant in its willingness to assert policy positions in support of U.S. national interests. Although the U.S. should not feel compelled to respond to every statement by a DPJ legislator, this reticence must be balanced with the need to periodically and publicly affirm U.S. positions, lest silence be interpreted by Tokyo as tacit acceptance of policy trial balloons.

The Obama Administration cannot abandon U.S. policies simply because they may differ from the views of the new Japanese government. U.S. strategic interests did not change as a result of a foreign election; neither has Japan's. The U.S. should disregard the counsel of those who advocate abandoning U.S. objectives if they do not conform with DPJ desires.

As the alliance approaches its 60-year anniversary in 2010, both partners will face greater challenges in preventing differences in policy and strategic viewpoints from damaging the relationship. There is greater potential for misinterpretation. This will require deft alliance management.

DPJ security policy options run from, in the best case, a continuance of the disappointingly weak *status quo* to a more dramatic re-ordering of Japanese priorities away from the U.S. alliance in favor of Asian regionalism.

The U.S. may question the reliability of Japan as an ally if it is willing only to pursue a benevolent assistance role overseas, eschewing any risky security roles. The U.S. would then be left with the difficult decision of lowering its strategic objectives, assuming a higher risk in achieving them, or augmenting military deployments. In the absence of allied security contributions, Washington would be forced to redeploy U.S. troops from existing security commitments in Europe, South Korea, or Japan.

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