U.S.-Japan Relations and Nuclear Weapons

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The U.S.-Japan Alliance is the most positive element of the East Asian regional security environment. It ensures structural stability as a key pillar of both U.S. regional strategy and Japanese national security policy. At the same time, the Alliance has not been sufficiently effective in preventing nuclear proliferation, nor in promoting nuclear disarmament.

Changing conditions have propelled adaptation in the U.S.-Japan relationship since the Korean War brought about the Reverse Course during the Occupation, continued with the build-up of Japanese maritime defense capabilities in the 1980s, and through to the post-Cold War revision of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the U.S.-Japan Alliance has confronted the global challenge of transnational terrorism.

If the history of the Alliance has been one of evolution from a transaction to a partnership, its present reveals the early stages of institutionalization. The Alliance has begun to transcend the Mutual Security Treaty, and through deepening interaction in operations, planning, research and development, and strategic dialogue, it is becoming an entity in its own right. Faced with severe tests of the international regime against nuclear weapons proliferation, the United States and Japan must strengthen their alliance's capabilities to resist proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their delivery systems, while promoting universal nuclear disarmament and the complete abolition of nuclear weapons.

The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Regional Security

The U.S.-Japan Alliance has been the linchpin of regional security in the Asia-Pacific region for decades.[i] During the later phase of the Cold War, after Japan's emergence as a major economic and technological power, the significance of the Alliance began to transcend the American military bases on Japanese territory and emerged as a political partnership for common global goals. That the world's two largest economies, accounting at the end of the Cold War for as much forty percent of global product (and a vastly larger share of Asia-Pacific economic output) could sustain their close partnership through the

turbulence of the post-Cold War era, in the face of sometimes severe trade friction, has been the key buttress of regional prosperity.

As part of preserving stability, the Alliance plays a role in threats to use force in international politics (although Japan is forbidden from this by its Constitution, it undoubtedly abets American threats, particularly in regard to North Korea, and especially since 1999). These threats have until recently been oriented toward preserving the status quo; in other words, for deterrence. Deterrence has been a critical function of the Alliance in coping with threats in Northeast Asia from the Cold War era to the present.

The most explicit target of deterrence for the Alliance had been the forces of the Red Army and Soviet Pacific Fleet, but after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR, explicit deterrence was briefly replaced by "preserving regional stability" as the Alliance's rationale.

In 1993, suspicions over North Korean activities at its nuclear research reactor at Yongbyon led Pyongyang to declare in early 1994 its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, or NPT (under which it received nuclear technology as a non-nuclear weapons state). This first North Korean nuclear crisis escalated through the summer of 1994, with U.S. military pressure intensifying to the brink of war before former President Jimmy Carter brokered a compromise that, through bilateral negotiations in Geneva, led to the Agreed Framework between the United States and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) in October of 1994.[ii] While the conflict was avoided, U.S. preparations and consultation with Japan revealed limits in the ability of the Alliance to respond to a regional contingency.

With the flaws in Alliance operability highlighted by the 1994 North Korean nuclear crisis, the strategic context in post-Cold War East Asia was being reshaped by the emergence of China as a potential regional challenger to the global dominance of the U.S.-centered system. Chinese rhetoric of multipolarization, its criticism of the U.S.-Japan Alliance as a "relic of the Cold War," and its aggressive claims to maritime territory in the South and East China Seas caused concern in Washington and Tokyo. From 1994 on, the direction of strategic reevaluation in both capitals moved to emphasize the continuing importance of the Alliance, as seen in the Nye Initiative and the Higuchi Commission report.

The two dimensions of China and North Korea came together again in April 1996, when President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro announced the reaffirmation and rejuvenation of the Alliance (to include a revision of the 1978 Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation to repair the weaknesses apparent at the time of the 1994 North Korea nuclear crisis) in the wake of a major crisis in the Taiwan Strait. As a result of the coincidence in timing, the process of revising the Guidelines included discussion of the security of Taiwan.[iii] With the passage of Guidelines-enabling legislation (the Law on Situations in Areas Surrounding Japan), the long-awaited regionalization of the Alliance was complete. Having struggled to involve Japan formally in the security of the Korean

Peninsula and the are of the Taiwan Strait since the Nixon-Sato Communiqué of 1969, the United States had at last captured an explicit Japanese commitment in the case of the former, and implicit support for the latter. Contrary to Chinese expectations of multipolarization and greater freedom of action, Northeast Asia remains firmly under the hegemony of the United States.

Nuclear Weapons in U.S.-Japan Relations

The U.S.-Japan relationship has been intertwined with nuclear weapons issues since the dawn of the nuclear age with the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. As a result, the normative dimension of nuclear non-proliferation and disarmament in U.S.-Japan relations shows a stark contrast. On the one hand, the United States is the only country to have actually employed nuclear weapons, and clings to its status as a nuclear weapons state. On the other hand, based on its experience as the sole victim of atomic attack Japan has maintained a strenuous anti-nuclear posture, not only abjuring nuclear weapons itself but encouraging their total elimination.

At the same time, the Alliance relationship between the two has been predicated on U.S. willingness to use nuclear weapons to defend Japan. While Japan has opposed nuclear weapons, it has also been criticized for doing so from under the protection of the American nuclear umbrella.[iv]

The charge of hypocrisy has some basis. Japan has always taken a different position on nuclear weapons within its Alliance relationship than it has in general. Despite the three non-nuclear principles not to possess, produce, or introduce nuclear weapons, Japan turned blind eye to nuclear-equipped U.S. Navy vessels entering Japanese ports. Furthermore, despite demanding (and securing) the return of Okinawa to Japanese sovereignty in a "denuclearized" state, the Japanese government secretly agreed to allow the reintroduction of nuclear weapons to Okinawa in the event of a crisis.

The U.S.-Japan Alliance versus Proliferation

The Alliance has played an important part in reducing the danger of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and their means of delivery, both regionally and globally. The first of the means by which it has done so is by obviating Japanese nuclear armament. With the decision by Prime Minister Sato Eisaku to reject nuclear armament despite China's 1964 nuclear test, Japan prepared to accept the framework of non-proliferation established by the nuclear powers. Japan's hesitation in accepting this framework drew primarily on concern that the inherent discrimination against non-nuclear weapons states would make it more difficult for them to apply pressure for disarmament (although within Japan there was also the argument that Japan should retain the potential to obtain nuclear weapons if the national interest demanded). As it turned out, Japan's expectation was correct, as the government became ever-more concerned about preserving

the guarantee of the extended U.S. nuclear deterrent and therefore muted its position on issues such as No First Use doctrine or core deterrence.

In the mid-1970s, under the Carter administration, the United States made a substantial effort to restrain Japan's development of a plutonium-reprocessing capability in the 1970s out of concern over the potential for Japan to convert the fuel-cycle into a weapons-grade plutonium manufacturing system (and simultaneously pressured both Taiwan and South Korea to abandon suspected nuclear weapons programs). Japan had already declared its firm intention to remain free of nuclear weapons in domestic law, bilateral treaties, and the NPT. The pressure to roll back Japan's plutonium program had less to do with any reasonable suspicion of Japan than a concerted effort by both superpowers to deal comprehensively with the threat of proliferation – a common security concern in Moscow and Washington.

Japan's Plutonium and Meta-Deterrence

The effort in the 1970s to shut down Japan's plan for a domestically self-sustainable nuclear fuel cycle met with severe resistance in Tokyo for several reasons. First, Japan had already invested substantial funds in developing the program. Second, in an era of high and volatile oil prices, the importance of energy security was very high indeed. Third, national pride was on the line and many Japanese were unwilling to submit to superpower pressure. Fourth, Japanese leaders and officials were offended by the implication that their program had even the potential for clandestine weapons development purposes. Fifth, in contradiction to the previous point, there were the lingering arguments that whatever the current situation (including provision of the nuclear umbrella by the United States), the future was uncertain and it would be unwise to completely close any avenue. Finally, there is the logic of meta-deterrence, which assumes that the potential to "go nuclear" is a useful tool for Japanese diplomacy and security, even if nuclear weapons themselves are undesirable.

Meta-deterrence exploits the expected negative consequences for other states if Japan were to develop a nuclear arsenal as a tool to constrain the behavior of those states. Moreover, meta-deterrence relies on Japan's bad reputation in Asia to threaten China and North Korea, as well as U.S. allies such as South Korea, the Philippines, and Taiwan with the prospect of a nuclear Japan. This technique continually undermines other countries' trust in Japan, carrying substantial image costs for a country that seeks to develop a plutonium-based nuclear fuel cycle. In essence meta-deterrence exploits both the horror of nuclear weapons and the horror of Japan's own atrocious 20th century history.

Meta-deterrence appeared again in response to the North Korean nuclear crisis of 2002, when the Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer suggested playing the "Japan Card" against China. This would consist of informing Beijing that unless it took dramatic steps to prevent North Korea from moving forward with a nuclear weapons capability, Japan would likely find it impossible to resist pressure to obtain nuclear weapons itself. The Japanese, once eager to deny any prospect of violating their treaty obligations, played

along by hinting to the Chinese that their thinking was proceeding along these lines, while privately admitting that in fact no Japanese nuclear deterrent makes sense even vis-à-vis North Korea. If North Korea can be deterred by nuclear weapons, then U.S. nuclear weapons suffice. If North Korea cannot be deterred by nuclear weapons, Japan gains nothing and loses a great deal by obtaining them. If there is some question about the credibility of the extended nuclear deterrent, suggestions that Japan is dissatisfied only erode its credibility further.

U.S.-Japan Cooperation for Arms Control

The Clinton administration devoted substantial efforts to arms control, negotiating several multilateral treaties during the 1990s while seeking to uphold the legacy of prior achievements. The most notable success was in the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), an accomplishment that saw the United States and Japan working together for common ends in a positive sum security milieu. Other endeavors, despite joint efforts, yielded no similar triumphs. The most frustrating of these for Tokyo was undoubtedly the failure of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), which was not only a commitment undertaken in connection with the indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995, but a goal close to the hearts of the Japanese. Stopping nuclear testing had been a hope at least since the H-bomb test at Bikini atoll in 1954 irradiated the crew of the Japanese fishing vessel *Dai-go Fukuryu-maru*.[v] The challenge of guiding Chinese modernization away from excessive emphasis on military power likewise made the CTBT a strategically rational aim for Japan.

The refusal of the U.S. Senate to ratify the CTBT drastically undermined the Japanese belief in the extent of reciprocal constraint in the Alliance. Japan was certainly subject to various forms of control by the United States, and could be pressured into offering generous Host Nation Support or financial contributions for multilateral military activities, but when Tokyo sought to constrain Washington it found the Alliance offered little leverage. Despite the revision of the Guidelines and the decision to proceed with joint research on ballistic missile defense (see below), there was no American consideration of Japanese preferences.

Still eager for Japan's diplomatic support in multilateral negotiations (including especially the 2000 NPT review conference), the Clinton administration offered the creation of a special U.S.-Japan Commission on Arms Control and Disarmament, jointly chaired by Undersecretary of State John Hollum and Arms Control and Scientific Affairs Bureau Director-General Kenji Hattori. This body aimed at resolving some of the Senators' objections to the CTBT, especially in the area of verification technology, but the change of administrations shifted the focus to non-proliferation and saw the end of serious effort to pass the CTBT. In the meantime, the Bush administration decided to scuttle the Biological Weapons Convention's verification protocol and withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty.

The official meetings of the Commission since the inauguration of Undersecretary John Bolton have dealt with North Korea and the threat of ballistic missile and WMD proliferation. Although the Track II component of the Commission process has brought together Japanese and American scholars and policy analysts to provide new ideas and insights, these have made no dent in the Bush administration's posture. Instead, the Japanese face the danger of being co-opted into the preemption doctrine.

Counter-proliferation

The proliferation of ballistic missiles has been a bipartisan security concern in the United States since at least the Gulf War of 1991. The development of ballistic missile defenses, seen to be technically feasible, was pursued as part of a strategy to reduce the appeal of such systems for asymmetric warfare. If the penetrability of a ballistic missile can be compromised, its value as a military tool declines sharply. Particularly for lower-technology ballistic missiles, the combination of poor accuracy and spotty reliability makes a Scud-type ballistic missile a far from ideal choice of weapons system to begin with, so reasonably effective (and not too expensive) missile defenses might dry up demand for such missiles.

With the global threat of ballistic missiles growing and North Korea building and deploying large numbers of Nodong rockets, the United States and Japan shared an interest in building such an effective missile defense system. After the launch of the Taepodong rocket in August 1998, Tokyo and Washington were quick to conclude a memorandum of understanding on joint research on Theater Missile Defense (TMD), particularly a sea-based mid-course intercept system known (then) as Navy Theater-Wide (NTW). NTW was to have relied on the advanced radars of the Aegis radar system, operated by both the U.S. Navy and the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force.

Missile defense was made a top priority by the Bush administration, and the program was reconfigured to be more flexible, less constrained by the ABM treaty, and quicker. Japan, which had been arguing that its participation in TMD was not connected to the issue of the global strategic balance (a matter raised by the prospects for National Missile Defense), found the lines blurring. Nonetheless, Japan has proceeded on the assumption that defenses are inherently legitimate, and conform to Japanese preferences for avoiding retaliatory measures for security.

The joint development of missile defense has raised questions about the sustainability of two components of Japanese defense doctrine: the ban on arms exports and the refusal to exercise the right of collective self-defense. Although Japan has exported military equipment to the United States, the prospect that components or technology that Japan had developed or even produced would be sold to third countries raised concerns that Tokyo might break with its posture of not contributing to conflict as an arms exporter. Most recently the Director General of the Japan Defense Agency, Ishiba Shigeru, has argued that the arms export ban should be not only relaxed to allow for BMD-related exports, but also reexamined in its entirety to provide Japan's weak defense industrial base a larger market

on which to achieve economies of scale. Japan seems to retain enough pacifist preferences to resist such an extreme shift, and the *otoshidokoro* (point of settlement) seems likely to be a relaxation limited to missile defense equipment only, but the trend of erosion in Japan's anti-military norms is clear.

Another dimension of concern in relation to missile defense is the question of whether Japan can engage in missile defense cooperation with the United States to shoot down a missile that is not attacking Japan (or U.S. Forces in Japan). If Japan were to destroy or even support the destruction of a missile that was aimed at another country, this would violate the traditional interpretation of the Constitution as banning the exercise of the right of collective self-defense. The Cabinet Legislative Affairs Bureau (*Naikaku Hoseikyoku*) has argued that any action that becomes integrated with the use of force – such as providing munitions or even intelligence – violates Article IX's prohibition of the use or threat of force to resolve international disputes. This interpretation has been under great pressure since the Guidelines review process of 1996-7, as both Japanese and American defense specialists call for its relaxation. The problem is that once Japan accepts the right of collective self-defense, there is no clear indicator of when the use of force is justified or not. Legitimacy in the use of force would become a matter of executive authority, in a context in which neither the Japanese public nor the region is yet comfortable with Japan's judgment in security matters.

The trend in debate seems to indicate that yet another special exception will be made in Japanese thinking about defense doctrine, to argue that destruction of a ballistic missile constitutes a legitimate act of self-defense, but that dispatch of combat units overseas would still be against the Constitution. That said, Japan is already strengthening its use of the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) outside of its territory. While pursuing missile defense cooperation with the United States within the framework of its longstanding *senshu boei* (exclusively defense-oriented defense) policy, Japan has also been driven by the North Korean threat and the imbalance in the Alliance to become a participant in the Bush administration's Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).

The PSI is designed to stop rogue countries or non-members of international non-proliferation regimes from exporting WMD and delivery systems. It calls for the inspection and, if necessary, seizure of suspected vessels (ships and aircraft) entering the territory of any PSI member. Japan has in recent months strengthened its domestic laws to allow for such activities, while also expanding the legal ability of the Maritime SDF to use force to stop and search suspected ships even in international waters. This adjustment comes as the SDF has sharply expanded its ambit of operation in terms of both geography and mission.

Junior Alliance Partner in a Larger Role

Since September 11, 2001, Japan has dispatched the SDF on two extraordinary new missions far outside its traditional sphere of action. First, in support of Operation Enduring Freedom (the U.S. attacks on the Taliban regime that harbored the terrorist group Al Qaeda

in Afghanistan), Tokyo sent the MSDF to supply fuel to coalition ships in the Indian Ocean. Second, despite the lack of international authorization for the U.S.-led war against Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom), Japan has dispatched Air and Ground Self-Defense Force units to Iraq to aid in reconstruction there.

The logic of Japan's participation in these missions has been threefold. First, these tasks are in support of international peace and stability and are welcomed by the international community as a whole (by the United Nations). Second, these missions advance Japan's national interest directly, by reducing the threat of terrorist activities and by contributing to the stable supply of petroleum from the Persian Gulf. Third, these missions contribute to Japan's national interest by strengthening U.S.-Japan Alliance relations and ensuring the credibility of the American defense commitment in the face of potential threats from China and, above all, North Korea.

For many observers the third rationale is the *honne*, or true thinking, behind Japanese contributions outside of Northeast Asia. Japanese who hold this view have observed the unilateralist tendencies of the Bush administration – and its willingness to damage alliance ties to advance its own goals – with great dismay. The age-old tension between entrapment and abandonment has apparently shifted once again to the fear among Japanese defense intellectuals that the United States would punish Japan for failing to provide support by leaving Japan to face North Korea (and China) on its own. The perception is widespread that Japan is in serious relative decline and can secure its future only under the auspices of the hegemonic power of the United States. Yet there is a fourth rationale for the missions in the Indian Ocean and in Iraq: to continue the incremental expansion of Japan's international military activities as a goal in its own right.

There are a couple of reasons for the government of Japan to wish to push the envelope in terms of SDF missions. First, to improve the capability and profile of the SDF itself. SDF officers have sought a larger and more prominent role through various new international missions since the end of the Cold War, including participation in UN Peacekeeping Operations (PKO) in Cambodia, Mozambique, the Golan Heights, and East Timor; international Humanitarian Relief Operations (HRO) in Zaire; international Disaster Relief Operations (DRO) conducted in Honduras, Turkey, and India; joint search and rescue exercises (SAREX), including submarine rescue exercises carried out with militaries from around the region; and various forms of defense exchange and security dialogue as confidence-building measures (CBMs). Such missions can fulfill on the global stage the positive and popular role that the SDF has long carried out within Japan, enhancing the image of the SDF and Japan.

Second, and more critically, the continual and incremental "normalization" of Japan's defense establishment is a long-term strategic aim that will add a vital aspect to Japanese national power in an era of (at best) slow economic growth. Although Japan relied on economic and financial power during the Cold War era, the need to buttress its

"comprehensive national power" in response to the rise of China, in particular, has motivated defense intellectuals and strategists.

In some ways this is a distinction without a difference, as the aims of these strategists in terms of increasing Japan's military power are shared with the United States. Washington has sought to make Japan the "Britain of Asia," a political and military partner without reservation. North Korea and its proliferation threat are seen as a short-term (if serious) challenge, but Japan is being groomed for the longer-term role of balancing against a potential challenge from China.

Nuclear Weapons, the Alliance, and the Regional Security Environment

For Japan to emerge as a "normal nation" has been seen either as natural and inevitable or as the destabilizing resurgence of ultra-nationalist militarism, depending on the perspective of the observer and the understanding of normality. The course of incremental expansion of Japan's security role has been steady and predictable, if occasionally accelerated by shocks in the international system like the 9-11 attacks. The important point to keep in mind is that the process of incremental expansion should be transparent, in keeping with democratic values, and in accordance with Japan's domestic and international legal obligations.

There is no fundamental reason that Japan should avoid the onerous duty of actively supporting international security, including rendering judgment on the legitimacy and necessity of the use of force. In the case of the 1991 Gulf War, Japan's position that the use of force was appropriate and necessary made its own refusal to participate seem cowardly rather than principled. In the future, Japan also must take up the burden as a member of international society to decide when force is needed and to use it effectively when called to do so. That said, Japan must beware of being entrapped by the self-serving logic of preemptive war and the capability-based defense doctrine of the Bush administration. This boils down to the notion that "if we can, we will attain any new military technology or capability that gives us an advantage, but you if you seek to do likewise we will destroy you." In other words, might makes right.

This thinking is pernicious enough applied even to international pariah states like Iraq and North Korea. In regard to China it could be extremely dangerous as well. The prospect of the Alliance moving toward naked military hegemony is disturbing indeed. At the same time, the Alliance still holds out hope as an institution dedicated to preservation of the status quo and a guarantor of regional stability. As Japan strengthens its own credentials as an ally, it should also be in a position to demand the Alliance adhere to shared core values of the American and Japanese people, including minimum use of force, an international process of legitimization, and reduced dependence on nuclear weapons.

[i] Arguably the Alliance was the key security institution in Northeast Asia (or, precisely, the Far East) from its inception, and the most important in the broader Asia-Pacific region at

least since the U.S. withdrawal from South Vietnam in 1973. By the 1980s, in the famous phrase of U.S. Ambassador Mike Mansfield, the United States and Japan shared "the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none."

[ii] Michael Green, "The Challenges of Managing U.S.-Japan Security Cooperation after the Cold War," in Gerald L. Curtis, ed., *New Perspectives on U.S.-Japan Relations*, Japan Center for International Exchange (Tokyo: 2000), pp. 256-7.

[iii] On the timing of the Clinton-Hashimoto Joint Declaration, see Michael Green, "Balance of Power," in Steven K. Vogel, Ed., *U.S.-Japan Relations in a Changing World*, Brookings Institution Press (Washington, DC: 2002), p. 27. On Taiwan and the Guidelines, see Former Assistant Secretary of State Winston Lord in Nancy Bernkopf Tucker, *China Hand: An Oral History,* p. xxx

[iv] India pointedly rejected Japanese complaints about its 1998 nuclear tests, arguing that Japan made use of a proxy nuclear deterrent and thus had no basis to argue India should do without. See *Japan's Proactive Peace and Security Strategies – Including the Question of "Nuclear Umbrella,"* NIRA Research Report No. 20000005, National Institute for Research Advancement, Tokyo, 2001, p. 18.

[v] See Nobumasa Akiyama, "The Socio-Political Roots of Japan's Non-Nuclear Posture," in Benjamin L. Self and Jeffrey W. Thompson, eds., *Japan's Nuclear Option: Security, Politics, and Policy in the 21st Century*, Henry L. Stimson Center (Washington, DC: 2003), pp. 72-76.