



United States-Japan: Beyond the Defense Guidelines

by Ralph A. Cossa

Japan's new Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro will have a lot to talk about with U.S. President George W. Bush when the two meet for the first time at Camp David this weekend. High on the agenda should be the initiation of a strategic dialogue aimed at redefining the U.S.-Japan security relationship.

Prime Minister Koizumi appears ready to expand the U.S.-Japan relationship while also supporting a greater role for Japan in regional security affairs. While stating that he is not prepared at this time to put the difficult question of constitutional revision on the political agenda, Koizumi has stated that it is desirable for Japan to be allowed to participate in collective defense activities and to help defend its allies (read: the United States) in the event of regional crisis. In a comment which appears aimed at stimulating debate on this once-taboo subject, the new Prime Minister noted that "we should stop branding anyone speaking about revising Article 9 as hawkish or a rightist," correctly noting that this section of the Japanese constitution - which stipulates that Japan shall never maintain land, sea, or air forces - "fails to reflect reality."

Koizumi's view seems to dovetail nicely with calls for a more equal relationship coming from Washington. Last fall, a Special Report on The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership, produced by the National Defense University's Institute for National Strategic Studies, stated that the 1997 revised Japanese Defense Guidelines outlining future cooperation with the U.S. should be viewed as a "floor" upon which to build further bilateral defense cooperation, and not as a "ceiling" preventing further, deeper cooperation. The so-called Armitage-Nye Report (after its two primary authors, former Assistant Secretaries of Defense Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye) calls for an expanded Japanese role in the transpacific alliance, while noting that the uncertainties of the post-Cold War regional setting require a more dynamic approach to bilateral defense planning between Washington and Tokyo.

While this was an unofficial, bipartisan report, Mr. Armitage has since assumed the position of Deputy Secretary of State and his remarks during an early May visit to Tokyo that "the lack of consensus on collective self-defense is an obstacle" to expanding U.S.-Japan security cooperation suggests that much of the thinking in the Armitage/Nye Report will be carried over into the Bush administration's policy toward Japan. While in Tokyo, Armitage noted that "Japan's lack of an ability to participate in collective self-defense, although it is a signatory to a defense treaty, is an obstacle. I think it is a healthy thing for the Japanese to look at some of these things and see what is reasonable and what is not." While Armitage appears clearly supportive of an increased Japanese security role, even if this requires constitutional reinterpretation or revision, he was careful not to

directly call for such a move, recognizing (as did the Armitage/Nye Report) that this is a domestic Japanese decision.

But what exactly does the United States expect from Japan? How much is Japan willing or able to contribute beyond current levels, given both legal and political restrictions to greater Japanese participation in collective defense activities? And how can any revitalization or reconfiguration of the alliance and respective roles and missions be accomplished in ways that are both generally acceptable to the publics of both nations and non-threatening to Japan's neighbors?

It was with questions such as these in mind that the Pacific Forum CSIS joined with the Tokyo-based Policy Study Group and the Okazaki Institute to examine the future of U.S.-Japan security cooperation. This research effort was driven by a belief that the U.S.-Japan governmental dialogue on security issues is overly preoccupied by short-term problems without adequate attention to where both countries are going in the long term. Study group participants shared one common view and objective: all believed that the U.S.-Japan alliance is fundamental to long-term peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region and must be sustained and revitalized because it is in the mutual national security interests of both nations, and of the region in general, to do so.

The group's objective was not to achieve consensus on future paths as much as to stimulate thinking by laying out various policy options and by discussing topics that, at least until very recently, were often too sensitive or controversial to be placed on the official dialogue agenda. One consensus view did emerge, however: the U.S. should not be seen as pressuring Japan to change its constitution ... nor should Washington be seen as opposing such changes if this is the will of the Japanese people.

Washington has a responsibility to make it clear to Japan what it expects and desires from Tokyo in terms of greater security cooperation. It is then the Japanese government's responsibility to determine where it wants to go and where and how its desires overlap with Washington's. The two sides then need to reach some common understanding about revised roles and missions to ensure that their actions continue to be complementary - this is what strategic dialogue is all about. Once Japan has determined what it is willing to do, it must further determine if reinterpretations or amendments to current laws or even the constitution itself are required in order to travel down this chosen path.

It has long been the Japanese position that Japan, like all other members of the United Nations, has the right of collective self-defense. But unlike all other states, Japan has elected not to exercise this right. The decision to change, or not to change, this self-imposed restriction is for the Japanese people and government alone to make. Whether more active Japanese participation in international peacekeeping, peacemaking, or other

such activities requires a reinterpretation or revision of the current constitution or just more courageous political leadership and greater national consensus is likewise for Japan to decide. The study group took no position on this subject, even though many participants had strong opinions on this issue. Rather, its efforts were aimed at stimulating the dialogue and identifying the possible challenges and the future roles and missions breakdown that would best sustain the alliance relationship well into the 21st Century.

This is not to imply that the U.S.-Japan alliance is seriously troubled today. Both the current state of the relationship and the opportunity for improvement are as good or better than at any time since the historic 1996 Clinton-Hashimoto Joint Declaration set the Defense Guidelines revision process in motion. But maintaining the status quo does not mean doing nothing. Considerable effort is required on both sides to sustain the momentum and take advantage of the opportunity to further expand and reinvigorate the alliance as new, forward-thinking leaders take command on both sides of the Pacific. Greater strategic dialogue is needed in order to ensure the alliance's future relevance. Hopefully, that dialogue will begin this weekend at Camp David.

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