



## **Japan Battles Gulf War Ghosts**

by Brad Glosserman

Memories of the Persian Gulf War have weighed heavily on Japanese policy-makers during the last two weeks. As the world reeled from the Sept. 11 terrorist attack on the United States, Japan's leaders have acted with the knowledge that they failed to meet their ally's expectations a decade ago and a similar failure could provide a body blow - perhaps even a fatal one - to an alliance that only weeks ago celebrated its 50th anniversary. That fear, along with Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's penchant for bold gestures, has prompted Japan to rise to the occasion and take action. But there is also the danger of over-reaction. Japan must join the fight against international terror - and it has much to contribute - but the country's politicians must avoid over-reaching: the surest way to guarantee political paralysis is to exploit this horrific tragedy for political purposes.

It is clear that Prime Minister Koizumi is aware of the risks. Immediately after the attack, he offered strong verbal support for the U.S. and \$10 million in rescue assistance. Earlier this week, he vowed to "stand firmly" with the U.S. after his summit meeting with President George Bush in Washington. To emphasize the point, he even spoke in English. Yet in between, it looked like old instincts would prevail: there was a week of virtual silence and increasing concern in both Tokyo and Washington about Japanese inaction. At a meeting between Richard Armitage, number two at the State Department, and Yanai Shunji, Japan's ambassador to the U.S., the U.S. official, a long-time supporter of the bilateral security alliance, reportedly urged Japan to take some positive, visible action before the Gulf War analogy became impossible to ignore.

Fortunately, Mr. Koizumi did just that. On Sept. 19, he unveiled a seven-point plan that would allow Japan to support the U.S. "as much as possible." Its measures include: the provision of logistical support for the U.S. military in the case of a retaliatory strike; strengthened security around U.S. facilities; the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces ships to gather information; \$40 million in emergency humanitarian and economic aid to Pakistan and India; and cooperation with other governments to ensure that there is no confusion in the international economy. The prime minister also promised to enact emergency legislation that would allow Japan to take those steps, some of which are unprecedented and raise questions about their constitutionality. Nonetheless, "It will no longer hold that Self-Defense Forces should not be sent to danger spots," he explained in Washington this week.

Mr. Koizumi has drawn a clear line to distinguish what his country can and cannot do. While he has called for the dispatch of Self-Defense Forces, he has stressed that that does not mean Japanese troops will play a role in combat. "We are making preparations for a new law that will enable Japan to make all

possible contributions on the condition that they do not require the use of force."

They should not have to. The U.S. does not need a Japanese military contribution in forward areas. Japanese forces would be best used to provide protection for U.S. bases and facilities in Japan. The U.S. does need logistical and medical support, diplomatic cooperation, and intelligence. Japan has contacts within the Middle East and Central Asia that would be especially helpful as the U.S. tries to build and sustain an international coalition to fight terrorism. The dispatch of special envoys to Iran and Pakistan is a good start. Japanese intelligence assets, from both the public and private sector, will be invaluable in the campaign ahead.

Japan has an important role to play on another front: the international economy. In his seven-point package, Mr. Koizumi promised to help ensure international financial stability. In the short-term, that requires the sort of financial easing that the Bank of Japan supplied following the Sept. 11 attacks. The long-term effort will be complicated by the attacks' impact on Japanese domestic political priorities and on U.S. growth, which is essential to Japan's own recovery. In simplest terms, all bets on reform are off.

The military contribution should be enough. Mr. Bush seems to think so. When he thanked Mr. Koizumi for his support this week, he expressly noted that "intelligence-gathering, diplomacy, humanitarian aid, as well as cutting off resources" are equally important contributions in the fight against terror. They should respond to the very real need for Japan to "show the flag."

Some politicians and armchair strategists will see in this tragedy an opportunity for Japan to finally become a "normal" nation and shed the constraints imposed by the Peace Constitution. That would be a mistake. Japan needs domestic legislation that will allow SDF forces to provide the rear-area support envisioned by the prime minister and to protect facilities at home. Japanese politicians recognize that the public is behind such legislation. One Japanese poll found that 87 percent of respondents agreed that Japan should cooperate either "actively" or "to some extent" with the U.S. in the fight against terrorism. But the responses also show that support is limited to rear-area action by Japanese forces.

Any whiff of political opportunism would threaten the Japanese domestic consensus that is now firmly behind the alliance. It would alienate the public and give obstructionist politicians the lever they need to block legislation. And now, as the initial shock of the Sept. 11 attacks wears off, individuals opposed to lifting any constraints on Japan's military activities will be especially sensitive to any attempt to exploit this tragedy. Similarly, China and South Korea, both of which are looking for any sign (real or imagined) of Japanese remilitarization, would be quick to condemn Japanese over-reaching. Worse, it would raise

the price of maintaining the international coalition to fight terrorism. Thus far, Beijing and Seoul have been muted in their criticism of Japanese moves. While Tokyo should do what is necessary to protect its own national interests, Japan should ensure that it does nothing unnecessarily to give them cause to complain.

Yet even without raising the prospect of constitutional change, there are problems with the proposed legislation. First, while it will be introduced in the extraordinary Diet session that began Sept. 27, passage will take time. Cabinet approval is expected in early October, which means it will not pass the Diet until mid-October at the earliest, and perhaps even later. It is unlikely that the U.S. will wait that long before launching its first retaliatory attacks. Then, there are the conditions likely to be attached to any such legislation. Komeito, a key coalition partner, members of the opposition, and even some Liberal Democratic Party politicians would like to see any U.S. military action subject to United Nations Security Council approval; Washington is not going to accept any such limit on its freedom of action. The proposed legislation does not require U.N. authorization; rather, it requires approval of host nations that will be accepting SDF forces. Given the sensitivities surrounding any discussion of national security issues in Japan, Mr. Koizumi must find a compromise to ensure support across the political spectrum. The fight against terrorism will be long and difficult; a broad domestic consensus is essential to guarantee that Japan does not falter.

The U.S. has a role to play in this process. It must encourage Japan to participate as much as it can to play the roles to which it is best-suited and not shy away from the complications that may result. Washington should not push Japan to do more than it can or can be realistically expected of it. Fortunately, the administration's Japan team is well acquainted with the constraints under which Mr. Koizumi must act. Its members also have the contacts throughout the bureaucracy and the political world to ensure that there is no miscommunication. Most important, however, the U.S. must be seen as encouraging Japan to be responsible in every sense of the word: as a good citizen of the international community and as faithful to its own constitution and the wishes of its own citizens.

*Brad Glosserman is Director of Research of Pacific Forum CSIS.*