



U.S.-Japan Defense Ties: Excellence Over Arrogance

by James E. Auer

A report on U.S.-Japan relations by a bipartisan group led by Republican Richard Armitage and Democrat Joseph Nye (both former Assistant Secretaries of Defense) calls for the new U.S. Administration to exercise "excellence without arrogance" in relations with Japan. The October 11, 2000 Institute for National Strategic Studies Special Report on "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," envisions a time when Washington and Tokyo are "better able to realize the full potential for cooperation nurtured during the past 50 years."

Nowhere is that point better made than in the security section which says the revised Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation should be regarded as the floor – not the ceiling – for an expanded Japanese role in the alliance. More to the point, it says "Japan's prohibition against collective self-defense is a constraint on alliance cooperation."

Under the guidelines Japan is supposed to help U.S. forces in an emergency by providing "rear area" (non military) support. A principal Japanese official who helped draft the guidelines wrote recently that such support will not endanger Japan because it 1) will not be military 2) will only be provided in areas away from the combat zone and 3) will be withdrawn if the rear area becomes dangerous.

Virtually all Americans knowledgeable about Japan believe the so-called "Japan passing" phenomenon is irresponsible. Yet would Americans and Japanese who want Japan to play a more realistic role in security affairs want Congress and the American people to clearly understand the above Japanese view? Would they want it known that if Japan lived up to its publicly stated denial of the right to collective self defense, the country's 60 destroyers and 200 F-15's would have to stand idle even if Americans were dying in Korea or the Taiwan Strait in defense of U.S. and Japanese national interests?

The Armitage-Nye report regards a major war in Europe as "inconceivable for at least a generation." Though it does not regard conflict in Asia as likely, it calls the prospect "far from remote," noting the presence of some of the world's largest and most modern armies, several nuclear-armed or nuclear-capable powers, and potential flashpoints in Korea, the Taiwan Strait, the Indian subcontinent, and Indonesia. The report regards Asia as promising, but is mindful of the dangers and evaluates the U.S.-Japan alliance as more important than it was in the past.

Though the authors call for an "advance towards a mature partnership," the Armitage/Nye committee does not naively think Japan's current leadership will "suddenly embrace reform or assume a higher profile on the global

stage." Perhaps, more to the point, they criticize "the lack of clear direction from Washington" and the "episodic executive branch leadership (which) has failed to produce a well conceived game plan" for U.S.-Japan relations.

Seven Elements. Specifically the report calls for a "special relationship" between the U.S. and Japan modeled on that between America and Britain, and including seven elements:

- A reaffirmed U.S. defense commitment to the defense of Japan including the Senkaku Islands claimed by China;
- Diligent implementation of the Guidelines including Japanese passage of crisis management legislation;
- "Robust cooperation" between the sister services including an update of combat roles and missions last done in 1981 and training that "replicates reality;"
- Full Japanese participation in peacekeeping and humanitarian missions and removal of self-imposed restraints that would otherwise burden other peacekeeper nations;
- Development of a U.S.-Japan force structure characterized by mobility, flexibility, diversity and survivability to reflect regional security environment and take advantage of technology to reduce the U.S. presence in Japan and Okinawa;
- Making U.S. defense technology available to Japan and encouraging strategic alliances among U.S. and Japanese defense firms; and
- Broadening the scope of U.S.-Japan missile defense cooperation.

Healthy Debate. The Armitage-Nye report notes that a larger role for Japan in security would cause a healthy debate in both countries and no doubt elsewhere in Asia. But it notes the need for "burden sharing" to evolve to "power sharing" which can and will only happen if "the next U.S. administration will devote the considerable time that will be necessary to bring this into being."

Dr. Nye would likely give this advice to Vice President Gore if he wins, and Amb. Armitage is an adviser to Governor Bush. Given that, hopefully U.S.-Japan defense policy in the next administration will be characterized by considerably more effort than has been the case since the Gulf War.

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