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New Challenges, New Opportunities for the U.S. and Japan by Christopher Sigur and Brad Glosserman

As its 55th birthday approaches, the U.S.-Japan alliance faces new challenges and new opportunities. Ironically, new security threats – and new demands for cooperation – provide the best opportunities to revitalize the alliance.

The bilateral security relationship is in better shape than ever. From the close Bush-Koizumi friendship to the good working-level relations between the two foreign affairs and defense establishments, the alliance rhetoric of shared values has never been more real. Japanese and U.S. forces serve together in Iraq, Japan is a key player in the multilateral effort to deal with North Korea's nuclear ambitions, and both are focused on developing a ballistic missile system to defend against such threats. A large and expanding network of personal and institutional relations nurtures this spirit and allows for productive discussions of issues of common concern. In the process, the two countries have turned a bilateral partnership into an instrument for regional security and are expanding it to the global level.

Of course, the relationship is not without problems. Local opposition in Japan to U.S. military bases is making more difficult alliance maintenance and the transformation of the U.S. presence in that country and the region. Seemingly lukewarm U.S. support for Japan's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has become (for some Japanese) an "alliance issue." International issues such as Iran and the recent U.S.-India nuclear agreement could drive wedges between Washington and Tokyo.

The most important challenge is China. While both countries see China as critical to regional stability, security, and prosperity, ensuring that concerns don't overshadow cooperation and calibrating the trilateral relationship have been difficult. Both the U.S. and Japan see China's growth as a risk and an opportunity, and both are struggling to minimize the former and take full advantage of the latter.

The challenge of China is still writ in recognizable terms for the bilateral alliance. While Washington and Tokyo work this issue out, the real test is posed by new and non-traditional security threats.

Topping this list is terrorism and the activities of other nonstate actors. This group includes well-known bad guys like al-Qaeda and others in its network, "rogue actors" such as nuclear black marketeer A.Q. Khan, and transnational criminal organizations that smuggle drugs, arms, humans, and other forms of contraband.

Pandemic diseases pose a second threat. SARS provided the first modern experience with this danger, but bird flu is the current menace. Its spread has highlighted global vulnerabilities and a shocking lack of preparation for both natural and manmade outbreaks of infectious disease.

A third security concern is the dissemination of new technologies and know-how that can be used for good purposes and bad – and in many cases, we don't know which will prevail. This is a long and somewhat amorphous list that includes biotechnology, nanotechnology, cloning, and other cutting-edge technologies and research.

A fourth worry is the vulnerability of national infrastructure. This too encompasses a broad array of issues, ranging from transportation security (both for commerce and individuals), energy (power stations and other key facilities), and the electronic networks that make the information economy possible. Data and network security is central to a modern economy. Planes don't fly, power stations don't run, banks (and increasingly) governments don't function without networks. Without them, terrorists can't be tracked, or diseases treated. They are also increasing important to traditional security concerns as militaries embrace new technologies.

Each of these threats can do great damage to the social, political and economic interests of both countries, as well as harm the physical well-being of their citizens. Yet they cannot be dealt with through the alliance's traditional mechanisms: Neither U.S. nor Japanese military forces have much of a role in combating these dangers. They may battle terrorists, but an effective counter- and anti-terrorism strategy will encompass a range of responses, using an array of political, military, economic and diplomatic tools.

Ironically, these new security threats offer new opportunities for the alliance because responses to them will fall outside the traditional bilateral framework. That means each country has different assets and strengths that it can contribute to efforts to fight these problems. That, in turn, will allow the two countries to forge more equal and equitable relationships to deal with them. And, perhaps most important, because these are "new" and nonconventional threats that require equally new responses, many traditional constraints on the security partnership will not apply. It is hard to see how Article 9 could limit efforts to build a more secure information infrastructure or battle the spread of pandemic diseases, or how and why the Japanese public would object to either program.

Given the centrality of secure data networks, we believe the U.S. and Japan should make cybersecurity a top priority for bilateral cooperation. The two most advanced economies are most vulnerable and have the wealth and talent to tackle this problem. They both have large cadres of researchers working on these and other cutting-edge issues in science and technology, particularly in the private sector. Both are well positioned to establish control mechanisms, regimes, and best practices that can safeguard science and technology in their

own country. And they can use that base both for engaging the corporate sector in the security dialogue, and for building more broad-based multilateral regimes. Tokyo has made export controls a priority in its relations with Asia, but it can work more closely with the U.S. to implement a more effective regional – and global – technology control regime.

The need for a broad-based antiterrorism strategy also facilitates burden sharing. The rise of anti-U.S. sentiment worldwide puts a premium on actions by U.S. allies that will not be seen through the same lens (or tarred by the same brush). Japanese efforts to spur economic development can help eliminate the poverty and despair that breeds terrorists. Japan's strengths lie in law enforcement (a skill set that can be used in peacekeeping and other nation-building exercises), aid, and networks that have been established throughout Asia that can be used for intelligence collection and monitoring and the dissemination of best practices (be it good governance, diffusion of technical know-how, etc).

A more expansive security dialogue will bring new voices – not only government researchers but those from the private sector too – to alliance discussions. These experts are not collaborating within an alliance framework. They should benefit from the opportunity to cooperate, and the alliance should get new energy. New institutions and bureaucracies will join the discussions as well, since many of these issues are outside the competence of the traditional security bureaucracy.

The concerns identified here are illustrative, not exhaustive. They demonstrate the range of new issues that need to be brought to the bilateral security agenda. The challenge is to recognize their immediate relevance to the U.S.-Japan alliance and to create mechanisms that integrate them into its routines. Doing so would reinvigorate the security treaty, by recognizing the new range of issues and actors that are part of a bilateral security agenda, and assure its relevance and effectiveness for the next half century.

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