



Don't Bypass Japan by Peter Brookes

President Clinton is presently in China for his second summit meeting within a year with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. The summit has been mired in controversy since before it began but, perhaps the most egregious foreign policy error President Clinton made was in not stopping in Japan on his way to or from China.

The oversight is significant and more importantly sends unfortunate signals to our Japanese friends at a time when reassurance from an ally and real "strategic partner" is in order. Nine days in China without a day in Japan is a serious policy mistake.

By most measures, the Clinton Administration has over-emphasized the importance of China in relation to a number of countries but in particular to Japan. Granted, China is an important country, but Clinton's Sino-centric Asian foreign policy is unnecessarily putting at risk America's most important bilateral relationship in East Asia – and perhaps the world.

Consider for a moment the following: politically, Japan is one of the world's largest democracies and a nation which respects human rights. China, on the other hand, at best, is an authoritarian state which grossly violates the human rights of its own people and denies them fundamental freedoms. The people of Japan choose their government, but the people of China – one-quarter of the world's population – do not.

Economically, Japan is one of the world's premier economic powers with the world's second largest economy. Japan is responsible for 15% of the world's GDP – second only to the United States. Its economy is six times that of China. U.S.-Japanese trade is valued at close to \$200 billion dollars per year – three times that of U.S.-China trade. American exports to Japan are 5-6 times those to China. Japan accounts for more than 70 percent of total East Asian economic output and purchasing power. Tokyo holds the world's largest foreign currency reserves and owns more U.S. Treasury bills than anyone else. Access to Japanese markets – though not perfect – is a dream compared to the obstacles that U.S. businesses face in China. Tokyo has contributed \$19 billion towards stemming the Asian financial crisis. China has provided only 10-15% of that amount. The devaluation of the unconvertible Chinese RMB pales in comparison to the significance of collapse of the Japanese economy and the yen.

Despite the end of the Cold War, the East Asian security environment remains somewhat uncertain; *quo vadis* China perhaps being one of the key questions. Japan is a military ally of the United States which allows the stationing of 47,000 U.S. troops, an aircraft carrier battle group, and several tactical air force squadrons within its territory. The security of the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait is highly dependent on

the U.S. forces in Japan. The U.S. Marines on Okinawa were the first combat forces to arrive off Kuwait in the buildup to Operation DESERT STORM. Japan is indispensable to U.S. economic, political and security interests in the Pacific. China, conversely, may prove to be inimical to those interests. Our security relationship with Japan is paramount to stability in East Asia.

Internationally, Japan is the world's largest donor of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), providing over \$10 billion annually to needy aid recipients. Likewise, Tokyo will contribute \$1 billion towards the light water reactors (LWR) being built in North Korea under the provisions of the 1994 Agreed Framework. China has contributed nothing towards the LWRs or the delivery of the 500,000 tons of heavy fuel oil required annually by the Agreed Framework. Further, Japan is the world's second largest contributor to the United Nations despite not having a permanent seat on the Security Council. China's contribution, despite its seat on the Security Council, is minimal and Beijing is fighting paying additional dues. Japan has been supportive of U.S. initiatives at the U.N. especially in places like the Persian Gulf. This cannot be said for China.

The Japanese are disconcerted by Clinton's "overflight" but are reluctant to say so publicly. They are rightfully bothered by the fact that President Clinton decided not to stop in Japan – reportedly at the request of the Chinese. As you may recall, the last President to visit mainland China, George Bush, stopped in Japan during his travels to the PRC.

The White House will likely have to do some damage control with Tokyo after this visit. The decision by the White House undermines the prospects for the upcoming consideration of the Defense Guidelines by the Diet in the fall and the willingness of the Japanese to heed U.S. advice to reform its banking system and reflate its ailing economy. It has also created a call by some Japanese for Tokyo to take a more independent foreign policy course – placing some distance between Washington and Tokyo. This is an unfortunate thought and could be avoided by paying appropriate attention to this critical bilateral relationship.

Clearly, China is an important nation whose integration into the international system requires significant attention and careful handling, but relations with Beijing should not be at the expense of America's most important bilateral relationship -- the relationship with Tokyo. Bypassing Japan is not only bad judgment on the part of the White House -- it is bad policy.

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