The U.S.-Japan Alliance

PREPARING FOR KOREAN RECONCILIATION & BEYOND

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Charles M. Perry
Toshi Yoshihara

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Preface

As this monograph goes to press in April 2003, uncertainties and deep anxieties hang over Northeast Asia. In particular, several major and unexpected developments on the Korean Peninsula over the past six months have shaken the regional security environment to its foundations. In October 2002, Pyongyang's admission that it was pursuing a clandestine uranium enrichment program ignited a whole new debate over a nuclear-armed North Korea and its potential implications for regional (and even extra-regional) proliferation. Since then the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has escalated tensions further by 1) withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT); 2) restarting a nuclear facility frozen under the 1994 Agreed Framework; 3) conducting cruise missile tests over the Sea of Japan; 4) threatening to carry out additional tests of longer-range ballistic missiles; and, 5) refusing until mid-April 2003 to participate in any multilateral dialogue for defusing the current impasse, insisting instead on bilateral talks with (and concessions from) the United States as the primary path toward resolving the nuclear problem. Hopefully, the trilateral talks just beginning in Beijing involving China, the United States, and the DPRK will trigger some positive forward movement, but it remains to be seen whether real substantive progress – eventually to include other key regional powers (es-

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pecially South Korea, Japan, and Russia) – will be made. If the past is any guide, it will not be an easy or rapid process.

The timing of this most recent standoff with Pyongyang over its nuclear policies, certainly a part of the North's calculus, could not have been worse for the United States, as Washington and the world focused first on how to encourage Iraqi compliance with UN resolutions on disarmament and then on the war in Iraq. The difficulty in shaping an effective response to the DPRK's brinkmanship has been compounded, moreover, by a reluctance on the part of Beijing, Moscow, and Seoul to bring too much pressure to bear on Pyongyang, in part for fear of triggering a collapse and/or encouraging still more provocative behavior. So, too, while they are now supportive of U.S. calls for a multilateral dialogue with the DPRK, these same powers still prefer to see the problem as one that must principally be resolved between the Unites States and North Korea. Beyond questions of diplomatic approach, there are also suspicions that North Korea might be the next target for the United States after the military campaign against Iraq is over. More worrisome still, there are fears that should Washington turn its attention to Pyongyang in hostility, Kim Jong Il might consider extreme action, including preemptive attacks against U.S. forces deployed in the region. No doubt, this would likely include strikes against American bases in Japan, as well as those in the South Korea.

In the meantime, South Korea's presidential elections in December 2002 swept Roh Moo-hyun to power, in large measure on a wave of anti-Americanism. President Roh has already unnerved a number of U.S. officials by hinting that the South may serve its own interests more effectively by playing the role of intermediary between Washington and Pyongyang in the current standoff rather than that of a steadfast ally of the United States (and of the American approach to talks with the DPRK). This, in turn, together with the near nightly protests against U.S. policy in Seoul and other major cities in South Korea, led in early 2003 to rather dramatic public pronouncements and serious discussions in the United States on the need to reassess and reconfigure the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula, including repositioning American troops located near

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the demilitarized zone to points well south of Seoul. In part to shore up his ties with Washington, President Roh has now toned down earlier suggestions that Seoul might play a more independent, mediation role in disputes with the North, and he expended considerable political capital in securing National Assembly approval for a bill authorizing the dispatch of some 700 South Korean combat engineer and medical troops to assist coalition operations in Iraq. Yet, despite these and related efforts on both sides at damage control, the bilateral U.S.-ROK relationship is still thought by many Korea watchers to be hanging in the balance.

It is against this backdrop of an unsettled regional setting that the U.S.-Japan alliance confronts a broad range of twenty-first century security challenges, including most prominently both the uncertain future of a reconciled (and possibly reunited) Korea and the next essential steps in the war on terrorism. Given the pace and dizzying array of unfolding events, one may perhaps be forgiven for succumbing to dire predictions of nuclear breakouts, war, and alliance breakdown in Asia, with Northeast Asia leading the way. However, a more considered and sober reflection strongly suggests that all is not lost. Indeed, the often cited observation that the Chinese characters for "crisis" connote both danger and opportunity is perhaps most appropriate to invoke in this instance. With that notion in mind, this study makes an effort to cut through the uncertainty of how best to proceed and to focus on the future tasks and missions of the U.S.-Japan security partnership. The analysis that follows makes a strong case for why and how the U.S.-Japan alliance will emerge from the current period of tensions with the DPRK, and from other potential shocks on the Peninsula, more vital to the region than ever. More importantly, this study charts a longer-term course for alliance adaptation within which the United States and Japan can nurture a more fruitful (if nonetheless increasingly complex) relationship.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Post-September 11 events have heightened hopes (and some anxieties in certain quarters) that the U.S.-Japan alliance has reached a new "strategic plateau."[1] It is generally held that with Japan's unprecedented political and military support of the United States in the war against terrorism Tokyo has arrived at a point of no return. Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's deftness and courage in overcoming seemingly impenetrable barriers in contemporary Japanese political culture enabled Japan to participate in support of U.S. military operations in the Afghanistan campaign on an unparalleled scale. The extraordinary pace with which the Diet passed legislation that permitted such a bold move also astounded many close observers. Japan's broader diplomatic and financial support for the reconstruction effort in Afghanistan is viewed as well as a sign of Tokyo's growing willingness to increase its activism abroad. These unexpected breakthroughs may well signal a departure from Japan's traditional restraint in international security affairs.

There have, in fact, been growing expectations that the success of Japan's involvement in the first phase of the war on terrorism has laid the foundations and created opportunities for deepening and revitalizing the alliance in ways that were hitherto

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absent. Some observers have speculated that this success could have unanticipated consequences that could accelerate defense reforms – well underway since the mid-1990s – to reinvigorate the alliance, thereby making Tokyo less inhibited about joining future military support missions. The lessons learned from this joint counterterrorism experience could further expand cooperation to every aspect of the U.S.-Japanese security relationship, including intelligence cooperation, closer coordination and, over the longer term, integration of Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) and U.S. military capabilities, and a closer diplomatic partnership. With regard to diplomacy, Tokyo, it needs to be stressed, enjoys a tremendous but still largely untapped reservoir of diplomatic capital that can be used to positive effect in support of alliance priorities. The likelihood of this happening, moreover, has increased since the terrorist attacks of September 11, which contributed to a greater symmetry in strategic and national interests between Washington and Tokyo. Indeed, it would appear that Japan and the United States are more closely aligned now than they ever have been since the end of the Cold War, a posture that no doubt has contributed to Tokyo's quite solid support for the American position during the debates over Iraq at the United Nations in early 2003.[2]

Yet, despite this apparently promising step forward for the alliance, there are cautionary views as well on both sides of the Pacific on how (and in what direction) the security relationship may evolve from here. Certain skeptics, for example, believe that the shock of September 11 only temporarily strengthened the alliance and that much groundwork still needs to be done if similar cooperative efforts are to be forthcoming (if indeed they ever will be).[3] Moreover, they go on to argue, Japanese actions following September 11 provided just a glimpse of what *might* be possible – and even that primarily with regard to situations of exceptional crisis – rather than an illustration of what is really likely for the alliance on a more permanent basis in the future. In fact, it is noted that Japan's dispatch of naval forces to provide logistical assistance in a combat-related mission in the Indian Ocean went well beyond the parameters of its treaty obligations to the United States – or at least

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as those responsibilities have traditionally been defined. And while this deployment certainly reflected a new willingness to act in support of the broader U.S.-Japanese alliance relationship, it should not be viewed, these same voices would add, as an action that was taken within the formal context of the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security Between Japan and the United States (hereafter the "Security Treaty") or as a template for future treaty-compliant operations. Quite a few policy makers and analysts in Tokyo and Washington, therefore, have cautioned against mistaking Japan's robust response to September 11 as a more permanent feature of the alliance. Indeed, drawing such a conclusion obscures the reality that Tokyo's military support was a voluntary, ad hoc response to the horrors of the terrorist attacks.

How Japan, within the more formal constraints of its 1946 Constitution of Japan, the 1960 Security Treaty, and the 1997 Guidelines for Japan-U.S. Defense Cooperation (hereafter "Defense Guidelines"), can react adequately to other similar crises in the future remains to be seen. In other words, a wide gap still may exist between Japan's current defense posture, limited primarily to the defense of the home islands and the surrounding areas, and Tokyo's ability to contribute to broader responsibilities, such as collective self-defense or even collective security. Filling this void will require more work on the basic structures of the alliance to ensure that the partnership can translate progress already made into practicable (and sustained) cooperative defense.

That said, an important starting point from which Washington and Tokyo can move forward may be found in their preparations to respond collectively to the security challenges of the Korean Peninsula, a long-standing rationale for the alliance since the end of the Cold War. First, the continued division between the two Koreas and the associated security problems stand as enduring features of Northeast Asian security that will remain for some time a centerpiece of the alliance's raison d'être. While progress on the North-South engagement front has been made since the euphoric moments of the June 2000 inter-Korean summit, no one expects a tension-free Peninsula any time soon. This

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is true, especially in view of the nuclear controversy sparked by Pyongyang's admission in October 2002 that it was indeed pursuing a uranium enrichment program and the subsequent U.S. decision to suspend fuel-oil supplies provided to the DPRK under the 1994 Geneva Agreed Framework.

Second, and most notably, the immediate threats from North Korea that existed long before September 11 still demand vigilance. North Korea remains home to an unpredictable and truculent regime that poses a menacing military threat to South Korea, Japan, and U.S. forces in the region. The North's possession of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the ballistic missiles to deliver them throughout Northeast Asia (and possibly beyond in the longer term) poses a direct danger to regional and alliance stability. To some degree, in fact, the war on terrorism may have further heightened the North's profile as a dangerous rogue state, and it has certainly further sensitized America's threat perceptions of the North Korean regime, which President George W. Bush included as a member of the "axis of the evil" in his 2002 State of the Union address.

Third, North Korea represents a serious proliferation problem, one that may well worsen. This is especially true with regard to what is often called "forward proliferation" – namely, the export of WMD- and missile-related capabilities (be it an actual weapon, key components, or production technology alone) to other proliferant nations, including countries (such as Iran, Pakistan, Syria, and Yemen) where the use of such capabilities may carry a high probability and where measures may be lacking to prevent their re-transfer to non-state actors. Indeed, Pyongyang's historical record suggests that it could very well support state and non-state terrorism with the supply of WMD and the associated means to deliver them. Worries about such forward proliferation, moreover, increased in early 2003, as the DPRK moved closer to a potential decision to begin plutonium reprocessing and the serial production of weapons-grade nuclear material.

Fourth, as noted above, crisis or conflict on the Korean Peninsula remains a primary planning parameter for the alliance as a whole. Indeed, Washington and Tokyo designed and built

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the 1997 Defense Guidelines around a potential contingency emanating from North Korea. Joint preparations between the United States and Japan for instability on the Peninsula, therefore, have provided, and will continue to provide, the crucial stimulus to further refine and bolster the capabilities of the alliance. This includes long-standing arrangements between the United Nations and Japan to allow military forces operating as part the United Nations Command (UNC) headquartered in the Republic of Korea (ROK) access to designated U.S. bases and support facilities in Japan in the event of hostilities on the Peninsula.[4] Should the standoff with the DPRK over its nuclear programs intensify (perhaps even requiring more explicit U.S. and/or UNC planning for military options to deter or, if need be, respond to provocative North Korean behavior), Japan's important rear-area support function for Korea-focused contingencies could very well come to center stage.

Fifth, the ROK, as a core member of the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG)[5], has emerged as an indispensable partner to Japan and the United States in the overall process of coordinating allied policy toward North Korea. As a result, Seoul's position on Pyongyang serves as a critical benchmark against which to measure the appropriate scope and direction of broader defense preparations, both at the U.S.-ROK and U.S.-Japan alliance levels. Any posture developed solely with the interests and priorities of the U.S.-Japan alliance in mind, without meaningful South Korean input or at least review, would likely prove to be problematic, if not a political nonstarter. So, too, as recent events have demonstrated, South Korean approaches toward the DPRK, crafted more with a national ROK or inter-Korean agenda in mind, may also diverge quite dramatically from U.S. and Japanese perspectives. There is, therefore, an ongoing need for efforts to promote a trilateral consensus among Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul on how best to cope with North Korea, a need that seems likely to ensure as well that Korea-related concerns remain central to future security planning for the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Quite apart from immediate policy concerns, moreover, the prospect of reconciliation on the Korean Peninsula is an even-

tuality (however distant and undesirable to some) that must be confronted by the U.S.-Japan alliance and by the other powers of the region. Reconciliation or some process toward reunification will produce pressures and geopolitical shifts at the sub-regional level that could severely stress bilateral security ties if proper precautions are not taken. Particularly worrisome, the short- to medium-term weaknesses or vulnerabilities of a reconciling Korea – and then, later on, the real and perceived strengths of a united peninsula – could provoke regional competitions and rivalries not seen since the early twentieth century. Yet, whatever the outcome of reconciliation or reunification, the U.S.-Japan alliance, if it is well adapted, could provide the necessary shock absorbers to prevent the region from sliding into instability or conflict. To a certain extent, the events of September 11 may have already planted the seeds for such preparations. For example, should the alliance become more robust as a result of the war on terrorism, it can draw on that experience (and on the mechanisms for cooperation that such an effort may set in place) to develop better ways for coping with broader regional challenges, including those that may arise from the emergence of a unified Korea.

Viewed from a more positive angle, lessons learned by Tokyo and Washington as they plan together for a variety of alternative futures on the Korean Peninsula could substantially benefit the U.S.-Japan alliance over the long term. Allied coordination on the Korea question, for example, may help to pinpoint weaknesses in crisis response procedures and capabilities that might otherwise go unattended, while highlighting strengths that could be more fully maximized in the future for other regional and extra-regional contingencies. On a broader level, an established pattern of U.S.-Japan coordination on Korea (together with trilateral TCOG-centered efforts as noted above) could serve as a model for – and even set in place cooperative structures and institutions that could help to promote – deeper regional security cooperation in Northeast Asia.

In order for the U.S.-Japan alliance to retain its relevance over the longer haul, however, it must also balance between the broader geopolitical forces of change in the post-September 11 era and

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the more enduring challenges arising from potential flashpoints of long standing, most particularly the Korean Peninsula. This study will assess how the alliance can best prepare both for the new global and regional trends that took root after September 11 and for traditional, well-established concerns that will remain part of the strategic landscape – especially with respect to Korea – in what many now call a "post-post-Cold War" environment.[6] Measures taken on these two very important fronts, moreover, could further improve the alliance's ability to cope with difficult internal management issues, such as the security partnership's evolving operational requirements, as well as with a wider range of regional and extra-regional missions that have little to do per se with Korean security dynamics. In short, these new and old missions could provide both the energy and the rationale for guiding the alliance into the future.

Notes for Chapter One

1 Dr. Michael Green, director for Asian affairs, U.S. National Security Council, unpublished remarks at *Preparing the U.S.-Japan Alliance for a New Security Environment*, the second IFPA-JIIA workshop, April 8-9, 2002, Tokyo, Japan.

2 At the UN Security Council's debate on Iraq on February 18, 2003, for example, only Japan and Australia consistently supported the U.S. and British position, leading some Japan watchers to suggest that Tokyo, while preferring a UN mandate for military action, would likely support unilateral action by the United States and its coalition partners. It has even been suggested that Prime Minister Koizumi will propose to the Japanese public (perhaps 80 percent of which opposed the war in Iraq) that such support on Iraq is the price Japan must pay for a steady U.S. effort to deal with North Korea, whose saber rattling in late 2002 and early 2003 has increasingly worried Japan. See J. Sean Curtin, "Koizumi Trades Baghdad for Pyongyang," *PacNet Newsletter,* no. 12A (March 14, 2003).

3 Ambassador Hideshi Owada, then president, Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), unpublished remarks at *Preparing the U.S.-Japan Alliance for a New Security Environment*.

4 On February 19, 1954, eleven of the twenty-two nations that had sent combat or medical units to the UNC in support of the Korean War signed the UN-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) allowing

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UNC personnel, ships, and aircraft to flow through and operate from Japan. Eight U.S. facilities were designated as UNC bases: five on the home islands – Yokota air base, Yokosuka naval base, Camp Zama, and Atsugi naval air station on Honshu, and Sasebo naval base on Kyushu; and three on Okinawa – Kadena air base, Futenma Marine Corps air station, and White Beach naval base. The provisions of the SOFA, including UNC access to these eight facilities, are administered in Japan by a UNC(Rear) component, activated on July 1, 1957, when UNC headquarters moved to Seoul.

5 The TCOG was established as a byproduct of the Clinton administration's review of U.S. policy toward North Korea under the leadership of former U.S. Secretary of Defense William J. Perry, acting then as U.S. policy coordinator for the DPRK. The so-called Perry Report, entitled *Review of United States Policy toward North Korea: Findings and Recommendations,* was formally released on October 12, 1999.

6 See Ralph A. Cossa, "Toward a Post Post-Cold War World," *PacNet Newsletter,* no. 41 (October 12, 2001).