

# Strengthening the Alliance: U.S., Japan and Their New Common Strategic Objectives

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## 1. Introduction

At a time when some of America's most important traditional alliances sour, in "Old" Europe as well as in Northeast Asia, and when the U.S. is finding new allies and relying more on "coalitions of the willing", rather than on established frameworks, there is one traditional ally that is increasingly "showing the flag"<sup>1</sup>.

Indeed, in the past few years, Japan, the U.S.'s most crucial ally in Asia-Pacific, has been taking important steps to strengthen the Trans-Pacific strategic alliance, which served as the cornerstone of postwar peace and stability in the region.

## 2. The driving forces of a renewed partnership

Continuing volatility in the Asia-Pacific region, as illustrated by the first North Korean nuclear crisis, in 1994, or China's test-firing ballistic missiles across the Taiwan Straits in 1996 prompted the two allies to redefine their alliance, through a Joint Declaration on Security, signed, on April 17, 1996, by the U.S. President Bill Clinton and the Japanese Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto<sup>2</sup> and through the agreement to revise the 1978 Guidelines for Defense Cooperation, carried out in 1997<sup>3</sup>.

Things were further set into motion by other events, such as the 1998 launch by North Korea of a Taepodong missile, which increased Japan's awareness of its vulnerability and determined it to take new steps to increase its preparedness and the security cooperation with the United States. The event paved the way for the adoption of the Law concerning situations in areas surrounding Japan.

The inauguration of the Bush and Koizumi administrations, in January, respectively, April 2001 and the close personal relationship established between the two leaders announced a

The U.S.-Japan security relation proved to be extremely enduring throughout the past almost six decades, although there were enough difficult times, when the two partners were at odds with each other and had divergent interests or positions with respect to bilateral or international issues.

This was especially true in the first half of the '90s, when, following the disappearance of the common enemy, the Soviet Union, the economic tensions erupted and threatened to endanger the alliance and, at one point, to escalate into an all-out economic war across the Pacific.

fresh start and a new era for the alliance, which was already foreseeable ever since the release of the Armitage-Nye Report<sup>4</sup>, in October 2000, and the Republican presidential candidate's electoral pledges to shift the focus of U.S. foreign policy on East Asia and to strengthen the security relationship with Japan.

The September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon not only changed the world, but also the Japan-U.S. security alliance. They forced the new Administration in the White House to shift focus not on East Asia, but on a global war against terrorism, but, at the same time, they opened a new chapter of cooperation between the United States and Japan.

Those tragic events triggered an unprecedented display of support from Japan, which represented an utmost Japanese contribution to the strengthening of the Trans-Pacific strategic partnership<sup>5</sup>, rather than just a Japanese contribution to America's war against international terrorism.

Japan's logistical support for the U.S.-led coalition in Afghanistan was followed by other important measures, such as support for the war against Iraq, including "putting some boots on the ground"<sup>6</sup>, close bilateral consultation and coordination on some critical issues, such as the North Korean nuclear crisis, the joint project concerning ballistic missile defense or the realignment of U.S. troops in Northeast Asia.

In parallel, Japan took some important domestic measures, highly relevant for its alliance with the United States, among which the adoption of a legislative package concerning the response to an armed foreign attack, in 2003, or the adoption of a new National Defense Program Guideline, in December 2004.

### 3. United States' and Japan's new common strategic goals

The so-called "2+2" meeting of February 19, 2005 marked another milestone in the process of strengthening the alliance.

The Ministers in charge with foreign affairs and defense of the two countries gathered in Washington DC, for the first meeting of the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) since December 2002.

The key topics in the original agenda should have been the realignment of the U.S. forces in Japan and the roles of the two partners in East Asia, but North Korea emerged as the front issue, considering its announcement of February 10, that it already possessed nuclear weapons and that it would withdraw from the six party talks indefinitely.

Other issues discussed involved Iraq, Afghanistan, the Middle East Peace Process, the cooperation between the two countries in the Indian Ocean, including the relief operations for the *tsunami*-stricken regions, non-proliferation.

At the end of the meeting, the two sides issued a Joint Statement<sup>8</sup> and held a joint press conference<sup>9</sup>.

The Joint Statement recognizes the "excellent" state of the bilateral security, political and economic cooperation and the pivotal role the alliance will continue to play in ensuring the security and prosperity of both countries and in enhancing the regional and global peace and stability.

It also introduces a new set of shared regional and global strategic goals, based on the understanding of a new international security

environment, threatened by terrorism proliferation, as well as of a regional security environment challenged by persisting old threats, which will continue to create "unpredictability and uncertainty" and emerging new ones.

These moves, which anticipate fundamental changes in Japan's defense and security policies, are being seen by some scholars either as steps toward Japan's becoming a "normal" country, or, on the contrary, as signs of a "Heisei militarization"<sup>7</sup> and of a erosion of the pacifist sentiment in Japan. Nevertheless, they are welcome and, some of them, long overdue, from the point of view of the U.S.-Japan security relationship, which has to face many challenges, old as well as new, such as potential instability in the Korean Peninsula or the Taiwan Straits and China's increasing assertiveness as a political, economic and military power.

In the region, common strategic objectives include:

- Ensure the security of Japan, strengthen peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region, and maintain the capability to address contingencies affecting the United States and Japan;
- Support peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula;
- Seek peaceful resolution of issues related to North Korea, including its nuclear programs, ballistic missile activities, illicit activities and humanitarian issues such as the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korea;
- Develop a cooperative relationship with China, welcoming the country to play a responsible and constructive role regionally as well as globally;
- Encourage the peaceful resolution of issues concerning the Taiwan Strait through dialogue;
- Encourage China to improve transparency of its military affairs;
- Encourage Russia's constructive engagement in the Asia-Pacific region;
- Fully normalize Japan-Russia relations through the resolution of the Northern Territories issue;

- Promote a peaceful, stable and vibrant Southeast Asia;
  - Welcome the development of various forms of regional cooperation, while stressing the importance of open, inclusive and transparent regional mechanisms;
  - Discourage destabilizing sales and transfers of arms and military technology;
  - Maintain the security of maritime traffic.
- Global common strategic objectives include:
- Promote fundamental values such as basic human rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the international community;
  - Further consolidate U.S.-Japan partnership in international peace cooperation activities and development assistance to promote peace, stability and prosperity worldwide;
  - Promote the reduction and nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, including through improved reliability and effectiveness of the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the International Atomic Energy Agency, and other regimes, and initiatives such as Proliferation Security Initiative;
  - Prevent and eradicate terrorism;
  - Coordinate efforts to improve the effectiveness of the United Nations Security Council by making the best use of the current momentum to realize Japan's aspiration to become a permanent member;
  - Maintain and enhance the stability of the global energy supply.

The Joint Statement underscores the need to continue examining the roles, missions and

#### 4. Regional reactions

China was quick to voice its strong dissatisfaction. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kong Quan expressed China's "concern" and stated that "*the U.S.-Japan military alliance is a mutual arrangement made in a special historical condition, which should not overstep the bilateral category*". He went further to add that "*the Chinese Government and the Chinese people are firmly against*" the inclusion of the Taiwan problem in the U.S.-Japan Joint Statement, since it "*is related to China's national sovereignty, territorial integrity and national security*".

The Chinese official expressed his hope that both the United States and Japan "*take full consideration of the interests and concerns of other countries in the region*" and "*take concrete actions to honor their commitment on the Taiwan*

capabilities of Japan's Self Defense Forces and the U.S. Armed Forces required to respond effectively and in a well-coordinated manner to diverse challenges and emphasizes the importance of increasing inter-operability between U.S. and Japanese Forces.

Last but not least, it inks the commitment of the two sides to strengthening the alliance, maintaining the deterrence of the U.S. Forces in Japan, in parallel with reducing the burden on local communities in Japan hosting U.S. bases and facilities, within the process of realigning the U.S. force structure in Japan.

On the sidelines of the SCC meeting, the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs, respectively the two Ministers of Defense held separate Ministerial meetings, too.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Japanese Foreign Minister Nobutaka Machimura issued a Joint Statement on North Korea<sup>10</sup>, in which they expressed their concern about that country's February 10 declaration, urged it to return to the six party talks immediately and without preconditions and to completely dismantle all its nuclear programs under credible international verification.

In their separate meeting, U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Japanese Director General Yoshinori Ono agreed to move the ongoing joint research on a missile defense system to the development stage in U.S. fiscal 2006<sup>11</sup>.

*issue*". What this implies is that Beijing expects Washington and Tokyo to continue to adhere to the "one China principle".

With respect to the two countries' concern about China's military build-up and their appeal to Chinese "transparency in military affairs", the Spokesman reiterated that China's foreign and defense policies are peaceful, with a defensive nature, therefore "*it is untenable for anyone to arbitrarily make any irresponsible remarks on China's national defense construction aimed at safeguarding national security and territorial integrity*"<sup>12</sup>.

Strong reactions came also from the Chinese media, while representatives of the academic community took a more nuanced stance.

Thus, People's Daily held the view that the U.S.-Japan Joint Statement over the Taiwan issue severely interferes with China's internal affairs, while the two countries' claim of "*China's threat*" is nothing but an "*excuse for their military expansion in Asia-Pacific, which will pave the way for their aggression and interference in China's sovereignty*"<sup>13</sup>.

Political analysts in China, while joining the outcry against U.S. and Japanese interferences in Chinese internal affairs, linked the inclusion of the Taiwan issue in the U.S.-Japan Joint Statement with China's intention to adopt the "anti-secession law"<sup>14</sup>, which, they believe, added a new rationale for the strengthening of the American-Japanese security alliance.

Some Chinese scholars think that this is not equal to say that the U.S. and Japan will take military actions in the case of a Taiwan Straits conflict, but a way to increase pressure on China and influence it into making the contents of the "anti-secession law" softer<sup>15</sup>.

Others consider that the Joint Statement is likely to send a wrong signal to the separatist

### 5. Regional implications

At a first glance, the agreements reached between the U.S. and Japan on February 19 might be old news, not necessarily requiring a special attention. After all, issues like North Korea or Taiwan have long been matters of common concern on the agenda of U.S.-Japanese talks and so were counter-terrorism or non-proliferation in more recent years. The two countries shared a common interest in developing cooperative relations with China or promoting fundamental values, long before the last SCC meeting.

What, then, makes the Joint Statement so important and why did it trigger such strong reactions from countries like China or North Korea?

Its relevance is to be found when analyzing, even though not in depth, the current state of affairs at three levels: domestic developments in the countries concerned, bilateral relations in the region and the U.S.-Japan security alliance.

To begin with, according to Kurt Campbell, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asia-Pacific, the Joint Statement, which will have "*enormous consequences*", signals that the U.S. may be refocusing on Asia, after concentrating on Afghanistan and Iraq, following

forces in Taiwan, who were given a shot in the arm, making them more rampant to push forward their way for independence.

The best way to avert a crisis in the Taiwan Straits and preserve peace in Asia-Pacific, they argue, would be for China, the United States and Japan to expand their military exchanges and cooperation and to set up a mechanism for strategic communication, which will enable them to elucidate their respective strategic intentions and to eradicate their strategic distrust<sup>16</sup>.

At its turn, North Korea accused Japan of plotting an invasion of Korea with U.S. assistance, as a first step toward its aspiration to rule a new "Greater Asia Co-prosperity Sphere", hinting at Imperial Japan's brutal domination of East Asia before and during World War II.

Thus, Rodong Sinmun, North Korea's state newspaper accused the Japanese of joining with the United States' "*vicious hostile policy*" toward North Korea and dismissed the "*military threat*" the two countries perceive from the Koreans as "*far-fetched allegation fabricated by themselves*"<sup>17</sup>.

the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In his opinion, in the next four years of the Bush Administration, Asia will be the "*most likely place where the U.S. can face major strategic surprises*"<sup>18</sup>.

For the first time, Taiwan appears explicitly mentioned as a strategic goal of Japan. So far, Japan had preferred "strategic ambiguity", in order not to antagonize China, as proved by example, by the Japanese official position with respect to the Law concerning situations in areas surrounding Japan, which insisted that there was not a geographical, but a situational definition of contingencies that could affect Japan's security.

The Taiwanese government has apparently already welcome the new Joint Statement and expressed its interest in a security alliance with Japan, while Bloomberg quoted the Spokesman of the Japanese Foreign Ministry as saying that "*Japan would provide logistical support to the United States if the People's Republic of China attacked Taiwan*".<sup>19</sup>

In the past two decades, China experienced explosive economic growth, which had a commensurate equivalent in terms of military modernization. For the first time, while stressing

the need of cooperative relations with China and welcoming the country to play a responsible and constructive role regionally and globally, The U.S. and Japan expressed concern about China's military build-up and urged it to show transparency in its military affairs.

This move can not be separated from developments taking place within the larger framework of Sino-Japanese relations. High level political dialogue between the two countries has practically been frozen since 2001, due to China's anger over Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni shrine, which shelters the spirits of the Japanese war-dead, including the World War II Class A war criminals. Other irritants that fueled the tensions accumulating between China and Japan, over the past year, were the intrusion of a Chinese submarine in Japan's territorial waters, the explosion of anti-Japanese feelings in China on the occasion of the Asian Cup soccer final between the two national teams, increased Chinese "maritime research" activities and test-drilling in disputed natural gas fields in the East China Sea, aggressive diplomatic offensive in Southeast Asia to reduce Japan's influence.

In response, Japanese policy-makers took other measures that are as many proofs that China is more and more seen as a threat to Japan. Suffice it to mention the decisions of 2004 to downsize, for the first time after the end of the Cold War, the contingent of the Ground Self Defense Forces (GSDF) in Northern Japan and increase the GSDF contingent in the South of the country, to upgrade fighter jets at Naha Base in Okinawa, in response to the modernization of Chinese Air Forces<sup>20</sup>, as well as the decision of March 3, 2005 to discontinue yen loans to China by 2008, since the country "is experiencing swift economic growth and has resources for military modernization".<sup>21</sup>

China is constantly voicing its dissatisfaction about the strengthening of the U.S.-Japan alliance, which it views as a form of "containment" and is strongly against the U.S.-Japan ballistic missile defense system, which, it believes, is aimed also at protecting Taiwan and at reducing the deterrence capability of its own ballistic missiles.

Following the release of the U.S.-Joint Statement of February 19, it can only be assumed that the Sino-Japanese relations will have additional variables to deal with.

The Joint Statement also refers to a range of issues related to North Korea, from its nuclear programs and ballistic missile activities, to illicit activities and the abduction of Japanese nationals by North Korean agents.

Not only situated in the striking range of North Korea's ballistic missiles and threatened by Pyongyang that Tokyo will be transformed into a "sea of fire", Japan is increasingly being affected by that country's illicit activities, especially drug trafficking and counterfeiting. Moreover, the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korean agents became a very inflammatory issue in Japan since 2002, to which the Japanese attribute equal importance to that of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missiles programs.

Washington displayed support for Japan's position on the abductions more than once, but the inclusion of the issue in the Joint Statement reinforces it and reassures that the U.S. and Japan will remain united in their common stance against North Korean, should the six party talks resume. In addition, due consideration shown by the U.S. to the public Japanese sentiment is likely to contribute to the securing of the high support rates in Japan for the bilateral security arrangements, an important asset considering both the surge in anti-Americanism worldwide and the challenging tasks ahead the alliance.

The attention attached by the Joint Statement to the consolidation of the U.S.-Japan partnership with respect to international peace cooperation activities, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or the eradication of terrorism prepares the legal ground for expanding the scope of an alliance started initially, in the aftermath of World War II, for the defense of Japan and later redefined to encompass the whole Far East.

As the participants in the recent "2+2" meeting declared in their joint press conference, the definition of the new set of shared strategic goals is the first in a three-stage process concerning the review of the U.S. force structure in Japan.

The second one involves the examination of the roles, missions and capabilities of the Japanese Self Defense Forces and the U.S. Forces in Japan, while the third stage will be the review of individual facilities and areas in Japan, with a view to maintaining credible deterrence in

parallel with reducing the burden on local communities.

As it is well known, the U.S. Administration is currently examining changes to the U.S. Global Defense Posture, whose underlying philosophy is the Quadrennial Defense Review 2001<sup>22</sup>.

As Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith declared before the House Armed Services Committee, on June 23, 2004, the goal of the realignment is to update the American defense posture so that it looks forward, not back to the Cold War. In this process, utmost importance will be attached to greater flexibility of the U.S. forces, their ability to deploy powerful capabilities rapidly anywhere in the world where they are needed and to strengthened allied roles<sup>23</sup>.

## 6. Conclusions

Long accused by the United States for its "free ride" on security, in the past few years Japan has been taking remarkable steps to contribute to the strengthening of the Trans-Pacific alliance, once compared by an incumbent Japanese Prime Minister with an "unsinkable aircraft carrier".

Moreover, Japan appears willing to free itself from strategic ambiguity and to revise its security and defense policies, in line with the change of times.

It is in this context that the realignment of the U.S. forces in Japan must be considered.

The carrying out of the second and third stages of this process will lead to a redefinition of the roles and missions of the Japanese and American forces, increased inter-operability and a joint use of bases, which will allow the return of some facilities currently used by the U.S. forces in Japan, without jeopardizing their deterrence capability.

At the same time, Japan can expect to continue to be asked by the U.S. to shoulder more responsibilities within the alliance, since, as U.S. State Secretary Condoleezza Rice stated, in the joint press conference of February 19, "alliances, in order to remain vital, have to be upgraded and improved every day".

Self-imposed taboos and constraints are gradually fading away, under the influence of a growing realism and a better understanding of the complex regional and international realities.

Equally important is the fact that Japan appears willing to give up its traditional complacency and insularism and shoulder more responsibilities for maintaining regional and international security, within a robust alliance with the United States, which showed remarkable capacity of adjusting to the post-September 11 challenges.

## Notes and bibliographical references

<sup>1</sup> "Show the flag" is the symbolic appeal made by then U.S. Deputy State Secretary Richard Armitage, in the wake of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the U.S., when requesting a Japanese contribution in the war against international terrorism.

<sup>2</sup> *Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security – Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Defense of Japan 1998 (the White Paper of Japan's Defense Agency), The Japan Times Ltd., Tokyo, 1998, pg. 320-323

<sup>3</sup> *Completion of the Review of the Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation*, available on the official website of the Japan Defense Agency, [http://www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f\\_work/sisin4\\_h.htm](http://www.jda.go.jp/e/policy/f_work/sisin4_h.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Richard Armitage, Paul Wolfowitz, Joseph Nye and others, *The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership* – a bipartisan study released in October 2000, prior to the Presidential elections in the U.S., by the Institute for National Strategic Studies of the National Defense University,

[http://www.ndu.edu/inss/press/Spelrepts/SR\\_JAPAN.HTM](http://www.ndu.edu/inss/press/Spelrepts/SR_JAPAN.HTM)

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed account of Japan's contribution to the campaign against international terrorism, see Anca Mantulescu (under the penname of Ana Dragos), *Japan's Response to September 11 and Its Significance for the Japan-U.S. Security Alliance: A Historical Perspective*, Romanian Journal of International Affairs, Volume VIII, Number 4, 2002, pg. 108-141

<sup>6</sup> "Boots on the ground" is an appeal attributed to U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, when requesting the dispatch of Japan's Self Defense Forces to assist the U.S.-led coalition in the reconstruction of Iraq.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Tanter, *Japan, Heisei Militarization and the Bush Doctrine*, [http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0442A\\_Tanter.html](http://www.nautilus.org/fora/security/0442A_Tanter.html)

- <sup>8</sup> *Joint Statement, U.S.-Japan Security Consultative Committee*, on the official website of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html>
- <sup>9</sup> The full text of the joint press conference is available on the U.S. State Department's official website, at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2005/42492.htm>
- <sup>10</sup> *Joint Statement on North Korea*, on the official website of the Japanese Foreign Ministry, [http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/fmv0502/n\\_korea.html](http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/fmv0502/n_korea.html)
- <sup>11</sup> Japan Times, February 21, 2005, quoting an unnamed Japanese official
- <sup>12</sup> The full text of the statement is available on the Chinese Foreign Ministry's official website, at <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/xwfw/s2510/t184139.htm>
- <sup>13</sup> [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/21/eng/20050221\\_174148.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/21/eng/20050221_174148.html)
- <sup>14</sup> The "anti-secession law", currently debated by the National People's Assembly (?), aims at opposing and restraining the splitting forces of Taiwan independence.
- <sup>15</sup> [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/05/eng20050205\\_173117.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/05/eng20050205_173117.html)
- <sup>16</sup> [http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/23/eng20050223\\_174441.html](http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/200502/23/eng20050223_174441.html)
- <sup>17</sup> <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/US/02/20/us.japan/index.html>
- <sup>18</sup> The Japan Times, March 3, 2005
- <sup>19</sup> Press Conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, February 22, 2005. The Ministry's Spokesman refrained from commenting. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/press/2005/2/0222.html>
- <sup>20</sup> The Daily Yomiuri, March 4, 2005
- <sup>21</sup> The Daily Yomiuri, March 3, 2005
- <sup>22</sup> <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs>
- <sup>23</sup> Under Secretary of Defense Douglas Feith's Statement is available on the House of Representatives' official website at <http://armedservices.house.gov/openingstatementsandpressreleases/108thcongress/04-06-23feith.pdf>