

U.S.-Japan Relations: Planning Ahead

Brad Glosserman
Pacific Forum CSIS

The final quarter of 2004 was uneventful, at least as far as U.S.-Japan relations were concerned. I don't dwell on this tranquility to fill space; it's revealing of the maturity and solidity of the relationship and a welcome change from the turbulence of the 1990s. This period of calm permits the two governments to focus on future planning rather than alliance management. To their credit, they are doing just that.

Highlights of this quarter include a public discussion of the meaning of the "Far East" clause in the U.S.-Japan security treaty, a topic that fits into a broader national security debate that is taking place in Japan, Japan's hosting of a Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise in Sagami Bay, and approval of the National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG), which outline Japan's future security posture. The quarter closed with the terrible earthquake in Indonesia and the tsunami it created; Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro was quick to respond, both to deploy Japan's formidable assets to help combat the devastation, and to demonstrate his country's ability to play a vital regional and international role.

Debating Security

For over a decade, Japan's security thinking and posture have been changing. Much of that evolution has been traced in these pages. While Japan has moved incrementally toward a more realistic security strategy, this has largely been an ad hoc process in which Tokyo responds to external events. In this quarter, however, the intellectual debate caught up with reality. Three publications – the report of the Prime Minister's Council on Security and Defense Capabilities (better known as the Araki Commission), the NDPG, and the Mid-term Defense Buildup Plan – laid out Japan's visions for the future and its security strategy.

The Araki Commission report was presented in October and it anticipated many of the issues that would be discussed in the NDPG. It identifies two security goals: preventing a direct threat from reaching Japan and reducing the chances of threats arising in parts of the world that could reach Japan or harm Japanese interests. Three approaches are available to Japan: self defense, cooperation with the United States, and working with the international community.

While those goals and options have existed, the Araki report is notable for stressing the need for an “integrated security strategy” that is more flexible and outward looking than the self-defense approach that prevailed throughout the Cold War. It calls for “bolstering the credibility of the Japan-U.S. alliance” and continuing to rely on extended deterrence provided by the U.S. This, the report continues, obliges Japan to acquire effective ballistic missile defense systems in cooperation with the U.S. More generally, Japan “must continually upgrade arrangements for cooperation to deal with these types of situations, and strive to enhance the reliability of Japan-U.S. cooperation in actual operations.” In practical terms, that means Japan must relax its ban on arms exports, at least to the U.S. so that it can fully participate in the development and deployment of an antiballistic missile system.

A similar logic guides thinking when the commission turns to “preventing the emergence of threats by improving the international security environment.” Given their shared values, it is obvious that Tokyo and Washington should work together – both consulting and cooperating – to maintain peace and prevent conflict. The report even goes so far as to call the U.S.-Japan alliance “a public good” for countries in Asia. A closer strategic dialogue is one way of clarifying the appropriate roles for each country and creating a framework for action.

In practical terms, the report calls on Japan to embrace the “Multifunctional Flexible Defense Force concept” which would allow the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to be more versatile and take on a wider range of functions. It also outlines the structural reforms in decision making and information management that are needed to bring the integrated security strategy into being. [For more on the Araki Report, see Yuki Tatsumi, [“Japan’s First Step Toward a National Security Strategy: Assessing the Araki Commission Report,” PacNet #47A, Oct. 22, 2004.](#)]

While the Araki Commission’s conclusions will seem unexceptional to outside observers, they did trigger controversy in Japan. The left complained about the call for lifting the arms export ban and worried about increasing integration between the U.S. and Japanese militaries. Conservatives generally applauded the report for its realism but were disappointed that specific threats – China in particular – were not mentioned.

Realignment and Redefinitions

Japan was denied the luxury of contemplating the implications of those plans. Shortly after the Araki Commission report was released, U.S. and Japanese officials met in Tokyo for regular talks on security strategy. A key agenda item was U.S. plans to realign U.S. forces in Asia. Three items have dominated public discussion: the transfer of functions of the Fifth Air Force from Yokota Air Base to the headquarters of the 13th Air Force in Guam (this would permit joint civilian-military use of Yokota); the transfer of the Army I Corps headquarters from Washington state to Camp Zama; and the relocation of the Marine Corps Futenma Air Station and some Marines in Okinawa to the Japanese mainland or out of Japan. Lightening Okinawa’s burden has long been a demand of island residents. The crash of a Marine helicopter last August increased concern and the

sense of urgency. This quarter, Prime Minister Koizumi acknowledged the need for some movement.

The talks appear to have bogged down; the mayors of two towns bordering Camp Zama have protested any expansion of the base. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage confessed that the two governments may have approached the problem in the wrong way. They should have first talked about the broader mission of the alliance – and their forces – rather than the particulars of deployment. “We started talking about individual items or locations, rather than starting from a philosophical discussion about how the U.S. and Japan see our alliance in 10, 15, or 20 years.” Armitage also said that the purpose of the U.S. realignment would be “to lessen the burden on the Japanese people” and enhance deterrence.

The problem is that any discussion of realignment of U.S. forces and new missions or responsibilities for Japan ultimately requires a hard look at Article 6 of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty, which stipulates that the purpose of U.S. forces stationed in Japan is to maintain peace and security in the Far East. But what is the Far East? Does it include, for example, the Taiwan Strait? To date, Japanese security planners have gone out of their way – and used impressive verbal gymnastics – to avoid a firm answer to that question. Part of the reason is a reluctance to anger neighbors – China in the case of a Taiwan Strait crisis – but there are also constitutional concerns. Military activity in a situation that does not involve an attack on Japan could violate Article 9. Critics allege that allowing the U.S. to move I Corps HQ to Japan would entangle Japan in activities well beyond the scope of national defense – reaching perhaps as far as the Middle East – and violate the constitution.

The Japanese government’s response has been mixed. Defense Agency chief Ono Yoshinori told an Oct. 15 press conference that it would be difficult to limit the command based on territory but he also said that the two governments had long ago agreed on the meaning of Article 6. He also called for the two countries to evaluate their alliance to reflect current cooperation that aids the region and the world. Four days later, Prime Minister Koizumi said that any discussion of changes in U.S. forces in Japan “should be discussed from the viewpoints of the security treaty and the Japan-U.S. alliance in the global context.” Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka weighed in saying both countries need to be “flexible” when discussing U.S. redeployments while chief Cabinet secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki ruled out a redefinition of the alliance or a review of the treaty.

National Defense Program Guidelines

The December publication of the long-awaited “National Defense Program Guideline for FY 2005 and After” may provide some clarity. This is only the fourth time that Japan has revised its defense guidelines and this document for the first time identifies by name regional threats – China’s military and nuclear modernization program and North Korea.

The NDGP repeats the two security policy objectives identified by the Araki Commission, appears to confirm the shift toward a regional and international emphasis, and endorses the multifunctional, flexible approach explained in the Araki report. It notes that Japan will “on its own initiative engage in strategic dialogue with the U.S. on wide-ranging security issues such as role sharing between the two countries and the U.S. military posture...” Japan will also “actively promote intelligence exchange, operational cooperation including that in the ‘situations in areas surrounding Japan,’ cooperation on ballistic missile defense, equipment, and technology exchange, and efforts to make the stationing of U.S. forces in Japan smooth and efficient.” Chief Cabinet secretary Hosoda also confirmed that the Japanese government will exempt items related to ballistic missile defense from the arms export ban. Tokyo will decide on a case-by-case basis whether to further cooperate with the U.S. on arms development and production and to export defensive equipment to countries in support of their efforts to fight terrorism or piracy.

The document got a predictable reception. The opposition Democratic Party of Japan said the guidelines reflected bureaucratic compromises and had no guiding philosophy. Critics from the left said it signaled the abandonment of the Pacifist Constitution and would make it easier for the government to send the SDF overseas. China was angered by the idea that it might constitute a threat to Japan. North Korea produced its own blistering riposte. Little attention was paid to the fact that the budget that followed publication of the NDGP decreased defense spending for the third consecutive year.

Tokyo hosts the PSI

A taste of what Japan’s new security posture might entail was evident in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) exercise that Japan held Oct. 26-28 in Sagami Bay. This was the 12th such exercise, the first ever hosted by Japan. Forty-four observers from 18 countries watched the drill, which involved ships from the Japanese, Australian, French, and U.S. navies, and included the interception and search of a vessel suspected of transporting sarin gas. Japan provided nine vessels and six aircraft. From his front-row seat, John Bolton, U.S. under secretary of state for arms control and international security, called the event “another momentous occasion” in the U.S.-Japan relationship and another case of Japan proving “yet again its commitment to the global war on terrorism by demonstrating its ability and willingness to use naval assets to counter proliferation.”

Nuts and Bolts

Throughout the quarter there was the usual alliance interaction. U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell met with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Machimura in early October in Washington and again at the end of the month in Tokyo, at which time Powell also met Koizumi. The two foreign ministers covered a range of topics, from Afghanistan to United Nations reform. They tackled U.S. force realignment and the resumption of U.S. beef exports to Japan, suspended because of the discovery of mad cow disease in the U.S. They also agreed on the need to resume the Six-Party Talks on the North Korean nuclear crisis, and urged Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table. Japan promised continuing support for reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Once again, Japan's efforts to assist in the reconstruction of Iraq ended in tragedy. Koda Shisei, a 24 year old, was taken hostage by Islamic radicals when he went to Iraq. They then demanded that the Japanese government withdraw the SDF from Iraq; when Tokyo refused Koda was killed. This incident had little effect on Japanese opinion. Koda had been denied a visa to Iraq when he applied in Amman Jordan, but apparently that had no effect. He journeyed on, unprepared, into the arms of the extremists.

While that drama was unfolding, the Japanese Cabinet agreed to extend for another six months (until May 1, 2005) the logistical support provided by the SDF to "Operation Enduring Freedom" in Afghanistan. This support was initially established by the terms of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law that was passed by the Diet in October 2001. Since November 2001, when the support began, until Oct. 12, 2004, the Maritime SDF has completed 430 refueling operations, providing 100 million gallons of fuel. The Air SDF has completed 252 transport missions in Japan and overseas. At the Oct. 26 Cabinet meeting, the government also agreed to permit the MSDF to provide fuel to other countries, in addition to the U.S.

Closing a messy remnant of the Cold War, U.S. Army deserter Charles Robert Jenkins was found guilty of deserting his post on the Demilitarized Zone Jan. 5, 1965 and was sentenced to 30 days in jail, demoted from sergeant to private, forced to forfeit all back pay and benefits, and given a dishonorable discharge. Jenkins is the husband of Soga Hitomi, a Japanese woman abducted by North Korean agents and forced to live in that country. She was returned to Japan following the September 2002 summit between Koizumi and North Korean leader Kim Jong-il but her family – Jenkins and two daughters – remained in the North. Pyongyang may have hoped that U.S. treatment of Jenkins – the Pentagon had refused to ignore his desertion – would focus Japanese ire on the U.S. and provide a wedge issue that it could exploit between the two allies when dealing with the North. Instead, the Army apparently reached agreement on a relatively lenient sentence and handled the case accordingly. Jenkins was eventually released a week ahead of schedule. Of course, 40 years in North Korea is punishment enough.

Warm and Fuzzy

As in the past, the bilateral relationship took its cues from the top. President Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi continued their close consultations. On Nov. 8, Koizumi called Bush to congratulate him on his election victory. (During the U.S. campaign, some Japanese politicians came perilously close to stepping over the line with their comments about the election. Koizumi said that while he didn't want to interfere in another country's politics, he "was acquainted with President Bush [and] wanted him to carry on." Liberal Democratic Party Secretary General Takabe Tsutomu went a step further, saying that he thought "there would be trouble" if Bush wasn't re-elected. Koizumi calmed the tempest that followed by saying that the alliance is vital and therefore U.S.-Japan relations would stay on course no matter who won.)

At the Santiago APEC Leaders Summit, Bush and Koizumi met for 35 minutes to discuss the usual issues: North Korea, Iraq, the economy, and the redeployment of U.S. forces.

Both men confirmed their commitment to the six-party process in North Korea and the denuclearization of North Korea. Koizumi reportedly emphasized the importance of maintaining the U.S. deterrent after redeployment and the need to lighten the burden imposed on Japanese communities by U.S. bases. Bush is said to have praised the prime minister as “a man of clear vision and inner strength” and reportedly invited Koizumi to visit the U.S. in 2005.

Tragedy and Opportunity

The quarter closed with the 9.0 earthquake in Indonesia and the resulting tsunami that killed some 150,000 people on two continents (the death toll continues to climb) and left millions homeless. As the scale of the disaster became clear, governments worldwide mobilized to provide aid and relief. President Bush announced the formation of an aid group that included the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India. A week later, the group was disbanded and leadership in the aid effort was turned over to the United Nations.

For his part, Prime Minister Koizumi seized the opportunity provided by the disaster to push Japan to the forefront of international aid efforts. He attended the Jakarta emergency summit in early January that provided a focus for relief efforts. Tokyo has pledged \$500 million in aid and is reportedly considering some form of debt relief, most likely by suspending payments of affected countries. Japan has mobilized every branch of the SDF to provide assistance: 800 GSDF troops are being sent to Aceh and other hard hit areas, ASDF planes are flying in emergency supplies, and MSDF ships are providing supplies and troops. It is the biggest Japanese emergency relief operation in history and marks the first time that the country has deployed all three branches of the SDF simultaneously in such efforts. Tokyo has pledged to back development of a regional tsunami early warning system and put its substantial knowledge in development and disaster prevention and relief to work on behalf of the region.

Koizumi has said that he will use this tragedy to demonstrate what Japan is capable of contributing to the region and the world and will use it to buttress Japan’s bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC. At the same time, deployment of the SDF is designed to shape domestic and regional perceptions of Japan’s military, showing that it can be used for pressing humanitarian and relief operations and thereby defusing criticism, such as that which has followed the deployment to Iraq. The framework for such action is newly available; the trick will be doing that in a way that doesn’t appear overly cynical and opportunistic. Stay tuned.

U.S.-Japan Chronology October-December 2004*

Oct. 1, 2004: Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro appoints former Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Vice President Yamasaki Taku and former Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko as assistants to help on diplomatic and national security issues.

Oct. 2, 2004: Over 3,000 Okinawans call for closure of U.S. Marine Corps base in Futenma.

Oct. 4, 2004: Koizumi comments on possible shift of U.S. bases in Okinawa to other parts of Japan.

Oct. 4, 2004: Prime Minister's Defense Advisory panel (Araki Commission) presents "The Vision for Future National Security and Defense Capabilities." It recommends bolstering U.S. ties, easing arms exports, and enacting a permanent law on Self Defense Force (SDF) deployments overseas.

Oct. 4, 2004: *Keidanren* calls on the government to ease weapons export ban.

Oct. 6, 2004: Chief Cabinet Secretary Hosoda Hiroyuki proposes U.S. move some military units out of Okinawa.

Oct. 6-7, 2004: New Foreign Minister Machimura Nobutaka makes first official visit to Washington to meet Secretary of State Colin Powell. They reaffirm U.S.-Japan alliance and the realignment of the U.S. troops in Okinawa.

Oct. 7, 2004: U.S. forces in Okinawa resume *F-15* training flights after Oct. 4 *F-15* midair collision.

Oct. 8, 2004: Koizumi raises possibility of relocating U.S. troops from Okinawa to overseas bases.

Oct. 11, 2004: Japan decides to develop components for interceptor missiles for antiballistic missile system with the U.S. According to *The Japan Times*, Japan will have to pursue a "politically sensitive review" of its ban on weapons exports.

Oct. 12, 2004: U.S. and Japanese officials meet for regular talks on U.S.-Japan security strategy. Items include U.S. force realignments North Korea and reconstruction of Iraq.

Oct. 12, 2004: Japan approves restart of U.S. *CH-53D* helicopter flights, ending ban that followed August crash in Okinawa.

* Compiled by Lena Kay, Vasey Fellow, Pacific Forum CSIS.

Oct. 12, 2004: U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Japanese Vice Foreign Minister Takeuchi Yukio reconfirm that the Six-Party Talks are the best way to resolve the crisis over DPRK's nuclear ambitions, and DPRK must return to the Talks without conditions.

Oct. 13-14, 2004: Japan hosts 3rd Donor Committee Meeting for Iraq in Tokyo.

Oct. 13, 2004: Okinawa assembly adopts resolution protesting *F-15* accident.

Oct. 13, 2004: Cities hosting Camp Zama oppose plan to relocate U.S. forces.

Oct. 14, 2004: Japan unofficially proposes relocation of U.S. Marine Corp artillery unit from Okinawa to Hokkaido.

Oct. 16, 2004: LDP Secretary General Takebe Tsutomu says there will be trouble if Kerry wins U.S. presidency.

Oct. 16, 2004: Koizumi provokes tempest from Japan's opposition parties with comment that he is close to Bush and "would like him to do well."

Oct. 20, 2004: Chief Cabinet secretary Hosoda says Japan intends to maintain a clause in security alliance that limits operations of U.S. forces stationed in Japan to the Far East.

Oct. 21, 2004: Defense Agency chief Yoshinori Ono says that relocating the headquarters of a U.S. military unit to Japan would not violate the Japan-U.S. security treaty – even if the range of the unit's activity goes beyond the Far East.

Oct. 21-22, 2004: Japan and U.S. consult on the bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) issue related to the resumption of U.S. beef exports to Japan.

Oct. 24-25, 2004: FM Machimura meets Secretary Powell in Tokyo.

Oct. 25, 2004: Powell said the U.S. has "never asked Japan for any change in the interpretation of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Article 6" (the "Far East" clause).

Oct. 25, 2004: Japan agrees to partially resume imports of U.S. beef from animals with birth records of up to 20 months after a 10-month ban.

Oct. 26, 2004: House of Representatives Speaker Yohei Kono expresses concern about U.S. military command transfer to Japan.

Oct. 26-28, 2004: Japan hosts Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) Maritime Interdiction Exercise. Japan, U.S., France, and Australia participate in the exercise while 18 other countries send observers.

Oct. 27, 2004: The government decides effective Nov. 1 to extend the current deployment of MSDF vessels in the Indian Ocean until May 1, 2005, under an antiterror special measures law.

Oct. 27, 2004: Japan refuses terrorists' demand to withdraw SDF from Iraq even though terrorists have threatened to behead 24-year-old Shosei Koda, a Japanese hostage.

Nov. 1, 2004: Japan condemns brutal slaying of Koda, but vows to keep SDF in Iraq.

Nov. 1, 2004: Rocket attack on Japanese forces in Samawah.

Nov. 2, 2004: U.S. Army Sgt. Charles Jenkins found guilty of desertion, and sentenced to 30 days confinement and a dishonorable discharge.

Nov. 4, 2004: Democratic Party of Japan leader Okada Katsuya tells U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker of party's opposition to SDF presence in Iraq.

Nov. 5, 2004: SDF camp in Iraq comes under attack again; no injuries sustained.

Nov. 9, 2004: Koizumi says troops in Iraq are still in a "noncombat zone," despite the Iraqi government declaring a state of emergency for most of the nation. (The noncombat zone designation is a prerequisite for SDF troops to operate in Iraq under a special law authorizing the mission.)

Nov. 9, 2004: Japan says U.S. hasn't asked it to keep the SDF in Iraq, following comments by Ambassador Baker in which he said the U.S. hopes Japan will keep its troops there.

Nov. 18, 2004: U.S. dollar hits seven-month low against yen (USD \$1= ¥104), after Treasury Secretary John Snow's says that the U.S. government is comfortable with the dollar's decline. Japanese officials warned they would take action against the yen's excessive rise against the dollar.

Nov. 19, 2004: Defense head Ono meets with Secretary Rumsfeld, Vice President Cheney, and Deputy Secretary Armitage in Washington to discuss security issues. Ono tells Cheney that there is a close relationship between Japan's review of the National Defense Program Outline and the transformation of U.S. forces.

Nov 20, 2004: Japan proposes easing of weapons export ban to allow exports of weapons jointly developed and manufactures with either the U.S. or a multinational project centered on the U.S.

Nov. 20, 2004: Koizumi and Bush discuss military realignment, strong dollar, Iraq, and North Korea during APEC summit in Santiago.

Nov. 28, 2004: U.S. deserter Sgt. Charles Jenkins released ahead of Dec. 3 scheduled release date.

Nov. 28, 2004: Defense Agency chief Ono hints SDF could be out of Iraq by December 2005.

Dec. 10, 2004: Japan Security Council and Cabinet approves of the “National Defense Program Guideline for FY 2005 and After” (the new NDPG) and the “Mid-Term Defense Build-up Plan (FY2005-FY2009)”(the new MTDBP).

Dec. 13, 2004: Deputy Secretary Armitage urges Japan to avoid economic sanctions on North Korea because Pyongyang could use such a move as a tool to “outmaneuver” its adversaries.

Dec. 14, 2004: U.S. Ambassador Howard Baker backs Japan’s bid for United Nations Security Council seat with veto power.

Dec. 16, 2004: Cabinet and coalition approve extension of SDF deployment in Iraq for one more year.

Dec. 17, 2004: Japan adopts new National Defense Program Outline to pursue “multifunctional, flexible and effective” defense buildup to deal with terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as well as other threats to security.

Dec. 17, 2004: Ambassador Baker says he is “stepping down and would leave Japan Feb. 17, 2005.”

Dec. 17, 2004: Japan and the U.S. sign MOU to improve cooperation in their missile defense programs and related projects. The agreement was signed by the Japanese defense chief, Yoshinori Ono, and the U.S. ambassador, Howard Baker.

Dec. 20, 2004: Japan agrees to contribute \$60 million (¥66 billion) as additional support for the Middle East peace process.

Dec. 20, 2004: Japan to reduce defense spending by 1 percent next fiscal year, marking the third annual cut in a row, while increasing investment in the development of a U.S.-led missile defense system.

Dec. 21, 2004: Japan and U.S. hold meeting of working-level officials in Tokyo to discuss realigning U.S. Forces Japan.

Dec. 24, 2004: *Daily Yomiuri* reports that Japan and U.S. agree on joint use of U.S. military bases in Japan by the U.S. military and SDF. Details of what the phrase “transfer of jurisdiction” entails will depend on future bilateral consultations.

Dec. 26, 2004: Defense Department's Defense Security Cooperation Agency reports that Japan is No. 2 arms buyer for U.S. Foreign Military Sales program. Japan spent \$1.3 billion (about ¥135 billion) on U.S. arms last year.

Dec. 29, 2004: FM Machimura and Secretary Powell agree in a telephone conversation to establish a structure for international cooperation to help victims of the powerful earthquake and tsunamis.

Dec. 29, 2004: President Bush announces that the U.S., Australia, Japan, and India will form an international coalition to lead relief efforts after the devastating earthquake and tsunami that claimed more than 150,000 lives. The U.S. has already pledged \$35 million and sent its navy to help the aid effort.