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Jointly Managing the Japan-US Alliance: New Options for a Pivotal Japan

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Introduction:

Japan has been America's ally for a remarkably long time. Insisting that they have no option but to depend on the United States for national security, Japanese leaders have now made the military relationship more intimate than ever. An alliance once designed to protect Japan, help contain the Soviet Union, and reassure Japan's neighbors is now openly redirected toward the maintenance of global peace and security-- and increasingly toward potential containment of China.[1]

This, because the tectonic plates of global and Asian security are shifting. With the Soviet Union gone, the United States is unchallenged and there is no longer a global balance of power. Meanwhile, China is rising. It has displaced the United States as Japan's largest trading partner, and has begun to display, if not flex, coercive muscle. North Korea has become a de facto nuclear power with demonstrated missile capability to reach all of Japan, while U.S. forces are being reduced and redeployed in the Republic of Korea. Japan is reacting to these growing uncertainties by hugging the US closely, while actively developing capabilities of its own to hedge against the risks of a rapidly changing security environment and by optimizing possibilities for economic gain.

Domestic politics have also been transformed in ways that affect Japanese security policy. Public support for the Japanese military-- and for constitutional changes that will provide it more legitimacy-- have never been stronger. Both the newly reinvented LDP and its major opposition party, the DPJ, support revision of Article Nine and the Japanese defense industry appears finally to be gaining traction in its effort to participate in global markets.

Given these fundamental changes in international and Japanese domestic politics, we witness an evolution in Japanese security strategy and, consequently, in the US-Japan alliance. As one observer has pointed out with particular clarity, Japan has elected to "jointly manage the United States' continuing hegemonic presence in the region."[2] "Joint management of hegemony" is, of course, a blunt way to describe the more equitable and balanced security relationship that is in the works. Such a development suggests that Japan's junior partnership with the United States is slipping into history. The question, then, is how a more muscular Japan will position itself to be more pivotal. The answer depends on whether Japan comes to see itself

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[1] See Przystup, 2005, for a comprehensive account of these changes.
[2] Taniguchi. 2005, p.457.

as a great or middle power, and whether it will define its role in regional or global terms.[3] It also depends on the way Tokyo balances its need to hedge against risk against its chance to optimize for gain.

Scholars and practitioners have operated with four assumptions about the nature of Japanese security policy: 1) that it started afresh in 1945; 2) that "pacifism" was the ideological touchstone after 1945; 3) that U.S. and Japanese interests overlap more than they diverge; and 4) that Japanese leaders have comfortably followed the U.S. lead and have been unable to develop strategic plans to guide Japanese policy choice. Let us reexamine each briefly before considering where this all might be headed.

1) Fresh Start?

Important continuities in Japanese discourse stretch across the Pacific War-- particularly its geo-strategic elements. Although often depicted as monolithic, Japan's foreign policy repertoire-- like America's-- has been variegated, its discourse kaleidoscopic.[4] There were pre- and postwar "Big Japanists" (those who preferred Japan to be a great power); there were pre- and postwar "Small Japanists" (those who preferred Japan to be a merchant state); there were pre- and postwar "Asianists" (those who viewed Japan as a leading regional actor); and there were pre- and postwar "Nationalists" (those who viewed Japan as unique and believed in its special mission abroad). Some held cosmopolitan and liberal aspirations for Japan, others insular and militarist ones. Still others were Gaullists. While policy intellectuals often held contradictory, overlapping, and shifting views-- as the cases of Nitobe Inazou and Ishibashi Tanzan illustrate-- hotly debated ideas converged into a consensus on national strategy twice before-- in the 1930s Konouye consensus on the New Order in Asia and (more productively) in the 1950s Yoshida Doctrine.

Today, in the early 21st century, another active debate on strategic ideas is well underway. The consensus chiseled out by Yoshida Shigeru, which prescribed a small, merchant Japan dependent upon the United States, is beginning to unravel.[5] It is useful to speculate about what, if any, grand strategy will replace it-- and at what pace.

2) Pacifism?

We can rule out pacifism. It has been a half-century since the Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) were established. During that period, there has been unchallenged civilian control of the military and the SDF has been reinvented as "reliable and warm-hearted."[6] Generations of

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[3] The 2002 (Akashi) Report of the Kokusai Heiwa Kyouryoku Kondankai was the first to address explicitly the ways in which Japanese security depended upon global security. The Akashi Report is available at: http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/sing/kokusai/kettei/021218houkoku.html). The 2004 Araki Report followed this by speaking of the need for the alliance to "contribute to regional and global peace and security." See Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, ed. 2004, p.9. A more expansive notion of "the globalization of the US-Japan Alliance" (*Nichibei Ampou Guroubaruka)* is described in Asahi Shimbun Jieitai 50 Nen Shuzaihan, ed. 2005. See also the *Tokyo Shimbun* 11 August 2005.

[4] On the U.S. case, see MacDougall, 1999 and Mead, 2002.

[5] Historian Kenneth Pyle makes this suggestion in his forthcoming study for the Century Foundation, *Japan and the Primacy of Foreign Policy*.

[6] *Bouei Hakusho* (Defense White Paper), Tokyo: Boueichou, 2002. See also Frühstück, Sabine and B.A. Eyal. 2002, pp.1-40. "Civilian control" often has meant "bureaucratic control," and it is only in the past decade that politicians (with the support of the media) have stepped up pressure on the bureaucrats to stand aside. See Ishiba Shigeru. 2005 for an account by one such politician. For analysis of Japanese civil-military relations and the role of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, see: Samuels, 2004.

Japanese leaders have painstakingly cultivated the image of Japan as a "peace-loving, responsible" member of the United Nations-centered world community. The Japanese public now accepts the SDF as a legitimate unit of government.

This took so long because pacifists opposed to the very idea of a Japanese military were one of three major political blocs when Japan's postwar security strategy was being forged. But they, and the pragmatists in the LDP mainstream who tacitly allied with them, have been marginalized by anti-mainstream conservatives who now command an unprecedented two-thirds majority in the Diet.[7] Article Nine, the "pacifist" impediment to national autonomy, national muscularity, and national honesty, may no longer have to be continuously reinterpreted. The Koizumi Cabinet is committed to a combination of constitutional revision and reinterpretation that would formally legitimate the collective self-defense that is already essentially in place. The Japanese military is one of the best equipped in the world today. The domestic and international political landscapes have shifted, and the Japanese people have made their choice openly for a more erect Japanese posture in world affairs.

The larger point here is that Japanese foreign and security policy was never the simple product of a widespread, defeat-induced "anti-militarist ethos." It was always based upon the realities of international affairs, domestic politics, and on a realist conception of possibilities in a hostile world-- and there is no reason to expect otherwise going forward.

Consider the progressive erosion of many of the "pacifist" fundamentals. In 1981, Prime Minister Suzuki committed Japan to defending the sea-lanes out to 1,000 nautical miles, and today there is serious discussion about extending this commitment to 6,000 nautical miles.[8] In 1983, Prime Minister Nakasone opened the door for defense technology cooperation with the United States. And today this cooperation is on the verge of rapid expansion, as co-development of missile defense suggests. After the 1991 Gulf War, Japanese troops were sent across the globe to keep peace under United Nations auspices. Then, in the wake of the Al Qaeda attacks on New York City and Washington, DC in September 2001, Japanese naval forces were ordered to sail to the Indian Ocean and, in 2003, Japanese boots hit the Iraqi ground without UN cover. In 1969, Japan committed to the peaceful use of space, but following the 1998 North Korean missile test in Japanese airspace, a quick decision was made to introduce satellite surveillance and a commitment to ballistic missile defense followed shortly thereafter. The 2004 National Defense Program Outline introduced new missions in counter-guerilla warfare and counter-terrorism. New equipment is on order-- transport planes, aerial refueling tankers, and assault ships that will enable Japanese forces to reach out and touch adversaries. So will "counter coercion" armaments such as cruise missiles, should that proposal go forward. Meanwhile, there is open discussion of relaxing the legal constraints on the use of armed force (*buryoku*).[9]

It has not been the ghosts of militarists past who have driven these developments, as some Japanese pacifists and others elsewhere in Asia have claimed. Rather, they have been part of an evolving, fundamentally realist "hedging" policy by pragmatic Japanese leaders seeking to square the circle of maintaining a robust alliance and developing a vigorous regional economy at the same time.[10] One journalist, before becoming a MOFA spokesman, wrote that "Tokyo has

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[7] For a detailed analysis of these three groups, see: Boyd and Samuels, 2004 and 2005.

[8] Taniguchi, 2005, p.453 refers to the deployment of the MSDF to the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea as "quasi-permanent."

[9] Former JDA Director General Ishiba Shigeru has noted that the SDF was not yet legally empowered to defend Japanese assets in the EEZ, even though the UN Law of the Sea allows it. *Sankei Shimbun* 1 October 2005.

[10] See Heginbotham and Samuels, 2002.

been able since the end of World War II to purchase its marine insurance policy solely from the United States."[11]

But Japan's evolving hedge by now involves more than just the purchase of insurance. To be sure, Japan relies on its alliance with the United States to protect against military threats. On the other hand, however, it relies on different partners, including some the United States identifies as present or potential security threats, to protect against economic uncertainties and dangers. Using the U.S. alliance as a military shield and other economic relationships as a mercantile sword has required Japan to rely on diplomacy for the sometimes tricky task of harmonizing the military and economic aspects of its strategy. Importantly, Japan's diplomats also have access to an economic tool shed containing trowels as well as swords. While the swords are used to protect and deter, the trowels are used to build. After all, investment for gain is different than insurance against risk. Still, each is a component of comprehensive security. And so, Japanese leaders build regional economic institutions as well as military capabilities.

Most agree that for the foreseeable future, the U.S. military is still needed to maintain the regional security community if wealth is to continue to be generated. They are hopeful that behind this shield, Japan will lead the region. They prefer the use of the trowel over the use of the sword. Some are more ambivalent. For them Japan should be-- and act like-- a great power. Great powers use many tools, often simultaneously. For others, this is a recipe for disaster. But for most, it seems that the most prudent course is to hedge for the time being while new military capabilities and new economic modalities are added to Japan's comprehensive security portfolio.

Indeed, there is an evolving discourse about the most appropriate strategy for Japan. Professor Tanaka Akihiko, a leading policy intellectual, frames the balance between Japan's security hedge and economic optimization very persuasively. Japan, he says, needs "a strategy to prevent the worst while trying to construct the best." "Preventing the worst" requires a strong alliance with the United States and a more global role in international security affairs. Building an East Asian Community that resembles the stable, prosperous, integrated Western Europe would go a long way toward "constructing the best."[12] Another analyst, Itou Kenichi, a former diplomat now directing a foreign policy think tank in Tokyo, is somewhat less sanguine about the efficacy of the alliance. He argues for a sharper hedge, a grand strategy that will enable it to navigate between "declining American power and growing Chinese strength" so that it can avoid "subservience" to either.[13] A leading business think-tanker, Terashima Jitsurou, suggests that the alliance may have become a liability, and prefers that Japan stake out its relationship with the United States from a greater distance.[14] Okamoto Yukio, another former diplomat, is more confident of US power and reliability. He makes the dual hedge argument with exceptional clarity, arguing that "America can be Japan's ally in security affairs, but I do not think it can be an ally in economic affairs."[15] Finally, Soeya Yoshihide, has argued for a "middle power Japan" which retains (and contributes to) the alliance with the United States, but which builds more autonomous capabilities and finds common cause with other states that eschew great power

[11] Taniguchi, 2005, op.cit., p.456.
[12] Testimony by Professor Tanaka Akihiko to the House of Representatives Budget Committee, 23 February 2005. Elsewhere Professor Tanaka uses the example of the US relationship to NATO (in) and the EU (out) as a model for a possible East Asian future. See *Mainichi Shimbun* 23 July 2005.
[13] Itou, 2000.
[14] Terashima speaks of the US as a "worn out superpower" (*tsukarehateta choutaikoku*). See *Gendai* 1 February 2005. Also see his interviews in *Zaikai* May 2005 and in *Ronza* February 2005.
[15] Okamoto, 2002, p.36.

ambitions.[16] There is a vigorous debate about how best to reconcile the potential for Asian economic growth with the continuation of the Japan-U.S. alliance. Analysts disagree about modalities, but maintain an unwavering focus on national interests while evaluating threats and interests very realistically.

3) Overlapping or Diverging Interests?

Interests are the base for any realist calculation-- and shared interests (along with shared values) are the base for any alliance relationship. It is worth reminding ourselves that Japan's dual hedge notwithstanding, the United States and Japan share a great many vital interests, the most significant among which are:

1. Preserving stability among great and aspiring powers.
2. Preserving of the safety of the sea lanes of communication (SLOCs) throughout East and Southeast Asia.
3. Maintaining leadership roles in regional and global institutions.
4. Pacification of the Korean Peninsula.
5. Peace in the Taiwan Strait.
6. Defense against terrorism.
7. Avoiding the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to unfriendly states and non-state actors.
8. Ensuring the independence of Indochina and Southeast Asia.[17]

Although most Japanese national security interests coincide with American ones, two points seem relevant. First, even shared interests do not translate directly into shared policy. For example, the Republic of Korea (ROK) shares each of the interests listed above, yet the ROK has embarked on a very different path from Japan vis-à-vis its alliance with the United States.[18] It is possible that the rise of China may have different meaning for Japan than for the ROK-- though it may be that the ROK is simply ahead of Japan in distancing itself from the United States. It is also possible that for both nations, regional peace and stability may have more immediacy than for the United States. In contrast, WMD-terrorist links to the Middle East has far more immediacy to the United States than to the ROK or Japan. These are precisely the sorts of differences-- born in part from different geo-politics and in part from different ideologies-- that contribute to the growing gap in perspectives even when interests are shared.

Should we expect the same logic to apply to the U.S. Japan economic relationship? Japanese trade with Asia as a percentage of its total trade is nearly twice that of the United States-- and is growing. Even allowing that some of this trade is U.S.-bound, the growth of Sino-Japanese interdependence elevates regional integration-- not a U.S. priority-- to near the top of Japan's agenda. Indeed, the United States has repeatedly expressed its displeasure with being sidelined while an East Asian economic community is being built. But the building proceeds.

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[16] Soeya, 2005.

[17] Przystup, 2005, op.cit. speaks of "an ongoing convergence of a common strategic vision" (p.2). An earlier version of this list appeared in Samuels and Twomey, 1999. In February 2005, the US-Japan Consultative Committee issued a similar list.

[18] Dujarric, 2005.

Thus, we are drawn to consider the geographic and functional areas where U.S. and Japanese interests may diverge.[19] As the issues of East Asian economic integration and Japanese permanent membership on the UN Security Council suggest, the United States and Japan may hold different ideas about leadership of regional and international institutions. This is normal between allies, even if not always appreciated. Differences about how to interact with Iran and the DPRK have been more open, but even these critical issues seem fundamentally less important than the larger question how to manage the rise of China.

Of course, both the United States and Japan have a shared interest in the smooth integration of a stable and wealthy China. It was less clear until this year, however, that the United States and Japan were on the same page vis-à-vis the future of Taiwan. The declaration at the February 2005 "2+2" meeting that peaceful resolution of the Taiwan issue is a common strategic objective does not change the geo-strategic fact that once Taiwan becomes part of the PRC, whether democratic or not, Japanese control of the SLOCs in the South and East China Seas may be compromised.[20] Likewise, while pacification of the Korean peninsula is a shared interest, there may be fundamental differences in U.S. and Japanese preferences on final outcomes.

Finally, while the economic frictions of the 1980s have largely abated, it seems increasingly unlikely that the United States will continue to indulge Japan with extended deterrence and access to technology without receiving the sort of increased in-kind security cooperation that missile defense co-development seems to offer. Push may indeed come to shove at some point, but it is fortunate for the alliance that today's Japanese leadership is eager to provide that cooperation on the view that it makes Japan stronger as well as safer.

The US-Japan alliance has been a resilient relationship that has served both nations' interests for more than half a century. Still, the shifting balance of relative power in East Asia could strain it, especially if one or the other partner opts for a smooth adjustment to Chinese power or to North Korean nuclearization while the other resists it. Similarly, invoking the prohibition on collective defense could seriously debilitate cooperation on missile defense.[21] We should also expect strain if a gap grows between the rhetoric and practice of Japanese security policy or if new leaders, with different preferences, emerge.

4) **Follower, Partner, or Independent Actor?**

As the preceding analysis suggests, there need not be a sharp divergence of interests for the United States and Japan to opt for different modalities, or for Japan to elect to hedge against risk. Indeed, as we have seen, the idea of a U.S. "insurance policy" suggests that Japan has been doing this all along. Long-held assumptions about the inability of Japanese leaders to think and act strategically undervalue their proven ability to manage their much stronger alliance partner and to set a steady course in foreign and security policy. The key alliance dynamic may become the ability and willingness of Japan to become a fuller, more equitable, and sovereign alliance partner-- and the willingness of the United States to accept it as such. Calls for "autonomy" and

[19] Green, 2001, p. 277, suggests that divergences between U.S. and Japanese interests are "primarily tactical" and marginal to the shared core interests. He adds that although Japan has forged coalitions to constrain the United States, Japan simply has too few reasonable alternatives to the alliance for this divergence to amount to much.
[20] Taniguchi, 2005, op.cit., p.456. Not everyone agrees. Some US analysts think that the acquisition of Taiwan by the PRC will not significantly enhance PLAN influence in the East and South China Seas.
[21] Lim, 2005.

"fuller reciprocity" are heard in both countries, but it is not yet clear if autonomy is possible, or if everyone really fully appreciates its implications.[22]

Once a reduction in asymmetry is achieved, the alliance should be able to continue to adapt and survive-- though the dangers of entrapment and abandonment by the alliance partner will now extend more clearly to the United States as well. Whether focused on the stable integration of China, on defense against a hostile DPRK, or on some other shared interest, we should expect a continued internal rebalancing of alliance roles and missions. At a minimum, reduced asymmetry will require the doctrinal acceptance of collective defense-- and it could mean much more, even including the possibility of a revised security treaty.

There are no foregone conclusions, however. There also exists the possibility that Japan could elect to balance Chinese power on its own. In doing so, it might entrap the United States into a conflict Washington was not seeking. Alternatively, Tokyo might elect to accommodate to Chinese hegemony in the region. Taniguchi's "insurance policy" is transferable. In his view: "(I)n the event that Taiwan falls to China, Japan (and Korea) will find themselves buying insurance policies from Beijing."[23] Then again, Tokyo may elect to self-insure. A stronger and more equitable alliance with the United States would provide Japan with the wherewithal and incentive to resist both options.

Conclusion:

Although some Japanese continue to express anxiety about U.S. "Japan passing," Washington clearly understands that "for the United States, the alliance with Japan remains the keystone of U.S. involvement in Asia and is central to America's global strategy."[24] It is also clear, though, that the alliance has now sailed off into uncharted water. Certainly, the alliance may yet become more reciprocal and "mature," just as the 2000 Armitage/Nye Report hoped. In that event, joint roles and missions will be even more deeply institutionalized and collective self-defense will at last be accepted doctrine. Alternatively, the alliance may yet return to the water's edge for any number of reasons, not the least of which would include shifting perceptions of the importance of the China relationship and the gains to be derived there from. Thus, it is most likely that Japan's evolving hedge-- comprising both risk minimization and gain optimization-- will become the tool of choice to maintain peace and prosperity in the neighborhood simultaneously.

In short, the game is on in Tokyo. Japanese policy intellectuals are sorting out their options realistically and a third moment of historic consensus may be in the offing. This consensus is by no means likely to undercut the alliance in the near term. Moreover, it should go without saying that that militarist Asianists will not dominate the agenda as they did in the 1930s. Much political reporting to the contrary, there are none of them left. But it is also unlikely that the new consensus will revolve around either the low profile, cheap riding liberal internationalism that Yoshida Shigeru preferred-- or the corked bottle that the Americans once supervised. Indeed, those days also have expired-- just as Yoshida said they would.[25]

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[22] The most influential expression by senior leaders of the hope for a closer, more equitable relationship was probably the so-called Armitage-Nye Report in 2000. See Institute for National Strategic Studies, ed., 2000. There are differing views of autonomy. Professor Tanaka, for one, is clear about the limits to what Japan can achieve as a single actor. See his 23 February 2005 testimony to the Lower House Budget Committee, op.cit. For further discussion of autonomy see Soeya, 2005, op.cit. On reciprocity, see Morimoto, 2005.

[23] Taniguchi, 2005, op.cit., p.456.

[24] Przystup, 2005, op.cit., p.4.

[25] See Yoshida, 1963.

The changes within Japan and between Japan and the rest of the world seem to converge on a Japan that will have greater degrees of freedom in international affairs. This time, we should not expect Japan to be as central to world affairs as it sought to be in the 1930s, nor as marginal as it became in the 1950s-1990s. We should expect Japan to construct for itself—hopefully with US support-- a policy space in which it can be pivotal in regional and world affairs. Indeed, we might expect a more global security role because an enhanced regional one is likely to continue to inflame neighbors' passions and be counterproductive. Thus, while the outcome is not yet clear, four procedural elements are:

1) Japan has moved from a passive to active alliance relationship[26],
2) The scope of this relationship has shifted from highly local to regional and global,
3) A dual hedge strategy is continuing to evolve, and
4) Tokyo will acquire capabilities enabling it more fully to engage its own interests on its own terms.

Japan is doing what all states do to reduce risk and optimize gain in an uncertain world--it hedges. Nothing could be more "normal." It is not yet ready to let go of the United States--and, indeed, it may never wish to do so. Certainly it is not in U.S. interests to force Japan's hand. But let us be clear about what we are seeing: While Japan seems to be allowing itself to become more dependent than ever on the United States for military security, this dependence is balanced by new economic opportunities and greater military capability. Viewed this way, hedging is not only a way for Japan to reduce risk, but is also a way to create options. It is likely that when the repositioning and debates currently underway are resolved, Japan will not only have provided itself more security options than it now enjoys, but it will have done so on its own terms.

This paper was prepared for the IIPS Symposium entitled, "Japan's Role in the Forthcoming World Order" held in Tokyo on November 2-3, 2005. It is a prototype for the author's forthcoming book, *Securing Japan*, in which the ideas are more fully developed.

[26] See Hughes, 2004, p.24 for his view of this.

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