

The U.S.-Japan Alliance

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Summary

The U.S.-Japan alliance has long been an anchor of the U.S. security role in Asia. Forged in the U.S. occupation of Japan after its defeat in World War II, the alliance provides a platform for U.S. military readiness in the Pacific. About 53,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Japan and have the exclusive use of 89 facilities. In exchange, the United States guarantees Japan's security. Security challenges in the region, particularly nuclear and missile tests by North Korea and increased Chinese maritime activities, have reinforced U.S.-Japan cooperation in recent years. The vitality of the alliance is particularly salient as the Obama Administration renews its focus on the Asia-Pacific region through a strategic "rebalancing." The U.S.-Japan alliance, missing a strategic anchor since the end of the Cold War, may have found a new guiding rationale in shaping the environment for China's rise.

Since the early 2000s, the United States and Japan have taken significant strides in improving the operational capability of the alliance as a combined force, despite constraints. In addition to serving as hub for forward-deployed U.S. forces, Japan provides its own advanced military assets, many of which complement U.S. forces. The joint response to a 2011 tsunami and earthquake in Japan demonstrated the interoperability of the two. Cooperation on ballistic missile defense and new attention to the cyber and space domains has also been strong. Japan's own defense policy has continued to evolve, and major strategic documents reflect a new attention to operational readiness and flexibility.

Steady progress on an initiative to realign U.S. forces based in Japan has been overshadowed by the failure to resolve difficult basing issues on Okinawa, the major U.S. forward logistics base in the Asia-Pacific. Congressional leaders have raised concerns about the cost of relocating Marines to Guam and, as a result, imposed stringent restrictions on U.S. funding for the realignment. The sustainability of the U.S. military presence on Okinawa remains a critical challenge for the alliance.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is a strong supporter of the alliance and has an ambitious agenda to increase the capability and flexibility of Japan's military. Japanese politics have stabilized after five years of divided rule, creating opportunity for more predictable alliance planning. However, constitutional, legal, fiscal, and political barriers exist to significantly expand defense cooperation. The most prominent debate involves relaxing or removing the self-imposed ban on Japanese forces participating in collective self-defense. Such measures face opposition from the public and from political parties. In addition, leaders in China and South Korea distrust Abe because of his past statements on Japanese actions in the World War II era. Suspicion from Beijing and Seoul also complicates Japan's efforts to expand its security role.

Japan faces a complex security landscape in the region. North Korea's increased asymmetric capabilities pose a direct threat to Japan. A territorial dispute with China over a set of islets in the East China Sea raises the risk of military escalation, a scenario that could trigger U.S. treaty obligations to defend Japan. Japan has pursued security cooperation with others in the region, including Australia and several Southeast Asian countries. Of increasing concern to the United States is the tense relationship with South Korea that has prevented effective trilateral coordination and, in the views of some, degraded U.S. credibility in the region. Without cooperation among its allies, the United States may find itself less able to respond to North Korean missile threats and to influence China's behavior.

Both Japan and the United States face significant fiscal challenges. Limited resources could strain alliance capabilities as well as produce more contentious negotiations on cost-sharing. The Japanese government provides nearly \$2 billion per year to offset the cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan. The United States spends an additional \$2 billion per year (on top of the Japanese contribution) on non-personnel costs for troops stationed in Japan.

This report will be updated to reflect major developments in the alliance.

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Introduction

The U.S.-Japan alliance, forged in the U.S. occupation of Japan after its defeat in World War II, provides a platform for U.S. military readiness in Asia. Under the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, about 53,000 U.S. troops are stationed in Japan and have the exclusive use of 89 facilities throughout the archipelago.¹ Okinawa hosts 37 of the facilities and is the major U.S. forward logistics base in the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S.-Japan alliance was originally constructed as a fundamentally asymmetric arrangement—Japan hosts U.S. military bases in exchange for a one-sided security guarantee—but this partnership has shifted toward more equality. (See the **Appendix** for historical background.) Japan boasts its own sophisticated defense assets and the two militaries have improved bilateral capabilities as a combined force.

The U.S.-Japan alliance has endured several geopolitical transitions, at times flourishing and at other moments seeming adrift. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the organizing principles of the Cold War became obsolete, forcing the United States and Japan to readjust the alliance. The shock of the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 ushered in a period of rejuvenated military ties, raising expectations that Japan would move toward a more forward-leaning defense posture and shed the pacifist limitations that have at times frustrated U.S. defense officials. However, the partnership struggled to sustain itself politically in the late 2000s; a softening of U.S. policy toward North Korea by the George W. Bush Administration dismayed Tokyo, and the stalled implementation of a base relocation on Okinawa disappointed Washington. After the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came to power in September 2009, Tokyo hinted that it might seek a more Asia-centric policy and resisted the agreement to relocate the air base in Okinawa.

A series of provocations by North Korea and increasingly aggressive maritime operations by China appeared to set the relationship back on course. From 2007 to 2012, unstable leadership and political paralysis in Tokyo slowed some bilateral security initiatives, but ultimately the turmoil that plagued Japanese politics may have reinforced Japan's commitment to the alliance. In the end, both the left-leaning DPJ and the conservative Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) reaffirmed the centrality of the partnership with the United States.

Despite broad strategic alignment, both the United States and Japan face restraints on their ability to enhance the alliance. Fiscal conditions and sequestration-induced cuts put pressure on defense budgets. Hosting U.S. troops puts strain on Japanese communities, particularly in Okinawa. Despite Prime Minister Abe's drive to upgrade Japan's security capabilities, it remains unclear whether the Japanese public has the appetite to shift Japan's fundamental post-war military posture. Revisions to the bilateral defense guidelines may depend heavily on Japanese legislative and bureaucratic decisions on controversial issues like Japan's ban on collective self-defense and offensive strike capability. Budgetary, legal, normative, and political constraints on Japan's military activities remain.

Meanwhile, China has continued its steep ascent as a regional giant. Emboldened by its own economic growth and a perception of U.S. decline, Beijing has asserted itself more forcefully in diplomatic and military arenas, including direct challenges to Japan's territorial rights over a set

¹ Of the 53,000 U.S. military personnel based in Japan, about 39,000 are stationed onshore and about 14,000 are afloat in nearby waters. Source: U.S. Forces Japan.

of islets in the East China Sea. As the United States extracted itself from wars in the Middle East, Washington's attention turned more forthrightly to the Asia-Pacific region. On the economic front, the United States is seeking to build trade and strategic connections to the Asia-Pacific through the 12-country Trans-Pacific Partnership free trade agreement, now under negotiation. The Obama Administration's "rebalance" to the Pacific was seen by many as a reaction to China's rise, despite insistence by U.S. leaders that the "pivot" is not a containment policy.² The U.S.-Japan alliance, missing a strategic anchor since the end of the Cold War, may have found a new guiding rationale in shaping the environment for China's rise.

Although the emphasis on the Asia-Pacific in many ways makes Japan more central to U.S. foreign policy, the renewed attention to the region may also open up new defense partnerships that could displace elements of Japan's strategic importance. The United States has pursued new basing arrangements with countries in Southeast Asia that could host rotations of troops or other assets: Singapore, the Philippines, Australia, and Malaysia have, to varying degrees, allowed or indicated a willingness to provide expanded access to the United States, although the vast majority of U.S. military assets in Asia will remain in Japan and South Korea for the foreseeable future.

A particularly complicating factor for U.S. defense officials is the diplomatic dissonance between Japan and South Korea. The downturn in Seoul-Tokyo relations since 2012 not only thwarts trilateral defense cooperation but also, to many, degrades U.S. credibility in the region because two of its closest treaty allies do not appear willing to cooperate on a shared strategic vision. Without cooperation among its allies, the United States may find itself less able to respond to North Korean missile threats and to influence China's behavior.

Congress has expressed considerable interest in the alliance for a range of reasons. Some Members of Congress have focused on strategic issues, particularly China's military expansion into maritime and airspace domains, leading to congressional resolutions and letters that largely support Japan's position in territorial disputes. Many of the concerns from Members of Congress center on the costs associated with the alliance, particularly the price tag on the realignment of marines to Guam. A 2013 Senate Armed Services Committee inquiry into the cost of the U.S. overseas military presence once again raised the issue of appropriate burden-sharing with Japan.

Toward a More Equal Alliance Partnership

The asymmetric arrangement of the U.S.-Japan alliance has moved toward a more balanced security partnership in the 21st century. Unlike 25 years ago, the SDF is now active in overseas missions, including efforts in the 2000s to support U.S.-led coalition operations in Afghanistan and the reconstruction of Iraq. Japanese military contributions to global operations like counter-piracy patrols relieve some of the burden on the U.S. military to manage every security challenge. Advances in SDF capabilities give Japan a potent deterrent force that complements the capabilities of U.S. forces, for example in anti-submarine warfare. Due to the co-location of U.S. and Japanese command facilities in recent years, coordination and communication have become more integrated. The United States and Japan have been steadily enhancing bilateral cooperation in many peripheral aspects of the alliance, such as ballistic missile defense, cybersecurity, and

² For more information, see CRS Report R42448, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia*, coordinated by Mark E. Manyin.

military use of space. Alongside these improvements, Japan continues to pay nearly \$2 billion per year to defray the cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan.

Abe Administration Security Agenda

Although Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has emphasized improving Japan's struggling economy, he has been a staunch advocate of a more assertive security posture for Japan, both in terms of policies and physical capabilities. During his first term as Prime Minister in 2006-2007, he upgraded the Japanese Defense Agency to a full-fledged ministry for the first time since the end of World War II and has argued for changing the name of the Self Defense Forces to a "National Defense Force." However, unlike in his first term, Abe has a solid political foundation to pursue his security priorities. The ruling party controls both chambers of the Japanese parliament, known as the Diet, with no elections required until summer 2016. This period of expected stability follows a prolonged stretch of divided government between 2007 and 2012, when six different men served as Prime Minister, each for about one year.

The reform of Japanese security policy has been underway for decades, but Abe has accelerated the trend of moving toward a more "normal" military posture. Abe supports amending Japan's constitution to allow greater operational flexibility for the SDF and has established a National Security Council to facilitate more integrated decision-making on foreign policy. The new National Security Council, which will begin meeting in December 2013, is expected to foster centralized, strategic policy-making under the guidance of the Prime Minister's office, supported by the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs. Abe also authorized the first increase in the defense budget in years upon entering office (see "Fiscal Constraints" section). He has been a stalwart supporter of the U.S. alliance, including the controversial plan to relocate a Marine Corps base in Okinawa. As of early December 2013, the LDP-controlled Diet appeared on the verge of passing a controversial State Secrets bill, which would facilitate U.S.-Japan intelligence sharing by introducing a new classification system and imposing harsher penalties on leaks.

Together with his strong security credentials, Abe brings to the office a reputation as a nationalist, a distinction that has drawn concern from South Korea and China. In the course of his political career, Abe has periodically made statements that question whether Japan has been unjustly criticized for aggression during the World War II era. In April 2013, Abe made statements to the Diet that appeared to suggest that his government may not reaffirm an existing historical apology to the victims of imperial Japan. Since then, however, he has reaffirmed the apology and refrained from visiting a controversial shrine that honors Japan's wartime dead, in an apparent effort to avoid offending Japan's neighbors. Security analysts point out, however, that Abe's defense reforms essentially bring Japanese policies in select areas up to the level of other developed countries, while leaving other constraints in place. Relations with Beijing and Seoul continued to deteriorate in late 2013. To many U.S. observers, Abe brings both positive and negative qualities to the alliance, at once bolstering it but also renewing historical animosities that complicate the regional security environment.

Challenges to a Deeper Alliance Partnership

Constitutional and Legal Constraints

Several legal factors restrict Japan's ability to cooperate more robustly with the United States. The most prominent and fundamental is Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, drafted by American officials during the post-war occupation, that outlaws war as a "sovereign right" of Japan and prohibits "the right of belligerency." It stipulates that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." However, Japan has interpreted the article to mean that it can maintain a military for self-defense purposes and, since 1991, has allowed the SDF to participate in non-combat roles overseas in a number of U.N. peacekeeping operations (PKO) and in the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. The direct participation of the SDF in combat operations is considered to be unconstitutional.

The Debate Over Collective Self-Defense

Dating back to his first term in 2006-2007, Prime Minister Abe has shown a determination to adjust one highly asymmetric aspect of the alliance: the inability of Japan to defend U.S. forces or territory under attack. Japan possesses the right of collective self-defense, which is the right to defend another country that has been attacked by an aggressor,³ but exercising that right would violate Article 9 of the Japanese constitution, according to the Japanese government interpretation. The Cabinet Legislative Bureau has declared that defending a foreign country would exceed the minimum necessary use of force and thus would be unconstitutional.

Participation in non-combat logistical operations supporting other nations, however, has been considered outside the realm of collective self-defense. On the basis of special legislation, Japan has dispatched the SDF to the multilateral counter-piracy task force off the Horn of Africa, to Iraq for reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, and to the Indian Ocean to supply coalition forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom.

In early 2013, Abe reestablished an expert advisory panel (first created in 2007) to consider how Japan could adjust its policy on collective self-defense. If Japan decides to exercise the right of collective self-defense, it could have significant effects on U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation. For example, Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF, the naval branch of Japan's military) vessels could defend U.S. Navy vessels or other countries' ships that come under attack on the high seas; Japanese minesweepers could operate in a warzone; and the SDF could potentially conduct logistical support operations for U.S. troops fighting on the front lines of an overseas conflict. Although these changes would have a large impact on alliance cooperation, there are a number of legal and institutional obstacles in Japan that would inhibit full implementation in the near term, even if Japan decides to exercise the right of collective self-defense.⁴

³ Article 51 of the U.N. Charter provides that member nations may exercise the rights of both individual and collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs.

⁴ Ian Rinehart, "Collective Self-Defense and US-Japan Security Cooperation," East-West Center Working Papers, Politics, Governance and Security Series, No. 24, October 2013, <http://www.eastwestcenter.org/pubs/34298>.

Domestic political opposition to this policy shift slowed the LDP's apparent rush to make a change. Public opinion polls in August 2013 showed that slightly more Japanese oppose collective self-defense than support it.⁵ Criticism from Chinese and South Korean media has been loud, based on claims that exercising collective self-defense represents an aggressive security policy for Japan and a step toward "re-militarization."

Fiscal Constraints

Both Japan and the United States face serious fiscal constraints in their ability to maintain, let alone increase, defense budgets. Funding for new, expensive alliance initiatives appears to be limited; increased investments in new dimensions of alliance cooperation may come with trade-offs in existing or planned defense capabilities. In recent years, key Members of Congress have voiced concern about the rising costs of troop realignment plans and imposed strict restrictions on U.S. funding. Yet, U.S. and Japanese leaders have made rhetorical commitments to allocating a greater share of resources to bolstering the alliance.

After 10 consecutive years of defense spending reductions, the Japanese government increased its defense budget by 0.8% in FY2013. Over the last decade, Japan's defense budget has decreased by 5%, while China's grew by 270%, South Korea's by 45%, and Taiwan's by 14%.⁶ Prime Minister Abe has indicated a desire to boost defense spending, but past administrations have established a strong normative (not legally binding) ceiling of 1% of GDP. Thus, over the long term, Japan's defense budget will likely be tied to economic growth and the overall fiscal environment. With gross public debt at roughly 250% of GDP and rising costs of the social safety net, some analysts believe that it will be nearly impossible for Japan to significantly increase defense spending.

Since FY2013, the United States has implemented steep cuts in its defense budget, partly through the sequestration mechanism established in the 2011 Budget Control Act. On the other hand, since 2012 U.S. officials have repeatedly stressed that, as one aspect of the rebalancing strategy, U.S. military deployments to the Asia-Pacific region will not decrease and may even be enhanced in certain areas. Nevertheless, U.S. allies are concerned about the impact of these budget cuts. In testimony to Congress in March 2013, PACOM Commander Samuel Locklear stated, "[The sequestration budget cuts] also will ultimately, if allowed to, undermine the rebalance."⁷

Public Sentiment: How Far is Japan Willing to Go?

Japanese voters have given the LDP two consecutive victories in parliamentary elections, but polls indicate that the electorate's approval of Prime Minister Abe is based primarily on his efforts to revive the Japanese economy and not on security-related issues. Since World War II ended, the Japanese public has gradually changed from its pacifist stance to being more accepting

⁵ Three polls by Japanese media outlets showed similar results: Asahi Shimbun poll published August 26, 2013; Kyodo News Agency poll published August 25, 2013; and Nikkei Telecom 21 poll published August 26, 2013.

⁶ Philippe de Koning and Phillip Lipsey, "The Land of the Sinking Sun," *Foreign Policy*, July 30, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/07/30/the_land_of_the_sinking_sun_japan_military_weakness.

⁷ "House Armed Services Committee Holds Hearing on the Proposed Fiscal 2014 Defense Authorization as it Relates to the U.S. Pacific Command and U.S. Strategic Command," CQ Congressional Transcripts, March 5, 2013.

of the need for a more forward-leaning defense posture.⁸ This adjustment, however, has been largely incremental rather than fundamental. Observers caution that there is still deep-seated reluctance among the public to shift away from the tenets of the “peace constitution.” Even as Japan’s defense establishment moves to become more “normal,” in the sense of shedding self-imposed limitations on military activities, it is unclear whether the Japanese people are ready for fundamental change. Proposals to amend Article 9 of the constitution have always met with resistance from many quarters. The LDP’s junior coalition partner, the New Komei Party, has also hesitated to embrace far-reaching defense reforms.

Regional Security Environment

Changes in the East Asian security landscape have shaped Japan’s defense approach and apparatus. North Korea’s belligerent rhetoric and repeated ballistic missile tests have heightened the sense of threat in Japan. China’s military advances and increasingly bold maritime activities have also exacerbated Japan’s sense of vulnerability, particularly since confrontation over a set of islets in the East China Sea began to escalate in late 2010.

Aside from such threats, Japan has also developed defense partnerships in the region, often working through the U.S.-Japan alliance. The strong ties and habits of cooperation between the American and Japanese defense establishments complement existing and emerging security partnerships. A high-level joint statement from October 2013 states, “Trilateral cooperation seeks to improve regional security and defense capacities—including humanitarian and disaster relief—in order to support regional peace and stability, helps to promote the freedom of navigation and regional maritime security, and acts as a stabilizing regional presence by building confidence and encouraging transparency in the region.”⁹ The U.S.-Japan alliance has been a vehicle for enhancing security ties with Southeast Asian countries, especially since maritime territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas began to intensify in the late 2000s. Some analysts see these bilateral and multilateral links among U.S. allies and partners as beneficial to U.S. security interests by both enhancing deterrence and perhaps lessening the sense of direct rivalry with potential adversaries.¹⁰

The two main mechanisms for U.S.-Japan regional security cooperation are high-level trilateral dialogues and multilateral military exercises. There is no comprehensive multilateral institution for managing security problems in the Asia-Pacific, although young forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus, and the East Asia Summit have shown potential in this regard. Therefore, the established trilateral dialogues between U.S. allies are an important mechanism for coordinating regional security activities. Training exercises that allow the militaries of Asia-Pacific nations to interact and cooperate are another means to improve trust and transparency. The United States and Japan participated in multilateral exercises with Australia, South Korea, Mongolia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and several other countries in 2012, indicating the breadth of these activities.

⁸ Paul Midford, *Rethinking Japanese Public Opinion and Security: From Pacifism to Realism?* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

⁹ “Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee: Toward a More Robust Alliance and Greater Shared Responsibilities,” Tokyo, Japan, October 3, 2013.

¹⁰ “The Emerging Asia Power Web: The Rise of Bilateral Intra-Asian Security Ties,” Center for a New American Security, June 2013, <http://www.cnas.org/publications/emerging-asia-power-web>.

Figure I. Map of Japan and Surrounding Countries

Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.

North Korea

North Korea has played a singular role in driving Japan's security policy, usually pushing Japanese leaders to pursue and the public to accept a more forward-leaning defense posture. After the Cold War threat from the Soviet Union receded, many analysts questioned whether the pacifist-leaning Japanese public would support a sustained military alliance with the United

States. The shared threat from North Korea—particularly acute to the geographically proximate Japanese—appeared to shore up the alliance in the late 1990s and into the next century. North Korea’s 1998 test of a Taepodong missile over Japan consolidated support for development of ballistic missile defense (BMD) with the United States. In 2001 the Japanese Coast Guard’s sinking of a North Korean spy ship that had entered Japan’s exclusive economic zone again publicly raised the specter of the threat from Pyongyang. Perhaps most importantly, the admission by Kim Jong-il in 2002 that North Korea had abducted several Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s shocked the Japanese public and led to popular support for a hard-line stance on North Korea, which in turn gave rise to hawkish political figures, including Shinzo Abe. In 2003, Japan launched its first spy satellite in order to track North Korean threats without relying on other countries’ intelligence collection.

In the past several years, North Korea’s behavior—repeated missile launches, three tests of nuclear devices, and its alleged sinking of a South Korean warship and artillery attack on Yeonpyeong island—have spurred Japanese leaders to pursue more robust missile defense cooperation with the United States. Japanese territory is well within the range of North Korean Nodong ballistic missiles, which are potentially capable of delivering a nuclear warhead.¹¹ Given that U.S. military bases in Japan would play an important supporting role in a conflict on the Korean peninsula, many experts expect that Japan would be a target of North Korean missile attacks in a major crisis situation. Pyongyang’s provocations have also driven Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington to closer defense cooperation, including attending each other’s military exercises and participating in high-level trilateral dialogues. With multilateral talks over North Korea’s nuclear weapons programs at a standstill, unity has been strong. If negotiations resume, this solidarity could be more difficult to maintain.

China

Despite normalizing bilateral relations in 1972 and despite the huge volume of two-way trade between them, China and Japan have long been wary of one another. That suspicion has solidified into muted hostility in the past few years over a set of uninhabited islets known as the Senkakus to Japan and the Diaoyu to China. The islets, located between Taiwan and Okinawa in the East China Sea and reportedly rich in energy deposits, are administered by Japan but claimed by Tokyo, Beijing, and Taipei. Japanese security officials have been deeply concerned about Beijing’s intentions and growing capabilities for years, but the Senkakus dispute may have convinced politicians and the broader public that Japan needs to adjust its defense posture to counter China.

Starting in the fall of 2012, China began regularly deploying maritime law enforcement vessels near the islets (with military vessels over the horizon) and stepped up what it called “routine” patrols to assert jurisdiction in “China’s territorial waters.” Chinese military surveillance planes reportedly have entered airspace that Japan considers its own, in what Japan’s Defense Ministry has called the first such incursion in 50 years. In 2013, near-daily encounters escalated: both countries have scrambled fighter jets, Japan has drafted plans to shoot down unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) that do not respond to warnings, and, according to the Japanese government, a

¹¹ David Albright, “North Korean Miniaturization,” 38North blog, US-Korea Institute at SAIS, February 22, 2013, <http://38north.org/2013/02/albright021313>.

Chinese navy ship locked its fire-control radar on a Japanese destroyer and helicopter on two separate occasions.¹²

In November 2013, China announced a new air defense identification zone (ADIZ) that includes airspace over the islets, a move that Japan and the United States condemned as a destabilizing move that alters the already delicate status-quo. The leadership of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee sent a letter to Chinese Ambassador Cui Tiankai expressing deep concerns about the area covered by the Chinese ADIZ and the potentially dangerous procedures for enforcement that China had announced.

The intermingling of fishing vessels, military assets, and maritime law-enforcement patrols creates a crowded and potentially combustible situation. Without effective crisis management tools and a political agreement, China and Japan are at risk of escalating into direct conflict, which in turn involves the U.S. commitment to defend Japan. As the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute surfaced anew since 2010, the United States reasserted its position that it would not take a position on sovereignty but that the islets are subject to Article 5 of the U.S.-Japan security treaty, which stipulates that the United States is bound to protect “the territories under the Administration of Japan.” Congress inserted in the FY2013 National Defense Authorization Act (P.L. 112-239) a resolution that would appear to bolster the U.S. commitment by stating that “the unilateral action of a third party will not affect the United States’ acknowledgment of the administration of Japan over the Senkaku Islands.”

Beijing is unnerved when the United States and Japan move to strengthen alliance capabilities, calling the alliance a “relic of the Cold War” and accusing Japan of “remilitarizing.” China has appeared to give concessions in its dealings with North Korea based on a fear that Japan will use North Korean provocations as an “excuse” to upgrade its military posture. Reportedly, U.S. diplomats and defense officials have quietly warned Beijing that Pyongyang’s repeated missile and nuclear tests provide ample justification for improving U.S. and allied BMD capabilities in the region. At the same time, defense planners in the United States and Japan are concerned about the quantitative and qualitative increases in Chinese military acquisitions, particularly cruise and ballistic missiles. China already has the ability to severely degrade U.S. and Japanese combat strength through conventional missile attacks on facilities in Japan, and the Chinese military may soon field anti-ship ballistic missiles capable of destroying an aircraft carrier at sea.

South Korea

For Japan, South Korea occupies an odd place between competitor and partner. On the one hand, South Korea, a fellow free-market democracy and U.S. treaty ally, faces nearly identical security challenges: the armed, hostile, and unpredictable North Korea and the uncertain intentions of the Communist Party regime in Beijing. Both Japan and South Korea have a shortage of natural resources and depend heavily on shipping lanes to fuel their economies. Both share a desire for strong international bodies that set trade standards and protect intellectual property rights. The countries normalized relations in 1965 and are among each other’s top trade partners.

Yet sensitive historical and territorial issues stemming from Japan’s 35-year annexation of the Korean Peninsula in the early 20th century have dogged the relationship and derailed attempts to

¹² “Japan to Shoot Down Foreign Drones That Invade Its Airspace,” *Kyodo News Service*, October 20, 2013.

cooperate in the security realm. In 2012, Seoul and Tokyo came to the verge of signing two landmark agreements that would have allowed for more military cooperation: a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) and an Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA). The GSOMIA would have allowed the two countries to more easily share classified information regarding common security issues like North Korea's nuclear and missile program. The ACSA provides a framework for logistical cooperation in situations like disaster relief and peacekeeping operations. The agreements, modest in scope, fell apart at the last moment amid public outcry in South Korea.

Both pacts would have allowed for more effective cooperation with the United States. U.S. officials have for years expressed their frustration at Japan and South Korea's failure to forge a meaningful trilateral defense relationship. As the United States has encouraged Japan to upgrade its defense capability, public sentiment in South Korea sees the moves as an indication that Japan is reverting to militarism. Japanese officials argue that South Koreans show insufficient appreciation for past apologies and Japanese restraint in venerating Imperial-era symbols, while South Korean officials argue that Japanese politicians have not learned and accepted the lessons of Japan's troubled past and that their apologies lack sincerity. In late 2013, Seoul-Tokyo relations continued to deteriorate.

Australia

Besides the United States, Japan's closest security partner is Australia. Building on the bold 2007 Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation, Tokyo and Canberra signed an ACSA in 2010 and a GSOMIA in 2012 to facilitate deeper military cooperation. Australian leaders made statements in 2013 strongly supporting an expanded regional security role for Japan, despite concerns that such firm support might irritate China.¹³ The Australian and Japanese militaries have worked side by side in overseas deployments (Iraq), peacekeeping operations (Cambodia, Timor-Leste, and elsewhere), and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief (HA/DR) operations, including the use of Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) aircraft to transport SDF troops and supplies after the March 2011 disasters in northeast Japan. The United States, Australia, and Japan participate in advanced military exercises together on a regular basis. For example, the RAAF and Japanese Air Self-Defense Force (ASDF) trained together with the U.S. Air Force in the Cope North and Red Flag exercises in 2013.

Southeast Asia

As the disputes over territory and administrative rights in the South China Sea became more volatile during the 2000s and 2010s, the United States and Japan have made efforts to increase their contributions to security and stability in Southeast Asia. These security contributions are most often not conducted in the context of the bilateral alliance, but the alliance may be a platform for more security engagement in the future. Building capacity in the security sector, especially in the maritime domain, looks to become a new area of joint effort for the alliance. The level of cooperation with individual Southeast Asian countries varies widely; the most active security partnership is with U.S. ally the Philippines, followed by Singapore and Vietnam.

¹³ Rick Wallace, "Jule Bishop Supports Japan on Defence," *The Australian*, October 16, 2013.

HA/DR operations, in which the U.S. and Japanese militaries have extensive experience, are another area of emphasis in disaster-prone Southeast Asia. Japan and the United States were two of the four non-Southeast Asian countries whose armed forces provided disaster relief following the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. The U.S. military and the SDF each sent approximately 1,000 troops and dozens of vessels and aircraft to assist the Philippines' recovery from Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda).¹⁴ From 2010 to 2013, Japan co-chaired the military medicine working group of the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus and helped to organize a multilateral HA/DR military exercise in Brunei in June 2013.

U.S.-Japan Alliance: Bilateral Agreements and Cooperation

The U.S.-Japan alliance is built on a foundation of bilateral agreements that define the scope and form of security cooperation. The 1960 Mutual Defense Treaty is the bedrock of the alliance, covering the basic rights and responsibilities of each party, and the accompanying 1960 Status of Forces Agreement governs the treatment of U.S. defense personnel stationed in Japan. The bilateral Mutual Defense Guidelines (MDG), first codified in 1978 and then updated in 1997, provide the policy guidance to direct alliance cooperation. The MDG outlines how the U.S. and Japanese militaries will interact in peacetime and in war as the basic parameters for defense cooperation based on a division of labor. The U.S.-Japan dialogue on the roles, missions, and capabilities (RMC) of the two militaries derives from the MDG and gives manifestation to the policy guidelines.

Within that policy framework of bilateral agreements, Tokyo and Washington chart the course for alliance cooperation at regular meetings of the Cabinet-level Security Consultative Committee (SCC). Composed of the U.S. Secretaries of Defense and State and their Japanese counterparts, and thus known as the “2+2”, the SCC meets roughly annually and issues joint statements that reflect present alliance concerns and provide concrete guidance for the near term.¹⁵ Some SCC meetings have been more far-reaching, elaborating on alliance priorities and common strategic objectives.

Outcomes from Recent SCC (“2+2”) Meetings

The 2002 SCC meeting established a working-level Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) to review alliance force posture and develop a common security view between the two sides. Following on this initiative, SCC meetings in the period 2005-2007 provided high-level guidance for many significant changes in the alliance, even as resolution of the Okinawa base conundrums remained elusive. At the strategic level, the 2005 SCC explicitly identified the stability of the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula as common priorities for the first time and called on China to make its military modernization more transparent. At the operational level, the United

¹⁴ The SDF deployed three CH-47 helicopters, three UH-1 helicopters, the amphibious transport vessel *Osumi*, helicopter carrier *Ise*, supply vessel *Towada*, two KC-767 supply aircraft, seven C-130 supply aircraft, and one U-4 aircraft. Source: Embassy of Japan in the United States, November 2013.

¹⁵ The SCC convened nine times in the 12-year period 2002-2013. A complete record of joint statements is available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/index.html>.

States and Japan sought greater integration of the two militaries and outlined a new alliance approach both to enhance the defense of Japan and to move beyond traditional realms of cooperation. Some new areas of focus were BMD, counter-proliferation, counterterrorism, intelligence and surveillance, HA/DR, response to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) attacks, mutual logistics support, and the use of civilian infrastructure during contingencies.

The SCC meeting in May 2010 was significant because it reaffirmed the centrality of the alliance to Japan's overall foreign policy, even under the DPJ government, and because it committed Japan to implement the bilateral 2006 Realignment Roadmap for relocating the Futenma air base to another part of Okinawa (see "Okinawa-Guam Realignment and the Futenma Base Controversy" section for further discussion).

The 2011 SCC meeting, taking place just three months after Japan's March 11 earthquake and tsunami, took stock of recent alliance progress and outlined a broad vision for bilateral cooperation. The 2011 joint statement listed 24 common strategic objectives, including acute security challenges such as North Korean provocations and more diffuse problems such as terrorism and cybersecurity. The great extent of common interests demonstrates the strategic alignment of the United States, although the depth of agreement on, and relative prioritization of, these many issues remains unclear. The 2011 joint statement also identified areas for strengthened security cooperation, reflecting DPRI progress and the new defense policy guidelines announced in Japan (see later section on the "Dynamic Defense Force" Concept) and the United States (2010 Quadrennial Defense Review). In contrast, the 2012 SCC meeting focused on the Okinawa-Guam realignment of U.S. forces. The joint statement attempted to facilitate a resolution by removing the strict linkage between the transfer of marines off of Okinawa and the construction of a replacement facility for the Futenma base.

Following the return of the LDP to power in December 2012, the 2013 SCC joint statement outlined an agenda for enhanced U.S.-Japan defense cooperation. The two countries agreed to revise the bilateral MDG by the end of 2014 to update the alliance for the 21st century, including the military use of space and cyberspace. The United States expressed support for Japan's initiatives to establish a National Security Council and to consider exercising the right of collective self-defense. The joint statement also announced the impending deployment of the most advanced U.S. military systems to Japan in the coming years.

Progress on Implementing the Defense Policy Review Initiative

The relocation of Futenma Marine Corps Air Station is the largest and most controversial part of a broad overhaul of U.S. force posture in Japan and bilateral military activities, but it is not the only element. With the exception of the Futenma base relocation, DPRI has largely succeeded in improving the political sustainability, interoperability, and scope of the alliance. A training relocation program allows U.S. aircraft to conduct training away from crowded base areas to reduce noise pollution for local residents. U.S. Carrier Air Wing Five is being relocated from Atsugi Naval Air base to the Marine Corps base at Iwakuni to reduce safety risks and noise. The Japanese government built a new, offshore runway at the Iwakuni base, which began handling civilian flights in December 2012. In Okinawa the U.S. military has turned several plots of land over to the Japanese government. Several more areas of present-day U.S. military facilities are approved for expedited return in the near future.

Figure 2. Map of U.S. Military Facilities in Japan



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS

The co-location of service headquarters has improved coordination between the U.S. and Japanese militaries. The SDF Air Defense Command recently completed a new facility at the U.S. Yokota Air Base. Since 2006, a Bilateral Joint Operations Command Center at Yokota has enabled data-sharing and coordination between the Japanese and U.S. air and missile defense

command elements. In 2010, U.S. Army Japan established at Camp Zama (about 25 miles southwest of Tokyo) a forward operational headquarters, which can act as a bilateral joint headquarters to take command of theater operations in the event of a contingency. The Japanese Ground Self-Defense Force (GSDF) Central Readiness Force moved its headquarters to Camp Zama in early 2013.

Increased joint training activities and shared use of facilities has improved the interoperability of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The SDF conducted its first joint drill overseas in a large amphibious assault exercise with the U.S. military in California in June 2013. Japan will have access to new training facilities on Guam and the Northern Marianas Islands as a result of a 2009 bilateral agreement. The two allies continue to discuss the potential costs and benefits of increasing the number of shared-use military facilities, which some observers believe would change the image of American troops as foreign occupiers.

March 2011 Earthquake and Tsunami: U.S.-Japan Alliance Performance

Appreciation for the U.S.-Japan alliance among the Japanese public increased after the two militaries worked effectively together to respond to a devastating natural disaster. On March 11, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake jolted a wide swath of Honshu, Japan's largest island. The quake, with an epicenter located about 230 miles northeast of Tokyo, generated a tsunami that pounded Honshu's northeastern coast, causing widespread destruction and killing over 16,000 people. Years of joint training and many interoperable assets facilitated a large-scale, integrated alliance effort. "Operation Tomodachi," using the Japanese word for "friend," was the first time that SDF helicopters used U.S. aircraft carriers to respond to a crisis. The USS *Ronald Reagan* aircraft carrier provided a platform for air operations as well as a refueling base for SDF and Japan Coast Guard helicopters. Other U.S. vessels transported SDF troops and equipment to the disaster-stricken areas. Communication between the allied forces functioned adequately, according to military observers. For the first time, U.S. military units operated under Japanese command in actual operations. Specifically dedicated liaison officers helped to smooth communication. Although the U.S. military played a critical role, the Americans were careful to emphasize that the Japanese authorities were in the lead. The Department of Defense committed an estimated \$88.5 million in assistance for the disasters, out of a total of over \$95 million from the U.S. government.

Within 8 days of the earthquake, the SDF had deployed 106,200 personnel, 200 rotary and 322 fixed-wing aircraft, and 60 ships. Nearly all of the MSDF ships were transferred to the affected area, and forces from distant provinces were mobilized. After rescuing nearly 20,000 individuals in the first week, the troops turned to a humanitarian relief mission in the displaced communities, in addition to supporting activities at the troubled nuclear reactors. U.S. military troops and assets were deployed to the affected areas within 24 hours of the earthquake. At the peak, approximately 24,000 U.S. personnel, 189 aircraft, and 24 Navy vessels were involved in the humanitarian assistance and relief efforts. Major assets in the region were re-directed to the quake zone, including the USS *Ronald Reagan* Carrier Strike group.

The successful bilateral effort had several important consequences. First, it reinforced alliance solidarity after a somewhat difficult period of public disagreement over the Futenma base issue. It was also very well received by the Japanese public, leading to exceptionally high approval ratings of both the SDF performance and the U.S. relief efforts. The operation demonstrated to other countries the capability of the alliance. It also illuminated challenges that the two militaries might face if responding to a contingency in the defense of Japan in which an adversary were involved, including having more secure means of communication as multiple agencies and services mobilized resources.¹⁶

¹⁶ See "Partnership for Recovery and a Stronger Future; Standing with Japan after 3-11," http://csis.org/files/publication/111026_Green_PartnershipforRecovery_Web.pdf.

International Operations

The 1997 guidelines outlined rear-area support roles that Japanese forces could play to assist U.S. operations in the event of a conflict in areas surrounding Japan. The passage of special legislation since 2001 has allowed Japanese forces to take on roles in Iraq and in the Indian Ocean under the category of international peace cooperation activities. Because of the dispatch of Japanese troops to Iraq in 2004-2007, to Indonesia in the wake of the 2004 tsunami, to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, and to several U.N. missions around the world, the SDF has gained experience in peacekeeping, humanitarian relief and reconstruction, anti-piracy, and disaster relief operations. Some prominent Japanese defense specialists have argued that non-combat missions—considered more politically acceptable to the Japanese public—are the most promising areas for development.¹⁷ Japan's security cooperation in Southeast Asia has focused on these activities, offering technical assistance and training to military personnel in ASEAN countries.

The MSDF has been engaged in counter-piracy activities in the Gulf of Aden since March 2009. Japanese vessels and P-3C patrol aircraft have escorted over 3,000 commercial ships and conducted over 1,000 surveillance flights.¹⁸ MSDF and ASDF personnel are stationed at a base constructed in 2011 in Djibouti, where Japan has deployed a total of roughly 600 SDF personnel since 2009.¹⁹ Although the Djibouti facility is Japan's first overseas base since World War II, the move has sparked little controversy among the Japanese public.

Maritime Defense Cooperation

The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) is one of the most capable navies in the world and cooperates closely with its U.S. counterparts. U.S. Navy officials have claimed that they have a closer daily relationship with the MSDF than with any other navy, conducting over 100 joint exercises annually. During the Cold War, the U.S. Navy and MSDF developed strong combined anti-submarine warfare cooperation that played a key role in countering the Soviet threat in the Pacific. The navies also protect key sea lines of communication (SLOCs), although Japan's constitution prohibits the MSDF from defending allied vessels in international waters. The most significant help extended by Japan in support of U.S. operations has come from the MSDF: refueling coalition vessels in the Indian Ocean active in Operation Enduring Freedom and, at times, an Aegis destroyer escort; the dispatch of several ships, helicopters, and transport aircraft to assist in disaster relief after the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami; participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) multinational exercises;²⁰ and the deployment of MSDF vessels for anti-piracy missions off the coast of Somalia.

The Japanese Coast Guard (JCG) plays an important role in strengthening Japan's maritime capabilities and has primary responsibility for effecting Japanese administrative control over the disputed Senkaku/Diaoyu islets. Along with rescue and environmental protection, the JCG includes "securing the safety of the sea lanes" and "maintaining order in the seas" among its core

¹⁷ Noboru Yamaguchi, "Thoughts about the Japan-U.S. Alliance after the Transformation with a Focus on International Peace Cooperation Activities," *The National Institute of Defense Studies News*, January 2006.

¹⁸ "Djibouti to Be Provided Patrol Ships for Security," *Kyodo News Agency*, August 28, 2013.

¹⁹ "Japanese PM on Official Visit to Djibouti," *Xinhua News Agency*, African News, August 28, 2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/africa/2013-08/28/c_132670904.htm.

missions. JCG protection of Japanese waters and participation in exercises overseas is more politically palatable compared to MSDF participation, both to the Japanese public and to foreign countries.²¹ As the maritime standoff with China over the disputed islets became progressively more intense after 2010, coordination between the MSDF and JCG has improved markedly.

Ballistic Missile Defense Cooperation²²

Many analysts see U.S.-Japan efforts on ballistic missile defense (BMD) as the most robust aspect of bilateral security cooperation. The two countries have cooperated closely on BMD technology development since the earliest programs, conducting joint research projects as far back as the 1980s. Largely in response to the growing ballistic missile threat from North Korea, the Cabinet of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi decided in December 2003 to acquire BMD systems for national defense. Japan's purchases of U.S.-developed technologies and interceptors after 2003 give it the second-most potent BMD capability in the world. The SDF has 17 PAC-3 units deployed across the Japanese archipelago and six vessels with Aegis air/missile defense software, four of which are equipped with SM-3 Block IA interceptors. The U.S. military has also deployed PAC-3 units at its bases in Japan and Aegis BMD-capable vessels in the surrounding seas. To complement the array of advanced Japanese radars, the United States has one AN/TPY-2 X-band radar in northern Japan, and there is a bilateral agreement to place a second one in central Japan, outside Kyoto.

The mature U.S.-Japan partnership in BMD has already served as a key driver of improvements to alliance interoperability. A Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) report stated in June 2012 that the United States and Japan "have essentially created a joint command relationship ... from the perspective of any possible adversary." Both nations feed information from a variety of sensors to create a common operating picture at the Bilateral Joint Operating Command Center at Yokota Air Base, located outside Tokyo. "A joint operation room for the two sides was newly set up in the basement of the new ASDF command headquarters building to allow them to decide quickly which [country] should be responsible for interception in missile defense, based on information they acquired." This information-sharing arrangement improves the effectiveness of each nation's target identification, tracking, and interceptor cueing. North Korea's long-range missile launches in 2009 and 2012 provided opportunities for the United States and Japan to test their BMD systems in real-life circumstances.

Extended Deterrence

The growing concerns in Tokyo about North Korean nuclear weapons development and China's modernization of its nuclear arsenal in the 2000s provoked renewed attention to the U.S. policy of extended deterrence, commonly known as the "nuclear umbrella." The United States and Japan initiated the bilateral Extended Deterrence Dialogue in 2010, recognizing that Japanese perceptions of the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence were critical to its effectiveness. The dialogue is a forum for the United States to assure its ally and for both sides to exchange assessments of the strategic environment. The views of Japanese policy makers (among others)

²¹ Richard J. Samuels, "'New Fighting Power!' for Japan?" *MIT Center for International Studies*, September 2007.

²² For more information, see CRS Report R43116, *Ballistic Missile Defense in the Asia-Pacific Region: Cooperation and Opposition*, by Ian E. Rinehart, Steven A. Hildreth, and Susan V. Lawrence.

influenced the development of the 2010 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review.²³ Reportedly, Tokyo discouraged a proposal to declare that the “sole purpose” of U.S. nuclear weapons is to deter nuclear attack.

Japan also plays an active role in extended deterrence through its BMD capabilities. The number of U.S. and Japanese BMD interceptors is judged to be sufficient for deterring North Korea without affecting strategic stability with China. In the future, Japan may develop a conventional strike capability with the intent to augment extended deterrence.²⁴ Japanese diplomatic support for nuclear non-proliferation is another element of cooperation to reduce nuclear threats over the long term.

Arms Sales and Co-production

Japan has been a major purchaser of U.S.-produced defense equipment and has the status of a NATO Plus Five country.²⁵ There are approximately 625 active Foreign Military Sales cases totaling over \$6 billion in defense products.²⁶ Japan shares more common weapons and equipment with the United States than any other country. Japanese companies domestically produce some equipment under license, including sophisticated systems like the F-15 fighter aircraft, and other equipment is purchased “off the shelf” from U.S. companies. The Ministry of Defense is reportedly considering purchases of several advanced U.S.-designed systems: Global Hawk, amphibious assault vehicle, V-22 Osprey, E-2D Hawkeye, Theater High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) BMD, and others.

In recent years, the United States and Japan have begun to explore deeper defense industry cooperation and co-production of weapons systems. Technological cooperation on BMD in the 1990s and 2000s led to an agreement to jointly produce the next generation of missile interceptors, the SM-3 Block IIA. This cooperative development program completed its preliminary design review in early 2012, and the interceptors are slated to begin testing in the near future. The Japanese government committed to allowing transfers of the SM-3 Block IIA to third parties in the June 2011 SCC Joint Statement, an important concession that Washington had requested. In December 2011, the Japanese government relaxed its self-imposed restrictions on arms exports, which date back to the 1960s, paving the way for other co-production arrangements. The “Three Principles on Arms Exports” (the so-called 3Ps) prevented arms transfers to Communist countries, those sanctioned by the U.N., and countries “involved or likely to be involved in international conflicts.”

The Abe Cabinet in 2013 decided to further extend the exceptions to the 3Ps, in order to allow Japanese firms to participate in the production of parts for the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter. Tokyo concluded that these restrictions unduly limit Japan’s participation in co-production of arms (e.g., the F-35) and prevent arms transfers that are expected to contribute to international security. The

²³ Brad Roberts, “Extended Deterrence and Strategic Stability in Northeast Asia,” National Institute of Defense Studies (Japan), Visiting Scholar Paper Series, No. 1, August 9, 2013, p. 24.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 20.

²⁵ With NATO Plus-Five status, a country may bid on certain Department of Defense (DOD) contracts; engage in certain research and development programs with DOD and the Department of State; receive certain DOD loan guarantees; receive preferential treatment for U.S. exports of excess defense articles; and participate in certain NATO-related training programs. The other countries are Australia, Israel, New Zealand, and South Korea.

²⁶ Mutual Defense Assistance Office, U.S. Embassy in Japan, December 2013.

new exceptions to the 3Ps allow Japan to export defense equipment for “peace contribution and international cooperation” and jointly produced arms, as long as the receiving country agrees not to reexport the arms without Japan’s consent.

The specifics of Japanese industrial participation are still under discussion, but the production of F-35 components would be a boost for the Japanese defense industry, which otherwise faces a decade or more without any contracts for fighter aircraft. Japan plans to acquire 42 F-35s at a total program cost of nearly \$10 billion, including logistics equipment, initial spares, training services, etc.; the first delivery of four F-35s should arrive in Japan by March 2017.²⁷

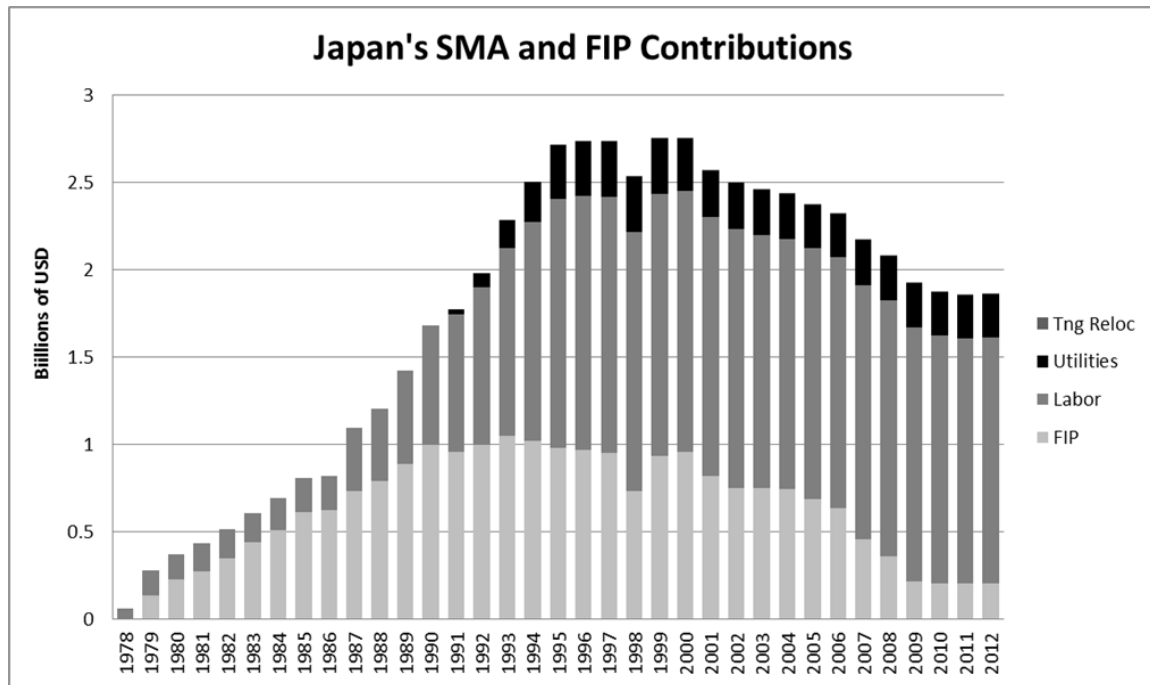
Host Nation Support for U.S. Forces Japan

The Japanese government provides nearly \$2 billion per year to offset the cost of stationing U.S. forces in Japan. The United States spends an additional \$2 billion per year (on top of the Japanese contribution) on non-personnel costs for troops stationed in Japan.²⁸ Japanese host nation support is comprised of two funding sources: Special Measures Agreements (SMAs) and the Facilities Improvement Program (FIP). Each SMA is a bilateral agreement, generally covering five years, that obligates Japan to pay a certain amount for utility and labor costs of U.S. bases and for relocating training exercises away from populated areas. The current SMA, which runs from 2011 to 2015, allows a gradual decline in Japan’s contributions to labor and utility costs, although U.S. costs are slowly rising, according to an April 2013 report issued by the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC).²⁹ The amount of FIP funding is not strictly defined, other than an agreed minimum of \$200 million per year, and thus the Japanese government adjusts the total at its discretion. Tokyo also decides which projects receive FIP funding, taking into account, but not necessarily deferring to, U.S. priorities.

²⁷ Mutual Defense Assistance Office, United States Embassy in Japan, July 2013.

²⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, Inquiry into U.S. Costs and Allied Contributions to Support the U.S. Military Presence Overseas, 113th Cong., April 15, 2013, S.Rept. 113-12 (Washington: GPO, 2013).

²⁹ Ibid.

Figure 3. Host Nation Support for USFJ

Source: U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, Inquiry into U.S. Costs and Allied Contributions to Support the U.S. Military Presence Overseas, 113th Congress, April 15, 2013, S.Rept. 113-12 (Washington: GPO, 2013).

Notes: Chart from U.S. Forces Japan, Presentation: Special Measures Agreement Overview (June 27, 2012). Tng Reloc = Training Relocation

Okinawa-Guam Realignment and the Futenma Base Controversy³⁰

A prominent controversy over the relocation of a Marine Corps base in Okinawa has vexed the U.S.-Japan alliance for years. While a comprehensive resolution remains elusive, the two governments have adjusted the realignment plan in a way that removes the issue from the center of the security relationship. The 2006 agreement between the U.S. and Japanese governments to relocate the Futenma Marine Corps Air Station from its current location in crowded Ginowan City to Camp Schwab, in a less congested part of the island, was envisioned as the centerpiece of a planned realignment of U.S. forces in Japan.³¹ Under this agreement, the United States would redeploy 8,000 marines and their dependents from Okinawa to Guam in exchange for permitting construction of a new Marine Corps facility at Camp Schwab, located offshore of the Henoko area of Nago City. Problematic from the start, the base relocation developed into a major point of

³⁰ For more information, see CRS Report R42645, *The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa and the Futenma Base Controversy*, by Emma Chanlett-Avery and Ian E. Rinehart.

³¹ Per the agreement, the redeployment of roughly half of the III Marine Expeditionary Force (III MEF) to new facilities in Guam would lead to the return of thousands of acres of land to Japan. Japan agreed to pay around 60% of the \$10.3 billion estimated costs. After years of negotiations, U.S. and Japanese officials settled on Camp Schwab because of its location in Henoko, a far less congested area of Okinawa.

contention between Tokyo and Washington after Yukio Hatoyama became prime minister in 2009; Hatoyama had promised Okinawans during his election campaign that he would oppose the relocation. Although Hatoyama and his DPJ successors all eventually endorsed the plan, local opposition remains staunch. Prime Minister Abe has declared his strong support of the agreement, but it is the Okinawa prefectural government that has the authority to approve or reject critical land-use aspects of the plan.

To remove impediments to the realignment of U.S. forces, the United States and Japan changed their agreement in April 2012 by “de-linking” the transfer of marines off Okinawa with progress on the new base in Henoko. In order to ease the burden on Okinawan residents, about 9,000 marines and their dependents would be transferred to locations outside of Japan: to Guam, Australia, Hawaii, and the continental United States. Alliance officials described the move as in line with their goal of making U.S. force posture in Asia “more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable.”³² The official timeline for the reversion of U.S. base territory back to Japanese control indicates that substantial amounts of land will not be turned over to local authorities until the mid-2020s at the earliest, around the same time period that the marines would be redeployed out of Okinawa.

Concern about the ballooning costs of construction on Guam and uncertainty about the future U.S. force posture in the Asia-Pacific region drove Congress to zero out the Obama Administration’s request for related military construction funding in the FY2012 and FY2013 National Defense Authorization Acts, P.L. 112-81 and P.L. 112-239. The acts prohibit authorized funds, as well as funds provided by the Japanese government for military construction, from being obligated to implement the planned realignment of Marine Corps forces from Okinawa to Guam until certain justifications and assessments are provided. In April 2013, the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) issued a report that examined U.S. costs associated with the American military presence overseas, including in Japan.³³ The report found that relocation of the Futenma base remained “unlikely” and that the Guam realignment would cost far more than the \$13.7 billion that the Department of Defense currently projects and would take longer to complete.

Significant obstacles remain in Japan as well. Public opposition has hardened considerably in Okinawa, with all the major political figures involved in the new base construction process declaring opposition to the plan. The deployment of the MV-22 Osprey tilt-rotor aircraft to the Futenma base in summer 2012 heightened safety concerns of nearby residents, and crimes committed by U.S. servicemembers periodically inflame local resentments. The grievances that Okinawans have harbored for decades seem unlikely to fade, driven by the presence of foreign troops on a crowded urban landscape. The current controversy reflects a fundamental tension in the relationship between Okinawa and the central government in Tokyo: while the entire country reaps the benefits of the U.S. security guarantee, Okinawans bear a disproportionate burden.

The April 2012 announcement that the U.S. and Japanese governments will undertake long-deferred repairs on Futenma raised suspicions that the base will remain indefinitely. Construction

³² “Joint Statement of the Security Consultative Committee,” State Department Media Note, April 26, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2012/04/188586.htm>.

³³ U.S. Congress, Senate Committee on Armed Services, Inquiry into U.S. Costs and Allied Contributions to Support the U.S. Military Presence Overseas, 113th Cong., April 15, 2013, S.Rept. 113-12 (Washington: GPO, 2013).

of the Futenma replacement facility near Henoko is now on hold as Okinawan governor Hirokazu Nakaima decides whether to sign the required landfill permit.

Deployment of MV-22 Osprey Aircraft

The U.S. Marine Corps replaced the 24 CH-46E “Sea Knight” helicopters stationed at the Futenma base with 24 MV-22 “Osprey” tilt-rotor aircraft in 2012 and 2013. The deployment of the first 12 Osprey aircraft to Japan in mid-2012 caused a public outcry in Okinawa and mainland base-hosting communities. Japanese politicians and civil society groups opposed introduction of the MV-22 to Japan due to the aircraft’s safety record.³⁴ However, the arrival of the second batch of 12 Ospreys in 2013 was greeted by substantially smaller protests in Okinawa.

The crashes of V-22 tilt-rotor aircraft in training exercises in Morocco and Florida in early 2012 reminded Okinawans of the U.S. military helicopter crash on the grounds of a school near Futenma Air Station in August 2004. In response to citizens’ concerns, the Japanese government conducted its own investigation of the aircraft’s safety in 2012. The investigation cleared the MV-22 for deployment, but concerns linger, especially in Okinawa. Intense public scrutiny of the aircraft’s safety record may be connected to widespread distrust of the government stemming from the March 2011 nuclear crisis. Observers warn that a crash involving an MV-22 Osprey on Okinawa could galvanize the anti-base movement and create serious problems for the alliance.

The introduction of the advanced tilt-rotor aircraft to Okinawa reportedly will enhance the operational capability of the Marines based there, particularly in a rapid response scenario. The SDF has expressed interest in potentially acquiring its own fleet of V-22s, which could be assigned for remote island defense and amphibious operations. Seeking to highlight the aircraft’s utility for operations other than war, the United States and Japan featured the MV-22 Osprey in a joint disaster relief drill on mainland Japan in October 2013. Okinawa-based MV-22s conducted disaster relief operations in the Philippines following the devastation of Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) in November 2013.

Evolution of Japanese Defense Policy

Since the end of the Cold War, Japanese defense policy has become more assertive, flexible, and realistic as a result of the changing security environment, enabled by gradual shifts in public opinion. Although some policy changes were sudden and unexpected, the long-run direction of movement has consistently been toward a more capable SDF and deeper cooperation with the U.S. military. Some of the main causes of this evolution are a growing sense of insecurity among Japanese elites; the gradual erosion of anti-militarist norms; positive experiences of SDF participation in international security and HA/DR missions; strong, conservative political leaders focused on defense policies; and mutual Japanese and American desire to share the burden of maintaining regional security and stability.

³⁴ During its development phase, the Osprey suffered several highly publicized crashes. Since the aircraft achieved initial operational capability in 2007, the Class-A mishap rate has been slightly better than the Marine Corps average. See the CRS Report RL31384, *V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft Program*, by Jeremiah Gertler, for more information.

During the Cold War, Japanese defense posture was based on resisting a Soviet invasion from the north. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 removed the basic logic of this position, but Japan's static defense posture was slow to evolve during the 1990s. (See the **Appendix** for historical background.) The SDF acquired new missions such as U.N. peacekeeping operations (PKO) and rear-area support for the United States in regional contingencies, but Japanese strategic culture remained reactive and risk-averse. It was not until 2010 that national defense policy moved beyond the "basic defense force" concept.

As part of its efforts to improve its own capabilities as well as to work more closely with U.S. forces, Japan established a joint staff office in 2007 that puts all the ground, maritime, and air self-defense forces under a single command. Under the previous organization, a joint command was authorized only if operations required multiple service participation, which had never occurred in the history of the SDF. The need for smoother coordination with the U.S. joint command was one of the primary reasons for adopting the new organization.

"Dynamic Defense Force" Concept

The 2010 National Defense Program Guidelines (NDPG) lay out a definitive shift away from the Cold War framework, which had called for strong bulwarks in the northern areas of Japan, to a focus on the southwestern islands of the Japanese archipelago, where Japanese forces have encountered Chinese military activities and incursions. The document outlines a new "dynamic defense force" concept that emphasizes operational readiness and mobility to enhance deterrence. The 2010 NDPG explicitly mentions the need to advance cooperation with other countries, including South Korea, Australia, India, and Southeast Asian nations. Whereas the 2004 NDPG leaned toward a global perspective that viewed the security of Japan and the region as linked with international stability, the 2010 guidelines appear to shift the focus back to the Asia-Pacific region. The NDPG also explicitly identifies China's military modernization and lack of transparency as concerns for the region; this attention to China appears to permeate many aspects of the report, even as it calls for promoting confidence-building measures with Beijing. Japan's 2013 defense white paper went further in calling attention to potential military threats from China, prompting the Chinese Foreign Ministry to accuse Japan of "hyped the so-called China threat and creating regional tensions to mislead international opinion."³⁵

The reaction to this more dynamic posture has been positive among U.S. experts. Allocation of resources from ground defense to air and naval power projection assets more accurately reflects the nature of Japan's security environment. The transformation away from a passive defense posture augments the capabilities of the U.S.-Japan alliance to manage regional and global security challenges. Other countries in the Asia-Pacific region that face potential confrontation with China over territorial disputes have largely welcomed the return of Japan as a more active presence in regional security. On the other hand, many South Koreans have voiced concern over what they see as the "remilitarization" of Japan. The official South Korean response to Japanese defense policy changes has focused on the simmering territorial dispute over the Liancourt Rocks, which Korea administers but Japan claims in its defense white paper.

³⁵ Paul Kallender-Umezu, "Japan's Blunt Stance Riles China, S.Korea," *Defense News*, July 14, 2013, <http://www.defensenews.com/article/20130714/DEFREG03/307140002>.

Table 1. Military Forces in Japan
Figures are approximate

Japan Self-Defense Forces (SDF) 2013 defense budget: \$59.4 billion	U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ)
Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) 45,500 sailors 47 surface combatants (6 Aegis-equipped), 18 submarines, 78 combat-capable aircraft	U.S. Navy 5,700 sailors ashore, 13,000 afloat 1 aircraft carrier, 10 surface combatants (8 Aegis-equipped), 70 aircraft
Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) 47,100 airmen 552 combat capable aircraft: 201 F-15J fighters, 17 AEW&C aircraft, 66 transport aircraft; PAC-3 BMD	U.S. Air Force 12,700 airmen 2 fighter wings, total of 60 fighters, AEW&C aircraft; 1 airlift wing, total of 12 transport aircraft; 1 special ops group
Ground Self-Defense Forces (GSDF) 151,300 soldiers 1 tank division, 3 armored infantry divisions, 5 light infantry divisions, 1 airborne brigade, 1 helicopter brigade, 1 special ops unit	U.S. Army 2,500 soldiers Forward operational headquarters
SDF Amphibious Assets GSDF Western Army Infantry Regiment (composed of 3+ infantry companies) 5 landing ships (LST), 19 landing craft	U.S. Marine Corps 18,800 marines 1 Marine division, 12 F/A-18D aircraft, 24 MV-22 transport aircraft, 12 refueling aircraft

Source: *The Military Balance 2013*, (London, UK: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013) and Mutual Defense Assistance Office, U.S. Embassy in Japan, June 2013.

Notes: The totals for the USFJ column account for U.S. forces stationed in Japan. The U.S. military is capable of rapidly augmenting these forces with reinforcements from elsewhere in the region, and around the world.

Attention to Amphibious, Space, and Cyber Capabilities

After taking office in December 2012, Prime Minister Abe announced his intention to develop new NDPG by the end of 2013. In July 2013, the LDP published its draft recommendations for the NDPG, and in August the Ministry of Defense issued an Interim Report. Together these provide indications that the new NDPG will likely intensify the trend of the SDF toward more mobility and resilience. Japan will invest more in amphibious capabilities to defend its remote islands as well as in BMD to protect itself from North Korean missiles. The SDF will seek to accelerate reforms to become more joint (i.e., improve inter-service cooperation), strengthen ISR (intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance), and develop more capabilities in the domains of outer space and cyber space.

Amphibious warfare (projecting military force from the sea onto land) has rapidly become a major emphasis of the SDF. Prior to the 2010s, amphibious capabilities were not considered important for defending Japan and were negatively associated with offensive strategies. The territorial dispute over the Senkaku/Diaoyu islets now presents a plausible scenario in which Japan would want to *re-take* its outlying islands from an occupying force: offensive tactics married to a defensive strategy. The challenge of delivering disaster relief to devastated areas

after the March 2011 earthquake and tsunami provided another motivation for developing these capabilities. Japan has therefore increased GSDF training exercises with the U.S. Marine Corps, as it begins to develop a Marine Corps-like function within the GSDF. Currently, the 700 soldiers of the Western Army Infantry Regiment are the primary amphibious response unit for the SDF. Japan also recognizes the need to improve inter-service jointness in order to carry out amphibious operations.³⁶ The SDF sent three warships, four combat helicopters, and over 1,000 servicemembers to the multinational Dawn Blitz exercise held in California in June 2013.³⁷ The newest MSDF flat-top destroyer *Izumo* reportedly can carry up to 14 helicopters, with 9 in operation at the same time. In the near future, the SDF may acquire amphibious assault vehicles, V-22 Osprey tiltrotor aircraft, and other air- and sea-lift assets to boost mobile deployment capabilities.

Japan has made strides in extending its defense policies to activity in outer space and cyberspace, but it lags far behind the United States in both domains. The 2008 Basic Space Law for the first time allowed Japan to make use of outer space for military purposes, although Japanese scientific and commercial endeavors had been developing space technology for decades. Japan has since launched imagery satellites with relatively low resolution while developing higher-resolution replacements. The threat of North Korean missiles has spurred Japan to consider early warning satellites, though UAVs may prove to be a more cost-effective solution. In May 2013, the United States and Japan signed a bilateral agreement on Space Situational Awareness to share information on space debris.

The United States and Japan inaugurated a bilateral cybersecurity dialogue in May 2013, led by the State Department and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officials discussed cooperation on identifying cyber threats, protecting civilian infrastructure networks, and aligning international cyber policies. Japan is preparing to inaugurate the first combined Cyber Defense Unit (CDU) from disparate SDF cybersecurity offices by mid-2014. The unit will have a budget of roughly \$140 million and 100 dedicated officers. Analysts have hailed the CDU as an important first step, but inadequate to the scale and sophistication of modern cyber challenges.³⁸ Constitutional and legal barriers prevent the CDU from protecting civilian infrastructure networks, engaging in counterattacks, and recruiting “white hat” hackers from outside the government. As Japan catches up to other advanced countries in this arena, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera declared that Japan would work closely with U.S. authorities.³⁹

³⁶ Ayako Mie and Mizuho Aoki, “Nation’s troops long way from hitting the beaches: experts,” *Japan Times*, August 1, 2013.

³⁷ “SDF joint landing drill in U.S. still a go,” *Associated Press*, June 10, 2013.

³⁸ Paul Kallender-Umezu, “Experts: Japan’s New Cyber Unit Understaffed, Lacks Skills,” *Defense News*, July 8, 2013.

³⁹ “Defense cybersecurity unit planned,” *Kyodo News Agency*, March 18, 2013.

Appendix. Historical Review of the Alliance

Post-World War II Occupation

Following Japan's defeat in World War II, the Allied Powers, led by the United States, occupied the archipelago from 1945 to 1952. Occupation officials initially intended to thoroughly demilitarize Japan. The Japanese constitution, drafted by U.S. Occupation officials and adopted by the Japanese legislature in 1947, renounced the use of war in Article 9, stating that "land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained." However, as the Cold War confrontation with the Soviet Union grew, the goals of the occupation shifted to building Japan up as a strategic bulwark against the perceived Communist threat. After the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, U.S. officials pressed for the establishment of a Japanese national paramilitary force, which in 1954 became the Self-Defense Forces (SDF). Debate about whether the existence of the SDF, which evolved in practice into a well-funded and well-equipped military, violates Article 9 continues today. Japan regained its sovereignty in 1952 after the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, which officially ended the conflict and allocated compensation to Allied victims of Japanese war crimes.

Bilateral Alliance Establishment

During the Cold War, the United States increasingly viewed Japan as a strategically important ally to counter the Soviet threat in the Pacific. A Mutual Security Assistance Pact signed in 1952 was replaced by the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, in which Japan grants the U.S. military basing rights on its territory in return for a U.S. pledge to protect Japan's security. Unlike other defense treaties with allies, this pledge is not mutual: Japan is not obligated to defend the United States if it is attacked. A military aid program during the 1950s provided equipment deemed to be necessary for Japan's self-defense, and Japan continued to expand the SDF and contribute more money to host nation support (HNS) for U.S. forces. Under Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida's leadership (1946-47 and 1948-1954), Japan followed U.S. leadership on foreign and security policies and focused on economic development.

The "Yoshida Doctrine" was controversial. Yoshida himself resisted U.S. officials' push for a full-scale Japanese rearmament (i.e., the establishment of a full-fledged military in name and in fact). In addition, many elements of Japanese society rejected the arrangement. For much of the 1950s, forces on the political right tried unsuccessfully to revise or even abrogate the Constitution's Article 9 and portions of the Treaty. When one of their number, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, negotiated a revision to the Treaty in 1960, the political left mobilized opposition to the changes. Although Kishi rammed the revisions through parliament, hundreds of thousands of protestors took to the streets in Tokyo, causing the cancellation of a visit by President Dwight Eisenhower and the resignation of Kishi and his government.

U.S.-Japan defense relations again entered a period of uncertainty because of U.S. President Richard Nixon's so-called Guam Doctrine of 1969 (which called on U.S. allies in Asia to provide for their own defense), the normalization of relations between China and the United States, and the U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam. One major irritant was resolved when Prime Minister Eisaku Sato and Nixon signed a joint communiqué that returned administrative control of the Okinawa islands to Japan in 1972, although the United States continues to maintain large military bases on

the territory. The establishment of the bilateral Security Consultative Committee in 1976 led to greater defense cooperation, including joint planning for response to an attack on Japan.

Post-Cold War Adjustments

In the post-Cold War period, Japan was criticized by some in the international community for its failure to provide direct military assistance to the United Nations coalition during the Persian Gulf War in 1990-1991, despite its contribution of over \$13 billion toward U.S. military costs and humanitarian assistance. After Japan's passage of a bill in 1991 to allow for its participation in U.N. peacekeeping operations, the SDF have been dispatched to Cambodia, Mozambique, East Timor, and the Golan Heights. Tensions over North Korea and the Taiwan Strait contributed to a revision of the defense guidelines in 1996-1997 by President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto that granted the U.S. military greater use of Japanese installations in time of crisis and vaguely referred to a possible, limited Japanese military role in "situations in areas surrounding Japan." That was assumed to be referring to potential U.S. conflicts in the Taiwan Strait and the Korean peninsula, although military officials insisted that the phrase was "situational" rather than geographic. North Korea's launch of a long-range Taepodong missile over Japan in 1998 galvanized political support for undertaking joint research with the United States on ballistic missile defense.

Post-9/11 Changes

U.S. policy toward East Asia under the Bush Administration took a decidedly pro-Japan approach from the outset. Several senior foreign policy advisors with extensive background in Japan took their cues from the so-called Armitage-Nye report (the lead authors were Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye), the final paper produced by a bipartisan study group before the 2000 U.S. presidential election.⁴⁰ The report called for a more equal partnership with Japan and enhanced defense cooperation in a number of specific areas.

With this orientation in place, Japan's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, reinforced the notion of the U.S.-Japan alliance as one of the central partnerships of U.S. foreign policy, particularly in Asia. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi, the Japanese legislature passed legislation that allowed Japan to dispatch refueling tankers to the Indian Ocean to support U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan. In February 2004, Japan sent over 600 military personnel to Iraq to assist in reconstruction activities—the first time since World War II that Japan dispatched soldiers to a country where conflict was ongoing.⁴¹ The ground troops were withdrawn in 2006. A Japanese SDF air division remained until 2008, when U.N. authorization for multinational forces in Iraq expired.

After a period of rejuvenated defense ties in the first years of the George W. Bush Administration, expectations of a transformed alliance with a more forward-leaning defense posture from Japan diminished. Koizumi's successors—Shinzo Abe, Yasuo Fukuda, and Taro Aso—each survived less than a year in office and struggled to govern effectively. Abe succeeded in upgrading the

⁴⁰ "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," Institute for National Strategic Studies, National Defense University, INSS Special Report, October 11, 2000.

⁴¹ The SDF operated under restrictions in Iraq: no combat unless fired upon and no offensive operations. Protection was provided by Dutch and Australian forces.

Defense Agency to a full-fledged ministry, but faltered on his pledges to create Japanese versions of the National Security Council and to pass a permanent deployment law to allow the government to dispatch SDF troops without a U.N. resolution. Fukuda, elected in September 2007, was considered a friend of the alliance, but more cautious in security outlook than his predecessors. He also faced an empowered opposition party—the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)—that temporarily forced Japan to end its naval deployment of refueling ships to support U.S.-led operations in Afghanistan. Aso, who served as Foreign Minister in the Abe Cabinet, was largely unable to pursue a more active military role for Japan due to his precarious political position. In the final years of the decade, political paralysis and budgetary constraints in Tokyo, Japan’s minimal progress in implementing base realignment agreements, Japanese disappointment in Bush’s policy on North Korea, and a series of smaller concerns over burden-sharing arrangements led to reduced cooperation and a general sense of unease about the partnership.

U.S.-Japan Relations Under the Obama and DPJ Administrations

The Obama Administration came into power in 2009 indicating a policy of broad continuity in its relations with Japan, although some Japanese commentators initially fretted that Washington’s overtures to Beijing would marginalize Tokyo. It was changes in leadership in Tokyo, however, that destabilized the relationship for a period. In the fall of 2009, when the DPJ came into power under Yukio Hatoyama’s leadership, relations with Washington got off to a rocky start because of differences over the relocation of the Futenma Marine base (see “U.S. Military Presence in Japan and Futenma Controversy” section above). Stalemate on the Okinawa agreement had existed for several years under previous LDP governments, but the more public airing of the dispute raised concern that the alliance—long described by the United States as the “cornerstone of the U.S. Asia-Pacific strategy”—was eroding. In addition, the DPJ initially advocated a more Asia-centric foreign policy, which some observers interpreted as a move away from the United States.

After months of intense deliberation with the United States and within his government, Hatoyama eventually agreed to move ahead with the relocation. However, the political controversy surrounding the Futenma issue played a major role in his decision to resign in June 2010. The fall of Hatoyama demonstrated to Japanese leaders the political risks of crossing the United States on a key alliance issue. His successor, Prime Minister Naoto Kan, looked to mend frayed relations and stated that his administration supported the agreement. The overwhelming response to the March 2011 disaster in Tohoku buoyed alliance relations. By the time that Yoshihiko Noda, Kan’s successor, finished his term in December 2012, American policy makers had regained confidence in Tokyo’s alliance management approach. A series of alarming provocations from North Korea and China’s increased maritime assertiveness also played a role in reinforcing the sense that the U.S.-Japan alliance remained relevant and essential.

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