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# US-Japan Defense Cooperation: Possibilities for Regional Stability

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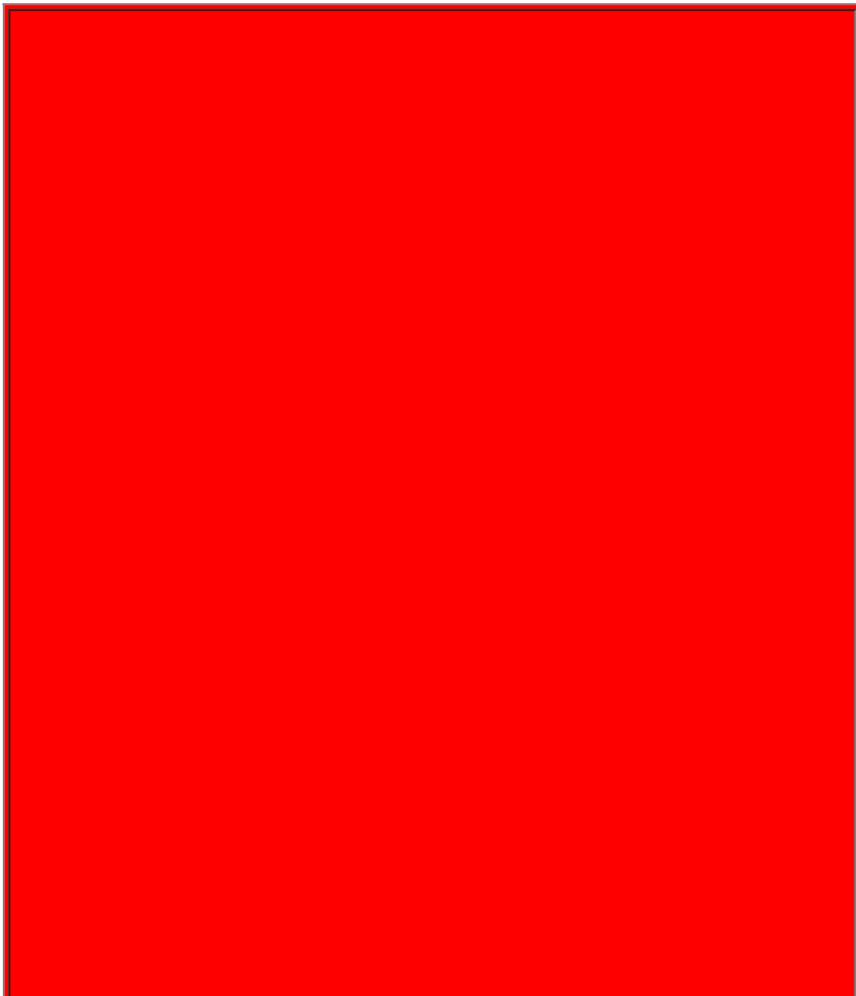
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From *Parameters*, Summer 2000, pp. 94-104.

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The security relationship between the United States and Japan continues to evolve, driven by a changing geopolitical landscape, a higher Japanese profile on the international stage, and multipolar dynamics in an age of uncertainty and increasingly sophisticated threats. The revised Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation provide a vehicle to assess changes in the scope and direction of the bilateral partnership. Legislation required to support the revised Guidelines, approved by the Japanese Diet on 24 May 1999, served to regenerate domestic and regional discussion as to what the revised Guidelines portend for American and Japanese military and security posture. This article provides an overview of the Guidelines as an expression of US and Japanese security strategy in the context of the symbols, realities, and possibilities for the bilateral security partnership.

The security strategies of the United States and Japan are mutually reinforcing, reflecting the criticality of each country to the other's defense posture in the Asia-Pacific region. The revised Guidelines represent the ongoing convergence of the national interests of the United States and Japan: they are congruent with Tokyo's National Defense Program Outline, Washington's *National Security Strategy for a New Century*, and the 1998 US Security Strategy for East Asia-Pacific. The revised Guidelines reflect continuity in the bilateral security partnership, reaffirming the security commitment to regional stability that both countries share.





**Figure 1. Japan and its neighbors.**

The plan to review the Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation was announced in the Joint Declaration on Security at the 1996 Clinton-Hashimoto Summit.[1] After the summit the review process began in earnest, culminating with promulgation of the revised Guidelines in September 1997. It was the first revision of the Defense Guidelines since 1978.

The Guidelines review accentuated recognition by the United States and Japan of the evolving security environment and the need to proactively accommodate change. The 1978 Guidelines focused on addressing the "posture for deterring aggression" and "actions in response to an armed attack against Japan." The 1978 Guidelines briefly addressed Japan-US cooperation "in the case of situations in the Far East outside of Japan which will have an important influence on the security of Japan." However, this aspect of the 1978 Guidelines was limited: they called for the governments of Japan and the United States to "consult together from time to time whenever changes in the circumstances so require." They also called for study of the "scope and modalities of facilitative assistance," under the auspices of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, to include the joint use of Japanese Self-Defense Force bases by US forces.[2]

By contrast, the revised Guidelines embrace a broader security perspective and greater specificity in areas of cooperation. The revised Guidelines are intended to provide for bilateral cooperation "under normal circumstances; actions in response to an armed attack against Japan; and cooperation in situations in areas surrounding Japan that will have an impact on Japan's peace and security." The functional areas identified by the revised Guidelines in the latter regard include relief activities and measures to deal with refugees, search and rescue, noncombatant evacuation operations, and activities for ensuring the effectiveness of economic sanctions for the maintenance of international

peace and stability. The Guidelines also provide for facilities to accommodate required forces and rear area support.[3]

The revised Guidelines build on previously established arrangements, the foundation of which remains the 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security. Consequently, the revised Guidelines do not represent a radical departure for US-Japan security cooperation. They do, however, reflect a proactive planning emphasis in response to the changed threat dynamics of today's security environment. The 1978 Guidelines were appropriately oriented toward Article 5 of the security treaty, which addressed an armed attack against Japan. With the end of the Cold War and its replacement with a threat environment that could include a number of regional contingencies, emphasis has shifted to Article 6 of the security treaty, which provides for American use of Japanese facilities and areas for the purpose of "contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East." [4]

In terms of the operational division of labor between US forces and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, the revised Guidelines continue to recognize their complementary roles and capabilities. This division of labor has been likened to a sword and shield, with the United States taking on offensive missions and Japan shouldering defensive mission responsibilities. This bilateral operational focus accommodates both Japanese constitutional restrictions and regional sensitivities. This division of labor in response to a potential regional contingency is addressed in the revised Guidelines as follows: "The Self Defense Forces will conduct such activities as intelligence gathering, surveillance, and minesweeping, to protect lives and property and to ensure navigational safety. US forces will conduct operations to restore the peace and security affected by situations in areas surrounding Japan." [5]

### **Regional Reactions and Implications**

The evolution of US-Japan bilateral security cooperation which the revised Guidelines represent elicited a mixed regional media reaction. Memories linger of Japan's role in dark episodes of World War II. For that reason, the modest steps to accommodate potential regional contingencies have made some governments wary. For example, North Korea's official media commented that the guidelines were a preparation for war and demanded, "The reactionary rulers of Japan must give up the anachronistic design of overseas military expansion and act with prudence." [6]

North Korea's reaction is balanced by statements from elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific Region. Fidel Ramos, who was President of the Republic of the Philippines when the revised Guidelines were announced, stated that if they gave Japan "a greater opportunity to be engaged in the security and stability of our common region, the Asia-Pacific, then I welcome this." [7] In Thailand, a senior Foreign Ministry official indicated the revised Guidelines "would boost stability in the Southeast Asian Region." [8] While media reaction has included positive as well as negative sentiments, there has been a fair amount of concern expressed from within the region in both the popular and scholarly press. For example, reservations about increases in Japan's military capabilities and external role as a potential consequence of the revised Guidelines were expressed by South Korea's Chang Moon-sug in the *East Asian Review*. [9]

China's response has been measured, but reflects concern over whether or not the "areas surrounding Japan" described in the revised Guidelines include Taiwan. Foreign Ministry spokesman Shen Guofang commented, "Whether the Taiwan Strait is included in the scope of the Japan-US security cooperation directly or indirectly, it would be infringing upon and interfering in China's sovereignty. This is unacceptable to the Chinese government and people." [10] Exactly what *is* included in "areas surrounding Japan," is intentionally vague. The revised Guidelines state, "Situations in areas surrounding Japan will have an important influence on Japan's peace and security. The concept, situations in areas surrounding Japan, is not geographic but situational." This vagueness allows flexibility; however, there have also been missteps which have exacerbated Chinese suspicions. For example, on 22 May 1998, an official of Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs indicated to the Japanese Diet that Taiwan fell within the purview of the revised Guidelines. Although the government of Japan again restated the official view that the implementation of the revised Guidelines would be situational and is not aimed at any particular issue or area, the remarks served to stimulate fears of Japanese intent and ambitions. [11] Yu Guoqiang wrote in the *China Daily Mail*, "All Asian countries, and even the United States, should be cautious that Japan does not go beyond military activities stated in the US-Japan defence accord." [12]

While fears have been expressed that the revised Guidelines may portend a resurgence of Japanese militarism, there is nothing in the actual revised Guidelines to justify such fears. They are a bilateral statement of strategy by the United

States and Japan. As such, they epitomize the continuing role of the United States working in partnership with Japan to facilitate and enhance regional stability. The Defense Guidelines have symbolic, real, and potential significance. In this respect, they are similar to the forward military presence which underpins US policy. Forward military presence has been a consistent element of US policy for East Asia and the Pacific, playing a vital role in supporting the global containment strategy of the Cold War; it continues to support the current national security strategy. This regional strategy focuses on providing capabilities to address requirements in the world's critical regions, recognizing the need for flexibility to manage change in the fluid security environment of regional conflicts.[13]

The importance of forward military presence to US strategy requires ongoing analysis of requirements and capabilities. This process resulted in a reduction from 135,000 personnel stationed in the region at the beginning of the decade (including naval forces afloat), to 100,000, where it has consistently remained since 1992.[14] This figure includes approximately 37,500 military personnel stationed in the Republic of Korea and 59,000 stationed afloat and ashore in Japan.[15] While the 1990 and 1992 Department of Defense strategy reports envisioned reduced force levels throughout the 1990s, by 1995 a forward presence of 100,000 troops was articulated as the current and continuing target.[16] This was reaffirmed in the 1998 US Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region.[17]

The physical presence of US troops in the Asia-Pacific region is an important symbol of US regional commitment and demonstrates the capability to fulfill security obligations with combat-ready forces. While symbolism is important, it should not overshadow capabilities: there is nothing magical about the number 100,000. It is simply the number required based on the assessed security environment, current capabilities, likely contingency scenarios, and existing technologies. There is a danger that too much significance is placed on the number rather than its purpose. Thus, a numerical reduction could be misconstrued as a diminution of the US commitment to the region or to America's security alliances. For this reason US leaders should take steps to "de-mystify" the 100,000 figure, publicizing that the number can and should change based on changing requirements, capabilities, and consultations with our regional security partners. The 1998 US Security Strategy for the East-Asia Pacific Region recognizes the profound changes technology is having on military affairs and capabilities.[18] The successful integration of technological enhancements should be taken into consideration as planners ponder appropriate force dispositions necessary to satisfy changing regional security requirements. Approaching the issue with flexibility and transparency will preclude misinterpretation of US commitment and intentions in the future. Like the Defense Guidelines, actual implementation of the forward military presence strategy should be flexible.

### **Japan's International Profile: Transcending the Past**

The revised Guidelines symbolize Japan's progress toward the goal of contributing to international security in ways commensurate with its economic might. The past asymmetric relationship between Japan's economic prowess and its military posture was brought home during the Persian Gulf War, during which Japan contributed significant financial sums (\$13 billion) to the coalition campaign but was criticized nevertheless for its use of "checkbook diplomacy." The result was a growing perception outside Japan and even within Japan itself that Japan's role must reflect the human risks that world powers assume in fulfilling their global obligations. The desire to make Japan a meaningful player in the international security arena is reflected in the writing of Ichiro Ozawa, an influential Japanese political leader who led a political coalition to bring down the Liberal Democratic Party, which had ruled Japan for most of the last 50 years. Ozawa's best-selling book *Nihon kaizo keikaku* (Plan to Reform Japan) puts forth the idea that Japan must become a "normal country." Proponents of this view believe "normalization" may be achieved by participating in collective defense, undertaking international efforts to support United Nations peacekeeping operations, and enhancing the US-Japan bilateral partnership to allow greater flexibility to deal with security requirements.[19]

The Gulf War was a catalyst for a changing Japanese military posture. The dispatch of a six-vessel Maritime Self-Defense Force minesweeping unit to the Persian Gulf in the war's immediate aftermath was the first overseas operational deployment of Japanese Self-Defense Forces since World War II. In another first, Ground Self-Defense Force personnel contributed to UN chemical weapon inspections in Iraq in October 1991.[20] The Gulf War also served to energize efforts within Japan to provide a legal framework which would facilitate participation in international peacekeeping operations. After protracted domestic political debate, the "Law Concerning Cooperation for United Nations Peacekeeping Operations and Other Operations" was passed in June 1992. Known as the "International Peace Cooperation Law," the legislation established five conditions for Japanese participation in UN peacekeeping

operations. These are: a cease-fire must be in place; parties to the conflict must have given consent to deployment of the peacekeeping force; the peacekeeping force must maintain impartiality; participation may be suspended if any of the above conditions are not met; and use of weapons will be limited to minimum necessary for protection.[21] These conditions are under review as the government of Japan contemplates legislative action to expand the ability of the Self-Defense Forces to fully participate in UN-led peacekeeping operations.[22]

In the autumn of 1999 the self-imposed restrictions for Japanese participation in UN peacekeeping operations factored into deliberations on how to support international efforts in East Timor. Unable to directly participate in peacekeeping operations because the situation did not meet all of the five conditions noted above, Japan donated \$100 million to the United Nations Trust Fund to facilitate participation by other countries in the multinational force. Japan subsequently supported the UN High Commission on Refugees by sending three Japan Air Self-Defense Force C-130s and 150 personnel to conduct airlift operations ferrying food and medical supplies between Surabaya and Kupang in West Timor. Japan's support to UN efforts in East and West Timor serves to illustrate the dynamics of its current international security posture in terms of its contributions and its limitations.[23]

Japan has supported a variety of international efforts under the auspices of the UN since 1992. This support has included Japanese assistance in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, El Salvador, and the Golan Heights. The range of functional support has varied in size and complexity. The focus in Angola, Mozambique, and El Salvador was on monitoring elections. Japanese support in 1992-93 to the UN Transitional Authority in Cambodia included monitoring the cease-fire and storage of collected weapons, advising and training police, construction of roads and bridges, logistical support, and election monitoring. Japanese support to Cambodia involved civilians, members of the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, and civilian police, which amounted to a total participation of approximately 1,330 personnel. In another example of Japanese involvement with United Nations overseas operations, Japan has deployed personnel to the Golan Heights in support of the UN Disengagement Observer Force since February 1996. Approximately 50 Self-Defense Force personnel are engaged there in transportation and storage of supplies, road repair, and maintenance of heavy equipment. Personnel are also involved in planning, coordination, and liaison.[24]

By the end of the 1990s, Japan's use of Self-Defense Force assets had become fairly routine in disaster relief and humanitarian operations. A recent example was the disaster relief operation to Honduras after the devastation brought by Hurricane Mitch in November 1998. Japan's assistance included an 80-member Ground Self-Defense Force medical team in addition to equipment required for medical services. The operation was supported by six Air Self-Defense Force C-130H aircraft, operated and supported by 105 Air Self-Defense Force personnel.[25]

Humanitarian and disaster relief operations are an area of potential bilateral cooperation which could render significant benefits in the future. The International Relief Cooperation Assignments for Rwandan Refugees represents a missed opportunity for bilateral US-Japan cooperation of this type. Japan responded to a request by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees by sending a Self-Defense Force contingent to Goma, Zaire, from September to December 1994. The contingent was 423 members strong, and supported UN efforts through medical assistance to refugees, water purification, logistical support, liaison, and coordination.[26] Complications arose in attempts to coordinate US airlift to support the Japanese deployment. Ultimately, Japan turned to a contractual arrangement with Russia to support its airlift requirements to Goma. That Japan would have to secure its airlift from a country other than the United States, which routinely stages cargo aircraft from bases in Japan, is very odd. This peculiarity is compounded by the fact that the United States had been involved in supporting operations in Zaire since 1991. From September to October 1991 the United States staged Operation Quick Lift, which provided airlift to transport French and Belgian troops and equipment in support of noncombatant evacuation operations in Zaire. Additionally, the United States engaged in Operation Support Hope in July 1994, providing humanitarian relief and support operations for Rwandan refugees. The ease with which the United States was able to support NATO allies with air-lift reflects the efficacy of NATO's acquisition and cross-servicing agreement (ACSA). Conversely, the Rwandan relief operation helped underscore the absence of such an agreement between the United States and Japan, and its potential value in facilitating efficient responses to requirements of this nature.[27]

In the aftermath of the Rwanda humanitarian relief operation, the United States and Japan worked closely to identify lessons learned in order to maximize future coordination and cooperation. Subsequently, the United States and Japan finalized an agreement that had been eight years in the making. Promulgated in September 1996, the "Agreement

Between the Government of Japan and Government of the United States of America Concerning Reciprocal Provision of Logistic Support, Supplies, and Services Between the Self-Defense Forces of Japan and the Armed Forces of the United States of America" was a significant development. The original agreement was specifically designed to facilitate effective operation of the Mutual Security Treaty and international efforts in the interest of peace under the auspices of the United Nations. Its focus was to support bilateral exercises, UN peacekeeping operations, and humanitarian international relief operations. It was subsequently revised to accommodate crisis situations, endorsed by the Diet, and went into effect in September 1999. The elements of the agreement include transportation (including airlift); petroleum, oils, and lubricants; medical services; communications; spare parts and components; repair and maintenance; food and water; billeting; clothing; use of facilities; base support; storage; and airport and seaport services.[28] The revised ACSA bolsters bilateral capabilities and will allow for potential future bilateral cooperation in UN-sponsored initiatives. Operations of this type would be an appropriate focus for future US-Japan bilateral efforts. They serve the goals of enhancing transparency and assuring Japan's neighbors that a more active role by Japan on the global stage should be welcomed as a means to enhance regional stability by promoting preventive defense.

### **Preventive Defense and Comprehensive Engagement: Vehicles for Stability**

The revised Defense Guidelines reflect proactive Japanese efforts to meet the responsibilities of being a world power. They enhance regional stability by adding flexibility to the partnership's ability to respond to regional crises. In today's complex threat environment, that flexibility is a vital weapon in the security planner's arsenal. The catastrophic potential of high-tech threats from a multiplicity of sources also lends urgency to the concept of "preventive defense." Japan's higher profile on the international security stage, as exemplified by its participation in international peacekeeping and disaster relief operations, is a manifestation of preventive defense.

Preventive defense has at its core the concept of engagement. Engagement provides the capability to prevent conflict by addressing conditions that could lead to conflict. Following the devastation of World War II, the merits of preventive defense were reinforced. Preventive defense was the US strategy at the foundation of postwar reconstruction programs and US leadership in creation of the United Nations. Former US Secretary of Defense William Perry described preventive defense as analogous to preventive medicine. In remarks to the Pacific Basin Economic Council on 22 May 1996, he noted, "Preventive medicine creates the conditions which support health and when successful makes disease less likely and surgery unnecessary. Preventive defense creates the conditions which support peace and when successful makes war less likely and deterrence unnecessary." [29]

The 1998 US Security Strategy for East Asia-Pacific reinforces that the bilateral partnership with Japan remains the linchpin of US security strategy in Asia.[30] US strategy recognizes the criticality of its alliance relationships in supporting the goals of regional peace and stability, while concurrently recognizing the value of building upon existing relationships to promote "security pluralism." US strategy is to support multilateral security dialogues as complementary to the existing array of its bilateral security relationships. Multilateral dialogues have the potential to be constructive vehicles toward reducing tensions through increased transparency and confidence-building.[31] This is an area where the forward presence of US forces also plays a constructive role in regional assurances; the United States has bilateral security ties among regional states who do not enjoy such ties with one another. In this respect the United States can be a facilitator with the enhanced credibility that forward forces provide.

An example of how security pluralism as a means of preventive defense is being pursued is provided by the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu, Hawaii. This academic institution was established in 1995 to study regional security and preventive defense. Its mission is "to foster understanding, cooperation, and study of security-related issues among military and civilian representatives of the United States and other Asia-Pacific nations." [32] The center provides an environment in which representatives from throughout the Asia-Pacific region interact as they explore the complex interrelationships of political, economic, diplomatic, and military factors that influence security considerations. The Asia-Pacific Center staff is composed of military and civilian personnel who support a variety of security-related academic activities. These include conducting core curriculum on security studies, hosting international conferences on security, and conducting applied research on security issues in support of the US Pacific Command.

The Asia-Pacific Center is an important component of the American strategy for preventive defense. It builds on the

US Pacific Command's strategy of maintaining strong bilateral partnerships while facilitating multilateral progress in security dialogues. Class composition includes representatives of America's closest bilateral allies, such as Japan, as well as students from countries that were former adversaries, such as Russia. Seventy-five percent of the class composition comes from Asia-Pacific nations other than the United States, reflecting the region's cultural and political diversity. For example, a typical class grouping includes representatives from Mongolia, Nepal, Kiribati, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Madagascar. Progress in promoting a multilateral security dialogue at the Asia-Pacific Center is likely to facilitate the regional peace and stability which both the US and Japanese security strategies seek to achieve.[33]

In the past, because the US-Japan bilateral security partnership was so intensely focused on the Cold War dynamics of the Soviet threat, there were doubts that the partnership could be sustained in its absence. However, what has emerged is an exponentially more complex threat environment: proliferation of nuclear and ballistic missile technologies, seething ethnic tensions, ideological confrontation, and sovereignty and territorial disputes. The ability of almost any group or nation to pursue goals using the lethal efficiencies of applied technology conjures morbid nostalgia for the simplicity of the Cold War and the unambiguous deterrent of mutually assured destruction.

Today's threat environment accentuates the reality that the need for security has not gone away, it has just become more difficult to achieve. The inability of Cold War security paradigms to counter today's threats underscores the importance of preventive defense as a means of providing security. Recognition of this reality is evident in the 1996 Japan-US Joint Declaration on Security and the 1998 US Security Strategy for East Asia-Pacific. In this context, the revised Guidelines for US-Japan Defense Cooperation reflect the ability of the bilateral partnership to continue to evolve in response to today's threats and tomorrow's challenges.

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