



# The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus

in-depth critical analysis of the forces shaping the Asia-Pacific...and the world.

## **The Will and Imagination to Return to Common Sense: Toward a Restructuring of the US-Japan Alliance [Italian translation available]**

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In a discussion of early 20<sup>th</sup>-century China, the writer Lu Xun lamented how the Chinese, completely accustomed to their colonial status, had become "slave-faced." Slave-faced is the expression of a person who is accustomed to being persecuted and lives by toadying to the powerful. It is the hollow expression of those who have lost the courage to think on their own about the condition they are in, of those who do not determine their own fates. That is "slave-faced."

Tracking media reports on the Futenma base relocation issue since the fall of 2009, I realized that slave-faced expressions have become a permanent feature of Japanese intellectuals, including the media. The US-Japan military alliance has become fixed as an unalterable postulate, and the intellectual indolence of those who utterly reject any discussion of altering the alliance is simply astonishing.

To return to common sense. This is what is required of the Japanese, to return to the common sense of international society and to restore the recognition that it is unnatural for foreign military forces to be stationed for an extended period of time in an independent nation. A nation that does not have the will to transcend sophistry and narrow self-interest and confront this problem directly cannot be called an independent nation. Let me once again specify the facts we must face.

- 1) In the 65th year since the end of the Pacific War and 20 years after the end of the Cold War, there are some 40,000 US soldiers (and about 50,000 civilians and dependents) stationed in Japan on US bases that occupy approximately 1,010 square kilometers of land (1.6 times the area of the city of Tokyo).
- 2) Of the top five large-scale foreign bases that the US maintains around the world, four are in Japan (the Yokosuka naval base, and the Kadena, Misawa, and Yokota air bases).
- 3) Since an agreement is in place that makes the entire territory of Japan available for bases, and decisions on what areas to provide are made by the Joint Committee of US and Japanese government representatives (Article 2 of the Status of Forces Agreement [SOFA]), bases can be established anywhere in Japan without the approval of the Japanese Diet. There is a concentration of US bases in the vicinity of the nation's capital, Tokyo, that is unparalleled anywhere in the world (the Yokota air base, the Yokosuka naval base, the Zama army base, and the Atsugi naval air station, among others).
- 4) 70 percent of the costs of stationing US forces in Japan are borne by the host nation, a situation that exists nowhere else in the world.
- 5) The status of US forces in Japan under the SOFA has been carried over from the Administrative Agreement that governed bases during the US occupation, and not only is Japanese sovereignty under the agreement weak, but Japan has had to bear base-related expenses that are not even specified in the SOFA.

### **Rediscoveries Made on a Trip to the US in Early December 2009**

I visited New York and Washington during the first week of December. Since I returned to Japan in 1997 after working in the US for more than 10 years, I have made four trips a year to conduct "fixed-point observations." The purpose of the trip was to share opinions with specialists on US-Japanese industrial cooperation in the environmental energy field, some nine months after the Obama administration launched the "Green New Deal;" and on next-generation information and communications technology, about which I chair a task force for the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communication. Discussions on the US-Japan security relationship were not on my agenda.

Nonetheless, simply because I am a long-time friend of Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio and sometimes have an opportunity to share thoughts with him, the *Nikkei* and *Yomiuri* newspapers repeatedly portrayed my visit to the US as that of a secret envoy of the prime minister, sent to pave the way for a solution to the pressing Futenma problem. Parallel diplomacy is always to be avoided, since conducting negotiations on a separate plane when official negotiations are taking place can only confuse the situation, and I am not stupid enough to engage in such activity. In fact, considering the delicacy of the timing of the trip, I intentionally avoided the departments of State and Defense, the president's office, and others with responsibility for US-Japan relations, and restricted my visits and discussions to Washington think tanks involved with international relations, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, and journalists and specialists involved with energy and environmental problems.

Those who just recently were saying, "Japan's refueling mission in the Indian Ocean is living proof of the US-Japan alliance, and if it ends, the alliance will collapse," are now insisting, "Unless Japan implements the terms of the US-Japan agreement on the Futenma relocation, the US-Japan alliance will crack." Many of the Washington-based correspondents for Japanese media are only capable of reporting that "a breakdown of favorable US-Japan relations looms."

Just what do these people mean by "favorable US-Japan relations"? I dare to say they think it is desirable to maintain the US-Japan relationship of the Bush-Koizumi era, when Japan responded swiftly to American expectations that it "show the flag," by dispatching Self-Defense Forces first to the Indian Ocean and then to Iraq. In other words, the reports of my trip to the US reflected the overreaction of those who consider the US-Japan security relationship as the permanent status quo, to which any change is unwelcome.

However, we have witnessed the failure of the war in Iraq. The US has sacrificed the lives of over 5300 soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, while spending over \$1 trillion on the wars. The initiator of the war, President Bush himself, concluded the Iraq war was based on faulty intelligence, and it is estimated that the war has cost the lives of at least 100,000 Iraqis. In the US itself, this reassessment has led to a paradigm shift, with the Iraq war-opponent Obama as president. Among the Japanese, it is amazing how few have been willing to admit that the nation took the wrong path when it got involved with that war. But it is not possible to map out the future of US-Japan relations without first sincerely coming to terms with these issues. This is because a proper recognition of the process that led to the reorganization of the US military after 9.11 is the foundation for examining the next stage in the US-Japan alliance.

Still, the foul odor emanating from those who cling to US-Japan security is fierce. I keenly feel the need to keep at arm's length those in Washington who make their living off US-Japan security, those who are generally referred to as "Japan hands" and "pro-Japanese." These people greet visitors from Japan with smiles on their faces, and often participate in symposiums in Japan, where they sing the praises of "the US-Japan alliance as a permanent axis." They

always refer to the “responsibilities” of base-hosting Japan and call for increased cooperation with the US, in the name of making “international contributions.” Of course, there is a group of “US hands” and “pro-American” Japanese who sing in chorus, and this mutual dependence has long set the course for US-Japan relations.

On my trips to the US over the past several years, I have made an effort to meet with people who have a broader view of the world and to hear their thoughts on US-Japan relations from a diversity of perspectives. This is because I wanted to hear objective opinions that went beyond vested interests and preconceptions, in order to assess the present state of the US-Japan alliance within a broader view.

What I have been surprised to find is that, even among top-level intellectuals and specialists in international issues, most of those who are not directly involved in US-Japan relations don't have any knowledge of the reality of the alliance (the state of the bases and the content of the SOFA). They might preface their response with “US national interest aside,” but they respond to the fact that this is the ongoing reality with puzzled expressions and honest doubt.

I would also like to mention a mind-twisting experience I had when I visited China to lecture at Peking University in October. In discussing the US-Japan alliance with a variety of diplomats and specialists in international affairs, they often mentioned as an honest concern the “cap in the bottle” theory. In short, this is the idea that, if an increasing sense of Japanese autonomy leads to the withdrawal of US military forces, the “cap” that suppresses the revival of Japanese militarism will be eliminated, to the alarm of Japan's neighbors in Asia. This made me aware of the irony that it is not only those who make their living off of US-Japan security who want to maintain the current framework, but China itself is counting on the continued presence of the US military in Japan.

One can only smile bitterly over the twisted reality of US-Japan security, but what we Japanese must resolve is that the peace and security of Japan has to be secured through the exercise of the will of the Japanese people themselves. It is our responsibility to exercise a thoroughly pacifist self-restraint that will present no threat to our neighbors.

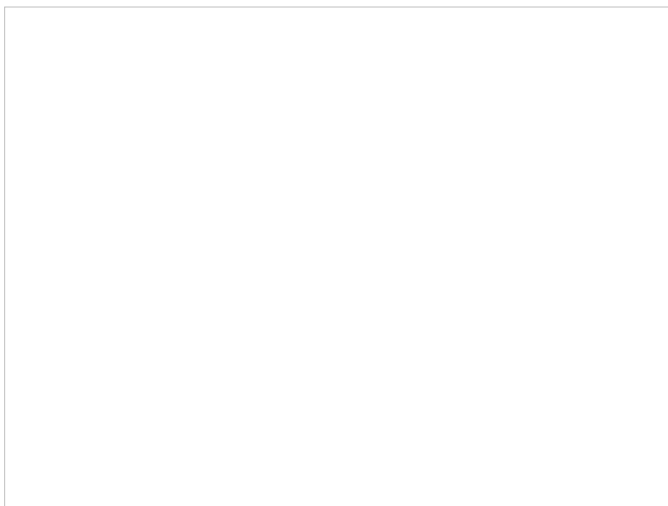
### The Essence of US-Japan Security and Post-Cold War Changes

It hardly needs to be said that the US-Japan security system was established in the context of the Cold War. This was clearly stated by Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru, who traveled to San Francisco in 1951 as the initiator of this system on the Japanese side. In Chapter 19 (“The Origins of the US-Japan Mutual Defense System”) of his memoir (*Kaisō Jūnen* [Recollections of 10 Years]), Yoshida wrote that the US-Japan security treaty was neither imposed by the US nor requested by Japan. Rather, Yoshida and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles “had the same perception of objective conditions and the prospects for Japan's defense and the defense of the free world, and we decided there was no better policy to fill the vacuum in Japan's defense that would result from the withdrawal of the occupation army after the peace treaty,” he explained. Yoshida then added, “The security treaty, as the treaty itself clearly assumes, is entirely a provisional measure. That is to say, if Japan's ability to defend itself is strengthened sufficiently, or if international conditions improve dramatically and the need for the treaty is eliminated, it can be terminated at any time.”

The US-Japan Security Treaty got its start in the context of the Cold War and was provisional in nature. From then until the late 1980s, it must be said that the treaty functioned effectively as the framework for security in the Cold War standoff with the Eastern bloc. However, in the inertia of those four decades, Yoshida's successors, politicians and diplomats alike, became fettered to the Cold War framework. They abandoned the ability to conceive of flexible policies that transcended that framework in active response to changing world conditions. And that continues today.

On the eve of the San Francisco Peace Conference and the signing of the US-Japan Security Treaty, Yoshida Shigeru told the young diplomats in his entourage, “I am prepared to sign, having made the judgment that it is appropriate to pursue postwar recovery and security as a member of the Western camp, but you must examine Japan's diplomatic options with flexibility.”

Emerging from the Cold War era, the Berlin Wall was toppled in 1989 and the world entered the post-Cold War era. The US-Japan security system, which was premised on the Cold War, should have been fundamentally reexamined in the context of the changed world situation. However, conditions in Japan didn't allow this. The “1955 System” that pitted the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) against the opposition Japan Socialist Party (JSP), in what amounted to a political proxy war in the East-West standoff, lost its reason for existence, and the political scene in the 1990s became much more fluid. In 1993 the Miyazawa Cabinet became the last in the unbroken string of one-party LDP governments, and a succession of relatively short-lived cabinets followed for the rest of the decade. This period even saw the birth of the Murayama Cabinet, heading a coalition of the LDP and the JSP. It was not possible to construct a new diplomatic foundation in this context.



**Yoshida Shigeru signing US-Japan Security Treaty, September 8, 1951**

During that first post-Cold War decade, Japan should have reviewed its US-centered security system, just as Germany did in 1993. As a result of the review of American bases in Germany, US forces were slashed from 260,000 to 40,000, and the SOFA was revised. In contrast, based on the perception that the Cold War had not ended in Asia, the US-Japan Security Treaty continued to be renewed automatically. To the extent there was a review, it was confined to the 1996 Clinton-Hashimoto Declaration that reaffirmed the security treaty and the 1997 revision of the guidelines for US-Japan defense cooperation.

In fact, the revised guidelines included provisions that harbored great danger. The emergencies that the security treaty was meant to address (now defined to include “situations in areas surrounding Japan”) were no longer restricted to the Far East, but instead were defined as situations that are judged to have “an important influence on Japan's peace and security.” In other words, this created the possibility for Japan to cooperate militarily with the US anywhere in the world, if a situation was deemed to threaten Japanese peace and security.

It should be noted that the context for these decisions was the perception of the state of the world in the 1990s. It had become commonplace to discuss the “unipolar hegemony” of the US in the post-Cold War world, and to describe the US as “the sole superpower.” Without careful consideration,

Japan became increasingly integrated into American global strategies. This was how things stood as we entered the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and when the US suffered the shock of 9.11 and the Bush administration, in a frenzy, invaded Afghanistan and Iraq, the unthinking decision that “Japan had no choice but to go along with the US” was unavoidable.

During the six decades since the security treaty was signed, what is incomprehensible amid the changing context is the ever-increasing share of the costs borne by the Japanese side. Originally, the SOFA did not impose a cost burden on Japan. Under Article 24 of the agreement, the costs of maintaining US forces in Japan were borne, not by Japan, but by the US. Japan was to provide the land for the bases, but maintenance expenses were to be paid by the US. There were even cases where the US paid a usage fee, just as it paid the government of the Philippines for the use of the Subic naval base and the Clark air force base until the US withdrew from these bases in 1992.

However, the Japanese cost burden increased steadily over the years. Beginning in 1978, when Defense Agency Director-General Kanemaru Shin offered to pay part of the welfare costs of Japanese employed by the US forces, in what he termed a "sympathy budget," Japanese cost-sharing became the norm. When the costs of land rental and measures for the areas surrounding bases are included, the Japanese government continues to pay about ¥600 billion (about \$6.7 billion) annually in expenses associated with the US bases. In the 20 years since the end of the Cold War, the Japanese people, through their taxes, have borne the "security cost" of more than ¥10 trillion (about \$110 billion) in US-base related expenses.

There are no other places in the world where the host country pays 70 percent of the costs of US military bases, and one quickly realizes that this contributes to the difficulty of changing the status quo. The knowledge that Japan is the cheapest place in the world to station US forces permeates the US military establishment, and Japan's payments nurture the population, in the US and Japan, that lives off the US-Japan security arrangement. Last fall, when the new Democratic Party of Japan government conducted its review of expenditures, it was pointed out that that wages paid to Japanese employees on US bases in Okinawa are 20–30 percent higher than wages paid for equivalent occupations in the civilian sector. There was discussion of paring these wages, which was met by angry comments from a representative of the base workers, an exchange that only highlighted the complexity of the base problem.

In any case, there was no structural review of the US-Japan security setup during the first "lost" decade of the post-Cold War era. Then, entering the new century, we were faced with 9.11 and the resulting "restructuring" of the US military, which further transformed the US-Japan alliance.

### **What Did the Restructuring of the US Military Amount To?**

The military analyst Ebata Kensuke, who died in 2009, always based his analysis on accurate knowledge and information, and was much deserving of respect. His 2005 book, *Beigun Saihen* (US Military Restructuring), was a cool-headed analysis of the reality behind the restructuring of the US military in Japan. "The US is planning to use Japan," he wrote, "as a forward position on the far side of the Pacific, from which to supply and deploy troops whenever necessary." Identifying this as the true character of the restructuring, Ebata suggested that these goals do not coincide with Japan's and indicated that "danger lurks" in the restructuring. He made strategic proposals for reducing and moving bases, revision of the SOFA, and reduction of the "sympathy budget." We would do well to heed his warnings and pursue his recommendations.

The restructuring of the US military, which military officials in the US refer to as a "transformation," was a strategy developed in response to the Iraq war and the war on terror, led by the Bush administration secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld. Its goals were, first, to increase the efficiency of the war on terror, including the use of preemptive attacks; and, second, to strengthen joint operations with allied forces. These goals deviate from the original goals of the US-Japan security relationship.

At a Tokyo symposium on US-Japan relations in December 2009, former deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage appealed to the audience, "The reason you can sleep peacefully tonight is because the United States is protecting Japan." I'm sure his intentions were good, but he failed to accurately convey the fact that, unfortunately, the US-Japan security apparatus has strayed far from its origins in "protecting Japan" and "protecting the security of the Far East." It has been transformed into the foundation for joint operations in "America's war"—the war on terror, focused on Islamic fundamentalism from the Middle East to Central Asia. Fighting terrorists grounded in Islamic fundamentalism subtly increases hatred of Islam in general and runs the risk of igniting a clash of civilizations. From Japan's perspective, it is foolish to place itself in a framework where Islam is seen as a threat to Japan's security.

I have been involved with the problems of the Middle East since the 1980s, and I think Japanese should be aware that many people in Middle Eastern countries have respect and affection for Japan as the only developed country that has not exported weapons to or intervened in any Middle Eastern country. In addition, in contrast to the US, there are no domestic pressures on Japan to support the Israeli side in the Israel-Palestine conflict. We must be aware of where Japan stands and realize there are things in the world that should be confronted jointly with the US and others that should not.

### **Examining Afresh the "Threats" that Surround Japan**

At the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the world in the midst of major structural change, what exactly are the threats to Japanese security? We should reconsider them with a cool head.

Does Russia pose a threat? While it is true that there are disputes between Japan and Russia over the Northern Territories and fishing rights, the possibility of military aggression that existed during the Soviet era is no longer realistic. Rather, incidents like the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 increase tensions between the US and Russia, and if these tensions lead to a new Cold War, the more likely threat is that Japan would be drawn into an American war as an ally of the US.

What about the threat from North Korea? To be sure, North Korea's continuing development of missiles and nuclear capabilities, out of proportion to its national strength, makes it a threat. But the North Korean threat today is different from what it was during the Cold War. Then, a North Korean invasion of the south represented a military action with the support of the Soviet Union and China, which posed the threat of transforming South Korea and Japan into socialist states. Today, the North Korean threat is that of a "rogue state," without a message that would mobilize world sympathy; it is like the death cry of the "Military First" state, the orphan of the Cold War, and it only serves to deepen North Korea's isolation.

However, a desperate North Korean invasion of the south cannot be dismissed entirely, and the presence of the US Marines in Okinawa as a deterrent force must be acknowledged. Nonetheless, what is most important for Japan is to pursue a diplomatic strategy that renders North Korean missiles and nuclear arms unusable, and to continue leading the initiative for a denuclearized Northeast Asia that also encompasses Russia, China, South Korea, and the US.

How about the Chinese military threat? Chinese military expenditures have increased annually for 21 years, and the 2009 budget was \$70.3 billion (an increase of 14.9 percent over the previous year), which is substantially more than Japan's military budget (¥4.7 trillion or \$52 billion in 2009). Considering the low cost of personnel in China, it is clear that the country is aiming to build a prodigious complement of armaments. Many are swayed by the logic that the US-Japan alliance must be strengthened to meet this Chinese threat, but the reality is not so simple. This is because of shifts in the US-China relationship. The high-level US-China Strategic Economic Dialogue begun in 2006 was upgraded under the Obama administration in April 2009 to include political and security issues. Meanwhile, nearly 500 US corporations now participate in the US-China Business Council, which, in contrast to the recent sluggishness of the Japan-US Business Council, has increased the intensity of exchange.

Given this, let us explore whether the US-Japan Security Treaty would come into play and whether the US would take action if China, in a hypothetical scenario, were to forcibly occupy the disputed Senkaku (Diaoyu) Islands. In the Japanese view, since the Senkakus were under US administration until the moment Okinawa reverted to Japan, there is no question about Japanese possession of the islands. But in recent years, as seen in the statements of US diplomats that the US does not want to get involved in territorial disputes between China and Japan, the US stance is ambivalent. Probably, in a balanced view, the US government would heed American public opinion, and if it concluded that it was appropriate to take action, it might defend the Senkaku Islands.

Engaging in speculation of this sort leads to the conclusion that the threats that Japan and the US must face jointly have changed dramatically and are not always clearly defined. From the Japanese side, neither excessive expectations nor excessive dependence are reasonable. Rather, the most realistic view is what might be called a "strategic ambiguity," that the US presence in the US-Japan alliance serves as a vague symbol of leverage in a time of crisis, and stands as a guarantee to the world that Japan does not stand alone.

### **The Evolution of the US-Japan Alliance**

With this understanding of the status of the alliance in mind, what sort of US-Japan security relationship should we aim for in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? With both governments having a new party in power, this is a good time to explore new frameworks that transcend the vested interests and fixed ideas of the past.

In his book *Embattled Garrisons: Comparative Base Politics and American Globalism*, Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies director Kent Calder cites the intriguing statistic that, over the past 50 years, the probability that a regime change in a country hosting military bases was followed by a withdrawal of bases is 67 percent, even for US bases. If one makes a calm assessment of the situation of East Asia, it is likely that the US military's presence in Japan should continue at a certain level, even if it is in the nature of a "strategic ambiguity." However, we should proceed with a reconstruction of a US-Japan alliance worthy of our mutual trust, not with the inertia that has prevailed to date, but on the basis of careful deliberation. To that end, I would like to offer the following proposals.

1) Establish a mechanism for strategic dialogue between the US and Japan, to facilitate cabinet-level discussions on future-oriented US Japan relations in the areas of economics and security, and to redesign the US-Japan alliance. Specifically, carry out strategic dialogue to deepen US-Japanese cooperation in economics and industry, through such measures as industrial cooperation and free trade agreements; and strategic dialogue on the preferred state of US bases in Japan and US-Japan defense cooperation, to foster the evolution of the security system.

2) With regard to security, clarify Japanese thinking on long-term goals for the US-Japan military alliance. For example, while paying heed so as not to create a military vacuum in East Asia, examine the purpose of each US military base and facility, and eliminate those that have fulfilled their purpose, with a goal of a 50 percent reduction over 10 years. (Note that Article 2.3 of the SOFA states, "The facilities and areas used by the United States armed forces shall be returned to Japan whenever they are no longer needed.")

3) With regard to the SOFA, gradually transition US military bases, under a framework administered by the Japanese government, to the stationing of US forces on Self-Defense Force bases, where they would be jointly administered (as provided in SOFA Article 2.4b). (Note that former Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru once proposed, with the same concern in mind, that "in the future, as a matter of principle, all American forces should be stationed at bases controlled and operated by the Self Defense Forces," in essence, that bases should be used jointly, under Japanese sovereignty.)

4) Regarding the future shape of US-Japan security, explore flexible scenarios, including an arrangement where Japan and South Korea bear an appropriate cost for retaining, for a certain period of time, an emergency dispatch force in Hawaii and Guam, as a mechanism to maintain a US presence and avoid a military vacuum in East Asia.

5) The problem of the relocation of the Futenma base should be considered in the context of the long-term review of the US-Japan security system, but, given the dangers to local residents from the continued use of the base, quickly determine realistic alternatives that will make it possible to fulfill the agreement with the US to move the base by 2014. In this case, considering US strategic planning, the point of agreement will likely be the maintenance of the combined strength of forces in Okinawa and Guam.

When you think about it, the perspective of "returning to common sense" that I mentioned at the beginning of this article resonates with the 1776 pamphlet that Thomas Paine wrote, using for his title the catchphrase "common sense" that was then used among Americans pressing for independence from Great Britain. Paine argued that it was common sense that American subordination to and dependence on Britain risked embroiling the colonies in unnecessary wars, fought in the name of "British justice," and he appealed for American autonomy and self-respect. The historical context is different, but this spirit should resound in the hearts of Japanese today.

The time is nearing for us to calmly face a revision of the treaty in our era.

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