
The North Korean Nuclear Threat and the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance: Perceived Interests, Approaches, and Prospects

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The problem of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has emerged as the driving force of Japan's growing security consciousness and activism and as a principal issue in U.S.-Japan alliance relations. North Korea's increasingly threatening nuclear and ballistic missile programs have been central to a major post-Cold War shift in Japan's security outlook toward both increasing direct military cooperation with the U.S. and greater defense self-sufficiency. For example, in the wake of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., the Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi provided unprecedented noncombat logistical support to U.S. military operations in the Indian Ocean. Japan has also played a leading role in organizing and providing international assistance for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. Additionally, on the highly contentious issue of Iraq, the Koizumi government broke with traditional Japanese reticence and gave strong and outspoken diplomatic support to the Bush administration before the American and British-led attack. In early 2004 Japan sent noncombat troops to Iraq to conduct humanitarian relief and to assist reconstruction, despite the absence of a clear United Nations mandate.

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Despite highly restrictive operational restrictions and rules of engagement, this cooperation is widely viewed as stretching the limits of Article 9 of Japan's U.S.-imposed "peace constitution."¹

SHARED GOALS, CONFLICTING PRIORITIES, AND APPROACHES

In broad terms, Japan and the United States share the same concerns about the threat posed by North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs, but the Koizumi government not only has a somewhat different approach from that of the Bush administration, but also different priorities and unique domestic political considerations. The latter include, especially, the strong desire to gain a complete accounting of scores of Japanese citizens believed to have been abducted by North

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Korea from Japanese shores and from Europe during the 1970s and 1980s. Koizumi's diplomacy has succeeded in obtaining the return to Japan of five former abductees and their families, but North Korea has balked at providing information on eight that Kim Jong-il has said are dead. North Korea has also refused to discuss the fates of 10 victims officially listed by Japan's national police and scores more suspected of having been kidnaped. Despite Koizumi's strong political

incentives to resolve this issue, he has been careful to make the resolution of the nuclear issue a precondition for normalizing relations and providing significant economic benefits, regardless of any progress on the abductee issue. This could change, however, if the Japanese government were to conclude that the Bush administration was not interested in any compromise resolution of the nuclear issue, or in the face of other adverse developments in U.S.-Japan alliance relations.

Currently, both governments take a harder line toward the DPRK than the other countries represented at the Six-Party Talks being hosted by China, but the Koizumi government sometimes has shown impatience with U.S. policy towards Pyongyang. Tokyo frequently has been frustrated by what it views as Washington's inflexible approach, and by the harsh rhetoric leveled at North Korea by one of the Bush administration's most influential policymakers, Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security John Bolton.

Neither country's policymakers are under any illusions that Kim Jong-il intends to give up his primary source of leverage and deterrent against attack-his nuclear weapons-but Washington and Tokyo appear to be basing their approaches on significantly different assumptions. The Bush administration essentially has demanded that North Korea agree to give up its nuclear program

before substantive bilateral talks on possible benefits accruing from meeting this U.S. demand can be held. The Koizumi government, on the other hand, has sought to draw North Korea into step-by-step negotiations aimed at gradually persuading Kim Jong-il that he has more to gain from taking his country out of its isolation and becoming part of the global economy than from maintaining his nuclear weapons program. Reportedly, Prime Minister Koizumi pressed this point with President Bush during the June 8, 2004, Group of Eight meeting in Sea Island, Georgia.²

Within this broad approach, Japanese policy has hardened somewhat since Koizumi's second visit to Pyongyang in March 2004, but more so because of North Korea's unsatisfactory response to the abduction issue than because of its intransigence on the nuclear issue. Japan has welcomed the Bush administration's decision to partly relax its negotiating position. Under a formula announced by the Administration in late June 2004, in advance of the third round of the Six-Party Talks, the United States offered to allow North Korea a three month period to fully comply with U.S. demands regarding the dismantlement of its nuclear facilities, during which time Japan and South Korea could supply fuel oil. Some analysts connected this shift directly to complaints by Japan, South Korea, and China that the U.S. stance was overly rigid and had not taken into account an indication by North Korea that it might be open to negotiating the dismantlement of its nuclear program and an end to its missile exports in return for U.S. aid, diplomatic recognition, and security guarantees.³

The Koizumi government and its supporters in the national Diet (parliament) have numerous reasons to maintain a strong U.S.-Japan alliance, but the threat posed by North Korea is arguably the most important consideration. This point was made clear in the report of the special advisory Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, which was delivered to the prime minister in early October 2004. Noting that both Russia and China possess nuclear weapons, and that North Korea had not abandoned its nuclear ambitions, the report warned: "The problem of WMD [weapons of mass destruction] development, including North Korean nuclear weapons, and the development and deployment of ballistic missiles could represent a direct threat to Japan, and instability on the Korean Peninsula may yet become a major destabilizing factor affecting the international relations of East Asia."⁴ The report underscored the critical role played by the U.S.-Japan alliance, especially American "extended deterrence," shorthand for the American nuclear umbrella.⁵

At the same time that Japan has significantly expanded its role in the alliance, it has also begun to increase its own defense self-sufficiency, and even considered, but thus far rejected, acquiring a limited offensive capability to attack North Korean missiles on their launch pads.⁶ In March 2003 Japan launched into orbit the first two of four planned national reconnaissance satellites to enable an

independent monitoring of North Korea's missile activities. It also constructed a new intelligence headquarters with expanded capabilities for intelligence collection and analysis. In late 2003, in a move that created remarkably little opposition, the Koizumi government decided to budget for the acquisition of two different U.S. anti-missile systems- ground and sea-based-beginning in 2006.⁷

Given the crucial importance of Japan's long-standing offer to provide massive economic and financial assistance following the normalization of bilateral relations, Tokyo's cooperation remains essential to a diplomatic resolution of the confrontation. Likewise, after China, which controls North Korea's economic lifelines but opposes sanctions, Japan is the country best positioned to apply economic and financial pressure to a regime that is desperately seeking to revive its economy enough to maintain political stability. Japan has continued to deploy both the economic "carrot" and the sanctions "stick."

Japan can live with some degree of nuclear ambiguity concerning North Korea-and so too, it would appear, can the United States, for the time being, at least. Yet it is unclear whether and for how long the Japanese government would be willing to wait for a negotiable American nuclear initiative if Japan's key

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domestic political imperative-gaining a full accounting of the fate of scores of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents during the 1970s and 1980s-and principal regional diplomatic objective lightening the burden of history by normalizing relations with Pyongyang-should become otherwise achievable. The Koizumi government has

pledged that it will not go forward with normalization without a resolution of the nuclear issue, but his government is not necessarily committed to the Bush administration's demand for the complete, verifiable, and irreversible, dismantlement of North Korea's nuclear weapons. Likewise, whether and for how long the administration itself will continue to insist on this formula remains to be seen, now that the president has been reelected.

NORTH KOREA AND JAPAN'S GROWING DEFENSE CONSCIOUSNESS

Japan's view of the Korean Peninsula as the proverbial "dagger pointed at the heart of Japan" dates from the thirteenth century invasions of Kublai Khan's Mongol hordes, which were launched from Korea and, famously, destroyed by the Kamikaze ("Divine Wind"). Japan's efforts to dominate the Peninsula have earned it the enmity of both North and South Korea. Hostility towards Japan based on catastrophic historical experience is strong in both Koreas, but especially in the North, where anti-Japanese feeling has been the basis for strident nationalism and

perhaps the only source of continuing popular support for a repressive and incompetent regime. The desire to overcome this enmity has been a major incentive for Tokyo's efforts to normalize relations with Pyongyang.

The transition from the Cold War to the post-Cold War era has significantly affected Japanese security perceptions regarding North Korea and Northeast Asia more generally. After the end of the Korean War in 1953, both the Soviet Union and China could be counted on to restrain Pyongyang, knowing that a new Korean conflict could well lead to a global nuclear conflagration. This equation changed radically, however, with the collapse of the former Soviet Union. Moscow's shrinking horizons and weak financial situation opened up new opportunities for Japanese leverage—such as Tokyo's singular ability to provide economic assistance, technology, and market access—but also spurred Pyongyang to seek nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles to reduce its vulnerability to American and Japanese pressure.

The 1993-1994 U.S.-DPRK Confrontation and a Potential Crisis in Alliance Relations

Despite North Korea's new incentives to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, until 1992 Japan had reason to expect that North Korea would not present a serious nuclear threat. Pyongyang had signed the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, and on December 31, 1991, North and South Korea signed a Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Cautious optimism turned to alarm in 1992, however, when the United Nations' International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported that North Korea appeared to have omitted as much as two bombs' worth of plutonium, one of two fissile materials.

Japan had a heavy stake in the U.S.-North Korea confrontation that began in March 1993, when Pyongyang announced that it would withdraw from the NPT in response to the IAEA's demand that it allow a "special inspection" of two suspected nuclear waste sites at its Yongbyon nuclear site. The Yongbyon complex included a 5-megawatt (5-MW) research reactor and a reprocessing facility that could extract plutonium from spent uranium fuel. The sense of crisis increased markedly in May 1994, when North Korea began to replace the reactor fuel rods without adequate monitoring by IAEA inspectors. Unsupervised or insufficiently monitored handling of the spent fuel rods would make it impossible to reconstruct the operating history of the reactor and thus compromise the IAEA's ability to assess the extent of any past plutonium production. Moreover, the spent fuel rods themselves could be used to obtain additional plutonium.

The DPRK's nuclear brinkmanship posed two different challenges to Japan and the U.S.-Japan alliance. One was the possible consequence for Japan of

a preemptive attack on North Korea's nuclear facilities, which the United States was reportedly prepared to carry out. If such an attack led to a full scale war, Japan faced the risk of attacks by North Korea's Scud-based Nodong missiles, and perhaps even more ominously, a wave of refugees across the Sea of Japan. Of different but equally urgent importance was the likelihood that, as in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, Japan might not be able to meet U.S. expectations of military support. The specter of American troops spilling blood while Japan stood on the sidelines became a serious concern to alliance managers in both governments.

Conflict with North Korea and crisis within the alliance was averted by the U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework of October 1994, which required North Korea to freeze its nuclear program in return for the construction of two proliferation-resistant light water power reactors and other potential diplomatic and economic benefits. Japan reluctantly agreed, after months of U.S. pressure, to provide approximately \$1 billion to help pay for the construction of the two light-water nuclear power plants that the Clinton administration had volunteered to organize via an international consortium, the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization. Although resentful of the American expectation that Japan would play such a large financial role in a bilateral agreement between the United States and North Korea, the Japanese government nonetheless was relieved that the possibility of a military conflict had dissipated.

Proactive Measures to Enhance Japan's Role in a Korean Peninsula Contingency: The Revised U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation Guidelines of 1996-1997

Concern that the alliance had narrowly avoided a crisis with North Korea in 1993 to 1994 spurred senior officials in both countries to find ways to close the gap between U.S. expectations and Japanese limitations before a new crisis emerged. This effort received further impetus from the national furor that erupted in Japan over the brutal kidnapping and rape of a Japanese high school student in Okinawa by two U.S. servicemen in September 1995. A set of revised defense cooperation guidelines negotiated from 1996 to 1997 created a new framework for security cooperation that allowed U.S. military planners and their Japanese counterparts to begin to detail each country's responsibilities in a regional conflict.

Controversy arose when senior Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) officials acknowledged that Taiwan was included in the area covered by the guidelines, but the record makes clear that defining roles and missions in a future conflict with North Korea was the main purpose of the agreement. The Japanese Diet did not pass the initial implementing legislation until late May 1998, a delay attributable to continuing public wariness about giving more latitude to the Japanese military.

*North Korea's August 1998 Taepo dong Missile Launch
and Missile Defense Cooperation*

North Korea's August 1998 launch of a medium-range Taepo dong I ballistic missile, with a potential range of about 2,000 to 2,200 kilometers, created a new level of concern about both the DPRK's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. The missile passed over the northern part of the main Japanese island of Honshu before the second stage splashed down in the Pacific Ocean. A third stage, which is thought to have carried a small satellite, failed to achieve its objective.⁸

The missile launch, which produced a media frenzy, hardened Japanese public opinion against Pyongyang and provided a new fillip to both Japan's defense modernization and U.S.-Japan security cooperation. The incident led to the development and deployment of two reconnaissance

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satellites that had far less resolution than those supplied by the U.S. military and intelligence services but which were completely under Japanese control. The Taepo dong I incident led Japan to increase its modest cooperation with the U.S. Navy and the Pentagon's Ballistic Missile Defense Organization in the design of an enhanced version of the Navy's Standard air defense missile. It also spawned the 2004 decision to begin to acquire two U.S. ballistic missile defense systems, the U.S. Army's ground-based Patriot Advanced Capability (PAC-3) and the U.S. Navy's advanced version of its Standard missile (SM-3), which will be deployed on ships equipped with the Aegis radar and fire control system. Japan has four Aegis-equipped destroyers and two more on order.

North Korea and Japan's Response to September 11 and the Invasion of Iraq

The weight of evidence suggests that concern about the North Korean nuclear and missile threat has a major influence on how Japan views its broader alliance relations with the United States and its own international political role. The first indication of this change was apparent in Japan's unusually assertive support of the United States after the September 11 attacks. Among its more important actions, the Koizumi government pushed controversial legislation through the Diet that allowed Japan, for six months at a time, to send a small flotilla of the Maritime Self-Defense Forces (MSDF) into the Indian Ocean to provide fuel and water to U.S. and allied ships supporting operations in Afghanistan. The Indian Ocean deployment was the first such action since the end of the Second World

War and marked a new chapter in U.S.-Japan alliance cooperation. In late September 2004 the Koizumi government extended this deployment for another six months until May 1, 2005—the sixth such extension—and agreed to continue to supply fuel to U.S. ships free of charge.⁹

Japan's vocal diplomatic support of U.S. policy toward Iraq before, during, and after the U.S.-British-led invasion represented a quantum leap in its international political role and alliance cooperation. During a highly contentious open debate in the UN Security Council in February 2003 that involved more than 50 countries, Japan and Australia stood alone in unequivocally supporting the call by the U.S. and Britain for the adoption of a Security Council Resolution authorizing the use of force against Iraq. Both the Japanese and Australians adopted this stance despite domestic opposition to the war in each country. The Koizumi government continued to provide strong public support for U.S. policy after the initiation of combat in Iraq.

On December 9, 2003, despite the devastating bombing a few weeks earlier of the Italian police headquarters in Nasiriyah, Iraq, the Koizumi cabinet adopted a "Basic Plan" for the deployment of up to 1,000 Japanese Self-Defense Forces (SDF) personnel to Iraq. In late 2003 and early 2004 Japan deployed the first of these troops to Iraq under rules of engagement significantly relaxed from those governing previous Japanese international peacekeeping operations, despite widespread public skepticism and opposition. Following the cabinet's action on the Basic Plan, Koizumi declared at a televised press conference that the time had passed when Japan could just "write checks." Instead, he told the Japanese people, "We are not in a situation in which we can just pay money and avoid making a human contribution because it's dangerous." He continued, "What's being tested is our ideals as a nation."¹⁰

While asserting Japan's larger national interests and international responsibilities, Prime Minister Koizumi has made clear that the North Korean threat and the long-term viability of the U.S.-Japan alliance have been at the forefront of his thinking. On April 2, 2003, a few days after the initiation of combat in Iraq, Koizumi deemed both Saddam Hussein and Kim Jong-il "despots," while also indicating that the North Korean threat required a different response than the use of military force. On this and subsequent occasions the prime minister explained that because Japan could not insure its own security, the U.S.-Japan alliance remained crucial.

In January 2004, shortly after the initial deployment of Japanese troops to Iraq, despite widespread public concerns about their safety, Koizumi told skeptical members of a lower house committee of the Diet that "Japan cannot ensure its peace and safety by itself, and that's why it has an alliance with the U.S." Koizumi was responding to charges that the government was abandoning Japan's "UN-centered foreign policy."¹¹ Should Japan actually face a crisis, he said, "the UN will not deploy forces to fight with Japan and prevent an invasion."¹²

Implied Expectation of Reciprocity

Some American and Japanese analysts also see Japan's increased support of U.S. global and regional policies as carrying the implied expectation of reciprocity in the form of greater U.S. recognition of Japan's national interests and priorities regarding the Korean Peninsula. A few observers even see Japan as seeking to emulate, to some degree, the U.S.-UK relationship, in order to gain more credibility with American leaders and greater influence over U.S. policy. The more general view is that Japanese policy is aimed primarily at making sure that Japanese perspectives are not ignored by U.S. policymakers.

One American analyst, who views enhanced bilateral security cooperation as a positive development for both countries, has noted nonetheless that "Tokyo's belief that it has to back the U.S. in Iraq to make sure its gets a hearing when it comes to North Korea reveals a disturbing lack of confidence in the alliance."¹³ Some other commentators—especially in the Japanese media—charge that the United States government seeks to take advantage of Japan's growing security anxieties in order to gain more support for U.S. policy, thus increasing Japan's subservience rather than increasing its influence. In the words of one American analyst, "These [Japanese] critics complain that Japan still can't say 'no' to the U.S.," and that "Washington is using the war against terrorism, and a pliant prime minister, to recalibrate the security equilibrium in Japan." From this perspective, Japan is not becoming "a UK in Asia" and a "normal" nation, but rather is responding to the U.S. Asian security agenda.¹⁴

Support for the Iraq deployment softened following the seizure and eventual release of five Japanese citizens in April 2004, though a large majority of the public agreed with the Koizumi government's refusal to meet the demand of the Islamic militant hostage takers that Japan pull its troops out of Iraq. As of March 2004, one poll by a major national newspaper found public opinion to be evenly balanced regarding the dispatch of Japanese troops to Iraq, with 42 percent still in favor and 41 percent against. At the same time, the hostage situation and rising anti-coalition attacks in April and May 2004 have reinforced existing doubts among both the public and the political and bureaucratic leadership about U.S. policy more generally and the commitment of Japanese forces to Iraq.

In the future, this uneasiness about U.S. policy could affect cooperation on North Korea, since the Koizumi government has some significant differences with U.S. priorities and negotiating approaches. The Japanese government finds itself under strong domestic political pressure to adopt a more active stance regarding Japan's own national interests and priorities. The Bush administration, for its part, finds its options limited by the war in Iraq and the inherent military and geopolitical constraints of the situation. Consequently, the historical ten-

dency of U.S. leaders to expect automatic, even if reluctant, Japanese support for U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula may become increasingly unrealistic.

**KOIZUMI'S ESSENTIAL POLITICAL IMPERATIVE:
RESOLVING THE ABDUCTEES ISSUE**

Japanese policy towards North Korea cannot be understood without referring to the range of political forces at play, especially in regard to the issue of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents in the 1970s and 1980s. These forces include Koizumi himself, senior LDP politicians, the foreign affairs and security bureaucracy, and the Japanese public. The Japan National Police Agency officially recognizes 10 cases involving 15 abductees, but some private groups suspect that another 40 to 150 missing Japanese nationals also may have also been kidnapped by North Korean agents both from Japanese shores and in Europe. Efforts by the Japanese government and individual leaders to resolve this issue have been one of the most important sources of periodic tension in U.S.-Japan relations

Because of the crucial importance of Japan's long-standing offer to provide massive economic and financial assistance-but not reparations-following the normalization of bilateral relations with North Korea, resolving this issue is of critical importance to a diplomatic resolution of the larger issues. Partly based on an extrapolation of the aid provided to South Korea when Seoul and Tokyo normalized their relations in 1965, Japanese officials have informally mentioned a sum of as much as \$10 billion. Public sentiment about the abductee issue is such that the Japanese government would likely find it very difficult, if not impossible, to participate financially in any diplomatic agreement to freeze or eliminate North Korea's nuclear weapons without also resolving this issue. In fact, Japan has made the resolution of both issues an essential requirement for normalization of relations and even for the discussion of possible benefits that might flow to North Korea.

Based purely on the stakes involved, the abduction issue pales in comparison to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs and its exports of WMD. Pyongyang, however, has attempted to exploit it as a "wedge" issue to separate the United States and Japan, implicitly offering to resolve the issue if Japan scales back its demands regarding the nuclear and other WMD programs. The Bush administration has made it clear that it shares the Koizumi government's insistence that no deal with North Korea on the larger issues can take place without resolving the abductee question. The Japanese government, meanwhile, has asserted that there can be no compromise on the need for the total elimination of North Korea's nuclear programs and facilities. Nonetheless, North Korea has continued alternately to seek to use the issue as a ploy to gain a side agreement with Japan that could weaken U.S. leverage or to create an excuse for intransigence in bilateral talks and in the Six-Party Talks.

In many ways, the issue of the abductees cannot be prioritized. The goal of obtaining a complete accounting of the fate of an uncertain number of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents is more the sine qua non of any agreement to resolve the hard core security issues than an objective that can be rank-ordered. Prime Minister Koizumi and other senior officials often have gone so far as to declare that the resolution of this issue is Japan's most important priority, but that formulation is better read as a political imperative. Certainly the abductees' families and Diet member supporters are by no means confident that the Koizumi government would not settle for less than a complete accounting.

The long-standing issue acquired heightened immediacy in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Faced with the loss of economic and military aid from Moscow and the warming of China's policy towards South Korea, North Korea responded by making overtures to Japan and South Korea to reduce its isolation and to seek new sources of assistance. The latter initiative led to the signing in 1991 of the historic (and soon-to-be-violated) joint North-South declaration to keep the Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons, and sparked Tokyo's own effort not to be left out of any progress toward normalizing relations with Pyongyang.

Japanese and North Korean officials held a series of normalization talks in early 1991, but all of the meetings foundered over the refusal of Pyongyang to discuss the issue of the abductees. When Japanese again raised the issue at a working-level meeting in November 1992, the talks broke down entirely. Full normalization talks did not resume until April 2000, after North Korea agreed in unofficial talks to discuss "missing persons" and to allow inquiries through Red Cross channels. Eventually, even the Red Cross talks broke down over this issue.

Koizumi's first trip to Pyongyang

During the spring and summer of 2002 several developments gave the Japanese government reason to hope that progress might be made on the abductions issue. These included the resumption of the unofficial Red Cross talks and secret communications between a senior Japanese foreign ministry official, Hitoshi Tanaka, and a North Korean official identified only as "Mr. X." Reportedly, Koizumi had been considering a trip to Pyongyang as early as May 2002, if positive results could be guaranteed. Favorable indications from North Korean officials in late summer 2002 led the Prime Minister to decide to fly to Pyongyang for a historic summit meeting with Kim Jong-il, an initiative widely viewed in Japan and elsewhere as a risky political gamble.¹⁵

Bush administration officials apparently were taken by surprise when Koizumi informed them of his plans in early September 2002. Reports differ concerning the reaction of U.S. officials, but in the end, President Bush is said to

have called Koizumi and expressed support for whatever the prime minister found necessary. Many analysts, both American and Japanese, believed that Koizumi's motivation was to bolster his then-sagging popularity with a dramatic breakthrough.¹⁶

Although the Japanese government expected some kind of positive movement on the abductions issue, Kim Jong-il startled Koizumi and other members of his delegation when he admitted and apologized for the abductions, which he blamed on the regime of his father, Kim Il-sung. The Japanese delegation was particularly stunned by Kim's admission that of 13 Japanese citizens or residents that had been seized by North Korean agents, only five remained alive. Kim said that the other eight had died, allegedly of natural causes. Reportedly, Koizumi, by his own account, was shocked upon hearing Kim's admission.¹⁷

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of the trip in the eyes of American officials was the Pyongyang Declaration of September 17, 2002, a joint declaration by the two leaders that included mutual apologies for past transgressions—North Korea's abductions and Japan's colonial rule over Korea during the period 1905 to 1945—and that sketched out a path for the resolution of all of the main international and bilateral obstacles to normalizing relations. To many in Japan, the declaration seemed out of place, but until they returned to Tokyo, Koizumi and his advisers apparently viewed the trip in a positive light.

Among other provisions, the two leaders pledged to “sincerely tackle outstanding problems...based upon their mutual trust in the course of achieving the normalization.” The context of the resolution makes clear that this included fully resolving the issue of the abductees as well as the nuclear and missile issues. The North Korean side described the abductions as “regrettable incidents” related to “the abnormal bilateral relationship” then prevailing. For its part, the Japanese side said that it “regards, in a spirit of humility, the facts of history that Japan caused tremendous damage and suffering to the people of Korea through its colonial rule in the past, and expressed deep remorse and heartfelt apology.” On the nuclear issue, both countries “confirmed that, for an overall resolution of the nuclear issues on the Korean Peninsula, they would comply with all related international agreements.” North Korea also agreed that in the spirit of the declaration, it would continue an existing moratorium on missile tests “in and after 2003.”¹⁸

Mutual miscalculation and the hardening of Japan's policy

If Kim Jong-il had expected that his gesture would be appreciated and would work to undercut Japanese support for the Bush administration's hard line, the move clearly backfired. Koizumi, likewise, was met with an unexpected storm of criticism from the hostages' families, their advocates, and the public at large. Visibly shaken by the highly critical public and parliamentary reaction to

North Korea's admission that eight abductees were dead, the Koizumi administration abandoned its emphasis on dialogue and began to apply pressure to gain the repatriation of abductees' family members, as well as to obtain information about the circumstances of the alleged deaths of the other eight and about the other Japanese thought to have been abducted during the same period. The Japanese government also placed renewed emphasis on resolving the nuclear issue following a trip to Pyongyang by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia and the Pacific James Kelly in early October 2002, during which North Korea admitted that it possessed a secret uranium facility.

Among other actions, Japan subjected ferries from North Korea to rigorous safety inspections, joined with the United States and several Asia-Pacific allies in conducting ship boarding exercises under the Bush administration's Proliferation Security

Initiative (PSI), and tightened export controls on dual use technology. In February 2004, the Japanese Diet amended the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Control Law, giving the government the power to unilaterally impose economic and financial sanctions-including a ban on cash remittances-without having to gain permission from the United Nations or other multilateral bodies.

North Korea complained bitterly about Japan's moves to strengthen its leverage. Although some analysts viewed the changes to the law governing remittances as largely symbolic, the move demonstrated the deepening well of antipathy to Pyongyang within the Japanese Diet and among the general public. In early March 2004, the Koizumi government and the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), the main opposition party, agreed to consider legislation that would give the government the power to ban North Korean ships from Japanese ports under certain circumstances. Several political leaders and government officials openly described the proposed legislation as a "bargaining chip" against North Korea's recalcitrant position regarding the nuclear and abduction issues. Another legal barrier to full U.S.-Japan military cooperation in the event of a Korean Peninsula conflict was raised on May 20, 2004, when the Japanese Diet enacted war contingency legislation that would allow, for the first time, the transport of arms and munitions to U.S. forces engaged in combat.

Koizumi's second trip to Pyongyang

Despite disappointment at the domestic criticism of his first effort at personal diplomacy, Koizumi and key foreign ministry officials remained optimistic

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that a step-by-step approach to addressing the abduction issue and mutual confidence-building could draw Pyongyang out of its isolation and pave the way for resolving larger issues. In the prime minister's view, both the application of pressure and the development of a relationship with Kim Jong-il were necessary for any progress. As early as March 2004, Koizumi himself reportedly told officials charged with handling North Korean affairs that he might go to Pyongyang again if North Korea agreed to release the hostage families and made a "promise" to address the nuclear and missile issues in the Six-Party Talks. Reportedly, Koizumi and the senior foreign ministry officials handling North Korean issues believed that only a personal visit could break the deadlock.

Koizumi's efforts to make progress on the abductee issue received a boost from two Bush administration actions: the public affirmation by administration officials that any resolution of the nuclear issue must also satisfy Japan's demands regarding the abductees' family members, and the inclusion of the abductions in the 2003 issue of the State Department's annual Patterns of Global Terrorism report, which was released on April 29, 2004. Reportedly, the inclusion had been made at Japan's request.

On Koizumi's second visit to Pyongyang, the atmosphere was even tenser than during the first trip. Koizumi did not stay overnight and reportedly was treated coldly by Kim and his officials. Nonetheless, the leaders struck a deal for the release of the families of the abduction victims. In exchange for 250,000 tons of rice and \$10 million in medical supplies and other humanitarian assistance-to be delivered through international organizations-North Korea released into Japanese custody five of seven grown children of the former abductees who had returned to Japan as a result of Koizumi's first trip. The two other children and their American father, the husband of a former abductee, refused Koizumi's personal request to accompany him. The American, Charles Jenkins, was a U.S. Army deserter who reportedly feared that he would be arrested and turned over to the U.S. government. (Jenkins and his two daughters eventually traveled to Japan via Jakarta, Indonesia. After medical tests and treatment, Jenkins turned himself in to the U.S. military in Japan.)

The May 2004 trip boosted Koizumi's popularity but was harshly criticized by some of the abduction victims and their advocates, including prominent members of Koizumi's LDP party, and in the media. The controversy focused mainly on whether Koizumi had given away too much leverage in return for too little. Critics took the government to task for the apparent lack of any progress on the allegedly deceased abductees and others believed to have been abducted, and for the prime minister's commitment not to invoke financial and economic sanctions so long as North Korea adhered to the spirit of the Pyongyang Declaration.

THE U.S.-JAPAN-SOUTH KOREAN TRIANGLE

Japan, South Korea, and the United States have often differed to varying degrees over how best to deal with North Korea, whose goals, motives, and actions often create uncertainty. In the early months of the Bush administration both the Japanese and South Korean governments expressed apprehension and impatience about an extended policy debate within the Bush administration over how to deal with North Korea. While both allied governments strongly preferred to see the United States continue the Clinton administration's policy of engagement, various signals from senior Bush officials indicated a sharp divide between "engagers" and "hawks." Absent a clear policy statement from the new administration, it was widely assumed in Japan and elsewhere in the region that the U.S. government was taking a rhetorical hard line in the absence of internal agreement, and leaving it to North Korea to make the first move toward serious talks.

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Initially, some Japanese officials may have been more comfortable with the Bush administration's approach, since Tokyo had already been taking a harder line toward Pyongyang over the abduction issue. Likewise, in a government in which forming consensual approaches to foreign and security policy is often painfully difficult, the passive approach of the Bush administration guaranteed that Japan would not be faced with immediate policy decisions.

Although cooperation with the United States has been essential to Japan's policy towards North Korea, Japanese policymakers have long had strong reasons for keeping in step with South Korea. The release of the results of the Bush administration's North Korea policy review, on May 6, 2001, just before a visit to Washington by South Korea's foreign minister, generated considerable frustration in both Tokyo and Seoul. Neither government believed that the Administration's continued insistence that North Korea must unilaterally and unequivocally give up its nuclear program before the United States would engage in serious negotiations was realistic. By the summer of 2002, however, both Tokyo and Seoul began to express optimism that the United States was seriously interested in exploring the possibility of eliminating Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and other WMD activities through diplomacy. Tokyo also was encouraged in October 2002 when the Bush administration firmly rejected a bid by North Korea to exclude Japan from the then-proposed Six-Party Talks.

Until the negative domestic political fallout from the Koizumi-Kim summit of September 2002, the Japanese government remained closer to the government of South Korea on its preferred approach, which emphasized diplomatic engagement, than to the U.S. approach. Since then, both governments have generally been in agreement on a policy of “pressure and dialogue,” with the Japanese placing more emphasis on dialogue. The South Korean government has also supported this phraseology, but has been even less supportive of pressure than Japan and continues to pursue economic engagement despite North Korean provocations. As if to underscore the gap between South Korean perspectives and those of the United States and Japan, President Roh Moo-hyun, in a nationally televised speech marking the anniversary of a 1919 Korean uprising against Japanese colonial rule, sharply criticized both American and Japanese policies. Roh called for more independence from the United States and sharply criticized Prime Minister Koizumi for his controversial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which enshrines, in the form of names inscribed on mortuary tablets, more than 2 million fallen soldiers dating from the suppression of revolts after the Meiji Restoration (1868) through the Second World War. Those enshrined from World War II include some 14 military leaders deemed “Class A” war criminals in the Tokyo war crimes trials. These visits, which Prime Minister Koizumi defends as a legitimate and unexceptional expression of respect for all of the country’s war dead, have provoked a bitter and ongoing condemnation from China.¹⁹

Getting Tough or Showing Bluff?

A number of initiatives by the Koizumi government to strengthen Japan’s own military capabilities vis-à-vis North Korea, and its cooperation with the United States on measures aimed at putting pressure on Pyongyang to change its course, go well beyond what Japan has been prepared to do even in the recent past. In February and June 2004 Japan’s Diet passed legislation that would give the government the authority to impose economic and financial sanctions on Pyongyang, including measures against the pro-Pyongyang Chosen Soren (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), such as cutting off financial remittances, and banning North Korean ships from Japanese ports under certain circumstances. The legislation regarding port visits appears to be aimed at the Mangyongbong-92, the North Korean ship that provides the only ferry connection between the two countries.²⁰ As stated earlier, several political leaders and government officials have openly described the proposed legislation as a “bargaining chip” in negotiating the nuclear and abduction issues, but others, who have low expectations of Pyongyang, also view sanctions as simply a means of punishing Pyongyang for its recalcitrance.

The potential value of these measures as negative incentives and bargaining chips could be significant, as Japan is North Korea’s third largest trading part-

ner after China and South Korea. North Korea's exports to Japan have shrunk from \$43 million in 1990 to only \$23 million in 2002. Even in the best of times North Korea's exports to Japan have been paltry compared with other East Asian countries, but sales to Japan still represent a significant source of hard currency, as do remittances from North Koreans living in Japan. Moreover, as the overall North Korean economy steadily declines, the hard currency earned by exports to Japan could be relatively more important. It also cannot be lost on Pyongyang that just as Japan has steadily squeezed both North Korean exports and remittances from ethnic Koreans in Japan in recent months, the country could also reap substantial benefits in return for abandoning its intransigence regarding its nuclear program and the abductee question.

Thus far, however, Japan has only considered sanctions as a potential pressure point to gain North Korean cooperation on the issue of the abductees, not as a source of leverage on the nuclear or missile-related issues. Legally, the authority could be used for any of these purposes, but the political backing for sanctions has related strictly to the abductee issue.

Likewise, although Japan is one of 16 "core members" of the U.S.-fostered Proliferation Security Initiative and hosted exercises involving American, Japanese, Australian, and French ships and aircraft near Tokyo Bay in late October 2004, Tokyo's contribution thus far is less than meets the eye. Among other limitations on the roles of the Japanese Coast Guard and the Maritime Self-Defense Forces, boarding at sea is permitted only as a consequence of violations of Japan's domestic law, including export and import control laws. For this reason, the scenario for the boarding exercise, "Team Samurai 04"—a designation not likely to amuse China and South Korea, whatever the reaction in North Korea-involved the transfer of a suspected cargo containing sarin or its chemical precursor by terrorists from a U.S.-flagged vessel to a Japanese-flagged cargo ship in Tokyo Bay, for delivery in Japan.²¹

What is less clear is how far the Koizumi government is really prepared to go in applying economic and financial pressure. In the case of the proposed port call prohibition legislation, some reports suggest that the government is worried that anti-North Korean sentiment among the public is getting out of hand and that there was a danger of hardening the North Korean position rather than softening it. Reflecting these concerns, one Japanese official reportedly told the press that the port call legislation amounted to "saber rattling" within the framework of a "dialogue and pressure" approach.²²

Constitutional Constraints on Japan's "Collective Defense" Role in a Korean Peninsula Conflict

A range of new security concerns emerging more than a decade after the end of the Cold War, of which the North Korean nuclear and missile threat is

only the most immediate, have begun to stretch the traditional interpretation of Japan's U.S.-imposed "No War" Constitution. Under a several-decades-old interpretation by the cabinet legal office, the Japanese Constitution allows Japan to cooperate with the United States to defend Japanese territory, but bars participation in "collective defense" against other countries. With the Koizumi government's decision to send Japanese troops for noncombat support of reconstruction activities in Iraq, Japanese political leaders from both the ruling coalition and opposition parties agree that the collective defense ban must soon be addressed, regardless of their own views on the matter.

Prime Minister Koizumi and other prominent figures in the dominant LDP have initiated studies on constitutional revision, an initiative that also includes the support of a plurality of Diet members from the opposition DPJ.²³ Even ahead of action on revision, the Koizumi administration response to September 11 amounts

...Strong voices in the Japanese political world, including the current head of the Japan Defense Agency, have called for a more self-sufficient defense capability.

to a kind of "front-loading" of the decision process, starting with the adoption of legislation allowing the Indian Ocean deployments in November 2001 and the dispatch of non-combat forces to Iraq, participating in the PSI exercises, and moving ahead with the acquisition of a missile defense capability. The sea-based missile defense system in particular cannot achieve its potential without some level of integration with U.S. Navy ships and access to satellite intelligence data.

As a practical matter, this operational integration would put the Japanese MSDF in a position to contribute to the defense of U.S. forces and territory—in other words, collective defense—as well as to involve constitutionally acceptable cooperation in the defense of Japan itself. Understanding the reasons for these limited, but still significant, changes in Japan's diplomatic role and security policies is important in assessing the role that Japan might be expected to play in U.S. strategy toward North Korea and other threats to regional security and stability.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

The way in which the United States responds to Japan's stronger assertion of its particular policy interests could have a significant effect both on the resolution of the confrontation with North Korea and on the longer-term future of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Thus, the failure of the United States to consult closely with Japan and to take Japanese interests into consideration could have negative consequences for American political and security interests. Even as Japan moves towards much closer security cooperation with the United States, strong voices in the Japanese political world, including the current head of the Japan Defense

Agency, have called for a more self-sufficient defense capability. Some senior Japanese policymakers have called for a more independent military and diplomatic stance as a better means of focusing American attention to Japanese perspectives on North Korea and other matters, rather than its traditional policy of following the U.S. lead.

Crosscutting Effect of the Issues of the Abductees and the Nodong Missiles

The main Japanese obstacle to a negotiated multilateral agreement—the issue of the abductees—has cross-cutting implications for U.S. policy. On the positive side of the equation, the confrontation between Japan and North Korea over this issue has greatly helped to persuade the Japanese public to support a strong stance against Pyongyang, including support for the acquisition of an enhanced military capability and cooperation with the United States on missile defense. On the negative side, the issue is a potential spoiler—assuming North Korea really is serious about negotiating away its nuclear and other WMD capabilities in return for economic and security benefits.

The problem of North Korea's Nodong missiles could also make Japan reluctant to support a comprehensive agreement on the nuclear issue. Both the abductee and Nodong issues could work against any effort to reach an interim deal with North Korea that would again “freeze” its nuclear program, unless the United States accepted total responsibility for the benefits currently being demanded by North Korea. However, many observers in both Japan and the United States view the likelihood of North Korea's elimination of Nodong missiles as even more remote than the renouncing of its nuclear capabilities.

One solution to the abductee issue could be a separate bilateral agreement between Japan and North Korea. China has strongly suggested that the issue be resolved bilaterally so that the nuclear issues “can take center stage.” The Koizumi government has pursued this issue officially with North Korea, but the North Korean government reportedly has pursued a long-standing strategy of undercutting the government's position by initiating private contacts with individual Diet members. These include legislators close to the abductees' families seeking to act as “brokers.” On one hand, if such a settlement were linked to Japanese compensation of some kind, the U.S. position in the Six-Party Talks could be weakened. On the other hand, if North Korea voluntarily returned the remaining abductees, without a significant quid pro quo, as reportedly was mooted by North Korea in late December 2003, the prospects for a multilateral agreement on the nuclear and WMD issues could be enhanced.

Given Japan's steadily increasing security consciousness and the calls for greater independence emanating from nationalistic quarters, both the short and long term security interests of the United States would appear to be best served

by a fully coordinated approach to the North Korean threat. It may well be that, under strong U.S. pressure, Japan could feel sufficiently dependent on the U.S. security umbrella to give up some of its own agenda. The costs of such an outcome to the U.S.-Japan alliance, however, could be severe.

Also, while the United States may still have the ability to insist on its own priorities, Japan is not likely to respond to the extent that it did with respect to financing the October 1994 Agreed Framework without close and ongoing consultation. Should the American attempt to overcome Japanese resistance because of Japan's fundamental dependence on the United States succeed, the consequences could be very negative for the alliance in the longer term. Among other considerations, U.S. pressure to accept and support an agreement with North Korea that did not satisfy Japan's requirements could significantly hasten Japan's acquisition of an independent military capability, and, in the extreme, lead Japan to pursue nuclear weapons. This would be especially likely if a bilateral or multilateral agreement with North Korea led to the removal of U.S. forces from South Korea—admittedly an extremely unlikely proposition as of late 2004.

Judging from recent trends in Japan's regional security policy, any successful effort to pressure Japan into supporting an agreement that was not perceived as in its national interest would have long term ramifications for the alliance. On the one hand, the Japanese public has become increasingly persuaded that "the world [has] become more dangerous than Japan had envisioned it a decade ago," especially in view of the perceived threat from North Korea. On the other hand, the public does not welcome increased dependence on the United States. To some Japanese, "the Iraq war has simply underlined Japan's supine dependence on the U.S. military umbrella."²⁴

If in the now unlikely event that Japan were to respond to a loss of confidence in the United States by downgrading the alliance while significantly upgrading its self-defense capabilities, or by adopting a more nationalistic foreign policy, regional tensions and national rivalries could well create unwanted regional instability. Another risk is that the perception in the region that the United States was not really serious about negotiating with North Korea could lead China and South Korea in particular to pursue their objectives without the United States. Such a development might cause Japan to move closer to the United States in the short run, but in the long run it could create a deep well of resentment.

The North Korea Factor in Japan's Response to the Pentagon's Proposals for "Transformation and Realignment" in East Asia

The U.S. Defense Department's plan for the "transformation and realignment" of U.S. forces worldwide has created some nervousness in both Japan and South Korea despite the potential domestic political benefits of reducing the

burden of U.S. bases on local communities. The main concern of Japan, which is shared by some in the South Korean government, relates to rumors of American force reductions that could signal a shift of focus away from the long-standing U.S. role of deterring conflict and reinforcing security in Northeast Asia. U.S. officials and senior military officers insist that any force reductions will be more than compensated for by increasing the mobility and lethality of remaining forces. Some Japanese officials and commentators, however, are not completely persuaded by these reassurances. Analysts have noted that unlike in Europe, where the Pentagon is drawing down and realigning forces that are no longer relevant in a post-Cold War environment, potential flash points such as the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Straits continue to represent active threats to peace. These observers note that given the lack of any collective security framework in Asia, the U.S. bilateral alliance system remains the lynchpin of regional stability and security.

In general, the Japanese government has indicated cautious support for proposed changes in the American command structure and deployments in Japan and South Korea. At the same time, however, the Koizumi government also appears to have some unresolved concerns about the larger portents of reconfiguring U.S. forces for new challenges arising out of the threat of global terrorism and proliferation. A struggle has emerged between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Japan Defense Agency over whether the new National Defense Program Outline, scheduled for adoption by the end of 2004, should include a parallel "transformation" of Japanese forces to facilitate their deployment outside the traditional boundaries of the "Far East," as referenced in the 1960 U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.

The same concern about the boundaries of the alliance has caused some in the Japanese government to resist a Pentagon proposal to relocate the headquarters of the 1st Army Corps, currently at Fort Lewis in Washington state, to Camp Zama, about 25 miles southwest of Tokyo. The camp currently houses the several U.S. Army headquarters elements as well as Japanese ground forces units. Reportedly, Japanese officials are concerned about the broader implications of hosting a U.S. military command that is responsible for missions beyond the area covered by the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. Some argue that this arrangement could transgress the limits of the prevailing constitutional interpretation banning participation in "collective defense" arrangements.

The Paradox of Managing U.S.-Japan Alliance Cooperation on North Korea and Broader Security Threats

The United States faces something of a paradox. On one hand, alliance cooperation has never been closer or more extensive, and Japan continues to remove legal and policy barriers to support for U.S. forces in combat situations.

On the other hand, Japan also has never been more materially and psychologically prepared to become a “normal” country, since the concept was first proposed by a prominent nationalist politician, Ichiro Ozawa, in the early 1990s, to develop an independent defense and power projection capability. Japan’s concerns about a rising China have also caused nervousness about any indication that the United States might find a “strategic” partnership with Beijing in the U.S. interest. Already, a number of Japanese analysts have warned that the maintenance of the U.S.-Japan alliance for more than five decades is unprecedented. On the other hand, the October 2004 report of the Prime Minister’s Advisory Commission on Defense Capabilities and indications of the contents of the new National Defense Program Outline covering the period 2005 to 2009, continue to emphasize the absolute necessity of maintaining Japanese defense policy on the basis of the U.S.-Japan alliance. These trends and indicators suggest that alliance relations could go in two very different directions, depending on how well the United States manages its current opportunity to forge a closer and more effective alliance. In the near term, the problem of North Korea’s nuclear weapons and other WMD is likely to be the crucible in which the vitality of the alliance is determined. In the longer term, greater Japanese security activism appears to be taking on a life of its own. That is, the expanded role and operational freedom that has been given to the Japanese military in response to Japan’s concerns about keeping the United States attentive to its interests regarding North Korea has acquired momentum that is not necessarily connected with any specific threat or conflict scenario. The Japanese challenge, at the moment, is to acquire the political will and cross-ministry cooperation to forge a new national strategy that reflects not only the need to maintain a strong alliance with the United States, but that also one that is comprehensive with respect to the totality of Japan economic, diplomatic, and military interests. ■

NOTES

- 1 Under Article 9 of the U.S.-imposed post-World War II Constitution, Japan renounces war as a sovereign right as well as the threat or use of force to settle disputes. The second paragraph of the article states that “land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential will never be maintained.” Over time, and often in response to U.S. pressure, the Japanese government gradually has abandoned a strict interpretation of those provisions. In response to pressure from the U.S. Occupation Authorities during the 1950-1953 Korean War, Japan reestablished its military forces under the rubric “Self-Defense Forces,” and asserted that the right of self-defense against a direct attack on Japanese territory was an inherent right and therefore constitutionally permissible. In 1981 the Cabinet Affairs Legal Office acknowledged that Japan has such a right under international law, but cannot exercise it because the constitution provides that the exercise of the right of self-defense must be limited to the minimum level necessary to defend Japanese territory. This finding is deemed to rule out “collective defense,” that is, active military cooperation with one country against another state. Japan is not obligated under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty to participate in the defense of the U.S. or U.S. forces, let alone participate in security cooperation involving third countries. See Japan Defense Agency, *Defense of Japan 2002*, (Tokyo: Urban Connections [English Translation], 2002), 92-93.
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- 11 The "UN-centered policy" referred to the requirement, under legislation dating from the early 1990s, that the participation of Japanese SDF personnel in peacekeeping activities could only be allowed in the case of a UN-sanctioned operation. Providing support to the U.S.-led coalition without a specific UN authorization was a departure from the past policy, and was viewed by some as exceeding the constitutional ban on "collective defense."
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