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**THE G.W. BUSH ADMINISTRATION AND NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY:
A JAPANESE PERSPECTIVE**

by Masahiro Matsumura

ABSTRACT

The current Northeast Asian security situation enjoys good stability and no imminent military threat. However, the United States and Japan see elements of potential enmity in China's behavior. The US- Japan alliance is taking a hedging strategy and this will be increasingly so under Bush. Howver, there exist a series of intractable impediments to upgrading and strengthening the bilateral alliance, and the prospect for transformation is limited. Many Chinese leaders are ignorant of these critical details and, unfortunately, are overreacting.

The Bush Administration inherited a geostrategic approach embedded in stark rhetorics

against the PRC and North Korea, an approach which it proclaimed during the presidential election campaign. The two countries will continue to be major problems. The Administration faces a series of constraints of the prevailing status quo in Northeast Asian security, and will continue an engagement policy, although some adjustments and changes are expected. The Administration will concentrate on its policy efforts in strengthening the USJapan alliance in order to preserve its dominance and leadership in the region.

This paper aims to make the above understanding more clear and explicit, and to inform the Chinese participants of potential disagreements and conflicts between the United States and Japan in creating a more militarily-effective bilateral alliance.

I. THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The current security environment in Northeast Asia lacks any imminent or serious military threat and/or confrontation, especially among the United States, the PRC, and Japan. Yet, the three countries do not share common values, and the region relies on a balance-of-power mechanism to articulate differing geostrategic interests. The region is devoid of political foundation on which to establish a solid multilateral collective security system involving military sanction and enforcement. The stability is reasonably high, but the durability is uncertain.

In this context, the Bush Administration will continue an engagement policy , however, with deterrence elements more salient. Essentially, the Administration will take a "tougher" stance, at least rhetorically, to the PRC and North Korea. Many Japanese leaders and analysts take this renewed Bush posture as a fact of life, but are concerned because it may cause unexpected effects on Northeast Asian security, both positive and negative. Yet, it is very difficult to evaluate these effects at this point.

1) NORTH KOREA

Bush's North Korean policy will be based explicitly on deterrence, while producing a virtual trilateral alliance of the U.S., Japan and South Korea. Even after the North-South summit meeting in Pyongyang, June 2000, and the subsequent rapprochement, North Korea still keeps its military posture intact for invasion and aggression, with some temporary improvement of military readiness. Some high-ranking officials of the Bush Administration, if not as its proclaimed policy, have already suggested to alter the 1994 Agreed Framework, constructing a fire-power station instead of a nuclear power station.

Hideshi Takesada as well as some analysts in Japan urge to differentiate diplomatic negotiation processes of non-proliferation from those of unification: four party framework (the U.S., ROK, PRC, and DPRK) for unification and a new four party framework (the U.S., Japan, ROK, and DPRK) for missile threat and non-proliferation. Japan has a strong and keen interest to secure a nuclear-free Unified Korea. The emergence of a nuclear Korea would compel Japan to go nuclear, which involves a militarily more independent Japan and, most probably, abrogation or at least major modification of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

A semi-permanent division of the Peninsular is congenial for the geostrategic interests of four major powers -- the United States, Japan, the PRC, and Russia. Due to very strong aspirations toward national unification among Koreans, both South and North, many Japanese analysts see eventual unification and withdrawal of U.S. forces in South Korea

unavoidable. Then the United States will have to lower the level of forward deployment in the region, and the US-Japan alliance will enhance its pivotal role. Depending upon the level of U.S. commitment, Japan may or may not need to possess more independent military capabilities within the alliance. The China factor is central to the post-unification balance of power.

2) THE PRC

The Beijing regime is experiencing serious economic and social problems, which deepens its legitimacy crisis. The political stability is in doubt even in a medium-term. China's participation into the WTO will generate complicate and complex effects on the protracted crisis. Beijing tries to avoid another military flare-up over the Taiwan Strait as indicated by a series of obscure but significant rhetorical changes. Beijing also has attempted in vain to improve its relations with Japan for the continued provision of her economic aids. These diplomatic maneuvers have produced a very limited success.

The Beijing regime has consistently made a significant military-buildup, with emphasis on modernization and professionalization. It has imported some high-tech naval vessels and jet fighters from Russia, and is interested in acquiring an aircraft carrier. However, serious resource limitation will necessitate its budgetary priority to be placed on nuclear and missile modernization. As a result, Chinese nuclear force will be strengthened while its size remains modest. Japanese analysts understand that China aims some 66 IRBMs at Japan. Due to a drastic change in the public mood, the Japanese government may further cut its economic aids to the PRC if Chinese hostilities continue.

Missiles are the only viable military threat for Japan. China's conventional naval and air force capabilities are very limited and will be so for decades to come, even if the above modernization and professionalization are achieved. These forces will be easily destroyed if an armed attack occurs. Whether Japan intervenes in the Taiwan Strait will be determined by the level of U.S. commitment to Taiwan, by any means Chinese efforts to deter Japan with nuclear missiles. Japan has been within the range of Chinese IRBMs for the last thirty years, and the Japanese do not feel any additional threats from these existing missiles.

Given the above parameters, the United States and Japan need to follow the current status quo policy by setting up the modus operandai of the bilateral alliance and improving its deterrence function.

II. THE U.S.-JAPAN ALLIANCE

The so-called Armitage report of October 2000, or "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership," proposes to upgrade the bilateral alliance as modeled after the Anglo-American alliance. Such an upgrade involves Japan's decision in favor of the exercise of collective self-defense action. Japan cannot accommodate this American expectation right away due to a series of constitutionality debates regarding Article 9.

In tandem with the legal questions, the alliance also needs to fulfill operational preconditions, such as the Standard Operational Procedures (SOP) and the Rules on Engagement (ROE), which are essential for combined operation, interoperability and data-link, and intelligence-sharing. (The 1997 U.S.-Japan Guidelines for Defense Cooperation emphasizes the importance of (1) information sharing and policy

coordination, (2) common standards and procedures, and (3) bilateral coordination mechanism.) Yet, the alliance has not succeeded in eliminating obstacles so as to satisfy these preconditions. Behind these details of alliance management, there exists the Question -- whether or not Japan's status of a de facto US protectorate to be redefined under the US "information umbrella."

(1) TMD

The Japanese government has not yet made any official commitment to procure and deploy a TMD system. However, the U.S. government has been driven by increasingly strong vested interests of its military-industrial complex, while having significantly deepened its policy initiatives toward NMD/TMD. Considering unflinching China's expansion and modernization of nuclear arsenals, US and Japanese defense policymakers now accept the argument that TMD per se makes good military/strategic sense. The Japanese government has already made solid commitment to collaborative R&D with the United States for naval upper-tier TMD. Given these factors, the policy choice for Japan to make is not whether it goes for TMD, but when and what kind of TMD system it should deploy.

Chinese complaints against NMD/TMD are of secondary importance, because many U.S. and Japanese analysts believe that Chinese missile development and nuclear modernization programs have their own R&D dynamics and strategic considerations, and are independent of U.S. and Japanese defense policies. Because of rapidly shrinking resource-base, Russia will not be able to sustain the current level of their nuclear arsenals. The United States has made some compromise and assisted Russia to reduce its nuclear weapons in the soft-landing transition to its complete decline as a nuclear superpower. This prescription does not apply to China.

Since spring 1996, the United States has provided limited early warning information via the DSP system and the NORAD. Japanese defense policymakers face a serious dilemma: a US-Japan combined TMD command relying on US infrared satellites is the most efficient format for weapon system management, while such a full integration with the US command and control system will deprive Japan of political autonomy and independence. How a TMD command is architected will shape the power structure of U.S.-Japan military relations.

2) DATA-LINK

Effective data-link is an imperative of combined military operations. If the US-Japan alliance should be modeled after the Anglo-American counterpart in a manner to function as in the Yugo/Kosovo operations, it is essential to secure real-time digital tactical information flows through the Joint Tactical Information Distribution System (JTIDS) via LINK16. Analog connectivity through LINK11 is not sufficient for high speed and large volume communications, which precludes effective battlefield management taking full advantage of AWACS, JSTAR, or tele-conference.

Japan's SDF forces have limited LINK11 capabilities, and very limited LINK16 capabilities; they are not interoperable with U.S. forces, save for limited naval air defense and anti-submarine countermeasures. Three SDF services have not had any unified command among themselves and no experience in genuine joint operation. (In this sense, the creation of a unified TMD command among themselves will constitute a breakthrough.) As a result, they do not have effective inter-service data-link and

common encryption measures.

Without solving these seemingly technical issues, the U.S.-Japan alliance remains a paper tiger; SDF forces are only capable of rear area support. It should be noted that French forces in the Yugo/Kosovo operations were not interoperable with U.S. force, and were compelled to operate rear area supports alone. The current U.S.-Japan divide in military capabilities necessitates decentralized coordination, rather than integrated cooperation.

Japanese policymakers need to reduce its level of reliance on the U.S. "information umbrella." For this purpose, SDF forces first need to establish a unified command and achieve full inter-service interoperability, before considering any meaningful combined command and data-link with U.S. forces.

3) INTELLIGENCE-SHARING

An effective alliance requires its partners to share a common assessment of threat, security environment and national interests so as to adopt a common defense policy. Intelligence-sharing in peacetime is, therefore, essential to strengthen the alliance relationship as proposed the Armitage Report.

European Parliament sessions and other open sources have revealed the existence of the Anglo-American communication intelligence (COMMIT) alliance consisting of five English- speaking countries -- the United States, Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. The intelligence-collecting system known as the code name ECHELON is very extensive and intrusive in which the exclusivity of the five countries are contrasted with their occasionally hostile activities against the third party allies and other countries. Japan is categorized as a third party country, which is concurrently an integral part of the COMMIT system for information collection and a primary target of hostile COMMIT activities. Japan enjoys a good access to the intelligence retrieval system, however, with considerable constraints attached if compared with the English-speaking countries. The PRC has a very limited access to the retrieval system which it has obtained originally in exchange of hosting two COMMIT facilities against the former Soviet Union which are located in Xinjian.

Japanese leaders cannot eliminate skepticism about the nature of the alliance with the United States until Japan becomes an equal and full COMMIT partner. They will deem it inseparable to achieve high military integration and interoperability on one hand and full intelligence-sharing on the other hand. They will be also sensitive to the question how the new U.S. Administration treats its extant COMMIT relationship with the PRC.

(There are some vital aspects for long-term structural transformation in U.S.-Japan military relations as the unavoidable, logical progression of the changes at the operational level as discussed above, such as defense industrial relations. But, these aspects are beyond the scope of this paper.)

III. THE CONCLUDING REMARK

The current Northeast Asian security enjoys a reasonably high level of stability, and no imminent military threat exists. However, the United States and Japan see some serious elements of uncertainty and potential enmity in Chinese behavior. The U.S.-Japan alliance is taking a hedging strategy so as to enhance its deterrence function; this will be

increasingly so under Bush who proclaimed such a strategic approach in the election campaign. Yet, there exist a series of intractable impediments to upgrading and strengthening of the bilateral alliance, and the prospect for transformation is limited. Many Chinese decision-makers and analysts are considerably ignorant of these critical details and, unfortunately, are overreacting. Relevant confidence-building measures need to be taken as the matter of top priority.

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