

Political Leadership Essential for Rebuilding Japan-U.S. Alliance

By Nabeshima Keizo

The year 2001 marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the original Japan-U.S. Security Treaty.

The alliance with the United States, known as the "San Francisco arrangement," based on the two treaties, enabled Japan to maintain peace and security during the Cold War. The mechanism allowed Japan to dispense with heavy armament, which in turn enabled the country to restore its war-ravaged economy and develop into the world's second largest economy.

The Japan-U.S. alliance has constituted the cornerstone of Japan's foreign policy and has had profound political, economic and social implications for the country for half a century since the end of World War II. However, the situation in the Asia-Pacific region underwent drastic changes in the last decade of the 20th century following the end of the Cold War. Japan-U.S. relations sounded a discordant note from the late 1980s to early 1990s over economic disputes as well as military base problems symbolized by frictions in Okinawa. As a consequence, the bilateral alliance began to drift.

Japan is facing the challenge of rebuilding its relationship with the United States under the new administration of President George W. Bush. At the first summit meeting between Japan's Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro and President Bush held on March 19, 2001, they noted that "the U.S.-Japan alliance is the foundation of peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region," and they "pledged to work together to further strengthen the alliance." Japan is required above all to clearly define its national interests, which forms the basis of strengthening the security arrangements with Washington and making global contributions. On the economic front, deregulation and structural reform must be accelerated. To



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In 1951 Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru signed the San Francisco Peace Treaty which covered Japan and 48 other countries

achieve these objectives, Japan needs strong political leadership. Without such strong leadership, Japan will not be able to manage a crisis potentially arising between the two countries, thus jeopardizing the bilateral alliance.

Changing Asia-Pacific Region

The Asia-Pacific region has been undergoing drastic changes since the end of the Cold War. Even on the Korean Peninsula, where the last vestiges of the Cold War linger on, tension began to ease with the holding of summit talks between top leaders of the North and South. Yet, unification of the divided peninsula is still a long way off, and tension could return depending on the moves of North Korea (Democratic People's Republic of Korea). China is expanding its influence to the entire Asian region and raising strong objections to the Bush

administration's plan to push for a national missile defense system (NMD). There is also the constant danger of relations between Beijing and Washington deteriorating over the Taiwan issue.

Since the 1997 Asian financial crisis, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has been losing its centripetal force. The ASEAN Regional Forum, established as a venue for security dialogue, is yet to fulfill its function of solving regional disputes. The security situation in East Asia remains unclear, and uncertainty still prevails over the region. But the ASEAN plus Three (Japan, China and South Korea) summit meeting held in November 2000 in Singapore prompted new initiatives in East Asia, such as arranging a summit meeting of East Asian countries and creating an East Asian free trade zone. These developments, representing an attempt by East

Asian countries to solidify their unity as a lesson of the financial crisis, should be highly evaluated.

The United States has kept 100,000 troops forward deployed in the Asia-Pacific region, mostly in Japan and South Korea, to keep watch over the Korean Peninsula and the Taiwan Strait. But in what seems to be a virtual review of security strategy, Washington has been beefing up its security relations with Thailand, the Philippines, Singapore, Australia and other Southeast Asian countries since the late 1990s. Mutual relationships among Japan, China and the United States, key players in Asia, will exert an impact on the Asia-Pacific situation. Stabilizing Japan-U.S., Japan-China and U.S.-China relations will be essential for the stability of the region.

A report compiled by a nonpartisan group of American experts on Japanese affairs in October 2000 during the U.S. presidential election race pointed out that "The inescapable forces of globalization and the dynamics of the post-Cold War Asian security setting pose new and complex challenges to the United States and Japan. How the two countries respond define significantly the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific."

The report, known as the Armitage Report, as the group was headed by Richard Armitage, newly appointed deputy secretary of state in the Bush administration, was titled "The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership." It particularly drew Japan's attention as it urged Japan to abandon its constitutional restrictions which the government claims bans collective defense. The report said that "Japan's prohibition against collective self-defense is a constraint on alliance cooperation," ... "Japan must recognize that international leadership involves risk-taking beyond its traditional donor's role." This passage seems to be aimed at enhancing the bilateral alliance.

The Armitage group was not alone in urging Japan to take new initiatives. U.S. Trade Representative Robert Zoellick cited trade barriers and the absence of

market competition as the culprit of Japan's economic stagnation and expressed his intention to prod for Japan's deregulation and market opening.

The Bush administration, which lined up Japan specialists in security and economic positions, will be tough for Japan to deal with. As for Japan's political stance in dealing with the Bush administration, Ohki Hiroshi, a diplomat-turned-politician in the House of Representatives who once served as director general of the Environment Agency, says Japan should take the new administration as an opportunity to clearly state its case to Washington.

Once the U.S. economy starts contracting, a spate of criticism will be directed against Japan from the United States because of its huge trade deficit with Japan. Fukukawa Shinji, chief executive officer of Dentsu Institute for Human Studies, argues that Japan must above all make a proper response to economic problems in order to build a trustful relationship with Washington. For that purpose, Fukukawa continues, Japan must dispose of its structural problems in such fields as the financial sector, and develop IT strategies which are important for its sustainable growth. At issue is whether Japan has the political capabilities to take such initiatives.

The price of the security arrangements

Some 75% of U.S. military bases in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa, which comprises only 0.7% of Japan's land mass. Okinawa's main island alone hosts key military facilities such as the Third Marine Expeditionary Forces, naval ports and the Kadena Air Base, the largest air base in Asia. The situation has remained virtually unchanged since Okinawa's administrative rights reverted to Japan in 1972. The rape of an elementary school girl by three Marines in 1995 triggered strong anti-American sentiment among the people of Okinawa and threatened the Japan-U.S. security relationship. In 1996 then Japanese Prime Minister Hashimoto Ryutaro and U.S. President Bill Clinton signed the Japan-U.S. Joint

Declaration on Security, paving the way for the consolidation and unification of U.S. military bases in Okinawa. But the relocation of the U.S. Marine Corps' Futenma Air Station, the largest pending issue, has been shelved due to objections from locals, as a result of which the summit agreement has not yet been implemented.

Another serious crime committed by U.S. military personnel or a crash of a U.S. military aircraft on the island would trigger an even bigger explosion of anti-U.S. sentiment among Okinawans. Indeed, Okinawa is a sticking point in the Japan-U.S. security arrangements. U.S. military facilities are also located in other parts of Japan. Even the Tokyo metropolitan area is home to the Yokota Air Base, Yokosuka naval base which is the home port of the Seventh Fleet, and the Atsugi Naval Air Station. We cannot ignore the fact that Japanese people are gradually growing wary of the presence of U.S. military bases on a densely populated land even after the end of the Cold War.

Regarding the frequent outbreak of crimes by U.S. servicemen, Foreign Minister Kono Yohei stated in February 2001 that unless the operation of the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement can be improved, the Japanese government will be forced to consider revision of the agreement itself. His remark reflected the fact that the Japanese people's anti-U.S. feeling has reached an alarming level that can no longer be ignored.

Kuriyama Takakazu, one-time ambassador to Washington, warns that unless something is done about the U.S. military bases in Okinawa, it will be politically difficult to maintain the bases there. "The current trend toward the easing of tension on the Korean Peninsula should be taken into account in the deployment of U.S. forces. Otherwise, the presence of U.S. forces in Okinawa cannot be practically maintained, even if the Japanese government clamors for the necessity of Okinawa bases under the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty," he argues.

It can be said that for half a century

Photo : Kyodo News



The Futenma Air Station, used by the U.S. Marine Corps, still faces the pending issue of relocation

since the end of World War II, the Japanese and U.S. governments have taken the bilateral security arrangements for granted, and they are now paying the price for it. In a way, the Japan-U.S. security arrangements and U.S. military bases in Japan have been managed through sheer inertia. Successive governments of the two countries have been unaware of the fact that the security arrangements have begun to strike discordant notes in Japan.

The Security Consultative Committee, known as the “two-plus-two” gathering of Japanese and U.S. defense and foreign chiefs, met last September for the first time in two years. It is unbelievable that the two countries waited for as long as two years to hold a meeting bringing together the secretary of state and secretary of defense from the U.S. side and the foreign minister and director general of the Defense Agency from the Japanese side.

It is worth noting the events that occurred in the one year following the previous two-plus-two meeting held in August 1998 on the heels of North Korea’s launch of a Taepodong ballistic missile that flew over Japan before splashing into the Pacific.

In November that year, the United States and North Korea started high-level negotiations in regard to

Pyongyang’s missile development and suspicions about its development of nuclear weapons. In March 1999, two suspicious ships believed to be sent by North Korea for spying intruded into Japanese territorial waters. The Japanese government gave the Maritime Self-Defense Force (MSDF) the green light to exercise maritime patrol operations for the first time, with MSDF destroyers firing warning shots and MSDF P-3C anti-submarine warfare aircraft dropping bombs near the vessels.

In May, U.S. military aircraft erroneously bombed the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade during the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s campaign against Yugoslavia, straining relations between Washington and Beijing. In August, Japan and the United States kicked off joint technological studies on the development of theater missile defense. In October, William Perry, former U.S. defense secretary, formulated a new U.S. policy toward Pyongyang in collaboration with Japan and South Korea. Despite this string of important developments, the two-plus-two ministerial meeting was skipped for a full year.

Kurt M. Campbell, senior vice president and director of the international security program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, analyzed the cause of the absence of

bilateral efforts in a paper titled “Energizing the U.S.-Japan Security Partnership” carried in the Autumn 2000 issue of *Washington Quarterly*.

“Perhaps the most important reason for the absence of a sustained effort to engage on common security themes in the immediate aftermath of the Cold War was the growing sense of economic competition and hostility between Japan and the United States marking the period of the late 1980s and early 1990s,” says Campbell, who served as deputy assistant secretary of defense for Asia and Pacific affairs in the Clinton administration. The Japan-U.S. security alliance began to drift in the aftermath of bitter item-by-item negotiations on semiconductors, auto parts and flat glass trade, among others.

Redefining the Alliance

Domestic legislative measures in line with the revised defense cooperation guidelines (Sept. 1997) based on the Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security (April 1996), issued by Hashimoto and Clinton, were virtually completed with the coming into force in November 2000 of a law allowing Japanese authorities to inspect foreign vessels on the open seas. As a result, Prime Minister Mori, in a policy speech to the Diet in January 2001, declared his readiness to initiate consideration of emergency legislation.

Emergency legislation is aimed at enabling the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to smoothly carry out its duties when they take self-defense measures in response to an attack on Japan. Legal studies show that, for example, the SDF would not be able to defend the nation and people in the case of an act of aggression against Japan unless they have a legal basis on which to build battle positions. Emergency legislation is an urgent task for the government. However, the government needs strong political leadership and energy if it intends to push for such legislation over objections from opposition parties.

The issue of collective defense, as pointed out in the Armitage Report, has been left pending for years to this day.

The nation still remains sharply divided over the advisability of revising Article 9 of the Constitution, which bans the use of force to settle disputes. Whether it would be possible to build a national consensus on this issue is a major political theme which will persist for years to come.

Kuriyama points out that Japan has to choose either revising the Constitution or changing the government's interpretation of the Constitution if the country is to exercise collective defense rights. In this regard, Kuriyama wants Japan experts in the United States to understand it would be unrealistic to assume that Japan would go so far as to build a national consensus on revising the Constitution during the Bush administration in order to participate in collective defense activities. He argues that Japan needs domestic discussions on what the country can do within the framework of the Constitution, rather than taking up the issue of collective defense. For example, he suggested Japan should consider such measures as: 1) making rear-echelon logistical support to the U.S. military more effective, 2) enacting emergency legislation, and 3) allowing the SDF to perform duties such as participation in the supervision of cease-fires conducted by United Nations peacekeeping forces, an issue frozen in the process of a political trade-off between the ruling and opposition parties.

In January 2000, the Diet at last started debates on the advisability of revision of the Constitution: the debate which had been a parliamentary taboo since the end of the war. The Constitution study committees, established in both houses of the Diet, are expected to present reports on the outcome of the debates in five years' time. The issue of collective defense is one of the core problems the committees have to tackle. But members of the Diet are sharply divided on the issue. Hatoyama Yukio, leader of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan, suggested that collective defense be incorporated in the Constitution. His idea, however, was rebuffed by members of his own party who were former-

ly affiliated with the Japan Socialist Party. The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the New Komeito and the New Conservative Party, which form the ruling tripartite coalition, are not of one mind either when it comes to the Constitution. Constitution-related security policy matters could trigger a realignment of political parties, which could have grave consequences on Japan-U.S. relations.

According to the Armitage Report, Washington wants Japan to become "a more equal alliance partner," because "it is time for burden-sharing to evolve into power-sharing." In Kuriyama's view, "power-sharing" means the sharing of policy decisions among alliance partners who are supposed to coordinate policies and take joint actions on the basis of agreement.

During the 1991 Gulf War, Japan contributed a vast sum of \$13 billion to multinational forces at the request of the U.S. government. But Japanese contributions without employing human resources were hardly appreciated internationally. If Japan is to transform burden-sharing into power-sharing, Japan will have to do more than financial cooperation. Japan will be asked outright to assume responsibilities and play roles worthy of an ally, including the SDF's participation in U.N. peacekeeping activities. Is the Japanese government ready to make a political decision toward a redefinition of the alliance relations? This will become a key factor which dictates the future relationship between the two countries.

The significance of Japan-U.S. relations must be grasped in a broad perspective of prosperity and stability of the Asia-Pacific region. The ASEAN plus Three summit last November witnessed an epoch-making development. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad proposed a summit meeting of East Asian nations within the ASEAN plus Three framework. The leaders agreed on the establishment of a working group for making preparations for the East Asian free trade zone. There is concern that these concepts could end up falling into a narrow-

minded regionalism which would shut out Western countries. Mori had in mind such concern when he presented three principles of regional cooperation among the ASEAN plus Three countries at the same meeting. The three principles are partnership building, open regionalism, and a comprehensive cooperative relationship and dialogue including the political and security areas. Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong, for his part, moved to dispel such concern, saying, "This is not an attempt to shut out Washington from Asia."

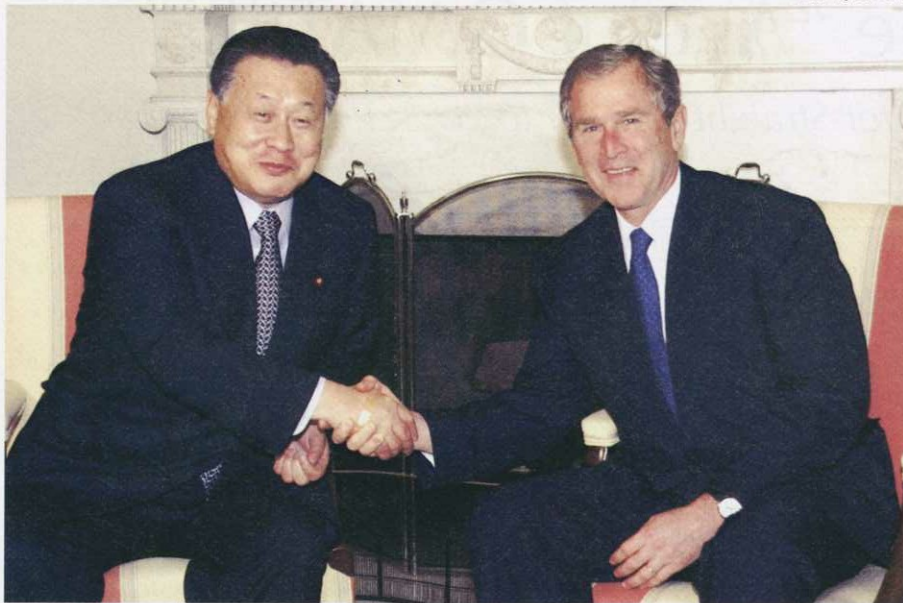
At the same time, the three dialogue partners of Japan, China and South Korea agreed to hold a summit meeting among themselves from 2002 onward on a regular basis on the sidelines of an ASEAN plus Three summit. China reportedly expressed its intention to discuss the Korean Peninsula situation on such an occasion. Japan finds it desirable to discuss regional security issues among top leaders of the three countries. The Japan-China-South Korea summit comes on top of the tripartite cooperative mechanism among Japan, South Korea and the United States as a venue for shaping policies toward North Korea. The framework for dialogue on security of the Asia-Pacific region would be further enhanced if a venue for coordinating security policies among Japan, the United States and China is additionally created. It is necessary to reinforce such an approach.

Chance for Strategic Dialogue

Some American specialists on U.S.-Japan relations are calling for "strategic dialogue" with Japan on security and regional issues.

Ezra Vogel, research professor at Harvard University, said in an interview with the *Strait Times* that the United States needs to "work with Japan to increase the amount of dialogue," ... "Emphasis should be placed on how to respond to emergencies, long-term adjustments and troop levels. And the United States should be ready to work on broader issues of regional

Photo : Kyodo News



The first meeting of Japan's Prime Minister Mori Yoshiro (left) and U.S. President George W. Bush in Washington on March 19, 2001

security.”

Campbell cited the start of strategic dialogue as the most important work in the strengthening of the Japan-U.S. alliance, saying “the most important step the two governments can take will be to engage in deep, sustained strategic dialogue.” “Topics would include the potential for dramatic change on the Korean Peninsula, the rise of China, the development of NMD, growing tensions in the Taiwan Strait, and the implications of political incoherence inside ASEAN,” he said.

In fact, at the March 2001 Japan-U.S. summit meeting, both leaders agreed on the importance of strategic dialogue. Gerald Curtis, a professor at Columbia University, says Americans who attach importance to the U.S.-Japan alliance place high priority on strategic dialogue with Japan. The absence of Japanese leaders who can discuss strategic matters would frustrate the United States and this is the most serious problem in U.S.-Japan relations, he points out.

Curtis is concerned about the gap between U.S. expectations on Japan and the reality in Japan. In his judgment, Yoshida Shigeru and Nakasone Yasuhiro were the only postwar Japanese political leaders capable of having strategic dialogue.

I attribute the absence of Japanese leaders with strategic perceptions to the

long one-party rule by the LDP under the Japan-U.S. security arrangements during the Cold War. Under such an environment, the role of Japanese politicians was to act as coordinators. During the Cold War, Japan had only to depend on the United States for the maintenance of Asia's security and follow U.S. initiatives in the international economic mechanism. Japan was not required to make risk-taking diplomatic initiatives. As a result, Japanese politicians distanced themselves from strategic consideration on global issues or Japan's role in the world.

Dietman Ohki admits that while U.S. senators are very interested and highly experienced in international affairs, Japanese lawmakers focus on domestic matters and hardly place high priority on international affairs. He stressed the importance of creating a mechanism under which Japanese and U.S. leaders can promote mutual understanding. Kuriyama prefers to see the two countries enhance the quality of bilateral consultations between top leaders or on the ministerial level, so that high-level consultation can have a real impact on their policies. Otherwise, he warns, rhetoric for the importance of the bilateral alliance will turn out to be nothing more than a policy slogan.

Mori and Bush agreed to establish a new organization for dialogue includ-

ing both government officials and private-sector leaders of the two countries in order to strengthen the economic and trade talks. For the Japanese side, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry have presented a proposal on the creation of such an organization. The proposal indicates that they will study such themes as structural reform, deregulation and encouraging investment in Japan, and present a report to the top leaders of the two countries. Fukukawa, however, suggested the repeated holding of multiple dialogues among government officials, business people and think-tank members of the two countries. In his view, Japan will have to present a clear vision on what it will do, if it intends to hold strategic dialogue in a broader framework. Japan's failure to present a clear vision on strategic dialogue will only leave the Americans discontented, he argues.

The era of the information technology revolution will increasingly require cultural versatility. The bond of an alliance will be weak if it is based only on military and political cooperation. Efforts for deepening mutual understanding of each other's culture will also be essential. Fukukawa emphasized the role Japan should play to deepen relationships of mutual dependence including cultural cooperation. The 21st century will offer Japan room to build a presence in the world not as a “hard power” represented by military might but as a “soft power” geared to build an environment for the creation of peace, he insisted.

As uncertainty persists in the post-Cold War world, Japan is required to adopt a comprehensive diplomatic strategy based on historical insight and an international perspective. Only strong political leadership with a firm will and capabilities to establish a new international order based on the Japan-U.S. alliance will make this possible. **JTI**

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