

# Japan's Security Options: A Democratic Security Community in Asia?

By Henry R. Nau

JAPAN is expanding its security role. Which way is it heading? Is it moving toward a more equal partnership with the United States under the bilateral U.S.-Japan Security Treaty? Or would it prefer to be part of a regional defense community, including southeast Asian and other regional neighbors? Still another possibility is a global collective security arrangement under the United Nations (UN) in which Japan takes a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Or will Japan develop its new security role more or less independently?

How Japan chooses among these various security options will have major consequences for peace and stability in Asia. An integrated and exclusive alliance with the United States might alienate China. Regional and UN arrangements may be neither effective nor in some cases even possible. As the Iraq war demonstrates, the great powers in the UN disagree more often than they agree. An independent Japanese security role may be the most destabilizing alternative of all.

There is another option, however, which avoids most of these disadvantages and yet provides effective security. That is the option of a democratic security community in Asia. This option is beginning to receive serious consideration. A democratic security community among Japan, the United States, South Korea, Taiwan (indirectly) and potentially other emerging democracies in Asia would preserve and multilateralize existing bilateral defense treaties, thereby maintaining the effective defense of Japan. At the same time, a democratic security community is less threatening to outside members than a traditional bilateral or regional defense alliance. Democracies do not use force against one another and make decisions to use force against non-members through transparent and accountable democratic procedures. Further, they open their markets and civil societies to non-mem-

bers and pursue cooperative security measures to control armaments and build confidence. In the context of a democratic security community, Japan's resumption of normal military activities does not destabilize regional relationships, as some participants fear, but actually strengthens a zone of democratic peace in Asia anchoring stability and confidence among all states.

## Alternative Security Options

Traditionally, it has been argued that the U.S.-Japan military relationship is sui generis unlike security options that have existed historically.

It is not a traditional alliance because the security commitments are not mutual. The United States is committed to defend Japan, but Japan is not obligated to defend the United States.

Yet the relationship is also not a dependency. Japan has one of the largest defense forces in the world and competes economically with the United States on an equal and independent basis.

Nor is the relationship a collective defense (regional) or collective security (universal) arrangement. Collective arrangements involve multilateral institutions in which member states consider an attack against one state an attack against all. The U.S.-Japan Security Treaty is a purely bilateral arrangement. The treaty has no centralized command structure, as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) does, and Japan, while it acknowledges the right to collective self-defense as a sovereign state, maintains that this right exceeds the minimum necessary level of force to defend the country and is therefore not permissible under the Constitution.

Some analysts argue that the relationship is also not a security community. As noted above, such a community requires that member states share social norms that preclude the use of force in

settling internal disputes and subject the use of force against non-members to open debate and common policies. As one commentator argues, "social norms make it difficult for Japanese decision makers to conceive of an international society of states knit together by abstract norms rather than enlightened self-interest."<sup>1</sup>

Although it conforms to none of these traditional relationships, the U.S.-Japan security relationship is closer than most traditional alliances or collective security institutions. Alliances form and dissolve against specific threats. The U.S.-Japan relationship has survived significant shifts in external threats. Initially, the alliance formed against the Soviet threat. But even when the Soviet Union disappeared, the alliance did not dissolve. More recently, the threat comes from North Korea and global terrorism. In the background and potentially in the future, it also derives from the rising power of China. Alliances also apply to specific areas, but Japan and the United States are progressively defining common security commitments that go beyond "areas surrounding Japan" to include the Indian Ocean and Iraq. And by the best available measures, Japan and the United States share a broad set of common democratic values and institutions. Domestic political similarities are not characteristic of traditional alliance or collective security arrangements. In all of these ways, Japan and the United States are more closely knit than traditional security institutions.

Japan's security role is clearly in transition. Since 1990 it has expanded in a number of different directions at the same time. The decision in 1992 to participate in UN peacekeeping activities signaled that Japan had chosen the UN global security option to expand its military role. But the decision in 1999 to implement the new guidelines under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty suggested a

move toward a more traditional bilateral alliance with the United States, one that was now more balanced and mutual. The decision in 2001 to dispatch the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) to the Indian Ocean to support the U.S. and British forces in Afghanistan suggested still a third possibility. Japan acted on its own national authority, in line with UN and alliance objectives but without explicit authorization from either body. Ships were dispatched to the Indian Ocean before the UN explicitly authorized the use of force in Afghanistan, and Japanese forces assisted coalition forces other than the United States, such as Great Britain, clearly going beyond the U.S. alliance. Finally the decision in June 2003 to send the SDF to Iraq was taken after the UN failed to authorize the use of force in that conflict and while the conflict in Iraq still involved major fighting. Japan is clearly undecided and divided about the best framework for developing its expanded security role.

### ■ Security Communities

What is implied in the idea of a democratic security community between Japan, the United States and possibly other open societies in Asia?

Originally conceived by Karl Deutsch, a security community is a grouping of countries in which member states develop “dependable expectations of peaceful change.” These states entertain “neither the expectation of nor the preparation for organized violence as a means to settle interstate disputes.”<sup>2</sup> In the most mature security communities, member states adopt a sense of collective identity and pursue a common defense and security policy, even in the absence of specific threats. They identify with each other as one unit and define and defend their security interests through integrated or overlapping military strategies and institutions.<sup>3</sup>



*Japan's Ground Self-Defense Force operating in Samawa, southern Iraq*

Security communities need not be democratic. The Holy Alliance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among the conservative monarchies of Russia, Prussia and Austria is an example of a non-democratic security community. But democratic security communities appear to be the most stable and least threatening because they open the decision to use force, both domestically and internationally, to public scrutiny.

Two standards are key for constituting a democratic security community. The first is that public officials and private citizens in the member countries have complete confidence that democratic procedures are being observed when it comes to the use of force. Historically, this standard has been a hurdle for Japan whose own people as well as neighbors harbor past memories of military dominance in Japanese security policymaking. A second standard is that member countries agree on the use of force with respect to non-member countries. If they do not, they may become suspicious of one another's motives and try to hinder the use of unilateral force by another member, ultimately leading to military rivalry within the democratic community itself. This standard is a hurdle today for U.S. security policy. U.S. unilateralism, especially in Iraq, has provoked sharp resistance from European allies and damaged the feeling of democratic fraternity in NATO. U.S. unilateralism could provoke similar tensions in relations with Japan.

Let's examine each of these standards more closely as they apply to contemporary U.S.-Japan relations.

### ■ Japan's Democratic System

By available measures of democratic values and institutions, Japan ranks as a strong democracy, very close to the United States as well as the majority of Western European countries, including the United Kingdom.<sup>4</sup> The three main features of a strong democracy are:<sup>5</sup>

1. free, fair and broadly participatory elections in which opposing political parties compete and rotate periodically in government, transferring power back and forth peacefully over an extended period of time.

2. separation of powers among governmental institutions, all of which, including in particular the military, are under the control of and accountable to elected officials.

3. fundamental protection of civil liberties, including, among other rights, freedom of speech, assembly, association and religion; protection of private property; due process of law; trial by jury; independent judiciaries; and the right to vote.

Japan has free, fair and broadly participatory elections and competing political parties. By comparison to the United States and other strong democratic countries, however, Japanese parties rarely rotate in power. Since 1955, the party in power has changed only once,

in 1993-94 when a coalition of opposition parties briefly replaced the dominant Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). In 2003, however, party realignment produced a stronger opposition party. The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) gained in lower house elections in the fall of 2003 and may do the same in upper house elections this summer. Japan may be developing political parties that rotate more in power, as in other advanced democracies.

One consequence of Japan's largely one party democratic system is less transparency than in other democratic governments. Policy decisions are not made in the parliament (Japanese Diet) through open political debates but more often behind-the-scenes in policy triangles that bring together LDP party leaders, top bureaucrats and leading business groups. The Japanese Diet ratifies these decisions rather than makes them itself. In recent years, the Diet has exercised more independence. In 1999, the Diet initiated about one-third of all the bills introduced, compared to about 10% in the past. Still, less than one-third (18 out of 60) of Diet initiatives became law, while 90% (110 out of 124) of government-initiated bills became law.<sup>6</sup>

Legislation enlarging Japan's security role over the past decade was drafted in the prime minister's office, not in the Diet or cabinet as a whole. Governing party mechanisms dominated. But, as opposition parties have become more significant, they too have gained influence. In 2001 Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro obtained the cooperation of the DPJ to pass the legislation sending SDF ships to the Indian Ocean. In 2003 the DPJ opposed sending troops to Iraq, and Diet debates became more significant.

The relative weakness of the Japanese Diet concedes more power to the Japanese bureaucracy. Historically, both before and after World War II, the major Japanese ministries initiated and controlled the policy process. The military bureaucracy dominated the cabinet before the war, and the economic ministries did so after the war, particularly

the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (now the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry). Defense was deliberately weakened. Today, the Japan Defense Agency (JDA) is still not a full-fledged ministry, and officials from more powerful ministries colonize many of the key positions in the JDA. Nevertheless, as security policy grows in significance, the JDA is acquiring a larger role. Its bureaucrats, along with Foreign Ministry officials, now staff large national security divisions in the prime minister's office. The increase in defense staff is not itself a concern as long as this staff remains firmly subordinate to elected officials in the prime minister's office and ultimately in the Diet.

Elected prime ministers and cabinet officials have wielded less power in Japan than in the parliamentary systems of other strong democratic countries. The prime minister's office is relatively understaffed, and the prime minister's role is more one of broker than initiator. Nevertheless, the cabinet staff, as we noted, is growing and has always housed one of the most influential offices in the security policy area. That is the Cabinet Legislation Bureau (CLB), which is responsible for the interpretation of Japan's peace constitution, particularly the crucial Article 9 banning the use of military force as an instrument of Japanese policy. This bureau has played a crucial role in the informal process by which Japan has reinterpreted the postwar Constitution to accommodate a larger security role for the SDF.

Japan ranks lower than the United States on the protection of civil liberties.<sup>7</sup> Police can detain suspects for up to 23 days and methods to extract confessions are sometimes violent.<sup>8</sup> Police search homes with or without warrants. More generally, "the social presence of the police is pervasive."<sup>9</sup> This presence is not resented but welcomed. Police are held in the highest regard, and Japanese society largely polices itself. Although house searches without warrants violate Article 35 of

the Constitution, for example, no lawsuits are filed. The more passive nature of Japan's civil society means that non-governmental groups exercise less of a watchdog role in the defense area. Press clubs that exclude foreign journalists and a relatively weak tradition of freedom of information laws restrict public knowledge about Japan's military establishment.

The political culture in Japan is less individualistic and more consensus-oriented than in the United States. Although individual rights are protected, the culture discourages individual initiatives and opposition. Nevertheless, the political culture may be one of the strongest underpinnings of Japanese democracy. According to some analysts, Japan has developed a constitutive norm of procedural consultation, that is, a non-majoritarian political culture that respects intensely the views of strong minorities. This non-majoritarian norm ensures that Japan's anti-militarist views and postwar peace constitution continue to play a vital role in security policymaking.<sup>10</sup>

### America's Unilateral Security Policy

The second threat to a democratic security community between the United States and Japan is American unilateralism. While America's democracy remains robust and ensures open decision-making on the use of force (to wit, the vigorous Congressional and ongoing public debates about the war and reconstruction in Iraq), the United States exhibits a tendency to act at times without the explicit consent of its closest democratic allies. Iraq was the first time it did so on a major issue of security. But it has done so more frequently in other areas, such as the Kyoto Protocol, the International Criminal Court and a number of international arms control agreements.

Such behavior disenfranchises allies and creates suspicions about America's motives. Within a single democracy, institutional checks and balances and a



concern for relative material and social equality discourage unilateral behavior. Within the security community of democratic countries in Europe, North America and Asia, however, there is no such balance of institutions or relative power. The United States dominates. That America remains competitive and divided internally mitigates the dangers somewhat. It would be far worse if the United States were a non-democratic country and acted unilaterally. Nevertheless, the unipolarity of American power coupled with the possibility that American policy can change because the country is so democratic (as could be the case if an anti-war opposition candidate wins the presidential election in 2004) weakens solidarity in a democratic security community. If the United States sees advantages in a democratic security community, it will have to exercise greater self-restraint while not abandoning its leadership role.

Fortunately, America has been less unilateralist in Asia than in Europe or the Middle East. Its approach to relations with China and the dispute with North Korea has been decidedly multilateralist. The Bush administration cooperates with China on both the war against terror and the management of the Taiwan issue. It also reversed previous U.S. policy toward North Korea that emphasized bilateral, not multilateral, talks and depended on unilateral initiatives by the United States. The six-power talks initiated in 2003 bring together all of the principal parties in the dispute over North Korea's nuclear program and emphasize a common regional interest in the denuclearization of the peninsula and the peaceful economic integration of North Korea.

The six-power talks constitute a diplomatic forum, however, not a defense community. If détente is going to help resolve a divided Korea as it did a divided Germany, it will require solid underlying defense arrangements, such as NATO provided in Europe. Hence the three democratic powers – South Korea, Japan and the United States – must maintain their defense alliances

and gradually trilateralize these commitments. In this regard, the growing divide between the United States and South Korea is regrettable. South Korea is a young democracy. It needs time and experience to adjust to a rotating two party democracy. The United States and Japan will have to be patient and refrain from acting unilaterally on either nuclear or abductee issues.

The North Korean crisis suggests the advantages of a democratic security community over bilateral or regional alliances. Multilateral alliances offend nationalist sentiments less than bilateral ones. South Korea will feel more comfortable in a larger rather than smaller democratic community. Yet multilateral alliances cannot become so large that they include non-democratic states and become ineffective. Europe had to preserve NATO in order to gain the confidence to deal with Russia through broader cooperative (collective) security arrangements, such as the Russia-NATO Council. Similarly, the three principal democracies in Asia will have to preserve defense commitments to gain the confidence to deal with China, Russia and ultimately North Korea.

## Conclusions

Asia has yet to develop a clear post-Cold War framework for security. Japan's and America's choices of security options therefore will be critical. Both countries are beginning to see the advantages of a democratic security community. Such a community preserves effective defense but unlike traditional alliances does not need a specific enemy to confront. It hangs together on the basis of common political values and institutions even in the absence of common external threats. As a consequence, this community is less threatening and more open to outsiders. It invites broader economic and diplomatic engagement, as Japan and the United States are doing today with China. Most importantly, it provides the most stable and reassuring context for Japan's expanding security role, and it constrains American

unilateralism by reminding U.S. policymakers that solidarity is a function of values not just threats. Unilateralism serves democracy only when it ultimately achieves consensus. **J.S.**

## Notes

- 1) Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996), p.173
- 2) Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett, "Security communities in theoretical perspective," in Emanuel Adler and Michael Barnett (eds.), *Security Communities*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.34
- 3) Alexander Wendt, "Collective Identity Formation and the International State," *American Political Science Review*, 88, 2 (June, 1994), pp.384-396
- 4) *Freedom in the World: The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 2001-2002* (New York: Freedom House, 2002)
- 5) Henry R. Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), p.23
- 6) Yamamoto Tadashi, "Japan," in R. Kent Weaver and Paul B. Stares (eds.), *Guidance for Governance*, (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchange, 2001), p.73
- 7) Japan earns a score of 2 on protection of civil liberties, lower than the United States but on a par with Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom. *Freedom in the World*
- 8) Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms.*, p.83. Differences between the U.S. and Japanese systems for protecting civil liberties became an issue recently in defining the legal rights of American military personnel in Japan suspected of violent crimes. In agreeing to transfer suspects to Japanese authorities even before indictment, the United States requested that its personnel have immediate access to an American representative during questioning. The Japanese system permits lengthy detention and questioning before a suspect is given access to legal counsel. See Thom Shanker, "Rumsfeld Presses Japan on U.S. Suspects' Rights," *New York Times*, Nov. 16, 2003, p.10
- 9) Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms.*, p.63
- 10) *Ibid.*, p.203

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