What Future Does the Japan-U.S. Security System Have?

By Takahama Tatou

The Cold War era was, in a sense, a very convenient period for Japan, with the U.S. heading up the "free world" on one hand and the USSR as the chief of the "communist camp" on the other. The two military superpowers dominated the world with threats of war using nuclear as well as conventional weapons. The world was clearly divided by coordinates drawn by the two superpowers, and there were few changes throughout that period. For a country like Japan, whose national characteristics guarantee only poor performance in both flexible decision making and taking the initiative for change, that period of fixed allegiances was rather comfortable.

Defeated in the Second World War, Japan made a clear choice to register itself as an ally of the U.S. during the Cold War. Following the conclusion of the San Francisco Peace Treaty, then-Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru signed the treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States in 1960 (referred to as the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty hereafter). The Cold War was a period of antagonisms. By signing the security treaty, Japan became a member within the U.S. alliance; however, both the U.S and Soviet Union were busy creating turbulence among their allies. It was thus acceptable, or even effective at times, for a country somewhat fuzzy like Japan to conduct a kind of double diplomacy. For example, the then-opposition Socialist Party of Japan (SPJ) and other "progressive forces" fiercely denounced the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The leader of the Social Democratic Party visited China and declared: "The Japan-U.S. alliance is the common enemy of China and Japan." In this sense too, that era was convenient for Japan.

After World War II, to prevent Japan from reemerging as a military power, the U.S. imposed a pacifistic constitution, allowing for only self-defense. At the same time, due to its geographical location—at the Pacific exit for the USSR and in the immediate vicinity of China and the Korean peninsula—Japan became strategically important for the U.S. This made Japan an indispensable front-line base for the U.S. military to deploy operations for solving regional conflicts in Asia, thus entrusting the role of Japan's national defense to fall mostly to the U.S., and allowing her to concentrate instead on rebuilding the domestic economy and expanding international trade. Moreover, by siding with the West, Japan could enjoy free access to the resources and markets of those countries, as well as the territories and countries under their influence. No one can deny that this is one of the major reasons for the quick recovery and expansion of the Japanese economy following the war.

The disappearance of the common enemy, however, has diminished Japan's raison d'être as a strategic location guarding against the USSR's designs on Asia and the Pacific. Naturally, the U.S. has hardened its view toward Japan, which developed into an economic power by placing itself under U.S. patronage during the Cold War. It is the existence of certain threats which necessitates alliances between countries, and as the original threat diminishes, alliances ought to

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The U.S. navy base at Yokosuka

wither if left unchanged. The same should happen to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, a document of the Japan-U.S. alliance formed under the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War, the treaty is, and will be, threatened with hollowing out if left as is.

Upon his inauguration, Prime Minister Murayama Tomiichi, who, as a member of the SPJ/SDPJ had opposed the Japan-U.S. mutual security system and for 40 years called for its abolishment, publicly announced that he would be "committed to maintaining the Japan-U.S. security system," and asserted to U.S. President Bill Clinton in their first talk, that, for Japan, "the alliance with the U.S. is the most important of all bilateral relations." He has not explained, however, why he is committed to maintaining the security system, when at the same time many experts are posing questions on the very existence of the alliance. Indeed, why was this alliance unnecessary during the Cold War, and now, with the end of that period and the start of a new one, is it important? I can only think that Murayama has never had a proper understanding of the role played by the Japan-U.S. Security Alliance.

Walter Mondale, U.S. ambassador to Japan, has stated, "With Prime Minister Murayama's endorsement of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty this year, and the shift in the position of the Social Democratic Party of Japan, there is now a public consensus that the treaty serves Japan's interests and is a source of regional stability for the first time since 1960. The existence of our alliance is no longer an issue in Japanese domestic politics" (speech to the Jiji Press Research Institute of Japan, November 25, 1994). It is understandable that he, as a member of the Clinton administration, welcomes the "about face" of the SDPJ. However, what matters is not an affirmation of the current situation by a transitional coalition government of the LDP and SDPJ. What really matters for Japan is realistic considerations looking toward the future: What should be done to the post-Cold War Japan-U.S. Security Treaty—reinforce, revise, or abandon it?

Changing perceptions

The Pentagon does not consider changes in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty necessary in the near future, nor does it have plans to reduce the number of 47,000 GIs stationed here. In addition, it is rather content with the fact that Japan subsidizes more than half, or about $4 to 6 billion, of stationing expenses.

As a result, the U.S. government is very sensitive to moves to cut the defense budget under the Murayama administration. On August 11, 1994, when U.S. budget requests were being proposed at a general session of the Senate, William Roth (Republican, Delaware) and Frank Lautenberg (Democrat, N.J.), representing the U.S. Defense Department, proposed a resolution, later adopted, demanding that Japan fulfill her obligations to provide financial assistance to the U.S. military stationed in Japan as stipulated in a January 14, 1991 agreement (Japan pays all yen-based expenses, excluding personnel costs, by 1995). Foreign Minister Kono Yohei has already informed the U.S. Commander of the Pacific Fleet of Japan's intention to pay. Thus, should this promised payment be reduced, problems lie ahead.

To reinforce the "strategic partnership," the Pentagon is considering different possibilities to "enhance the inter-operability of forces by together developing and producing military systems; looking into possible cooperation on theater missile defenses; and exploring ways to work together on peacekeeping operations."

However, many Japanese military experts believe these U.S. responses are short-term gestures to demonstrate its commitment to the Japan-U.S. security system, and that in the intermediate term they will "intentionally hollow out the treaty."

Japanese specialists commonly believe that U.S. authorities and politicians are losing in their attempts to explain to taxpayers, when the government is already burdened by huge budget deficits, the importance of maintaining the Japan-U.S. security pact post-Cold War. It is difficult for Americans to swallow the argument that the U.S. military is needed to defend Japan, which has accumulated as much as a $50 billion trade surplus with the U.S. Americans want to know what are the merits of continuing the security system for America. Is it for defending U.S. interests or rights in Asia? If this is the case, then the explanation, "we can contribute both to the security of Japan and more broadly to maintaining international peace and security in the Far East" is much too narrow. This, I believe is the crux of the argument.

Actually, former-U.S. Defense Secretary Dick Cheney commented on the significance of the Japan-U.S. Treaty, "U.S. forces are not in Japan to defend Japan; Japan is used as a forward land platform for operational readiness and deployment of forces wherever necessary. Japan is paying 75% of the costs of stationing U.S. forces in Japan. U.S. naval forces in the Far East cost much less to operate and maintain then if they were cruising off the U.S. coast" (March 1992).

How then can we explain the persistent Japanese feeling that the U.S. is defending Japan in anticipation of a crisis? A public opinion poll, conducted by the *Yomiuri Shinbun* in September 1994, reports that 64% answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you think the U.S. military will come and help us in case of a crisis?" Only 53.5% of Americans answered affirmative to the same question, indicating a widening gap in consciousness between the people of the two nations over the issue.

In addition to the gap in intentions, some Japanese have begun to insist that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is "just a free-ride for the U.S." Others, in relation to the talks between the U.S. and North Korea in settling the nuclear question, point to "deficiencies" in the treaty and demand a "restructuring" of it.

There are worries that constant trade frictions may jeopardize the mutual security system. If these frictions and tensions continue, the Japanese, if not their government, may increasingly dissociate themselves from the U.S. on security issues. Reflecting growing attention to Asia, some have conceived a scheme of a multilateral mutual secu-

rity system within Asia as an alternative to existing bilateral agreements. Apart from these, anti-U.S. military base campaigns in the light of rights for living and environmental concerns have been activated after the Cold War.

Moreover, within the Japanese Self Defense Force, a previously unwitnessed sense of "independence" has emerged and some young officers are suspect of the validity of the U.S. promise of militarily defending Japan. Thus, it is only to the extent to which officials and military authorities of the two countries stress the validity of the treaty that the significance of it is not felt by their peoples.

Calls for a revision of the treaty come not only from Japan. In November 1994, Vice-Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye, considered to be a leading strategist of the Democratic Party, and Ezra Vogel, senior analyst in charge of the Far East at the National Intelligence Council, visited Japan in succession to exchange opinions regarding the treaty with senior officials from both the Foreign Ministry and the National Defense Agency, top SDF officers, and former heads of the National Defense Agency from the LDP and the New Frontier Party (Shinshinto).

Nye and Vogel both emphasized that they discussed on many levels and redefined the Japan-U.S. security system in light of the post-Cold War. They proposed opening a discussion, in which academics and specialists from both countries would participate, over the future of the treaty. As both are Democrats, I suspect they may wish to strike some concrete achievement, such as a joint declaration, while President Clinton is in office. The U.S. has already suggested the preparation of a "New Declaration" at a future Japan-U.S. informal summit talk to take place during the APEC Summit Meeting scheduled for November 1995 in Osaka.

Even though the U.S. government is anxious, there is no sentiment to abolish the treaty overnight, nor to revise it. Although some Democrats have played with the idea of forming a new collective security system among Japan, the U.S., Russia, and China as a replacement to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, both Japan and the U.S. do not seem to have much confidence in Russia and China, a point which will be even more reinforced with Republicans in key offices.

Dialogue between the two countries is a good thing, but it seems that priority should be placed, at the intergovernmental level, on solving problems in the current mutual security system. For example, the intervention by Japan, the U.S., and South Korea around the question of North Korea's nuclear capacity revealed deficiencies in the existing system. At least legally, SDF ships cannot offer any material or service support to U.S. battleships in trouble on the high seas. This is because there is no "agreement for crossing services" between the two countries and no domestic laws to effectuate them.

An example of this occurred when an American soldier was seriously wounded during training exercises near Japan. A request for an emergency landing at a private airport in the Tohoku region was rejected by the prefectural governor. Given the current legal configuration, the government could not override the governor's decision. It should also be noted that the Japan-U.S. security system has many such out-dated "deficiencies." The aforementioned question of who pays the bill for stationing costs of the U.S. military is likely to become an important issue in the future, as will the question of joint research within the Theater Missile Defense System.

However, the key question is what should be done to the existing Japan-U.S. Security Treaty after these "minor adjustments" have been completed. Certainly, the military power of China and Russia in 10 years time must be taken into account, as well as the potential military capacity of Southeast Asian countries and even that of India. After assessing these questions, then, both Japan and America should conduct a thorough investigation into the merits and demerits of maintaining their mutual security treaty. I would suggest that Japan learn from the experience of other independent nations, such as Canada, which, like Japan, relies largely on the U.S. for its national security, but at the same time has made human contributions to U.N. PKO operations more than any other nation.

Can Japanese politicians and the population undertake meaningful discussions firmly based on "national interest," instead of brandishing ideology or banal pacifism which have so far accompanied security disputes? As long as the current SDPJ-LDP coalition continues, prospects are bleak. The current batch of politicians, who are only concerned with maintaining the status-quo, seem incapable of achieving real discussion on national and security matters.

The bottom line is that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, and even its amendment, the "Agreement Regarding Facilities and Areas and the Status of United States Armed Forces in Japan," have become nothing but anachronistic "archives." For this very reason, it seems impossible to make even partial amendments or revisions, as they might completely crumble once being touched. As one U.S. authority rightly remarked, "It is unwise to try to open Pandora's Box," the system may be a holy icon which should be kept in a shrine covered with dust.

We should try to find a way to enhance the mutuality in obligations and mobility in actual terms without brushing the dust away. The premises should be the conviction that the U.S. will not easily give up its bases in Japan, a "trophy" won through the Second World War, and Japan will never, under any circumstances, possess nuclear armaments, leaving that part to the U.S. nuclear umbrella. For both Japan and the U.S., the treaty can be used effectively to maintain their current positions in the Asia-Pacific region at least for the next several years. What should follow? The U.S. may forge a Sino-American security treaty, or Japan may attempt a Sino-Japanese security treaty. Then again, the Japan-U.S. security may be revised. JJTI

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