

Japan's New Security Agenda

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To rear a tiger is to invite disaster.

Sima Tan, *Records of the Grand Scribe, China*, 2nd century BC

Koizumi Junichiro, Japan's prime minister from 2001 to 2006, broke the mould of post-war Japanese foreign policy. His successor Abe Shinzo looks set to build upon this legacy: after the 'depression diplomacy' of the 1990s, Japan has returned as a diplomatic and military as well as economic power.¹ The United States has welcomed and encouraged this development, but it may get more than it bargained for. Japan is certainly re-emerging as a more confident partner, but it could also become more erratic, demanding and unpredictable.

It was Koizumi who smashed long-standing taboos and created the conditions for ending Japan's foreign and security policy inertia. Koizumi was the most significant Japanese prime minister since Yoshida Shigeru, who established, in the early 1950s, the 'Yoshida Doctrine' that underlay Japan's subsequent foreign policy: relying primarily on the United States for defence and concentrating on rapid economic growth to reintegrate Japan into East Asia and the family of nations.² The changes during Koizumi's tenure (2001–06) fundamentally changed the structure of Japan's domestic and foreign politics, and created both constraints and opportunities for Abe's foreign policy.

Japan had been portrayed as a reactive state, passive in security policy, free-riding on US power, refusing to bear the costs or responsibilities of an ally due

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to the constraints of Article 9 of its constitution, and humbly placating its East Asian neighbours because of memories of its wartime imperialist aggression.³ Japan's provision of financial support rather than troops during the 1990–91 Gulf War was derided as chequebook diplomacy. But under Koizumi Japan seemed to have transformed itself into a willing and active US ally. After the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Japan dispatched the Self Defense Force to provide non-combat logistical and reconstruction support for US 'coalitions of the willing' in Afghanistan and Iraq. In May 2006 the United States and Japan completed a Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) designed to strengthen the bilateral alliance for regional and global security functions.⁴ Japan had also become less afraid to antagonise South Korea and a rising China over issues of history and disputed territory, for example by Koizumi's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine on 15 August 2006, the anniversary of Japan's defeat in the Second World War. Japan also took progressively tougher stances towards North Korea over the abduction of Japanese citizens⁵ and the July 2006 ballistic missile tests.

The United States has encouraged this new Japanese stance. Koizumi has undoubtedly left an important legacy and strengthened alliance ties. On some issues, such as the handling of a nuclear North Korea, and possibly China, Japan will more fully support tough policies pursued by the United States. But there is a sting in the tail. Tokyo's diplomatic and security policy has entered an unpredictable phase likely to outlast Koizumi. Japan may emerge as a more capricious, obdurate and demanding US ally, ready to stand up for itself against its East Asian neighbours, or even the United States, and generating or complicating regional tensions with significant repercussions for America's East Asia strategy.

Koizumi's domestic transformation

Domestically, Koizumi inherited a political system that so inhibited a prime minister's power it had been called an 'Un-Westminster' system with a 'leadership deficit'.⁶ But by the time Koizumi led his party to a stunning and overwhelming victory in the September 2005 general election, he had moved Japan closer to a top-down 'Westminster' model of cabinet government than at any time in the post-war era.

In theory, of course, the Japanese political system already resembled the British form of parliamentary government. With the Liberal Democratic Party, which imposes party discipline on its National Diet members, in power for all but ten months of the last half-century, it might be expected that the Japanese prime minister would be powerful indeed. But Japan's previous prime ministers and cabinets were restricted in law and by political rivals. The Liberal

Democratic Party was divided into factions whose heads were rivals for the premiership; the prime minister had to make coalitions with one or more to come to power, then appoint some of their members, as well as rival factions, to the cabinet in order to ensure the party would support the administration. It was less cabinet government than 'collective' leadership. Then there were the *zoku* ('policy tribes') composed of veteran National Diet members holding party, parliament and government positions in particular policy areas.⁷ Before reaching the cabinet, all legislation had to go through the party's policy organ, the Policy Affairs Research Council, with its multiple policy divisions overseen by these *zoku*, who to a large extent dominated policymaking.⁸

Some of these limitations began to be removed even before Koizumi. Electoral reform in the early 1990s weakened, but did not eliminate, factions.⁹ Beginning in the 1980s, under the increasing influence of television, the party leader began to develop a personal image and popularity among voters separate from the party and its faction leaders.¹⁰ In foreign policy, the end of the Cold War and the self-destruction of the major opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party (now the Social Democratic Party of Japan), supplanted by the more centrist (especially on defence policy) Democratic Party of Japan, removed several obstacles to a more active security stance.¹¹ Few prime ministers, however, took advantage of these new institutional and media capabilities.

Then came Koizumi. Legal and staffing shortcomings were rectified by administrative reforms in 2001 giving the prime minister the right to introduce new policy initiatives, expanding the cabinet staff and adding several 'councils' whose heads had cabinet-level status and whose purpose was to advise the prime minister and cabinet on their policy areas. This buttressed the prime minister's and cabinet's influence and weakened the bureaucracy's.

But despite Koizumi's personal popularity and promises of change and reform, the *zoku* remained strong. He had to constantly water down his reform proposals on legislation that affected their entrenched interests. The confrontation came to a head over Koizumi's pet issue of 'postal' reform – mail, banking and insurance. When the postal *zoku* frustrated his efforts to pass his reform bill, Koizumi gambled and called a snap election of the lower house of the Diet, the House of Representatives, for 11 September 2006. He had the party throw out the rebels and made sure that hand-picked media celebrities ran with party endorsement as so-called electoral 'assassins' in their districts. Relying on his personal popularity and the need for both postal reform and to change the party lest future reforms be scuttled as well, Koizumi's party

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won its largest majority in a quarter-century. With its New Komeito coalition partner, it now controls, for the first time in the post-war period, two-thirds of the National Diet's House of Representatives. This supermajority is significant because a minimum two-thirds vote in both houses of the Diet is required to submit constitutional revisions to the voters in a referendum.

Postal reform was passed immediately, and Koizumi and other party leaders took steps to centralise the party and weaken the factions even further. After the election, any *zoku* hoping to resist a party leader on a key piece of legislation will probably think twice. The party is now more centralised, less factionalised and with a stronger prime minister than at any time in the post-war period.

The unity is grounded in the prime minister's popularity, however, and Abe could yet squander this legacy. He has inherited great power and leadership potential, but although this new domestic influence also can help him pursue foreign-policy goals, in that arena he has inherited a more ambiguous and complex legacy.

The foreign policy transformation

Koizumi's domestic policymaking revolution has created the conditions for a concomitant revolution in the formulation and execution of foreign policy. Using the strengthened institutions of the prime minister's office, and bypassing traditional consensus building within the Liberal Democratic Party and amongst the central ministries, Koizumi implemented a new form of 'top-down' decision-making in foreign policy. During Koizumi's tenure most key foreign-policy initiatives were taken by the prime minister, the chief cabinet secretary and cabinet officials, with occasional input from trusted confidants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other ministries.¹² The tight-knit, almost cabal-like, nature of the core executive enabled speedy and bold policy-making. Koizumi, calculating that he could appeal over the heads of any opposition from the party and bureaucracy to secure direct public support, appears to have been willing to gamble on highly risky decisions, many of which his predecessors might not have dared touch.

Koizumi first showed a propensity to gamble in foreign policy following 11 September 2001; the Diet passed an Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law by October 2001 dispatching the Maritime Self Defense Force and Air Self Defense Force to the Indian Ocean to support the US coalition in Afghanistan. The legislation required only three weeks and 33 hours of debate to pass both houses, compared with months for previous security legislation. Koizumi gambled again in the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq, pledging 'understanding' of the war aims, and enacting legislation to dispatch Ground, Air and Maritime

Self Defense Forces to Iraq and the Persian Gulf for non-combat reconstruction missions.

Koizumi also showed a penchant for bold summitry, visiting North Korea in September 2002 and May 2004 in an attempt to resolve the issue of the North's abductions of Japanese citizens, to break the logjam in bilateral normalisation negotiations and to contribute to a resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

Near the end of his tenure Koizumi continued to gamble, overriding party and local political obstacles to the realignment of US bases in Japan. As part of the US Global Posture Review (GPR) and the bilateral Defense Policy Review Initiative, Japan accepted the relocation of the command functions of US Army I Corps from Washington State to Camp Zama near Tokyo. One ramification was that Japan would serve as a frontline command post for US power projection as far away as the Middle East, marking a *de facto* reinterpretation of the US–Japan security treaty and US bases from covering only Japan and the Far East. In February 2005 Tokyo and Washington also issued, through the Security Consultative Committee, a joint statement stressing the common global strategic objectives of the alliance, including the eradication of terrorism and prevention of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons proliferation.¹³ In return Japan secured agreement for a reduction in the US Marine Corps presence in Okinawa through the relocation of 8,000 personnel and 9,000 dependents to Guam, and to push ahead with plans for the relocation of the USMC air station from Futenma in Ginowan to Henoko in Nago City. The Defense Policy Review Initiative also includes plans to relocate the US air carrier wing at Atsugi air base near Tokyo to the US Marine base at Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, by 2014. Japan's acceptance comes, though, at a considerable financial cost, estimated as at least \$6–7 billion to relocate marine units from Okinawa (although later estimates have reduced that figure substantially).¹⁴ Koizumi appears to have reckoned that, by trading these concessions for a reduced US presence in Okinawa and a strengthened alliance, the Japanese public would accept the rationale and costs of the realignments.

Koizumi's foreign-policy initiatives were audacious, especially measured against the standards of Japan's post-war record and its response to the Gulf War. At the same time, Koizumi challenged other post-war domestic structural restraints and taboos barring a more active foreign policy. He fostered a vigorous political debate and substantive moves toward revising Article 9 and lifting the self-imposed ban on exercising the right of collective self-defence. His administration also mooted plans to loosen the ban on exporting weapons, impose a licensing system for exports and enable joint development of weaponry with other states.¹⁵

Koizumi committed Japan to the acquisition of ballistic-missile defence systems from December 2003. Missile defence sits squarely at the forefront of Japan's response to 'new threats' in the revised National Defence Programme Guidelines of December 2004, and is the major procurement item in the Mid-Term Defence Programme for 2005–09. Japan aimed to deploy the terminal-phase *Patriot Advance Capability* (PAC)-3 from 2006 onwards, and to roll out the full panoply of missile-defence systems, consisting of 16 PAC-3 fire units, six *Aegis* destroyers equipped with mid-course phase interceptors, and upgraded sensors and command-and-control functions, by 2011. The Self-Defense Force, in response to the introduction of missile defence and its demands for enhanced integration of command-and-control systems, embarked on a restructuring programme to enable joint tri-service operational capabilities for the first time. The introduction of legislation in February 2005 to fundamentally redesign civilian control over the military, giving for the first time in the post-war period enhanced freedom to the prime minister and commanders in the field to make real-time decisions to mobilise military force in response to missile attacks without Cabinet and National Diet oversight, shows the impact of missile defence on Japanese defence policy.

Koizumi's administration argued that the missile defence systems would be operated under 'Japan's independent judgement'.¹⁶ But missile defence is a bilateral project crucial for consolidating the US–Japan alliance. Japan will

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procure the PAC-3 and *Aegis* missile-defence systems from the United States, and continue bilateral technological cooperation into the upgrading of the *Aegis* Standard Missile (SM)-3 interceptor. Successive Japan–US Security Consultative Committee statements on the importance of bilateral cooperation on missile defence culminated in the agreements of 2005–06, as part of the bilateral Defence Policy Review Initiative and the US Global Posture Review, for the establishment of a Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Centre at Yokota air base to co-locate

Japanese and US missile-defence command-and-control information systems, and for the United States to deploy additional and complementary missile defence assets around Japan.¹⁷ Reacting to North Korea's multiple test missile launches on 5 July 2006, Tokyo then sought to accelerate cooperation with the United States on missile-defence deployment, accepting the deployment in Japan of the USS *Shiloh*, one of the first missile-defence-capable destroyers. Japan now plans to speed up the introduction of PAC-3s from 2006 and refit the first of its existing *Kongo*-class *Aegis* destroyers to carry missile-defence SM-3s

by end of 2007 instead of March 2008, and the remaining three by 2010 rather than 2011.¹⁸

But moving Japan closer to the United States further distanced it from its Northeast Asian neighbours with whom it is so economically integrated. Although Koizumi started his Asian policy positively, proposing the establishment of an East Asian Community in Singapore in January 2002 and visiting China for a summit and tour of sites commemorating Japanese aggression in October 2001, his diplomacy soon foundered over issues of history. Most controversially, through his annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine, dedicated to the spirits of Japan's war dead, including a number of Class-A war criminals, Koizumi provoked a fierce debate on Japan's war responsibility. He justified his visits as a 'matter of the heart' and therefore constitutional in line with the right to free thought and expression, and as a commemoration of Japan's determination never again to start a war. But he may have had ulterior motives, including wresting the control of the history issue away from potential right-wing rivals, asserting his authority over the conduct of Japan–China relations, stimulating debate on whether Japan should stop letting history impede it from assuming a more active diplomatic and security role, and asserting Japan's new refusal to automatically placate China or South Korea on issues of history.

Abe's choices

Upon taking office, Abe moved quickly to mitigate problems on the Yasukuni issue. His first visits abroad were to meet the leaders of China and South Korea on 8 and 9 October 2006; the leaders made a show of their rapprochement and desire for cooperation. The history issue stirred up by Koizumi had left all parties eager to avoid further friction lest the problems spiral out of control.

For his part, Abe showed unexpected flexibility on the Yasukuni issue. He catered to his right-wing constituents by refusing to say that he would not visit the shrine, but the price he paid for better relations with China and South Korea was to indicate that he would not publicly announce whether he visited or not. In substance if not in form, he re-established the post-war status quo whereby prime ministers visited the shrine only in their private capacities.

It was at this point, perhaps intentionally, that North Korean leader Kim Jong Il threw cold water on this new Northeast Asian dialogue by conducting the 10 October nuclear test. Nothing could have played more readily into Abe's hands. If relations with Beijing and Seoul were Abe's weak points domestically, his known, very tough stand toward North Korea has been his 'niche issue' and strength. Using the actual and symbolic powers of the prime minister he had inherited from Koizumi, Abe acted quickly to move his party and nation

toward sanctions against Pyongyang. Even before UN Security Council Chapter 7 Resolution 1718 was adopted, the Japanese cabinet implemented the first of a series of sanctions, first planned during Koizumi's administration: closing off all Japanese ports to North Korean ships and cargo, and stopping visits by North Koreans to Japan. These sanctions were followed by a ban on trade in luxury goods, as mandated by Resolution 1718, and tougher sanctions to shut down the flow of remittances from North Koreans resident in Japan are in reserve.¹⁹

A broad result of this crisis will likely be a continuation and enhancement of the Koizumi policy of closer security relations with the United States.²⁰ With a media frenzy over whether Japan would seek an independent nuclear-weapons capability in response to the Korean test, Abe was quick to reassure that Japan would maintain its Three Non-Nuclear Principles: not to produce, possess or introduce nuclear weapons.²¹ Japan may feel some anxiety over the United States' determination to contain North Korea's future nuclear proliferation, but Japan's principal response will be to further speed up participation in missile defence, and to augment other military programmes designed to work in conjunction with the United States. Koizumi's transformation, and Abe's subsequent use, of the structures and objectives of Japanese policymaking have made Tokyo an increasingly 'normal' ally for the United States, expressing greater solidarity and willingness to provide not only bases but also military assets for US-led 'coalitions of the willing'. North Korea's nuclear and missile ambitions will only increase the pace and extent of this transformation.

Japan's military commitments so far have been non-combatant and logistical, and residual anti-militarism means that we are unlikely in the short to medium term to see the Japanese Self-Defense Forces storming beaches in the first wave of a US-led military operation. However, Koizumi and Abe have challenged a number of security-policy taboos, upgrading the Japan Defense Agency to a Defence Ministry in 2007 and initiating a debate on the revision of Article 9 to recognise the role of the Self-Defense Forces in contributing to international security. Koizumi and Abe both argued that Japan should consider changing its interpretation of Article 9 to allow the exercise of the right of collective self-defence, so Japan could come to the assistance of its ally outside Japanese territory.²² In April 2007 Abe established a study group to consider this reinterpretation, extended legislation in early 2007 to enable the dispatch of the Maritime Self-Defense Force to the Indian Ocean for a further year to support the US-led coalition in Iraq, and in April extended similar legislation to prolong for up to two years the Air Self-Defense Force's mission in Iraq. Abe has further argued that Japan should pass a permanent law on 'international peace cooperation' to obviate the need for separate laws whenever Self-Defense Forces

are sent overseas, and to facilitate participation in 'coalitions of the willing'. Furthermore, Japan's military procurement programmes mean it is acquiring interoperable and defensive power-projection capabilities, whether in the form of the *Aegis* sea-mobile missile-defence system or amphibious ships and long-range aircraft refuelling, which could support the United States in regional and global contingencies. Koizumi's move toward deeper alliance with the United States may have been the death knell of the Yoshida Doctrine. Koizumi's diplomacy and Abe's response to the North Korean crisis are inextricably integrating Japan into US global strategy and depriving Tokyo of effective strategies to hedge against entrapment. This will serve as a fundamental constraint on Abe's ability to give an outright 'no' to the United States when it requests or demands Japan's aid in the security realm.

Japan's new forward-looking foreign policy may thus bolster US military primary in East Asia. Expectations for Japan's cooperation on defence matters have never been higher, and many in Washington relish Japan's transition to the 'Britain of the Far East'.²³ But Koizumi's transformation of Japan is a double-edged sword that may yet undercut US regional strategy.

A fractious partner

With a decision-making process resting precariously on the force of the prime minister's personality and appeals to public opinion, Japan is a capricious ally that can spring surprises. Koizumi showed this with his diplomatic initiatives towards North Korea. The United States was informed shortly before Koizumi's first visit to Pyongyang in 2002 and resigned itself to support the visit as a means to engage the North,²⁴ but Japan's secret negotiations, run predominantly out of the prime minister's office and by one Ministry of Foreign Affairs official, Tanaka Hitoshi, came as an unwelcome surprise to the Bush administration. It appeared Japan might strike out on its own in North Korea policy, just at the time the United States was attempting to coordinate a new international position on the nuclear crisis.

Koizumi's diplomacy, though falling short of its objectives and actually reinforcing public antipathy towards North Korea over the abductions, was a bold move that may have made headway toward resolving bilateral problems in the longer term. But just as worrying for the United States, Koizumi showed how top-down leadership can create the potential for inconsistency in delivering on existing alliance promises.

After his last visit to Pyongyang in 2004, Koizumi showed declining interest in pursuing further North Korean initiatives, due not only to the worsening nuclear and missile crisis, but also declining domestic support for engagement

with Pyongyang. In the absence of public support Koizumi gradually retreated from the North Korea issue, leaving it to hard-liners such as Abe, so Japan veered towards a form of containment harsher than anything currently proposed by the United States and seemed more concerned, at least in public emphasis and rhetoric, about past abductions of its citizens than North Korea's development of a nuclear capability.

Abe has indicated that he intends to continue his close support and attention to the families of those Japanese abducted by North Korea from the 1970s onwards, and to challenge Pyongyang until it provides a full accounting of its actions. One of his five new ministerial advisers is specifically charged with handling the abduction issue. His minister in charge of telecommunications also has ordered NHK to carry more coverage of this issue on its overseas broadcasts.²⁵ Leaders of abductee family organisations are shown on the news visiting the prime minister's office or other government agencies for personal briefings on developments. On his European tour in January 2007, Abe also extracted from European leaders condemnation of North Korea over the abductions issue. Having climbed to power in part on the back of the issue, Abe has become increasingly beholden to it as a means of maintaining his domestic position. Japan's entire diplomatic policy towards North Korea and its ability to play a meaningful role in supporting US and multilateral regional efforts to deal with the nuclear issue are heavily constrained by this essentially bilateral and domestic issue. A portent of Japan's fixation on the issue was the Koizumi's insistence that the abductions be discussed at the Six-Party Talks on Pyongyang's nuclear programme, and Abe looks set to continue to paint Japan into a diplomatic corner over the issue during future nuclear talks.²⁶ Japanese Foreign Minister Aso Taro stated on 6 February 2006, in full knowledge that his stand might jeopardise a rumoured deal to freeze North Korea's nuclear programme in return for economic concessions prepared for a further planned round of the Six-Party Talks, that Japan was prepared to refuse US and Chinese requests to provide energy, financial or food aid assistance until Pyongyang made significant concessions on the nuclear issue, and certainly not until there was substantive progress towards a resolution of the abductions issue.²⁷ Japan, sensing its increasing isolation, began to hint by March 2007 that it might provide 'indirect assistance' by dispatching researchers to examine the North's energy needs. But Aso continued to insist that Japan would not 'even pay one yen' to help the nuclear deal without progress on the abductions.

If Abe and his successors can only be guaranteed to follow through on tough policy decisions if they generate positive spikes in public opinion, Japan may end up retracting key alliance promises to the United States. The US base rea-

alignments are a case in point: Koizumi gambled that the Japanese taxpayers and voters would accept the costs, to be fully revealed at a later date. But the signs are that the government will struggle to overcome an increasing domestic political groundswell opposed to the realignments. The government's preferred candidate, Nakaima Hirokazu, won the November 2006 Okinawan gubernatorial election, defeating candidates who opposed creation of a new facility to replace Futenma and argued that the facility should leave the prefecture. But while Nakaima is willing to discuss with the central government plans to create a new facility in Okinawa, he opposes the Defence Policy Review plan agreed by Washington and Tokyo, especially proposals to build two runways at Henoko. Meanwhile, in a National Diet House of Councillors by-election and local elections in Okinawa in April 2007, widely regarded as a referendum on the realignment issue, a Liberal Democrat was returned to the Diet but the mayor of Ginowan was re-elected, pledging to continue his opposition to the relocation of the air base within Okinawa.

Okinawa Prefecture's prolonged opposition seems to be sapping the confidence of the central government. Minister of Defence Kyuma Fumio has hinted since the end of 2006 that Japan might press the United States for a new facility with one runway on grounds of securing a quick local political deal for relocation and reducing costs. He has even publicly criticised Washington for thinking that Japanese local government would easily accept central government decisions as he seemed to think they do in the United States. Koizumi's domestic political gamble and the problems of implementation, borne of over-confidence in the powers of the prime minister, could thus threaten US-Japan bilateral agreements that have taken several years to negotiate.

Similarly, other parts of the Defence Policy Review Initiative relocation are still pending local political approval with no guarantee that Japan can deliver on its promises. The relocation of the US carrier air wing from Atsugi has been threatened by wrangling between the mayor of Iwakuni city and the city assembly. The mayor argued against the relocation and received overwhelming support in a referendum, but he was censured by the assembly, fearful of losing central government subsidies. Japan's pledge to the United States, separate from the Defence Policy Review Initiative, to allow a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier to use Yokosuka as its home port for the first time, has also run into opposition. The city mayor and assembly, although initially opposed, have accepted the deployment, but opposition from citizens' groups forced a debate

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in February 2007 on the need for a referendum. The central government may eventually get its way on Atusgi and Yokosuka, and perhaps even Futenma, through manipulating large financial subsidies to these communities, but there is as no guarantee it will win, and that the saga of Futenma will not drag on for a second decade. And Abe still has the tricky task of piloting legislation through the Diet to fund the removal of US forces to outside Japan. The pushed the legislation through the House of Representatives in April 2007 with minimal debate and has continued to obfuscate the final costs of the realignment. However, the opposition is still looking to use debates in the House of Councillors to scrutinise the legislation and force the government to reveal more clearly the costs of alignment and apportionment of the financial burden between the United States and Japan.

Japanese leaders' recent actions and rhetoric have raised ever higher expectations for future Japanese cooperation in both the functional and geographical scope of the alliance. Abe is ratcheting up those expectations even more with his conservative and pro-US rhetoric and his strong stance against North Korea. It is unclear, however, despite ostensible rising nationalism in Japan, if the Japanese public fully understands the full costs of a deeper alliance. A sudden major crisis demanding military action in support of the United States, for example over Taiwan, may produce a backlash among the public, leading to a betrayal of those high expectations.

Under Koizumi Japan was unafraid to stand up to China and South Korea on issues of history, even in the face of mass anti-Japanese protests. Koizumi's government took a robust stance against China over its territorial claims to the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands and gas fields in the East China Sea, and against South Korea's claim to the Takeshima/Tokdo Islands. Moreover, under Koizumi Japan showed a declining willingness to engage China, and instead sought to balance its rise with a build-up of the Japanese Self-Defense Force's capabilities and tightening alliance ties with the United States. Koizumi might argue that he merely asserted Japan's national interests as any 'normal' state would, and that he did not seek confrontation with Japan's neighbours. Many in Japan see Koizumi as disingenuous, given that he made significant domestic political play over his tough stand in relation to China and North Korea.

But the most disturbing aspect of Koizumi's foreign policy was his relative indifference to ties with China, South Korea and Southeast Asia. Ostensibly as a result of the Yasukuni issue and former Chinese President Jiang Zemin's anti-Japanese attitudes, Koizumi paid no official visits to Beijing for five years or to Seoul for the last 16 months of his premiership, an unseemly length of time for close neighbours and important economic partners. Despite its early start in

2002, Japan is also now perceived to be lagging behind China in the leadership stakes to establish an East Asia Community (EAC).

China and South Korea hoped Koizumi's successor would take a more pro-East Asia stance, and Abe, facing domestic pressure from his Komeito coalition partner, the opposition parties and big business, made China and South Korea the destinations for his first overseas visits as prime minister, looking to repair some of the damage wrought during Koizumi's period of office. Abe's summit meetings in China and South Korea in October, his subsequent summit with Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao in Tokyo in mid April 2007, and his face-saving 'out' on the thorny issue of Yasukuni may indicate that the hopes of all sides to reduce tensions over the colonial past can be fulfilled. But whether Abe can keep his visits to Yasukuni 'private' from the voracious Japanese media remains to be seen. A visit to Meiji Shrine in January 2007, an attempt to placate conservatives about his nationalist credentials and respect for Shintoism, prompted media speculation as to whether the visit was intended as a substitute for or a precursor to one to Yasukuni.

Abe may not be able to avoid the history and Yasukuni issues due to his personal convictions. He has a clearly articulated nationalist and revisionist ideology predicated on the belief that, for Japan to emerge as a 'normal' power, it must escape from the constraints of the post-war period (*sengo dakkyaku*). This means revising Japan's 'masochistic' view of history, along with other post-war constraints such as the 1947 constitution. In this view, Japan should not necessarily see its colonialism in East Asia as exceptional or wholly destructive, and a sense of nationalism should be reinducted in Japan. Japan's war dead should also be commemorated, so the issue of visits to Yasukuni is unavoidable.

Indeed, an indication of Abe's reluctance to remain silent on issues of history was the re-emergence of controversy over the issue of 'comfort women', a euphemism for women serving in brothels run by the Japanese imperial armed forces during the Second World War. In January 2007, Mike Honda, a Democratic member of the US House of Representatives, introduced a bipartisan non-binding resolution calling on the Japanese government to acknowledge responsibility for and offer a full apology to the comfort women. Abe gave international prominence to the issue by his remarks to Japanese reporters on 1 March that there was no evidence suggesting that women were 'narrowly coerced' into prostitution, in the sense that they were physically taken to military brothels. This seemed to suggest that Abe might approve of a review of Japan's 1993 'Kono Statement' under which the government had accepted responsibility for the forcible recruitment of comfort women. Abe, in the face of domestic and international criticism, soon stressed that his administration would not look

to change the Kono Statement, and reiterated Japan's sincere apologies for the suffering of the comfort women. However, the very fact that Abe was initially tempted to speak out on the issue demonstrated his difficulty in restraining his revisionist views.

Abe's political and diplomatic vision will encumber his policy towards China and the Korean Peninsula in other ways. In the past Abe has taken a harder line on China and the Korean Peninsula, and been a more stronger advocate of the US–Japan alliance, even than Koizumi. In his best-selling political treatise *Towards a Beautiful Japan (Utsukushii Kuni e)*, Abe argued that Japan should follow a foreign policy upholding the four principles of promoting freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and stressed shared values with the United States, Europe, Australia and India.²⁸ His hope is to demonstrate to China that Japan can construct a regional counter-coalition, including India. Abe's stress on these principles also means he remains close to Taiwan's policy elites and has an instinctive aversion to ties with a one-party state like China. Much like his 'Cold War warrior' grandfather Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke before him, Abe sees himself as opposed to the appeasement of authoritarianism in North Korea and China, and believes that Japan should assert its position as the natural leader of East Asia.

Beyond his personal convictions, Abe may find it hard in the long term to resist revisiting the history issue and playing upon tensions with China and North Korea because, just as for Koizumi, there are domestic political benefits. Abe's own successors will have an incentive to continue to exploit anti-Chinese

or anti-Korean feeling, dependent as they will be on public opinion and nationalist sentiment to shore up their authority. Abe's skilful moderation of Koizumi's policies during his first weeks in office may not be the end of the story.

His first months in office have not, in any event, been kind to Abe. In the wake of his popularity ratings of 60% or more after visiting China and Korea, his administration was hit with a series of personnel scandals. Despite generally negative public opinion and a deep split in the party, Abe approved the reinstatement of the postal rebels into the Liberal Democrats, provided they publicly and in writing attested to their future loyalty to the party and support of postal reform. Eleven of the 12 rebels who desired reinstatement agreed to the conditions. Two of Abe's top political appointees had to resign over inappropriate behaviour, and recently his minister of health and labour stirred up a storm of criticism and intra-party conflict for calling women 'birthing machines'. Support for the administration took a nose dive to hover around

His first months in office have not been kind to Abe

50% by the end of 2006 then fall to 40% by April 2007, a 25% drop since Abe took office.²⁹

Abe's popularity ratings are not yet disastrous, judged against the historically unprecedented levels that Koizumi enjoyed, but in the context of a leadership system increasingly dependent on strong public support they do threaten to undermine his position. He will become increasingly desperate to fight off challenges from rivals within his own party. Foreign Minister Taro Aso, a former rival for prime minister with even more nationalist and rightist views than Abe, is waiting in the wings for Abe to founder, making it difficult for Abe to avoid continuing to placate rightist opinion. The temptation may increase to play the 'nationalist card', pump up the North Korea threat, continue focusing on the abductee issue, and re-assert Japan's right to interpret the Pacific War as it wishes, whatever the consequences for regional relations. This may create problems for the United States in dealing with the North Korean regime and exacerbate friction with Japan's neighbours.

Washington might welcome Tokyo's tougher stance in East Asia, given that it means Japan is more willing to strengthen diplomatic and security ties, face down China and North Korea, and disrupt plans for a East Asian Community that might exclude the United States. But this would be short-sighted. If Japanese leaders exploit nationalist feeling and become ever more inflexible in relations with neighbouring states, it can only be destabilising for the region and US interests. Indeed, the United States has already seen how issues of nationalism and historical revision can damage regional and alliance ties. Japan found itself in dispute with its ally over the comfort women issue in early 2007. Japanese and US policymakers were greatly concerned that Abe's first summit in the United States with President George W. Bush at the end of April would be tainted by the issue, and will have to work hard to ensure it stays off the agenda.³⁰

Fortunately for Abe, Chinese and South Korean leaders, for reasons of their own, currently want to mend relations with Japan. China's leaders were conspicuous by their silence in the recent controversy over the comfort women, refraining from comment in order to court relations with Japan at a time they were facing increasing pressure over trade from the United States and a more hostile Democratic Congress. And Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao during his visit to Tokyo in mid-April, although not avoiding history altogether, studiously skirted around any mention of Yasukuni. Chinese nationalism, however, is on the rise, despite or perhaps even partially because of China's phenomenal economic success. Such nationalism could become more destructive should the Chinese economic bubble burst, tempting its leaders to use nationalism and the threat of external enemies to maintain some degree of legitimacy. If Abe

does not soon grasp the chance to settle, not paper over, the history issue, the window of opportunity will close. There are signs that US policymakers are becoming increasingly nervous over Japan and China's standoff on the issue.³¹

As the US–Japan alliance deepens, Japan will likely become a more demanding ally, seeking reciprocation and expecting the United States to help clean up its foreign-policy mistakes. A portent was Tokyo's belief that Washington should have more actively supported its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council during 2005–06. Similarly, in summer 2006 Japan demanded the United States' full backing to impose sanctions on North Korea in response to its missile tests, even if this threatened to derail the Six-Party Talks and went against Washington's priority on resolving the nuclear issue. Post-Koizumi, Japan is likely to expect more back up from the United States in its bilateral disputes with China and North Korea, including the abductee issue. There are also signs that Japan has been emboldened to challenge China more openly over territorial disputes in the East China Sea because of its enhanced expectations of support from the United States.³²

Japan's new assertiveness is also reflected in recent expectations that the US should lift its ban on the export of F-22A Raptor fighter technology. Japan hopes to license production of the aircraft to preserve its defence production base and provide it with the most advanced fighter force in the entire Asia-Pacific. However, US policymakers may be cautious about exporting the technology, not just because of industrial competition, but because a more assertive Japan's acquisition of the F-22A would tip the regional balance of power and generate further rivalry with China.

Moreover, as Japan provides increased military support to the United States in the Asia-Pacific, it may also feel freer to criticise American military strategy elsewhere. A foretaste was the public criticism of US Iraq policy by two cabinet

members. In January 2007 Kyuma criticised the US-led invasion of Iraq, and in February Aso called the American occupation of Iraq 'very naive'. While such views may be widespread around the world, and increasingly among the US public, they were an unwelcome surprise from a country supposed to be the new 'Britain of the Far East'. The United States officially complained about Kyuma's remarks and rejected a Japanese offer for a defence summit meeting.³³

Koizumi may have been a pathbreaking Japanese leader, but was he wise in thinking through Japan's next steps in its foreign policy agenda? Is there a true 'Koizumi Doctrine' or an 'Abe Doctrine' to replace the Yoshida Doctrine in guiding Japan in the future? No coherent new

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foreign policy doctrine has replaced Yoshida's, only a new inclination to follow the demands of public opinion or the United States when expedient, or to stand up to China and the two Koreas over history, or to rail against perceived subordination to US strategy. We will see if Abe and his later successors can construct a new edifice to replace the old one that has been undermined.

Who is entrapping whom?

In the post-Koizumi period US policymakers need to consider whether they have shackled themselves to, even actively contributed to, a Japan that has become more active but also more erratic, inflexible and demanding. These traits will only be accentuated by the loss of the middle layers of the foreign-policy decision-making process in Japan, and the direct link thus created between leadership and nationalistic appeals to public opinion. Abe has continued this trend by being the first prime minister to appoint the full complement of prime ministerial 'advisers' allowed under a 1996 reform of the Cabinet Law, including one for national security and one on the abductee issue. He has also made clear that he wishes to establish a National Security Council modelled on that of the United States, possibly staffed with the right-wing figures of his 'brain trust', and his administration is now preparing the necessary legislation.

Washington will need to devote increasing attention and skill to managing ties with Tokyo. Japan will no longer want to be taken for granted and the United States will have to work harder to not frustrate its aspirations for international status, as it was perceived to have done in the run-up to the Security Council bid. On the other hand, the United States will need to discourage Japanese leaders from again disturbing East Asian regional ties, especially with China, and compounding the North Korean nuclear issue with the parochial but domestically popular abductee issue. The alliance will undoubtedly hold, especially as Japan expended little energy during the Koizumi years in developing alternative political and security spaces in East Asia. But in contrast to Washington's initial delight over its new-found supportive and active military partner, the relationship bodes to be replete with irritation, pitfalls and dangers.

Dealing with these alliance growing pains is an essential task for Abe and his successors, and the next US president. If the United States fails to attend to its side of the alliance, it may regret pushing so hard for Japan to become a 'normal' state, and yearn for the days of slow but predictable consensus-based decision-making. And while a principal feature of the traditional relationship was Japan's fear of entrapment in an alliance that might lead it into conflict, the United States may now find itself caught up in regional crises in large part the making of its awkward ally.

Notes

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