

U.S.-Japan Relations: Still on a Roll

Brad Glosserman
Director of Research, Pacific Forum CSIS

I was wrong: U.S.-Japan relations could get better – and this quarter they did. Tokyo continued to provide rock solid support for the U.S. in Iraq and North Korea, even though the Japanese public had doubts about the U.S. war on Baghdad. Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro was rewarded for that backing with a summit at President Bush’s Crawford, Texas ranch, a privilege reserved for only a very few world leaders. The passage of “emergency legislation” and renewed enthusiasm for missile defense were more proof that Tokyo’s efforts to modernize its national security policies have not slowed. The prospect of U.S. force redeployments worldwide only confirmed the significance of the alliance and its increasingly sturdy foundations: while much of the region worried about a reduced U.S. presence, alliance officials discussed adding to U.S. forces in Japan. Even the fallout from crimes by U.S. servicemen on Okinawa was contained.

Some dark spots became apparent at the end of the quarter, but it would be churlish to focus on them. Economic issues are still a problem, and dollar devaluation adds a new wrinkle. But those misgivings aren’t new and I’m tired of sounding like Cassandra. So this quarter we celebrate without reservation the U.S.-Japan relationship.

Applause All Around

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Howard Baker summed up the administration’s view of the relationship in a June 30 speech to the International Friendship Exchange Council in Tokyo. He applauded Tokyo’s recent moves, noting that Japan “is a great power with worldwide interests.” With its “very substantial assets and opportunities,” Japan has risen to the occasion, playing since Sept. 11, “a crucial role in the multi-faceted campaign against international terrorism, clamping down ... on terrorist financing; sharing information; providing important support for Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan; and helping to plan the reconstruction, now, of Iraq.” Speaking for many in Washington, Baker concluded that Japan deserves “a seat at the table for the conversation and negotiation of international affairs and relationships.”

Ambassador Baker’s remarks reflected the good feelings on display at the Bush-Koizumi summit in Crawford, Texas that was held May 22-23. An invitation to the Bush ranch is the ultimate reward for world leaders, the standard by which relationships are judged.

Koizumi not only joined this elite group, but was even invited to the president's daily intelligence briefing, a privilege previously only afforded to British Prime Minister Tony Blair.

The summit itself confirmed that the two governments were marching in virtual lockstep. Proceeding through the list of international issues, there was no daylight in the two countries' positions. Bush noted that, "On the threat from North Korea's nuclear program, the prime minister and I see the problem exactly the same way. We will not tolerate nuclear weapons in North Korea. We will not give in to blackmail. We will not settle for anything less than the complete, verifiable, and irreversible elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons program." Both stressed their desire to resolve the issue peacefully, as well as agreeing to broaden the trilateral talks (U.S.-DPRK-PRC) to include Japan and South Korea. Significantly for Koizumi, Bush "assured the prime minister that the United States will stand squarely with Japan until all Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korea are fully accounted for."

Koizumi echoed those sentiments and vowed to crack down more rigorously on North Korea's illegal activities. He warned Pyongyang that, "threats and intimations will have no meaning whatsoever." On a key issue, he agreed with the U.S. that "further measures" would be required if the North continued to escalate the crisis. Finally, he declared that without a resolution of all issues, normalization of relations between Japan and North Korea would not occur.

The prime minister's statements were especially important as they aligned Japan more closely with the U.S. on this critical issue, shifting the dynamics in the trilateral relationship with South Korea. Now, both Washington and Tokyo would be trying to bring Seoul onboard, rather than having the U.S. convince two seemingly reluctant partners. From the U.S. perspective, Tokyo was no longer part of the problem but was becoming part of the solution.

The two men applauded each other's position on the war on Iraq. Bush thanked Koizumi for Japan's support during the conflict and expressed his hope for "visible Japanese cooperation" during the reconstruction of Iraq. The prime minister minced no words. "On Iraq, the president made a difficult and brave decision for a just cause. I supported this. Our decision was right. With Memorial Day coming up, I would like to express my heartfelt condolences to the brave U.S. men and women in uniform who sacrificed their lives for the cause as well as their family members." Rarely has a Japanese leader spoken so plainly about such a difficult issue.

The Road through Baghdad

Koizumi's Crawford rhetoric was consistent with his previous support for the Iraq war. The prime minister stood firmly beside the U.S. and Britain throughout the lead up to conflict, even though the Japanese public entertained considerable doubts about the war. Once the fighting stopped, Tokyo was back in the game. In early April, Tokyo announced a \$25 million humanitarian aid package to Iraq and expressed its support for the

provisional government in Baghdad set up on the heels of the U.S. invasion. Six weeks later, Japan unveiled a \$46 million aid package. At a June 13 Cabinet meeting, the government agreed to submit a new bill to the Diet that would provide funds for humanitarian assistance, reconstruction of Iraq, and ensure security in Iraq through the deployment of the Self-Defense Forces and others. As the quarter closed, Koizumi had won an extension of the Diet session to secure passage of that bill.

As ever, the SDF deployment has been problematic. The Japanese media highlighted repeated U.S. requests for Japan to put “boots on the ground.” The government has been eager to comply, but the rules of engagement substantially reduced the effectiveness of an SDF deployment since they would have to go to areas that are “noncombat zones.” But as the *Asahi Shimbun* pointed out in a June 26 editorial, it is unclear if such places exist in Iraq. The *Asahi* concluded that the legislation was “sloppily conceived” and “raises more questions than it answers.” Still, the troops are likely to go, even if only to unload aircraft and help rebuild infrastructure. One other notable element of this bill: deployment would mark the first time Japanese troops had been sent to a country without the request of the host government.

Some argue that Koizumi’s hands were effectively tied when it came to Iraq. Cynics maintained that Japan had to back the U.S. if Tokyo was to maintain leverage and influence in dealing with the far more pressing (for Japan) issue of North Korea. At times, Koizumi appeared to concede as much. Nonetheless, if the road to Pyongyang ran through Baghdad, the detour was worth the trouble.

Closing Ranks Over North Korea

North Korea has single handedly transformed the security consciousness of ordinary Japanese. The 1998 Taepodong test that over flew Japan, the increasingly belligerent rhetoric, the steady climb up the escalation ladder, and Dear Leader Kim Jong-il’s stunning September 2002 confession that North Koreans did in fact kidnap Japanese citizens convinced even the most reluctant Japanese that the North was a menace and a threat. Today, two issues dominate Japanese thinking about North Korea: the prospect of nuclear proliferation and the fate of the Japanese who were kidnapped and their families and both figured prominently whenever North Korea came up in bilateral discussions. Both surfaced whenever North Korea was on the bilateral agenda.

The U.S. and Japan were in regular consultations throughout the quarter on how to deal with North Korea. Bush and Koizumi spoke on the phone several times and the subject was a priority item on their Crawford summit agenda. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly kept his Foreign Ministry counterparts apprised of all developments in the lead up to and after the trilateral talks in Beijing in April.

Japan was torn between the desire to encourage dialogue between Washington and Pyongyang and the fear that, as in 1994, they would be left out of any security discussions. The U.S. did its best to allay those concerns, and made clear its preference for an expanded multilateral forum that included both Tokyo and Seoul. It promised to

push for five-party talks, and as the other contributors in this volume show, Tokyo worked to get other key players to push for its inclusion as well. Fortunately, Japan recognized the value of discussion, even if Tokyo was not at the table, and trusted the U.S. to make the case for its eventual participation. The Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) statement released June 13 after its Honolulu meeting noted that “the three delegations agreed on the necessity of multilateral talks expanded to include other interested parties. In particular, they agreed that the ROK and Japan have vital interests at stake and that their participation in multilateral talks is indispensable.”

As noted, the Crawford summit showed the two countries were marching in lockstep. Koizumi did not even flinch from endorsing “other measures” – shorthand for the U.S. hard line – if Pyongyang did not step back from the nuclear precipice – and this came despite the reported efforts of senior Foreign Ministry officials to strike that language from the summit press statement. Koizumi is said to have tried to get similar language inserted into the joint statement after his meeting with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun, but failed. Nonetheless, that effort still reflects the new dynamic in the trilateral – U.S.-ROK-Japan – relationship, with Tokyo more closely aligned with Washington than before, a shift that has not gone unnoticed in the U.S.

As the quarter closed, two possible rifts emerged on the North Korean front. The first concerned the response that the U.S. would offer to the alleged “bold proposal” that North Korea offered at the April talks. Reportedly, Seoul and Tokyo have been pushing for a similarly creative counter. The aggressive pursuit of every diplomatic option demands a response. There is only one slight problem: agreement among the three governments first requires agreement in Washington about U.S. aims and objectives. While there is little consensus regarding the U.S. North Korea policy, the one thing that virtually everyone does agree is that Washington does not yet have a strategy that goes beyond getting Pyongyang to cry “uncle” and go back to the negotiating table.

The second issue concerned the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO). While the Bush administration has shown no great affection for KEDO, Japan and South Korea are not yet ready to let the project die. At a June 27 meeting with KEDO President Charles Kartman, Japanese Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko said that any final decision should await North Korea’s response to the proposal for a five-party dialogue.

While Iraq and North Korea were the biggest issues on the bilateral agenda, Tokyo continues to support coalition forces in Afghanistan. Another Aegis-equipped destroyer was dispatched to the Indian Ocean on April 10 and the antiterrorism law that provides the legal foundation for that deployment was extended for another six months on May 9. Since the original legislation had a two-year life, it will be interesting to see how Japan treats the legislation in the fall.

Realism at Home

North Korea also spurred decisions on domestic security matters. Take missile defense (MD). In early April, Koizumi called for renewed study of Japan's air defense system; 10 days later Japan Defense Agency (JDA) head Ishiba Shigeru said that Japan was interested in buying the newest version of Patriot missiles from the U.S. JDA then revealed that the FY2004 budget would request funds for two types of missiles, land- and sea-based.

If air defense, why not missile defense? Japan's reluctance to embrace MD has apparently evaporated. At Crawford, Koizumi noted that ballistic missile defense was an important agenda item in Japan's defense policy and that its consideration would be accelerated. In mid-June, Lt. Gen Ronald Kadish, chief of the Missile Defense Agency, visited Japan to discuss technical aspects of MD programs. Shortly after his visit, *The Japan Times* quoted unnamed JDA sources as saying that attacking missiles overflying Japan would not be an unconstitutional act of collective defense, a decision – if verified by named sources, and the government – that would lift one of the most important obstacles to Japan's participation in an MD program.

Even more important was the passage this quarter of “emergency legislation” – bills that would help Japan respond to an attack on the nation. The JDA began studying the need for such legislation in 1977, but the topic has been too sensitive to submit to the Diet – until recently. The bills define basic responses to an actual attack on Japan as well as an “anticipated” attack. The Self-Defense Forces Law has been amended to facilitate SDF deployment during such contingencies. In brief, the central government now has more authority to override local legislation in crises; it can seize property and can exempt the SDF from local laws. The classic example is that tanks will be able to run red lights with impunity in a war. The law governing the Security Council of Japan was also revised to create a crisis-response committee.

The bills were first submitted last year but the Diet session expired before a vote was taken. That the government could get secure their passage this year is an indication of how much the security environment has been transformed. The bills were endorsed by the ruling coalition and the two leading opposition parties, the Democratic Party of Japan and the Liberal Party. (It is a bit disturbing that passage was not the product of debate but a late night deal between Koizumi and DPJ leader Naoto Kan, the night before the vote.) The legislation also has a rider: it will not go into effect until human rights protections are passed.

Redeployment? No Problem

The best indication of the transformation in security thinking in Japan is the country's reaction to news of U.S. force redeployments in the region. (See Regional Overview: “Everything Is Going To Move Everywhere . . . But Not Just Yet!” in this edition of *Comparative Connections* for more details.) There were once fears that scaling back the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula would inspire a call for similar cuts in

Japan; Tokyo's reaction to leaks of a draw down should end that nonsense. When the news stories reached Nagatacho, Japanese officials immediately denied that any cuts were in the works for Japan. Apart from a few faint cries from Okinawa, there was no public call for a cut in the U.S. force presence. In the ensuing discussions of redeployment – during which, U.S. defense officials conceded that there might be “minor adjustments” of the marines in Okinawa – most of the attention has focused on the rising significance of Japan in regional security. One leak suggested that the U.S. will move an intelligence facility from Hawaii to Japan.

Moves to increase the U.S. presence are ever more striking considering the crimes committed by U.S. service personnel this quarter. In one case, a soldier driving while drunk had a headon collision that killed a woman and injured her daughter. In another, a U.S. serviceman allegedly raped a teenage Okinawan woman. That incident occurred just before the Bush-Koizumi summit and was kept quiet until after their meeting. Ambassador Baker promptly apologized for the incident and pledged full cooperation. To head off the calls for revision of the Status of Forces Agreement that inevitably accompany any such crimes, the U.S. quickly handed over the suspect to the Japanese authorities. Even though the latter crime appeared to include every element of a major crisis for the alliance – Okinawa, rape, and a teenager – the fallout was minimized and the damage contained. The two governments have learned valuable lessons in alliance crisis management.

Equally telling is Tokyo's reaction to the Burmese junta's decision to attack and imprison democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and other members of her National League of Democracy. Japan has long been a quiet supporter of the regime, urging patience and subtle diplomacy to bring about reforms. This time, however, Tokyo appears to have had enough. Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Yoriko announced that Japan would suspend all development aid to Burma until Suu Kyi is released, a decision that also won plaudits in Washington. This rejection of “constructive engagement” is another sign of Tokyo's newfound realism.

Too Much of a Good Thing?

I promised no complaints this quarter, but a couple of issues are worrisome for the long-term health of the alliance. (Anyone who wants analysis unclouded by pessimism should skip this section.) Koizumi is to be applauded for seizing the momentum and modernizing Japan's security framework while he has the opportunity, but there are dangers. The repeated calls for “boots on the ground,” like the post-Sept. 11 admonition to “show the flag” can sound like bullying. So far, Koizumi has been given a lot of credit for what he has done – the Crawford summit, the kind words from Ambassador Baker – but that doesn't mean that Japan has benefited. The payoff for those moves has got to become visible. Instead, the quarter closed with reports that the State Dept. was complaining to Japan about its investments in Iran – which may be troublesome given speculation about that country's clandestine nuclear weapons program, but doesn't seem sensitive to Japan's need to diversify its energy supplies.

Public sentiment may also become a factor if the U.S. doesn't find those weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. An *Asahi Shimbun* poll at the end of the quarter showed that two-thirds of Japanese didn't support an attack on Iraq, and the country is pretty evenly divided (46 percent for, 43 percent against) over the need to deploy SDF forces to the country. Fifty percent said they don't approve of Koizumi's support for the U.S. and only 36 percent do. The number of negative responses has been increasing since the fighting ending. If the Bush administration is shown to have cooked the intelligence, Japanese – along with the British public – may well wonder what their special relationship really means. Does friendship mean you never have to say you're sorry? Prime Minister Koizumi may yet discover that a close relationship with the U.S. is a double-edged sword.

Finally, as always, there is the economy. This quarter, however, the big issue is the declining value of the dollar. The greenback's slide against the yen is a real headache for Japan's exporters, one of the few bright spots in the economy. Worse, it devalues overseas investments, another key pillar of support through the tough times. The Bank of Japan has spent trillions of yen, fruitlessly, in an effort to prop up the dollar. While the Bush administration continues its rhetorical support for a strong dollar, the currency's fall says actions are more important than words. Still, sentiment in Japan is picking up; check back next quarter to see if the surge in optimism survives the summer.

Chronology of U.S.-Japan Relations¹ **April-June 2003**

April 1, 2003: A portion of Camp Kuwae is returned to Japan based on the final reports of the Special Action Committee on Facilities and Areas in Okinawa (SACO) that stipulates the reversion of 11 U.S. facilities.

April 4, 2003: U.S. Navy announces that Japan has signed a \$164 million contract with Lockheed Martin for a *Kongo*-class destroyer, its fifth Aegis-equipped warship.

April 4, 2003: Japan Defense Agency signs contract to buy first air refueling tanker, scheduled to be delivered in FY 2007.

April 8, 2003: Matsui Hideki, "Godzilla," becomes the first Yankee to hit a grand slam in 2003, leading the team to a 7-3 victory over the Minnesota Twins in the home opener.

April 9, 2003: Tokyo announces humanitarian aid to Iraq, \$25 million worth assistance to the World Food Program, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and UNICEF in addition to previously unveiled \$5 million emergency aid package.

April 10, 2003: Aegis-equipped destroyer *Kongou* sails for Indian Ocean to replace the *Kirishima*.

¹ Chronology compiled by Vasey Fellow Hamada Kazuko.

April 12, 2003: U.S. Navy officer John Gibson, stationed at Sasebo Navy Base, smashes head-on into a car, killing a woman and injuring her daughter, and escapes from the accident, reportedly while drunk.

April 12, 2003: PM Koizumi and President Bush discuss on the phone upcoming U.S.-PRC-DPRK tripartite talks and agree that multilateral framework including Japan and South Korea should be the goal.

April 21, 2003: U.S. tanker and F-15s of ASDF begin first aerial refueling exercise over Kyushu and Shikoku.

April 26, 2003: Assistant Secretary of State Kelly visits Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda and Foreign Ministry Asia chief Yabunaka to report on trilateral talks in Beijing.

April 29, 2003: PM Koizumi and President Bush discuss North Korean issue on the phone and agree to continue close consultations among the U.S., Japan, and South Korea.

May 9, 2003: Cabinet approves six-month extension of logistic support for U.S.-led antiterrorism operations in Afghanistan until Nov. 1.

May 15, 2003: Three military emergency bills designed to prepare Japan for foreign military attacks pass Lower House with an overwhelming majority.

May 20, 2003: North Korean defector, identified as a former missile scientist, tells a U.S. Senate hearing that more than 90 percent of missile parts are smuggled in from Japan.

May 21, 2003: FM Kawaguchi announces that Japan will allocate \$46 million to restore Iraqi infrastructure and provide jobs and education.

May 22-23, 2003: Bush-Koizumi summit held at Bush's private ranch in Crawford, Tex.

May 28, 2003: Six Japanese F-15 fighters and an airborne warning and control system plane leave for Alaska to take part in aerial refueling exercise with USAF.

May 29, 2003: PM Koizumi states that while Tokyo wants to see a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, it recognizes the need to accelerate missile research.

May 29, 2003: *Los Angeles Times* reports that the Department of Defense is considering removing 15,000 Marines from Okinawa to Australia. Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz denies report the following day.

May 30, 2003: FM Kawaguchi and Chief Cabinet Secretary Fukuda deny reported relocation plan of the Marines in Okinawa.

June 1, 2003: In a meeting with Wolfowitz, JDA chief Ishiba asks the U.S. to provide Japan with information regarding U.S. missile defense projects.

June 4, 2003: Cash from organized crime networks in Japan contribute to funding for North Korean WMD programs, says John Bolton, undersecretary of state for arms control and international security.

June 5, 2003: JDA plans to seek funds in the FY 2004 budget for two types of missiles: SM3 missiles to arm the MSDF Aegis destroyers and PAC3 Patriots to be based on shore.

June 6, 2003: Three military emergency bills pass House of Councilors with an overwhelming majority.

June 12-13, 2003: TCOG held in Honolulu.

June 13, 2003: Cabinet approves bill that allows SDF to help Iraqi reconstruction, for the first time without the consent of the host country.

June 13, 2003: In meeting with JDA head Ishiba, U.S. Air Force Lt. Gen. Ronald Kadish, chief of U.S. Missile Defense Agency, urges Japan to introduce a “layered defense” combining the ground-based PAC-3 system and a sea-based SM3 missile defense shield in a meeting with JDF chief Ishiba.

June 16, 2003: Obtaining an arrest warrant from the Naha District Court, Tokyo formally requests custody of a U.S. Marine accused of beating and raping a woman in May in the town of Kin.

June 17, 2003: Lower House votes 40-day extension of the current Diet until July 28 to ensure passage of a bill to dispatch SDF to Iraq.

June 18, 2003: A U.S. Marine suspected of raping a woman in Okinawa is arrested; U.S. military authorities agree to hand him over before his indictment.

June 20, 2003: *Mainichi* reports that the U.S. is considering transferring a command post of the Pacific Fleet reconnaissance aircraft divisions in Hawaii to Misawa base to integrate intelligence divisions in the region.

June 20, 2003: U.S. and Japan sign criminal investigation cooperation treaty under which judicial authorities can directly exchange information on criminal cases without foreign ministries’ involvement.

June 25, 2003: PM Koizumi states need for permanent law that stipulates the principles of SDF dispatch.

June 26, 2003: Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Peter W. Rodman affirms that the Pentagon is considering “minor adjustments” of the Marines in Okinawa.

June 28, 2003: *The Japan Times* reports that Richard Lawless, deputy secretary of defense for East Asia and Pacific, requested SDF dispatch to Iraq on June 11.

June 29, 2003: *Asahi* poll finds that 46 percent of Japanese voters support sending SDF to Iraq, 43 percent oppose it, while about 70 percent feel that Japan needs to contribute to Iraqi reconstruction. The poll finds public approval of Koizumi’s Cabinet at 47 percent, down slightly from May, while 52 percent support Koizumi’s reelection in the LDP’s leadership election in September.

June 29, 2003: *Nihon Keizai* reports that JDA will seek funds for a 13,500-ton helicopter carrier in the FY 2004 budget.

June 30, 2003: U.S. State Department spokesman expresses concerns over Japan’s oil projects in Iraq, saying it is “unfortunate time to go forward with major new oil and gas deals.”