

# Japan's Security Policy in the Koizumi Era

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Under Koizumi's leadership Japanese security policy has become closely integrated with the US. One reason is that the US is regarded as necessary protection against regional developments which would threaten Japanese security. Japan's concern has been the threat of North Korea's ballistic missiles and China's rising military power. Moreover, Koizumi has represented a group of younger leaders in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party who have aspired to a global partnership with the US which would elevate Japan's status in international affairs. To this end Koizumi has supported the Bush Administration over Iraq and in May 2006 signed the realignment agreement which provided for closer security cooperation with the US. There are, however, domestic pacifist and external constraints which will limit Japan's ability to cooperate with the US, particularly beyond Northeast Asia. Koizumi has already been criticized from within his own party for allowing relations with China and Korea to deteriorate because of his annual visits to the Yasukuni shrine. His successors would be likely to improve these relations and to restore greater balance to Japan's security policy. Moreover, pacifist sentiment within the political parties would hinder the transformation of the US alliance into a global partnership.

## Introduction

Junichiro Koizumi has presided over unprecedented changes in Japanese politics. He was an outsider to the ruling Liberal Democratic party's (LDP) factions and was elected leader and consequently Prime Minister on 26 April 2001 because of a groundswell of popularity amongst local party chapters. With his characteristic disrespect for consensus and accommodation, usually regarded as necessary prerequisites for leadership in Japan, and boosted by the reforms of his predecessors, Koizumi has strengthened the role of the Prime Minister in Japanese politics. Strong leadership facilitated Japan's assumption of a greater security role within the framework of the US alliance and gave direction to Japanese security policy. For Koizumi's group of LDP supporters, closer cooperation with America answers Japan's need for protection against North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programs and also against China's rising military power. Nonetheless, Koizumi's reliance upon the US is not uncontested as pacifist opinion within Japan impedes the legal and constitutional changes that are necessary to give legitimacy to this new security role. Moreover, critics have argued that Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine have alienated Asian neighbours, and that his excessive reliance upon the US has made Japan less secure, and more vulnerable as a result.

## Changing attitudes towards security

Marked changes of attitude towards security have been noticeable within Japan which would explain the support for Koizumi's security policies. The changes have been both generational, reflecting the attitudes of younger leaders, and contextual as a product of a new and unsettling security environment. In the 1990s a new group of LDP leaders emerged, which has swung behind former Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone in the promotion of an upgraded security role for Japan. Their concern about North Korea's nuclear program and China's military modernization prompted them to discard the passivity that had characterised Japan previously. They argued that Article 9 of the 1947 constitution was outdated since it prevented Japan from having armed forces for self defence, and pressed for its revision.

While Ryutaro Hashimoto was Prime Minister the Acquisition and Cross Services Agreement (ACSA), which provided for Japanese logistical support for operations under the American alliance, was signed with the Clinton Administration on 15 April 1996. On 23 September 1997 new defence guidelines with the US were agreed which established the framework for alliance operations according to the phrase "situations in areas around Japan." The guidelines provoked a controversial debate in Japan as to whether they were situational, or geographical and limited to the Far East according to Article 6 of the 1960 security treaty with the US. The LDP majority view was that they were situational with the implication that Japan's obligations extended beyond the Far East while the opposition demanded a geographic limitation according to the security treaty. Moreover, Cabinet Secretary Seiroku Kajiyama, who was instrumental in coordinating the Japanese position over the guidelines, insisted that they included both Taiwan and the Korean peninsula.<sup>1</sup> Supporting this view with some qualifications was the Head of the LDP Policy Research Council, Taku Yamasaki, who was the spokesman for the LDP defence lobby. Opposition came from the Social Democratic Party, then in coalition with the LDP, which demanded that Taiwan be excluded.<sup>2</sup>

Another step was taken when North Korea's launching of the Taepodong-1 missile on 31 August 1998 shocked the Japanese and pushed the government into a realization of the need for closer cooperation with the US over ballistic missile defence (BMD). Despite the perceived urgency the Keizo Obuchi government moved carefully, fearful of the reactions of China and North Korea. Almost one year later, on 16 August 1999, it announced that agreement with the US had been reached for "joint research" into BMD. These decisions stimulated much controversy but the younger generation of politicians, those born during or after the war, had fewer inhibitions about

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<sup>1</sup> *Asahi Shinbun*, 17 August 1997.

<sup>2</sup> *Nikkei*, 23 August 1997.

security and were more willing than their elders to accept them as necessary.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Koizumi changes**

Koizumi's boldness of manner and unusual clarity, where other Japanese leaders were characteristically muddled and hesitant, attracted wide public support. He became the major representative of the younger generation of politicians which sought a greater security role for Japan through the American alliance. Some simply wanted the means for self defence against threats, others sought international recognition of Japan's status and a permanent seat on the UN Security council. The most ambitious, described as new nationalists, intended to revise the alliance to allow equality with America and to remove the asymmetry within the alliance relationship. They visualised a Japan that would be America's main partner in Asia, in much the same way that Britain was in the West. Koizumi has never articulated his ideas for the alliance in any extensive way but he leans towards the latter group. Prominent supporters were Shinzo Abe, grandson of Prime Minister and nationalist Nobusuke Kishi, and Taro Aso, grandson of Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida.

Koizumi became a loyal supporter of the Bush administration and, mindful of the criticism that accompanied Japanese inaction over the 1990-91 Gulf War, complied with its requests to provide support over Iraq and Afghanistan. On 29 October 2001 he obtained rapid Diet approval to despatch naval units, two destroyers and a supply ship, to the Indian Ocean to assist in the transport of fuel and other supplies for US and allied navies. This unprecedented deployment was hardly contested within the Diet, which revealed the extent to which attitudes towards security had changed, even the Japanese Communist Party supported the legislation. The Koizumi cabinet obtained Diet approval for the War Contingency bills on 7 June 2003 which allowed Japan to deploy forces abroad in the event of a military emergency, another unprecedented step which was seen by the opposition as conflicting with the pacifist constitution.<sup>4</sup>

Under this legislation Cabinet made the decision on 9 December 2003 to despatch Self Defence Forces (SDF) to Samawah in Southern Iraq. Some 1,100 soldiers were eventually sent in what was described as a "major turning point" for Japan's security policy.<sup>5</sup> Article 9 was circumvented by the argument that they were being sent for non combatant purposes and civilian

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<sup>3</sup> On the structural and generational changes in the Japanese system see Michael Jonathon Green, *Japan's Reluctant Realism; Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power*, New York: Palgrave, 2000, pp. 47-50, 73-75.

<sup>4</sup> Nao Shimoyachi, Reiji Yoshida, 'Diet Enacts Legislation for War Contingencies,' *Japan Times*, 8 June 2003.

<sup>5</sup> Keizo Nabeshima, 'Decision to dispatch SDF Troops to Iraq a watershed for Defense, security policy,' *Japan Times*, 3 January 2004.

reconstruction. This decision made the public uneasy and had the Japanese force taken casualties, Koizumi would have had a crisis on his hands. As it was, the Japanese force was conveniently protected by first Dutch and then later Australian forces in a quiet sector. A man of strong commitment Koizumi defended the Iraqi deployments as a “Japanese responsibility”, but why take the political risk?

In Japanese security circles it is argued that Japan has “no alternative” under the circumstances but to strengthen the alliance with the US.<sup>6</sup> Japan is compelled to develop the means of self defence within the framework of the US alliance, autonomous defence is a dream of some fanciful nationalists. One anxiety that troubles the Japanese is that an absence of commitment on their part may induce America to lose interest in the alliance. The Japanese recall American frustration during the first North Korean nuclear crisis over 1993-94 when Japan was caught unprepared and incapable of response.<sup>7</sup> An inability or unwillingness to work with the Americans over this and other regional crises could prompt an American reassessment of the value of the alliance, and may result in its downgrading. A related apprehension is an America that may choose China over Japan as its main partner in the Asia Pacific region. The Japanese were most concerned by Clinton’s visit to Shanghai in June 1998, which held out this very prospect. Condominium between America and China may alleviate tensions with Beijing but would be alarming for Japan as it would remove the assurance of American support over a range of issues. Similarly, an America tired of the nuclear standoff with North Korea may be tempted by popular pressure to negotiate a deal with North Korea. The Clinton Administration also toyed with the idea of an accommodation with North Korea to end the nuclear stalemate and sent Madeleine Albright on an exploratory visit to Pyongyang in October 2000. An end to the crisis would be desirable but an imperfect deal which would gloss over the verification of the North’s nuclear program, as did the October 1994 Agreed Framework, would jeopardise Japanese security. Moreover, it would be unlikely that the North’s ballistic missile program would be removed as a result of any such accommodation, which could allow America to disengage from the Korean peninsula while leaving intact the threat to Japan.<sup>8</sup> For these reasons the LDP defence group felt compelled to strengthen the alliance relationship by demonstrating Japan’s security value to the US, which required a willingness to assume greater security responsibly within the alliance framework. Their aim has been to bind the US more closely to Japan to forestall possible

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<sup>6</sup> Interview sources, National Defence Institute, Tokyo, 17 January 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Yoichi Funabashi, *Alliance Adrift*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1999, p. 82.

<sup>8</sup> According to Masashi Nishihara, then Director of the National Defence Academy, Japan would go nuclear if the US signed a non aggression pact with North Korea, this concession to the North is advocated by American proponents of engagement of North Korea; see ‘Non Aggression Pact could lead to Nuclear Ambitions,’ *Japan Times*, 17 August 2003.

developments in America's Asia Pacific policy which could go against Japan's interests.

The Japanese-US realignment agreement of 1 May 2006 was Koizumi's most significant step in terms of security cooperation. America's intention of transforming the alliance into a global partnership dovetailed with the Koizumi group's purposes of integrating Japanese security more closely with the US. Basically, it allowed the US greater flexibility to use forces currently deployed in Japan for missions in other regions such as the Persian Gulf and Middle East. This flexibility required greater Japanese cooperation with the US in East Asia to take up the slack, Japan was indeed expected to do more. The realignment covered four points: First, the Headquarters of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force in Okinawa as well as 8,000 out of 20,600 marines would be moved to Guam by 2014, Japan would pay 58% of the \$10.27 billion cost of the move; second the US would return five bases to Japan including Futenma air base, which would be vacated by 2014; third the Central Readiness Unit command of the SDF would be transferred to Camp Zama in Kanagawa prefecture to form a joint rapid reaction force with American forces. This rapid reaction force, called the Central Readiness Force, would act in emergencies in areas around Japan, including the Taiwan straits and the Korean peninsula; fourth Japan's air defence command would be transferred to the American 5th air force in Yokota air base by 2010.<sup>9</sup> The realignment demanded greater interoperability between Japanese and American forces in connection with contingency planning, intelligence sharing, international terrorism as well as BMD.<sup>10</sup>

The agreement brings Japan into uncharted territory and one of the major Japanese criticisms was that it failed to define the extent of Japan's role, which appeared open-ended.<sup>11</sup> Theoretically, Japan could be involved in a range of contingencies from Northeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, to the Middle East, and it is unclear where the limits are. Tokyo, however, seeks to confine its commitments to regional contingencies including a North Korean attack upon Japan involving WMD, hostilities in the Korean peninsula and the Taiwan Straits.<sup>12</sup> The realignment may involve a division of labour as the US restructures its forces to meet global contingencies while Japan is expected to assume more of the burden in Northeast Asia. Some Japanese are concerned that the agreements may be perceived as an American draw down from Northeast Asia, which may embolden North Korea in its intimidatory tactics against both the US and Japan.

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<sup>9</sup> 'Cabinet Oks Plan to Realign U. S. Military Presence, Skips Details,' *Nikkei*, 30 May 2006; Reiji Yoshida 'Japan, U.S. finalize forces plan,' *Japan Times*, 4 May 2006; the realignment will allow the US greater flexibility to respond to global challenges from the Middle East to Northeast Asia.

<sup>10</sup> Reiji Yoshida 'Troop Pact takes alliance with U.S. into New Era,' *Japan Times*, 4 May 2006.

<sup>11</sup> *Asahi Shinbun* 2 May 2006.

<sup>12</sup> 'Japan to revamp rules for defense cooperation with U.S.', *Nikkei*, 5 May 2006.

Although the government in Tokyo may be willing to support US military operations, its ability to act according to well-drafted plans may be impeded by constitutional restrictions and public pacifism. Negotiations over the realignment agreement were delayed by Tokyo's need to take local government views into account. Their resistance would hamper Tokyo in its efforts to draft legislation to allow American forces the use of Japanese airfields and ports in the case of Northeast Asian contingencies. In particular, Okinawa governor Keiichi Inamine has been a problem for Tokyo, demanding the relocation of Futenma air base elsewhere and the return of land currently being used by US bases. Moreover, the self imposed ban on collective defence as a declaration of pacifist intentions cannot easily be discarded and may hinder joint operations with the US.

Over the past decade the LDP has attempted to promote a revision of this ban as well as article 9 of the constitution to allow Japan to possess armed forces for self defence, and to promote joint operations with the US. Former Prime Ministers Nakasone, Hashimoto, Miyazawa and Mori have lent their weight to the effort which has support within the Diet.<sup>13</sup> In January 2000 the House of Representatives created a Research Commission on the Constitution, which was chaired by former Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama, to examine the issue, and it reported five years later on 15 April 2005. The report stressed that amendments were required to the preamble of Article 9 to reflect Japanese history, traditions and culture, and to allow armed forces for self defence. The committee was divided over the right to collective defence, however, and wanted specific definitions of the contingencies in which Japan may be involved placed in the constitution.<sup>14</sup>

The LDP's constitutional drafting commission headed by former Prime Minister Mori, reported in October 2005 and proposed several amendments to Article 9 which would allow Japan to maintain "self defence military" for the purposes of international peace and security.<sup>15</sup> Japan's second party, the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), has strongly supported the LDP over this issue (Its founding fathers were former LDP leaders and in policy it is close to the LDP). In May 2006 a bill for a national referendum on constitutional change was submitted to the Diet which would specify the procedures. Nonetheless, revision was made deliberately difficult as article 96 of the Constitution states that a 2/3rd vote in both houses is required before the Diet can submit the issue to a popular referendum. Despite major

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<sup>13</sup> Nikkei claimed that recent polls indicated that a "groundswell of popular opinion was in favour of changing the constitution," Editorial, 'Time is ripe for constitutional amendments,' *Nikkei*, 6 May 2004.

<sup>14</sup> Tetsushi Kajimoto, 'Change Constitution: Lower house report,' *Japan Times*, 17 April 2006.

<sup>15</sup> The LDP's draft preamble to Article 9 says that "the Japanese people jointly hold an obligation to support and protect their country and society with affection, a sense of responsibility and spirit," states that basic principles such as HR, pacifism, and international cooperation should be maintained as everlasting values. Tetsushi Kajimoto, 'LDP revises Article 9 in draft constitution,' *Japan Times*, 30 October 2005.

party support for change, a 2/3rd vote over this issue may not be obtained without compromises. The LDP's ally the New Komeito, which is linked with the Buddhist pacifist group Sokka Gakkai, could join with socialists, communists and pacifist objectors from the main parties over this issue. Rather than a complete removal of all pacifist constraints the result could be a very Japanese compromise which would allow armed forces for self defence but with the same prohibition on collective defence. If this were the outcome Japan would be unlikely to act in the way visualised by both LDP and American defence planners, alliance equality would be denied and asymmetry would be prolonged.

### **North Korea**

North Korea has impelled Japan into a closer security relationship with the US and its nuclear and ballistic missile programs pose particular problems for Japan. There were attempts to develop a direct relationship with North Korea to give Japan other options, but without success. A Foreign Ministry group sought to revive the dialogue that Japan had conducted with Pyongyang over 1991-92, which was suspended over the issue of the abduction of Japanese citizens and the North's demand for compensation for Japanese colonialism. Deputy Foreign Minister Hitoshi Tanaka strove to revive this dialogue by arranging Koizumi's visit to Pyongyang in September 2002. He hoped to stave off a fatal confrontation with North Korea and to give Japan other levers of influence over its behaviour. Koizumi's strong support for this venture signified a notable departure from the Bush Administration's hard line position over North Korea and represented a move towards policy autonomy. Kim Jong-il, however, admitted the North's involvement in the abductions and Japanese public opinion was outraged.<sup>16</sup> The families of the abductees formed a powerful lobby group and through the media could veto any accommodation of the North. LDP Secretary General and later Cabinet Secretary Shinzo Abe became chief negotiator for these families and was associated with a specifically hard line Japanese position over North Korea. Japan's options over North Korea were narrowed.

To deal with the ballistic missile threat from the North, Cabinet Secretary Yasuo Fukuda on 20 December 2003 announced that Japan would go ahead with the deployment of BMD. This demanded very close technical cooperation with the US not only in relation to missile and radar technology but also in intelligence gathering, where Japan was particularly deficient. The Japanese Defence Agency was disturbed by the North's Nodong 1 which was first tested in May 1993 and with a range of 1,350-1500 kilometres placed Western Japan at risk, the Defence Agency claims that over 200 have been deployed but other estimates are around 100. In

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<sup>16</sup> See Hong Nack Kim, *The Koizumi Government and the Politics of Normalizing Japanese-North Korean Relations*, East-West Center Working Paper no 14, February 2006.

January 2005 it was reported that the North had developed the Scud-ER (extended range) which was an improvement on the Scud-C and with a range of up to 1,000 kilometres could reach Western Japan.<sup>17</sup>

One solution to this problem was the development of a pre-emptive strike capability which was contemplated by the Defence Agency during the first North Korean nuclear crisis over 1993-94.<sup>18</sup> At the time, the agency contemplated an attack by F-1 or F-4EJ fighters, which did not have the range in any case. Defence Agency Director Shigeru Ishiba in February and September 2003 publicly claimed that a pre-emptive strike on North Korean ballistic missile sites would be justified if launches were imminent.<sup>19</sup> Japan had neither the capability for a pre-emptive attack nor the ability to gather accurate intelligence in relation to prospective missile launches by the North. Later Ishiba admitted that the Defence agency had considered the purchase of Tomahawk cruise missiles to create a pre-emptive strike capability which, he thought, would have been a more effective option than BMD.<sup>20</sup> Despite the difficulty of reconciling pre-emption with the pacifist constitution, discussion about its desirability and feasibility continued in the LDP Policy Research Council.<sup>21</sup> A fine distinction was made, which made sense only in Japanese defence circles, between pre-emption, which was prohibited by the constitution, and a counterattack after a missile launch, which would be permissible.

Japan's BMD was to be a two-layered system; the first layer would include the Standard Missile 3 (SM-3) to be deployed on six Aegis equipped destroyers which would intercept missiles at post boost phase up to 200 kilometres; the second layer would comprise PAC-3 Patriot missiles with a range up to 20 kilometres, deployed in Western Japan to intercept missiles in their terminal phase. Joint Japanese-US production of the advanced version of the SM-3 missile was decided in December 2005. It was to be deployed at sea starting in 2006. It was agreed that Japan was to produce nose cones and engines for the missile and was to pay one third of the estimated \$3 billion production cost; Japan's target was 36 SM-3s and 124 PAC-3 interceptors by 2010.<sup>22</sup> Most important was the development of an upgraded sea and ground based missile tracking capability; the AN/SPY-1D radar tracking system on the Aegis destroyers was to be integrated with the ground based EPS-3 radar system which is to be deployed at 7 locations, and the advanced EPS-XX tracking system to be deployed at four locations

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<sup>17</sup> 'New N. Korea Scud able to strike Tokyo,' *Japan Times*, 17 February 2005.

<sup>18</sup> 'Japan Studied Attack on N Korea in 1993; Report,' *Washington Post*, 8 May 2003.

<sup>19</sup> 'Ishiba says Japan will strike if N Korea attack is imminent,' *Japan Today*, 16 September 2003.

<sup>20</sup> Nao Shimoyachi, 'Japan mull buying cruise missiles for pre-emptive self defense: Ishiba,' *Japan Times*, 26 January 2005.

<sup>21</sup> 'LDP Eyes Ability to Attack N. Korea Missile Sites,' *Nikkei*, 26 March 2004.

<sup>22</sup> *Japan Times*, 11 March 2006.

in western Japan.<sup>23</sup> In addition the X Band radar system, which was capable of distinguishing between missiles and decoys, was deployed in Northern Honshu. The need for accurate early warning of missile launches is urgent and Japan has attempted to develop its own capability. In March 2003 two early warning satellites were launched, one an optical sensor satellite, the other with Synthetic Aperture Radar (SAR). Another two will be launched in 2007 with higher resolution, followed by two more by 2009. Japan's independent BMD capability would take this long to become operational and in the meantime Japan will still depend upon the US. Defence Agency Director Fukushima Nukuga on 13 January 2006 announced that Japanese BMD would be integrated with American early warning satellite systems, which would give Japan continuous information on North Korea.<sup>24</sup>

BMD, however, brings with it various problems and one is cost. The defence budget has been under the strict control of the Finance Ministry, which has imposed annual reductions since 2002. The estimated cost of the joint production of interceptor systems with the US has tripled to \$3 billion since the project was initiated. The Japanese are concerned that they will be asked by the US to accept a greater share of the costs while their budgets are being steadily reduced.<sup>25</sup> Another concern is its effectiveness as North Korean missiles only require 10 minutes to hit Japan after launching. Would Japan's BMD respond in time? The Defence Agency claims that 2 minutes would be sufficient for a response but this claim is dubious.<sup>26</sup> The Diet in 2005 agreed to "rules of engagement" which gave commanders the authority to respond to a missile attack but the limited time undermines the credibility of an untested system. Moreover, North Korean missiles are liquid-fuelled and require 3-6 hours of preparation before they can be launched, enough for early warning satellites to identify them. Should North Korea master the technology of solid fuel propellant, its missiles could be quickly brought out of underground bunkers and launched, depriving Japan of sufficient warning time to respond. The third stage of the Taepodong-1 launched in August 1998 was solid fuelled but it broke up in flight, which may illustrate particular difficulties not just in missile staging technology but also in developing a reliable propellant.

The North Korea missile launches of 5 July 2006 revealed that technical difficulties had still not been overcome. Seven missiles were launched on a trajectory towards the open sea in the North, three were Nodongs and three were Scuds, but the reported long range missile broke up after 40 seconds when a booster exploded. The launches were no surprise as satellite photos since May had shown that long trailers had moved a 35 metre ballistic

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<sup>23</sup> Hisane Masaki, 'Japan Puts its Defense in Order,' *World Security Outlook*, 27 December 2005, <[www.worldsecuritynetwork.com](http://www.worldsecuritynetwork.com)>.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Sieff, 'US, Japan to integrate BMD IT networks,' UPI, 18 January 2006, <[www.spacewar.com](http://www.spacewar.com)>.

<sup>25</sup> 'Cost of Joint Japan-U.S. Interceptor System Triples,' *Daily Yomiuri*, 25 September 2005.

<sup>26</sup> Reiji Yoshida, 'Missile defence plans have their skeptics,' *Japan Times*, 29 July 2006.

missile into position in North Hamkyong province. Media reports labelled the long range missile as the Taepodong-2 with a range of 3,600 kilometres, sufficient to hit Alaska. The Japanese defence agency at first claimed that it exploded 10 minutes after launch, which reportedly revealed problems with the Aegis tracking systems.<sup>27</sup> Pre-emption was again raised as an option by Shinzo Abe, Nukaga and Aso Taro, but not as an immediate response.<sup>28</sup> Japan sponsored a UN resolution calling for sanctions against North Korea under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, Chinese and Russian objections, however, reduced it to a condemnation of the launches without enforceable obligations.<sup>29</sup> The likely impact upon Japan would be to strengthen perceptions of North Korea as dangerous and to accelerate preparations for BMD.

## China

China's rise troubles the Japanese and in security circles there is the fear that a geopolitical clash is unavoidable.<sup>30</sup> Japan has never faced a strong China before, past Chinese dynasties were remote and contact was limited, except for certain periods of hectic cultural borrowing. One issue that concerns the Japanese is the development of China's military power and the fact that defence spending outpaces economic growth. The Defence Agency has drawn attention to China's defence spending in its annual series the Defense of Japan, identifying China's force modernisation as an issue.<sup>31</sup> Foreign Minister Taro Aso and DPJ leader Seiji Maehara both declared that China was a threat, Aso claimed that Chinese defence spending had expanded annually for 17 years without a clear purpose and decried China's lack of transparency.<sup>32</sup> Even the normally sanguine Yoichi Funabashi declared that though China was not a military threat it was a "security threat" for Japan. He wrote that Japan should build up its deterrent capability but should do it "quietly".<sup>33</sup> Others were disturbed the development of Chinese sea power, the transformation of its coastal navy into a power projection force with the acquisition of new naval capabilities, particularly Sovremenny destroyers and Kilo class submarines from Russia.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Japan Times*, 31 August 2006.

<sup>28</sup> 'Pre-emptive Strike Weighed Anew,' *Japan Times*, 11 July 2006.

<sup>29</sup> 'Security council Condemns Democratic People's Republic Of Korea Missile Launches,' *United Nations Security Council Resolution 1695*, 15 July 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Interview sources, Tokyo 17 August 2003.

<sup>31</sup> "Many countries in the Asia Pacific Region, against the background of economic growth, have been expanding and modernizing their military capabilities by increasing defense budgets and acquiring new equipments. Moves in this regard by China, a major power with significant economic and political influence in the region are drawing particular attention from other countries," *The Defense of Japan 2006*, Tokyo: Defense Agency, p. 2  
<[http://www.jda.go.jp/e/index\\_.htm](http://www.jda.go.jp/e/index_.htm)>.

<sup>32</sup> 'Foreign Minister Aso calls China 'threat'', *Nikkei*, 22 December 2005.

<sup>33</sup> Yoichi Funabashi, 'U.S. Forces Transformation,' *Ashahi Shinbun*, 29 September 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Hideaki Kaneda, 'Rise of Chinese Sea Power,' *Japan Times*, 14 September 2006.

Taiwan is one major area where China may use its new capabilities to enforce its will, which could provoke a clash with Japan. The Japanese have retained ties with their former colony and with the native Taiwanese in particular, former President Lee Teng-hui regularly visits Japan despite Chinese protests.<sup>35</sup> China has accused the Japanese of encouraging the Taiwanese independence sentiment and maintaining a de facto two China policy. Despite the lack of formal diplomatic links with Taiwan, dialogue and friendship groups have been established in the Japanese Diet through which informal relations are conducted. The Japanese are also concerned about China's role in the Korean peninsula and are suspicious of Chinese intentions there. Within defence circles there is the view that China has the means to compel the North to accept verification of its nuclear program to end the standoff with the US, but has no interest in so doing. In March 2003 China interrupted oil supplies to North Korea for 3 days which was interpreted as a move to push it into the six party talks. For China the North serves a useful purpose as an ally against both the US and Japan even while it sponsors the six party talks as a venue for negotiations. China's solution to the problem posed by North Korea requires US concessions to achieve its ultimate objective, which is the survival of the Kim Jong Il regime. Seen from this perspective China is the vicarious beneficiary of the North's efforts to intimidate Japan and the US and it has no intention to forgo this favourable position.

Another issue that has disturbed the Japanese has been the East China Sea zone where EEZ claims overlap. Japan's EEZ claim is based on the median line which is equidistant from the coasts of both countries, this China rejects. China claims an EEZ that extends to the edge of the continental shelf which would include the Japanese claim area. Since October 2003 China has been drilling and extracting gas from the Tianwaitian field which is very close to the Japanese claim line. The Japanese argue that China is taking gas from a common source under the sea bed which deprives them of their share of gas. The Japanese side protested to China and foreign ministry negotiations were conducted in Beijing in October 2004 and May 2005.<sup>36</sup> The Japanese side has been concerned by the increasing frequency with which Chinese scientific vessels and naval vessels cross into their EEZ. A Chinese Han class submarine intruded into Japanese territorial waters in September 2004 which was regarded by the Defence Agency as an act of provocation. Within Japan the Chinese were accused of attempting to intimidate Japan over the East China sea issue, the Chinese Foreign

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<sup>35</sup> Yoshida Soeya, 'Changing Security and Political contexts of Japan-Taiwan Relations: A View from Japan', *NBR analysis*, vol. 16, no. 1, October 2005.

<sup>36</sup> *Nikkei*, 21 September 2005.

Ministry subsequently issued what came close to an apology for the intrusion.<sup>37</sup>

Koizumi's annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honours 14 A class war criminals, have enraged both Chinese and Koreans as well as alarmed liberal Japanese. Why the Yasukuni chief priest Nagayoshi Matsudaira in 1978 decided to enshrine convicted war criminals, ordering them to them to be called "martyrs", is beyond the scope of this article, as is the significance of the Shrine for the right wing in Japanese politics.<sup>38</sup> Why Koizumi persisted in visiting the Shrine in spite of international and domestic criticisms owes much to his promise to the Bereaved Families Association, and also some very personal feelings about the war dead. Koizumi ignored the Foreign Ministry when it attempted to dissuade him from these visits and then turned against it by undermining the so-called "China School" through reshuffles.<sup>39</sup> His visits have support within the Diet and on 22 April 2005 a cabinet minister and 81 diet members visited the shrine to show solidarity with Koizumi. A group of 116 LDP members was formed in the Diet, chaired by Tadahiro Matsushita, to support Koizumi over the Yasukuni shrine. Matsushita criticised LDP members who appealed to Koizumi to stop visiting the shrine because of Chinese and Korean protests.<sup>40</sup> Chinese leader Hu Jintao has warned the Japanese over the issue and has imposed the condition that the next Japanese leader should cease visiting the Shrine if relations are to improve. Public Chinese censure, however, has stimulated greater support for Koizumi's visits within Japan as Japanese pride is challenged. This would explain the seemingly conflicting results from the Nikkei Research polls of public opinion. In one poll 48% of respondents approved of Koizumi's visit to the Shrine on 15 August 2006, another poll discovered that 52% called for the removal of the war criminals from the Shrine to defuse the dispute.<sup>41</sup> The Chinese are no doubt well aware that constant public condemnation could ignite a very volatile and unpredictable Japanese national pride and have toned down their criticisms.

The Koizumi group regards the American alliance as protection against China, but it comes with costs. The Bush Administration expects greater support for American objectives in relation to China, which may not always be in Japan's interest. While tensions stimulated by the Yasukuni Shrine and other issues may yet be alleviated, should Japan become locked into an

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<sup>37</sup> Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei declared it was a mistake and Koizumi said he took this as an apology; Nao Shimoyachi, 'Chinese submarine intrusion considered an act of provocation,' *Japan Times*, 14 November 2004.

<sup>38</sup> See Daiki Shibuichi, 'The Yasukuni Shrine Disputes and the Politics of Identity in Japan; Why all the fuss?', *Asian Survey*, vol. 45, no. 2, March/April 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Tatsuya Ishii and Osamu Sueishi, 'Foreign Ministry mind set: "Hate China"', *Japan Times*, 12 June 2005.

<sup>40</sup> Tetsushi Kajimoto, '116 lawmakers back Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni,' *Japan Times*, 30 June 2005.

<sup>41</sup> See 'Public Split on Yasukuni Visit By Koizumi's successor,' *Nikkei*, 21 August 2006; also Nikkei Poll, 'Majority calls for End to Impasse over Yasukuni Shrine,' *Nikkei*, 21 August 2006.

American strategy of confrontation of Beijing the downward slide in relations may become irreversible. The extent to which Japan may be dragged into an American-Chinese conflict over Taiwan has been a concern since the revised defence guidelines were agreed in 1997. When Japanese and American officials first met on 19 February 2005 in Washington to negotiate the realignment agreement, the Americans demanded a clear statement on Taiwan, which Japan resisted. American Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's statements lambasting China as one of the "emerging threats" to the region point to the danger of Japan becoming too closely associated with one particular American Administration.<sup>42</sup> China would have even less incentive to rein in North Korea and its relationship with the Kim Jong Il regime may be strengthened. China may also become more intransigent over issues of immediate concern to Japan such as the East China Sea EEZ dispute.

### **An assessment**

Over the past decade a series of Japanese governments has strengthened the security relationship with the US as the basis for the management of Japan's security. Koizumi has been more focused and determined than previous Japanese leaders in his efforts to elevate Japan as America's major security partner in Asia. His resolution and clarity of purpose have been unusual in Japanese politics where compromise and accommodation have been highly valued, but they have given rise to difficulties that his successors will face. One problem is the discrepancy that has emerged between security policy makers and the expectations of the Japanese public, which is not prepared to jettison pacifism entirely. Japan's pacifism expresses itself through political parties whose votes are required to reach the necessary majority in the Diet for constitutional change, and through local governments whose cooperation will be required to fulfil commitments under the US alliance. The ban on collective defence has been stoutly defended by these groups and has acquired a certain legitimacy in politics which would make it difficult to remove. A second problem is that Koizumi's policy of relying almost exclusively upon the US has exacerbated Japan's relations with China in particular and has been criticized as naïve. His Yasukuni Shrine visits have alienated Japan's Asian neighbours and have been regarded as unpardonable by Japanese liberals. LDP colleagues have broken with Koizumi over this issue and have become his opponents. Former LDP Secretary General Taku Yamasaki has stressed the importance of repairing relations with Asian neighbours and has been vocal in his

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<sup>42</sup> See Nobuyoshi Sakajira, 'Tokyo Appears Vital to Washington's Goal for Stability in Asia,' *Asahi Shinbum*, 21 February 2005; On 4 June 2005 in a speech to the Shangri-la Dialogue in Singapore Rumsfeld warned that China was spending considerably more on defence than it acknowledged and asked "Since no nation threatens China, one must wonder: why this growing investment? Why these continuing large and continuing arms purchases," *Taipei Times*, 7 June 2005; also 'Why does US preach 'China military threat'?' *People's Daily*, 15 June 2005.

criticism of the visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. Yasuo Fukuda, who as Cabinet Secretary had coordinated Koizumi's security policy, has been similarly harsh in his criticisms of the Shrine visits. Another former LDP Secretary General, Koichi Kato, has decried the emergence of extreme nationalism in Japan, fomented as he claims by the Yasukuni visits which in his view have damaged relations with Asia. Koizumi's fixation on America has resulted in a loss of balance between the US and Asia and the neglect of this second dimension of Japanese security is a serious omission. His successor Shinzo Abe is likely to continue with the Koizumi line though he has mentioned the need to improve relations with China and Korea. Former Prime Minister Nakasone has called for the institutionalization of a trilateral summit with China and Korea while Yoichi Funabashi has called for a Northeast Asian form of regionalism that would be compatible with the US alliance. Indeed, restoring the credibility of Japan's Asian policy should be a high priority for the post Koizumi leadership.

Ultimately, Japan's security policy should be understood as a product of a particular domestic and regional context, and it would make no sense to sketch scenarios of future Japanese behaviour without accounting for the domestic and external constraints to policy. Despite the hopes of Koizumi and his supporters it is unlikely that Japan could live up to the demands of a global partnership with the US, one which would assure it of a status equivalent to Britain as the principal US ally in the Asia Pacific. The Koizumi group's hopes have soared well beyond what the Japanese political parties and public could accept. Over Northeast Asia there may be an identifiable convergence of interests and the North Korean missile threat, no doubt, will keep Japan and the US together. Over this issue Japan has few alternatives in any case. Long term strategy for Japan, nonetheless, would demand some insurance against the possibility that a future American administration would revive the aborted Clinton engagement policy as a way out of the current impasse over North Korea. It would also require some means of ensuring that Japan would avoid the prospect of a hostile and united Korean nation some time in the future. The loss of policy flexibility in regard to North Korea, because of public outrage over the abductions, has been much lamented within Japan. Over China there are ambiguous areas that may become significant in the future. The Koizumi group may have felt that American support against China's military expansion and naval development was necessary, but not to the extent that Japan becomes entangled in the Bush Administration's disputes with Beijing over Taiwan. Powerful business groups in Japan regard China as critical for Japan's economic revival and have been urging the Koizumi government to prevent relations with Beijing from deteriorating further, particularly over the Yasukuni Shrine visits. Koizumi himself disregarded this pressure but his successors, despite their public declarations, are likely to be more prudent and more responsive to the concerns of the business community. Beyond Northeast Asia Japan's ability to act with the US would weaken accordingly. Pacifist constraints would limit

security cooperation with the US to specific issues such as disaster relief, anti piracy and anti terrorism. There is the widespread view in the West that Japan is coming of age as a security power and there indeed have been unprecedented developments which point in this direction. Despite everything, Japanese governments are unlikely to break free of these domestic constraints to the extent that their aspirations for a security role would be satisfied. Japan's inability to fulfil this role to the extent desired will have repercussions for Australia as an American ally which shares similar security interests. Australia can act where Japan cannot. As America revises strategic directions in the Western Pacific these constraints would prevent Japan from rising to the occasion to assume a compensating role, and would prompt it to seek out allies who would act as regional stabilisers on Japan's behalf. Australia's strategic value for Japan would be enhanced as a consequence.

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