THE EVOLVING ASIAN AND GLOBAL SECURITY ORDER:
WHAT ROLE FOR JAPAN?

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The changes taking place in … Japan’s external relations are providing Japan with unique opportunities for new policy initiatives. Indeed, these new opportunities are forcing Japan to adopt new directions in its foreign policy. A knowledge of its past policies is not sufficient by itself to explain adequately the current trends and alternatives for Japan.

Frank Langdon (1973)¹

The combined legacies of Japanese nationalism and pacifism are likely to produce new political constellations and policies that will resist analytic capture by ahistorical conceptions of a “normal” Japan. Real life is likely to be both more complicated and more interesting.

Peter Katzenstein and Nobuo Okawara (2001)²

The times demanded that Japan shift to proactive diplomacy based on new thinking. Shinzo Abe (2006)³

Introduction⁴

One of the hallmarks of Frank Langdon’s scholarship on Japan was his consistent reminder that Japan, Japanese society, and its political processes should not be treated as historical artifacts whose future would be dictated by stereotypic characterizations of pre and post-WWII experiences. Three decades later, another prominent North American analyst of Japan and his coauthor reiterated Langdon’s admonition not to rely on static preconceptions when looking to Japan’s future. Certainly, one need only note the events of the past several months, in particular Prime Minister Abe’s surprising (and apparently fruitful) overtures to his Chinese and South Korean counterparts, for confirmation of Langdon’s and Katzenstein’s counsel. We are finding that real life is indeed “more complicated and more interesting” than expected.

This paper looks to advance such thinking by exploring how Japan, through exercising proactive diplomacy, by building upon rather than simply relying on past principals and policies, might positively effect its regional and global security environment. In short, these remarks advocate that Japanese foreign and security policy

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makers to assume a new role or roles, by continuing its current momentum to move from being seen as “takers” to “makers” of regional bilateral and multilateral architectures.5

What follows is organized in three phases, the first a brief setting of context. Here I argue that the architecture of today’s regional security order—one premised on the capacity of bilateral alliances, “soft” institutional fora, and ad hoc multilateralism—has reached its limits. That is, while capable of sustaining the status quo through the short term, this architecture is not adequate for management of the longer term, non-status quo, aspirations of the region’s major powers. The U.S. should not be counted upon to provide leadership in this regard; its hegemonic authority will be curtailed by the effects of Washington’s declining interest and the overextension of its financial and strategic resources. Section II reviews Japan’s efforts to adjust to the shifting environment of the post-Cold War. In Inoguchi and Bacon’s terms, during this fifteen year, cyclical period, Japan strove to overcome its “legitimacy and capability deficits” to assume the “normal” state characteristics of a “global civilian power”.6 Here I argue that, while the combination of regionalization of the Japan-US alliance and of extension Japanese presence beyond the region achieved success, (in particular under Koizumi’s adroit leadership after September 2001), these policies also have reached their limits, indeed they limit the nation’s abilities to move further forward. Thus, in Section III, I set out ideas of the parameters of a more proactive diplomacy that would see Japan assuming a new and greater role in shaping a regional and global security environment that allows it to exercise initiative and leadership, in coordination with rather than counter to the interests of other key players. To preclude the reader’s early dismissal of such speculation, these are not arguments for removal of the US-Japan alliance as a centre piece of regional order. Instead the premise is that Japan is capable of utilizing this foundation to its advantage, building from it a more nuanced and proactive regional role than it has played to date.

I. Asia Pacific’s Regional Security Order:

Holding the Status Quo through Systemic Transformation

The Asia Pacific, in particular Northeast Asia, is continually highlighted as at risk because of its confluence of nuclear powers, highly militarized states, competitive arms acquisition, unresolved national reunification problems (concerning China and the Korean Peninsula), ideological confrontations (with North Korea), uncertainty over the longer-term aspirations of key states (China and Japan), and the unsettling impact of rising nationalism.7 That being said, any discussion of regional security architecture must proceed from acknowledgement of the remarkable success that the states of the Asia Pacific have had in managing their security relations. Over the last two decades the

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7 These themes recur through many reviews of Asian security. See, for instance, the annual Strategic Asia volumes published by the National Bureau of Asian Research.
region has “accommodated” (in the sense of avoiding conflict) the transformations of
global power associated with the establishment US unipolarity, China’s ascendance as the
centre of gravity of Asia, the preoccupation with international terrorism following
September 2001, North Korean achievement of nuclear power status, and the invasions
and wars on regional perimeters in Afghanistan and Iraq.

This achievement is due to (a) the underlying commonality of interests among the
major states in sustaining the conditions of national and regional stability necessary to
facilitate continued economic growth, and (b) a configuration of “hard” institutions
centred on key US bilateral alliances, “soft” institutions, (i.e, organizations and dialogue
mechanisms orchestrated on Southeast Asian principles), plus ad hoc multilateral
mechanisms such as the Six Party Talks. This architecture is fundamentally about
maintenance of the short-term status quo. No major state has an interest in its
disturbance. Thus, one sees the convergence of Washington and Beijing to ensure the
status quo prevails concerning Taiwan.

In similar terms, one sees a confluence of interests vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula
on economic, social, and security dimensions —not necessarily regarding North Korea’s
acquisition of nuclear weapons, per se, but rather regarding the extremely dangerous
consequences of sudden regime collapse. Indications of this shared priority were
demonstrated by recent events: first, the Chinese agreement to UN Security Council’s
sanctions of North Korea, in light of its refusal to cease testing missiles and to develop
nuclear weapons; second, in the apparent setting aside of the “historical legacies”
issues—ones that have stalled Chinese-Japanese relations for the last several years—in
the recent consultations by Prime Minister Abe in Beijing and South Korea concerning
Pyongyang’s announced nuclear test.

The concern, therefore, is about the longer-term, because the major states can not
be characterized as status quo powers for the longer term. China’s aspirations include not
only becoming the regionally dominant power in Asia but also gaining major power
status on the global level, (this in addition to national reunification). Japan continues to

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8 For purposes of this paper, the phrase “major states” is being used as a short-hand reference to the
U.S., Japan, China, and South Korea (and presumably Russia).
9 Space does not permit expansion on this possibly controversial point. However, as Glosserman
recently commented, “It is hard to see how Pyongyang’s bomb transforms [the security landscape] in any
fundamental way. The U.S. nuclear umbrella is still in place” and with it, its continued deterrent capacity
that has prevented North Korea from venturing south. The risk of North Korea’s use of nuclear weapons is
associated (a) with a response to its being attacked, which the five powers all disavow; and (b) as a
consequence of a striking out against outsiders (in a millenialist gesture) as the regime crumbles, or if/when
inter-regime factional fighting breaks out. See Glosserman, Brad. 2006. Straight talk about Japan's nuclear
weapons. PACNET (50a).
Certainly, personalities were involved here as well, PM Koizumi having made a point of visiting the Shrine
despite (perhaps because) of Chinese protests against it. That being said, the manner in which this issue
was finessed by both sides, i.e., without any public commitment by Abe not to visit the shrine emphasizes
the overriding interest that both sides had in restoring relationships, particularly regarding the North Korean
situation.
look to becoming a “normal” state, this to include revision of its constitution regarding the character and deployment of its military forces. The US’ stated goals, on the other hand, are to prevent the emergence of dominant regional powers and more specifically to engage in “hedging” policies (at minimum) vis-à-vis China. The current economic and security architecture of the region does not align with any of these states’ presumed future roles, nor does it facilitate resolution of today’s or tomorrow’s critical security issues. As Dick Nanto, writing for the Congressional Research Service summarized:

The transnational character of security threats (particularly with terrorism, illegal narcotics, and weapons proliferation), and a need to replace the Cold War structure with something more cooperative and less prone to generating hostility begs for a political/security organization for East Asia that is less process-oriented (meetings) and more directed towards functions and achieving concrete results.12

Nor, would I argue, should one look to continued US leadership in Asia, particularly concerning the sustained consultation and negotiation required to engineer institutional arrangements to manage the region’s security future. US hegemony in Asia is “limited” and “incomplete”. As one of its primary analysts has argued, “The US strategy has been more of a holding action, an effort to keep relationships from deteriorating, than a progressive attempt at final resolution.”13 The US continued presence and attention to Asia viewed with increasing skepticism and concern by regional analysts. Washington’s immediate attention is directed elsewhere, i.e. away from Northeast Asia, (at present to the Middle East, Southwest Asia, and concerning terrorism to Southeast Asia). US resources are seen to be stretched and declining in light of mounting deficits and over-stretched military capacities. Finally, those taking a broader historical perspective, are worried that the US, finding itself yet again fought to a standstill in Asian land wars, (albeit now in Central and Southwest Asia rather than Northeast and Southeast Asia as before), may well turn its attention inward, away from any direct hand in regional security affairs (if not economic ones) for a period of a decade or more.

To sum up, this is not a cry of alarm for the present, nor for the dismantling of existing institutions. Preservation of the short-term status quo absent an exogenous shock (i.e., a very low probability, high consequence event such as a 9-11 equivalent or North Korean collapse) appears relatively assured. It is, however, a cause for concern for Asian states looking to peaceful alteration of their status quo conditions, such as Japan.

II. Japan’s Adjustments to its Shifting Security Environment

The turn of the decade to the 1990s saw a Japan whose traditional security alliance with the US was adrift (bereft of the Soviet threat and lacking attention from

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Washington) and whose society, political parties, and government agencies were showing the first signs of dramatic reform and realignment. Fifteen years later finds Japan with (a) a solidified US-Japan alliance, broadened in scope and depth, (b) increased public acceptance of the deployment of Japanese forces abroad in UN peacekeeping roles and in support of US-led campaigns in Southwest Asia (although the latter was certainly more controversial); and (c) increased engagement in multilateral institutions—all three significant steps towards attaining “normal” state status and being regarded as a “global civilian” power.14

Since its inception the US-Japan alliance has been regarded as the critical component of Washington’s hub and spokes management of the Asia Pacific. All states in the region, albeit some begrudgingly, acknowledge that the alliance supplies “public goods” of stability for the regional security complex. For some this benefit remains the restraint that the relationship places on Japan’s independent development of its military capabilities. For others, including the Japanese, it reassures regarding US commitments to the region, albeit that nervousness prevails regarding US redeployments.

The alliance relationship that has emerged through Washington-Tokyo negotiations of the 1990s, coupled with associated changes in Japanese regulations and legislation, however, is now much broader. With its enlarged footprint through territorial extension to “areas surrounding” and its functional inclusion of regional crises and support arrangements for US missions, the alliance effectively has become “regionalized”.15 Japan’s security remains centred around its exclusive, bilateral relationship with the US, but it is now committed through closer cooperation with the US to a much greater role as a regional security participant.

It is important to reflect on the implications for Japan of its continuing to bind itself to the United States as it has. First and foremost, of course, the alliance is seen as providing security guarantees that Japan requires and can not provide for itself, given constitutional limitations and societal resistance. In immediate terms, it is the deterrent threat against North Korea that is regarded as most urgent; in broader and longer range terms, it is the latent threat possibilities presented by regional developments, in particular the rise of China, that are to be covered. In addition, Japan benefits from access to US technology and equipment and from integration into US regional systems, particularly missile defence systems. Thus, for the foreseeable future, the US-Japan alliance will remain the central pillar of the regional security order.

For Japan, however, the assurances that the alliance provides against abandonment are complicated by concerns of, if not entrapment per se (as Tokyo decision makers have been adroit in nuancing their commitments)16, then potential engagement in regional security situations in which it has conflicted interests. Certainly, this would be

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16 Again, see Hughes and Fukushima.
most apparent should a conflict arise over the Taiwan Straits. In more general terms, analysts point to the restrictive effect that “putting all its eggs in one basket” has upon Japan’s capacity to, and other regional states’ interests in, extending its security relationships. The alliance is, in effect, an instrument to guarantee the status quo; it is not an agent to provide solutions beyond the status quo for regional security problems—(as is apparent today, for instance, concerning the Korean Peninsula).

The singular preoccupation with the alliance by the Japanese defence and foreign policy bureaucracies has inculcated norms of “entrenched bilateralism” that have come to pervade Tokyo’s overall approach to regional security. Multilateralism and multilateral institutional arrangements have been viewed, and by and large continue to be viewed, with skepticism. Multilateral institutions, at both Track 1 and Track 2 levels, have traditionally been regarded as not viable or sufficient to provide meaningful security benefits, and thus to be discouraged or entered into as at best supplementary dialogue mechanisms.

To a certain degree these attitudes changed during the 1990s. Japan looked to broaden its regional and global profile, motivated and facilitated by a domestic impetus towards achieving “normal” state status. In the regional context, realizing that proactive initiatives on its part would not be accepted by other states, Tokyo looked to support the ASEAN-led agenda that resulted in the formation of the ARF, and subsequently to the establishment of the ASEAN Plus Three. However, the extent to which Japan has sought to capitalize on the potential of such institutions is questionable. Albeit that the ARF has remained a “talk shop” and has failed to address, or is prevented from addressing, the central security issues of the region, analysts suggest that Japan has remained a relatively passive participant. Indeed, especially within the ASEAN Plus Three context, China is seen to have conducted much more effective multilateral diplomacy, in effect stealing the march on a Japan that is now looking to play catch up to sustain its regional influence.

(Academic analysts debate the extent to which Japan has moved from an entrenched bilateralism posture to one of “bilateralism-plus” and thus towards an accommodation of multilateralist strategies. For some, e.g. Inoguchi and Bacon, who see the two as not incompatible but instead complementary, this is a successful avenue for Japanese regional security diplomacy. For others, however, Japan is regarded as still hindered by its bilateralist preoccupation. Thus, as Krauss and Pempel argue, “in security, ‘bilateralism plus’ remains a vague and problematic stage between bilateralism and the development of regional institutions.” For our purposes, the critical issue is less with terminology and rests on whether or not Japan is now in a position to benefit from a more proactive strategy of both bilateral and multilateral activities to advance its interests.

17 The contrast to Japan’s interest in multilateral economic arrangements, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, is striking.
On the global level, Japan’s concerted efforts to overcome its constitutional limitations and societal inhibitions against deployment abroad have resulted in a remarkable shift. Proceeding forward from 1992, Japan has become a selective (albeit cautious and restricted) participant in United Nations peacekeeping missions. More notable, indeed surprising, has been its post-911 participation, through passage of special legislative mandates, in the missions of the Persian Gulf and in Iraq. With the momentum built by Prime Minister Koizumi and the popular support apparently carrying forward for his successor, Prime Minister Abe, the chances for constitutional reform and modified interpretations of the restrictions on Japanese participation in collective self-defence missions appears to be increasing.

In light of these developments, the question is, “Is there more to be done?”. Has Japan already laid the tracks for moving forward towards an enhanced role of proactive diplomacy? Several sobering second thoughts suggest that the answer is “yes”, i.e., that a greater shift in attitudes and in choice of strategies should be considered. In the regard, Japan’s relationship with the US is at the heart of the matter, a relationship in which Tokyo must be very cautious not to become overly implicated in a US agenda that does not serve Japan’s regional and global interests. Certainly, there are signs that Japanese decision makers have proceeded very carefully when reacting to US overtures, for just these sensitivities. For instance, Japanese participation in post-911 US-led missions has not been undertaken through the mechanism of the alliance agreements per se, but rather through legislation tying them to UN authorizations—thus acquiring legitimacy through the global body, rather than the bilateral alliance.

Furthermore, in broader terms, there are both regional and global matters on which Washington and Tokyo are on divergent paths. The two capitals, for instance, display quite different priorities in evaluating their bilateral relationships with Iran (from which Japan gets fifteen plus percent of its oil) and Burma (which Japan views from an economic rather than human rights perspective). These two relationships reveal more basic, underlying distinctions between US and Japanese stands concerning proactive human rights policies and concerning non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Then, of course, there is the Kyoto Protocol.

With Abe’s ascension to office, and with a diminished George Bush fading into the end of his presidency, one does not foresee the prospects of the enthusiastic stepping into line behind US leadership that marked the Koizumi period. What in fact may be a greater concern to Japan is a more general withdrawal from regional security commitments, coupled perhaps with a renewal of friction on the economic front as US trade deficits mount and protectionist interests gain a larger voice in policy-making.

III. Some Thoughts on a Proactive Diplomatic Role for Japan

The combination of shorter-term political developments and longer-term concerns about the adequacy of regional security architecture, make this a propitious time for discussion of the more proactive diplomacy called for by Prime Minister Abe. On the domestic front, the Japanese public and Japanese political leaders appear to have the interest and appetite to broach debate on complex foreign and security policy issues. There does appear to be a realistic prospect of reforms and reinterpretations that will
allow greater latitude to Japanese engagement abroad. Regarding the external security environment, the argument has been advanced above that the existing Asia Pacific configuration of bilateral and multilateral security institutions (a) while capable of maintaining the status quo is not designed to, or capable of, providing positive solutions to the region’s critical security issues; and (b) restricts Japan (certainly in large part because of its own doing) to playing a limited and largely reactive role at a time when a larger and more proactive stance could well have both national and regional pay-offs.

Thus, four suggestions are offered to foster debate on what a more proactive diplomatic role could encompass.

The last three will be stated without much amplification; the first focuses upon the Asia Pacific regional context and will be developed in more detail. The argument proceeds from the premise that increasingly Asian security dilemmas will require “made in Asia by Asians” solutions, and by implication that Japanese participation in such solutions is called for. Note immediately that this is not an argument that US engagement and a US presence, as seen in the US-Japan alliance, are not necessary. Any scheme for regional security that omits or excludes the US is a non-starter. However, involvement of the US is not equivalent to a dependence on US hegemonic leadership; indeed, for reasons given above this is unlikely to be forthcoming. The US posture and contribution towards Asia is one of status quo maintenance, largely oriented towards preserving its bilateral relationships.

It is instructive to consider the North Korean problem from this perspective. It is becoming increasingly apparent over the course of the last several years that a solution of whatever nature will be achieved on a multilateral rather than bilateral dimension. While North Korea might be brought to a bilateral table by significant US concessions, the US and North Korea by themselves can not produce a solution—something that both sides must realize in light of their post-1994 experience. Somewhat ironically, North Korean determination to conduct its nuclear test in September on the heels of its July missile test has effectively shifted the centre of gravity and momentum among the key Asian members of the Six Parties. Thus, as Shiela Smith has commented, in the wake of Shinzo Abe’s visit to China: “China’s concurrence at the UN marks a significant departure for Beijing’s handling of Pyongyang and the creation of a framework for collaboration with Tokyo that signals an end to the divergence over North Korean policy.”

Arguably the overall logic of achievement of a solution to the Korean Peninsula has shifted, in effect reversing the assumption that a definitive resolution of the nuclear issue must precede any larger multilateral framework agreement regarding North Korea. Thus, as Gilbert Rozman already argued several years ago, “the security of Northeast Asia depends on a regional approach to the crisis over North Korea.” In any such solution encompassed by a (new) framework agreement, Japan will be a critical player; and while its financial clout has always guaranteed that it would be called upon, the possibilities of productive collaboration with Beijing and Seoul suggest that through

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19 Smith, Shiela A. 2006. Abe Shinzo's diplomatic debut. PACNET, September 26, 2.
proactive diplomacy Tokyo should look to fashion such a framework to address its own interests, (i.e., as opposed to its “cheque book” role in the implementation of the earlier Agreed Framework.)\textsuperscript{21}

On a regional plane, one also sees the possibilities and the need for more proactive Japanese leadership.

- Even apart from the management of the Korean Peninsula, for the Northeast Asian states there is an urgent need to support the creation and maintenance of a multilateral, subregional institutional forum or forums. The prosperity of their respective societies increasingly depends on achieving cooperation on matters of access to energy, transnational environmental regulation, management of maritime resources, and control (and facilitation) of migration.

- A more assertive Japanese presence within the ASEAN institutional family (e.g. APT and the ASEAN PMC) is merited, in part simply to regain diplomatic ground ceded to the Chinese among Southeast Asian states, but specifically to advance Japanese interests on key issues such as security of the sea lanes, enhancement of trade and investment, etc.

- Japanese attention to enhancing the flagging institutions of APEC and the ARF is warranted among other reasons because Tokyo has a strong interest in ensuring the engagement and attention of the US in the region. These stand as inclusive regional institutions, in contrast to the East Asian Summit and associated China-led east Asian initiatives that seek, against Japanese interests, to exclude the United States.

The second avenue for a more proactive role for Japan is in the area of peace operations, broadly conceived. Even if constitutional amendments are attained, it is unlikely for the foreseeable future that Japanese forces will be deployed on UN missions that involve combat, particularly if located in Asia. Instead, Japan could look to enhancing its civilian participation in peace operations, e.g. through provision and training of police, and to greater integration of its provision of foreign assistance into post-conflict societal reconstruction and reconciliation missions. It will be necessary for Japan, as with other OECD countries, to become more willing to participate in missions on the African continent.

A third important frontier for Japan concerns global regimes—the development of needed new ones and most importantly the shoring up of essential, but eroding, existing regimes. Among these latter, those with particular resonance to Japanese values and interests must be the WMD non-proliferation regimes, the refugee and associated IDP regime, and the global climate regime. All of these have been subject to substantial

\textsuperscript{21} A dilemma presents itself, however, over the issue of the abductees. To the extent that Japan insists upon a satisfactory resolution of this issue as a precondition to its cooperation in any agreement with North Korea, it may find itself eventually isolated by the other four parties. From this perspective, Prime Minister Abe, having given such prominence to the abduction issue upon taking office, may have created a significant domestic political barrier to foreign policy flexibility on this critical issue. Indeed, perhaps this was his intention.
attack and/or lack of compliance by key states, in particular the United States. For Japan to sustain the credibility of its commitments to the principles underlying these regimes, it will be necessary for it to evidence support, indeed creative leadership, on these fronts.

Finally, Japan should continue to capitalize upon its role as a primary advocate and singular financial supporter of the human security agenda. Its role in creating the Commission on Human Security and establishing the subsequent UN fund for human security were key instruments in solidifying the centrality of attention to the needs of civilian populations. The human security perspective resonates with the demands of people throughout the South; by staying in the forefront of this agenda, Japan can assure itself of a more significant role on the global stage.
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