

JAPAN CHAIR PLATFORM

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A 12-Step Recovery Plan for the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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The U.S.-Japan alliance has seen periods of strategic drift and even crisis before. Usually, the security relationship emerges stronger as each side adjusts to new political realities at home and shared strategic challenges abroad. Will the alliance come out of the current crisis of confidence resulting from the impasse over Marine Corps Air Station Futenma? Probably. Opinion polls in both the United States and Japan continue to show strong support for the security relationship, though increasing anxiety about its health. The U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review and preparations for Japan's new Mid-term Defense Plan both suggest more convergence than divergence in terms of American and Japanese strategic perceptions and planning for bilateral defense cooperation. The challenge will be finding a way to restore mutual confidence and rebuild a positive strategic agenda in the wake of the deflating bilateral disconnect over Futenma. The timing and the agenda will have to be realistic and not just superficial efforts to sidestep hard issues in favor of "easy" topics to work on together. To wit, an initial 12-step recovery program for consideration:

1. **Don't Give Up on Futenma Replacement (Yet).** For the next few months, the focus of alliance managers should be on finding a way to implement some mutually satisfactory variant of the original Futenma Replacement Facility (FRF) plan agreed to on May 1, 2006, between the United States and Japan. It is now broadly acknowledged within senior ranks of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), including the foreign and defense ministers, that the original plan is by far the most operationally and politically realistic option at this point. It probably could have been implemented last year, had Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama followed his cabinet's advice and acted on Okinawa governor Hirokazu Nakaima's endorsement of the plan in October after a preliminary environmental impact statement. Instead, the prime minister opened a debate that has brought the base realignment plan and his own premiership to the point of collapse. Recently, the prime minister himself has gravitated steadily back to the original plan, the key sticking points for him now being whether a portion of the Marine aircraft should be permanently stationed on distant Tokunoshima Island (an apparent nonstarter operationally for the Marines, but something the prime minister is pursuing so he can claim he moved part of Futenma's "function" out of Okinawa) and the construction methods for the new base off of Henoko (the prime minister has mysteriously brought back the idea of a quick installation platform [QIP] or offshore pylon construction, which was rejected for security reasons over a decade ago). It is not clear whether this gap can be closed before Hatoyama's self-imposed May deadline, and the Obama administration is understandably hesitant to declare the issue resolved without agreement on these two critical elements. In short, Futenma replacement is the indispensable lynchpin in the larger plan to establish a durable long-term Marine presence in the Western Pacific, reduce the burden on the Okinawan people, and demonstrate the U.S. and Japanese commitment to maintaining strategic equilibrium in a region shaken by expanding Chinese military presence and a nuclear North Korea. Arguments that the Obama administration should have set the Futenma issue aside ignore this larger strategic context. The White House is right to do everything it can to find a solution while there is still time.

That said, the U.S. side should not let the perfect become the enemy of the good. If the Japanese side comes within striking distance of an operationally and politically feasible replacement for Futenma, the White House should ensure that rigid operational requirements do not override larger strategic considerations. Deterrence capability has to be defined by more than just runway length or exercise schedules, as important as those may be. It would be better to advance a plan with a few imperfections and operational challenges at the margins

than to let the entire realignment process collapse and leave questions about the longer-term durability of U.S. forward presence in Japan. Of course, we are not yet at the point where those hard decisions have to be arbitrated in Washington.

2. **Call a “Time-out” If the Deal Collapses.** *If the Futenma replacement issue is resolved, then skip directly to step 4. If not, then keep reading.*

There are three “clocks” ticking that could signal the end of the Futenma deal. The first is Prime Minister Hatoyama’s self-imposed May deadline, which is politically perilous for him but not necessarily the end of the road for base realignment itself. The second clock ticking is in the U.S. Congress, where sometime this summer or fall funds appropriated for transferring half the Marines to Guam could disappear if there is no credible replacement for Futenma. The third clock ticking is the November Okinawa gubernatorial election, which could doom all realignment efforts if anti-base candidates prevail. At some point this year, it is possible (some would say probable) that the current base realignment will fall apart because one of these “clocks” stops. At that point, there is little option but to take a “time-out” on base negotiations. Simply put, there will be little appetite in the Pentagon, the Congress, or Okinawa for a “reset” on base negotiations. It will require a more stable political situation in Japan before efforts can be resumed. So step 2 is to take a “time-out” if the impasse over bases becomes irreversible. Then it will be necessary to proceed to step 3.

3. **Damage Control.** Step 3 is damage control in Okinawa. If the base realignment plan falls apart, the media will likely shift its attention from Hatoyama to the burden of the U.S. military presence. The Marines will be forced to continue operating from Futenma, with all the attendant risk from accidents and public frustration that the base is still there 15 years after the two governments promised to close it and find a replacement. That is not a good situation, but unilaterally withdrawing would create an even greater crisis of confidence in the alliance—particularly in the region—and increase the pressure on Kadena and other critical U.S. bases. Instead, the U.S. and Japanese governments will have to take steps to ameliorate the impact of U.S. operations in Futenma and Okinawa on the Japanese people. The deployment of Marines to Iraq and Afghanistan has lowered the operational tempo at Futenma. Still, the U.S. and Japanese governments will have to think about what else can be done to soothe the damage done to Okinawans’ trust in both Washington and Tokyo. Smarter outreach, rotation of training and exercises away from Okinawa whenever possible, initiatives to strengthen environmental standards at bases, and other proactive steps will be worth some operational inconvenience in the short term.
4. **Strategic Dialogue.** Steps 4 through 12 make sense under any scenario, but the content, tempo, and credibility will be highly dependent on the outcome with Futenma. Whatever the outcome on Futenma, it is important to establish a deliberate bipartisan U.S.-Japan dialogue on the fundamentals of the alliance, focusing on threats, opportunities, and the alliance tools available to affect outcomes. Within the governments, this dialogue should be modeled on former deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage’s strategic dialogue with his Japanese counterparts—a disciplined survey of the international scene and planning for what each partner in the alliance could bring to the table to solve the major geostrategic issues of the day. The rise of Chinese power should be a major focus of the dialogue. Under the DPJ, this dialogue should be led by the political vice ministers, but the concept is the same. Think tanks, civil society groups, and scholars should ensure that the broader dialogue about the future of the alliance is inclusive and eclectic. The U.S. president and Japanese prime minister may also want to appoint a bipartisan commission to deliberate on the broad challenges before the alliance and make recommendations. In U.S. and Japanese politics, commissions are often established to avoid talking about sensitive issues, but the purpose here would be to generate a new consensus around the alliance in the wake of leadership transitions in both countries.
5. **Legislative Linkages.** Connecting the two countries’ legislatures is another imperative. For the past two years there have been almost no Japanese political visitors to Washington during “Golden Week” in May because of election preparations. This past week about two dozen Japanese politicians came for separate inter-parliamentary dialogues sponsored by CSIS and George Washington University. That was half the number that regularly came until three years ago. Estimates are that somewhere around two-thirds of current Japanese Diet members (given the large turnover) have never been to Washington. The numbers for U.S. members of Congress heading to Japan are even more dismal. In an alliance between democracies, rebuilding this legislative link is critical.

6. **A Joint Statement on the 50th Anniversary of the Security Treaty.** There is a broad expectation that the president and prime minister will issue some statement on the U.S.-Japan alliance in November to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1960 Security Treaty. The precedent would be the 1996 Joint Security Declaration between President Bill Clinton and Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto. This is a good idea—perhaps an unavoidable idea—no matter what happens on Futenma. If the DPJ is unburdened of troublesome coalition partners after the Upper House election this summer, then the content of a joint statement with respect to defense cooperation will likely improve. It will be important not just to reaffirm fundamentals of the alliance, but also to put new “points on the scoreboard” that demonstrate the continued returns from alliance cooperation. (See step 7 for specifics.)
7. **Plan for Expanded Defense Cooperation.** In quiet eddies not troubled by the Futenma tempest, key DPJ politicians and Japanese defense officials are examining a fairly ambitious security agenda that could be implemented if (as seems likely) the DPJ forms a new coalition that moves the government further to the right after Upper House elections this summer. Among other things, the elements include: developing doctrine and capabilities for air sea battle, which in a bilateral context would form the basis for a discussion of roles and missions; missile defense; increasing peacekeeping operations; reinforcing extended deterrence; and enhancing intelligence cooperation and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR). Depending on the political context, there is also appetite for examining changes in the Three Principles on Arms Exports and introducing a permanent law authorizing the overseas dispatch of Self-Defense Forces (ippanhō), grim as the prospects for such a bill may appear in the short run. The fact is that in 1995 U.S. and Japanese officials labored to come up with concrete measures in the Joint Security Declaration planned for November of that year between President Clinton and Prime Minister Tomiichi Murayama. Clinton postponed his visit until April the next year for domestic U.S. political reasons, and in the interim, Ryutaro Hashimoto became prime minister and approved everything from revision of Defense Guidelines to missile defense cooperation. It would be an enormous mistake for the U.S. side to extrapolate a straight-line projection of Japanese strategic culture based on the current government coalition in Tokyo. Planning should be ambitious until the political dynamic sorts itself out.
8. **Forge a Counterproliferation Partnership.** Base issues and defense cooperation go to the core of the grand bargain made between the United States and Japan in the 1960 Security Treaty and have underpinned peace and stability in Asia ever since. But in times of peace, Article V (defense of Japan) and Article VI (provision of bases for the security of the Far East) work best as solid foundations rather than prominent edifices in the relationship. The foundation must be continually reinforced, but the structure and edifice of the relationship should broaden to reflect new challenges. One of those challenges is nuclear proliferation. President Obama and Prime Minister Hatoyama have spoken in similar terms about the desirability of a world without nuclear weapons, but Japan seemed almost marginalized at the April Nuclear Security Summit in Washington, despite the fact that Japan alone has been a victim of nuclear weapons and has sent veteran diplomat Yukiya Amano to head the International Atomic Energy Agency. The United States and Japan should move beyond the rhetoric of zero nuclear weapons and define a work plan that leverages Japanese comparative advantages in terms of nuclear safety and demonstrates Japanese leadership on proliferation challenges like Iran. Dialogue with South Korea should also be considered as Seoul prepares to assume a leadership role in preparation for the next nuclear security summit in 2012.
9. **Partnering on Regional Architecture I: APEC.** Japan and the United States should also deliver a solid “one-two punch” on regional economic integration as hosts of APEC in 2010 and 2011, respectively. They have jointly identified several priorities including efforts at facilitating agriculture-related trade and investment and should take full advantage of this opportunity to promote APEC as the only transpacific mechanism for economic cooperation (U.S. negotiations toward a Trans-Pacific Partnership notwithstanding). APEC is an increasingly important component of the bilateral economic agenda as efforts to revive the World Trade Organization’s Doha Round negotiations flounder and as the political winds in Washington and Tokyo do not yet favor a U.S.-Japan Free Trade Agreement.
10. **Partnering on Regional Architecture II: Minilaterals.** Success in APEC will be important to reaffirm the commonalities in U.S. and Japanese approaches to regional architecture in Asia in the wake of Prime Minister Hatoyama’s confusing and sometimes unsettling signals about creating an “East Asia Community” to reduce dependence on the United States.

Under the DPJ, Japan wants a more active Asia policy. The United States wants Japan to have a more active Asia policy. One way to increase Japan's influence in the region in conjunction with close U.S.-Japan alliance ties would be to pursue minilateral cooperation with like-minded states such as South Korea, Australia, and India. The institutional environment in Asia will remain fluid for some time and ad-hoc groupings facilitate close coordination on issues including nonproliferation, counterterrorism, maritime security, economic regionalism, and energy and climate. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton noted the need for more minilaterals in her January 12 speech on regional architecture at the East-West Center, and now a joint U.S.-Japan vision along these lines would be appropriate.

11. **Defining a Green Alliance.** Climate change is a natural area for strategic cooperation between the United States and Japan. Prime Minister Hatoyama's pledge last September to reduce Japan's emissions 25 percent below 1990 levels by 2020 made headlines but has largely been forgotten since. Why? Because the target was conditioned on U.S. and Chinese reduction commitments that now seem unlikely, but more importantly because even Hatoyama's extremely ambitious reduction targets do not give the U.S. side anything close to what it needs globally to meet the Kyoto Protocol's goals. If the discussion is reduction target pledges, then all the action will be with China and India. The real comparative advantage Japan has is in technology. Japan is, after all, the most energy efficient country in the world. And together, the United States and Japan are the two leading spenders on research and development and environmental technologies. A bilateral strategy focused on sectoral approaches, technology development, and Asia-Pacific cooperation would highlight Japan's leadership role. This was a theme in the Obama-Hatoyama summit in Tokyo last November, and that was a good start on which to build in future visions of alliance cooperation.
12. **Restarting the Strategic Development Alliance.** Any U.S.-Japan strategic dialogue that focuses on international challenges and then considers what tools each side brings should inevitably focus on official development assistance (ODA). With China's rapid expansion of unconditional aid to dubious regimes and the relative decline in Japan's own ODA budget, it makes sense to revitalize the U.S.-Japan Strategic Development Alliance that briefly captured senior officials' attention when it was inaugurated in 2005. Smarter and more strategic coordination of aid budgets will increase the ability of both the United States and Japan to shape the decisions of developing nations and perhaps set a positive example for China, particularly if South Korea and other regional donors participate in a dialogue aimed at setting high standards for official development assistance.

This is a sensitive period in U.S.-Japan relations with the denouement of Futenma still in the balance. The credibility of the alliance lies in the ability of the two governments to demonstrate robust security cooperation, and basing issues are fundamental to that process. But it is about time to broaden the scope of bilateral cooperation and conceive of other ways to exert leadership. Coordination on broader aspects of security will help restore confidence in the alliance, and the task at hand is to ensure that the core elements of a comprehensive framework are in place when it is time to move forward. This 12-step process, while not exhaustive, can help get the ball rolling.

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