

# Maintaining the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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**The U.S. rebalance to the Asia-Pacific region presents an opportunity to strengthen the U.S.-Japan alliance and further its role in maintaining regional security and prosperity.**

U.S. fiscal constraints and multiple crises in other parts of the world have prompted concern in Japan about the sustainability of the rebalance, but close ties with the United States are the cornerstone of Japanese foreign policy and the Abe government unveiled a national security strategy last year that mirrors U.S. diplomatic, economic, and security objectives in the region. There is much the two governments can do in the coming year to enhance alliance cooperation aimed at shaping the regional order.

Revised guidelines for bilateral defense cooperation expected by the end of 2014 will update the strategic framework for the alliance and signal a commitment to strengthen deterrence in an increasingly complex regional security environment. The two governments are conducting a policy dialogue to identify priorities. Examples listed in an interim report include maritime security; air and missile defense; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; capacity building; and space and cyber security. Core objectives are to increase Japan's defense capabilities and interoperability between the two militaries, and the Abe government's July 2014 decision to reinterpret the constitution and exercise the right of collective self-defense (or aid allies under attack) is potentially a means toward both ends. Requisite legislation for this policy reform will be submitted for parliamentary debate in 2015 and it will take some time to determine the impact in operational terms. Nonetheless, the guidelines likely will address the general implications for the alliance, which include improved information sharing as well as cooperation with other regional partners, a central tenet of the U.S. rebalance to Asia.

Japan will continue to seek U.S. support for its sovereignty claims over the Senkaku Islands and respond to the challenges posed by Chinese coercion in the East China Sea. Senior Obama administration officials have stated repeatedly that while the United States does not take a position on the islands' sovereignty, it does recognize Japan's administrative control over the islands and consequently Article V of the U.S.-Japan security treaty (which obligates the United States to defend Japan and all areas under its administrative control) applies. U.S. officials have also consistently voiced opposition to any unilateral attempts to coercively change the status quo, but declaratory policy alone will prove insufficient in deterring Chinese assertiveness. China has orchestrated multiple incursions into Japanese territorial waters and air space around the Senkaku Islands, probing activities that fall short of armed conflict but increase tension and instability. Japan would like to advance operational planning with the United States on these



so-called gray zone contingencies and reduce the probability of accidental conflict. The guidelines revision process should facilitate such planning and the U.S. Pacific Command should shed any reticence about exploring cooperation in future gray zone scenarios.

A core pillar of Japan's national security strategy and the U.S. rebalance is economic power. In joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership trade negotiations, both countries have recognized that economic competitiveness and trade liberalization are inextricably linked. The United States and Japan, as the first- and third-largest economies in the world, respectively, are poised to fuel the economic engine that is the Asia Pacific

and enhance their strategic influence by setting high standards for regional economic integration. Trade politics in both countries render the prospects for concluding TPP uncertain, but progress on the agreement in the year ahead will be critical to the credibility of Prime Minister Abe's structural reform agenda and the economic component of the U.S. rebalance. Article II of the U.S.-Japan security treaty focuses on economic cooperation, and joint leadership on TPP is a vital tool for enhancing both economic prosperity and security. Right

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now the United States and Japan are disagreeing on issues that probably account for less than 1 percent of our total bilateral trade. Both sides need to look to the larger strategic and economic picture. Japan should build on deregulation under way in the agricultural sector to sell TPP at home, and the White House needs to make the case politically not only for opening Japanese markets, but also to demonstrate to U.S. trading partners that President Obama is willing to fight for necessary Trade Promotion Authority (TPA) against opposition in his own party.

As a treaty ally of the United States, Japan naturally welcomes a sustained U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific region and wants to be a partner in realizing the objectives of the rebalance. This is evidenced by an interest in expanding the parameters for bilateral security cooperation and setting standards for regional trade. Translating these shared strategic interests into action will prove important in terms of demonstrating Japan's leadership capacity and a sustained U.S. commitment to the region despite a plethora of foreign policy challenges elsewhere. ►