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Author(s): Christopher Hughes and Ellis S. Krauss

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US-Japan Alliance Futures: Koizumi's Legacy, Abe's Security Policies, US Challenges

Christopher W. Hughes and Ellis S. Krauss

‘To rear a tiger is to invite disaster....’

(Sima Tan, *Records of the Grand Scribe*, China, 2nd Century BC)

‘Those who foolishly sought power by riding the back of the tiger usually ended up inside it’

(John F. Kennedy, Inaugural Address, January 1961)

New Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe has only been in office since late September, but already the outlines of his administration are becoming clearer, both in expected and unexpected directions. Abe's administration is proving to be conservative and revisionist, and even more so than that of his predecessor Junichirō Koizumi. Abe has certainly moved to improve ties with China and South Korea—Beijing and Seoul the October destinations for his first overseas visits within two weeks of taking power—and thereby to limit the damage wrought by Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni Shrine and bilateral wrangling over Japan's colonial history. However, the general thrust of Abe's diplomacy is built upon much of the legacy left by Koizumi, and is attempting to shift it on to a yet more pro-active and assertive path. The harder edge of Abe's self-proclaimed ‘battling diplomacy’ (*tatakau gaikō*) has already been revealed with Japan's swift imposition of financial and shipping sanctions on North Korea in reaction to its October nuclear test. Abe is also following Koizumi in seeking to strengthen bilateral security ties with the US, going beyond

anything Koizumi had sought to achieve. The Japanese government at the start of Abe's administration even mulled plans for the application of the US-Japan Guidelines for Defence Cooperation to enable Japan to support the US to interdict North Korean shipping.¹

Abe's foreign and security agenda, and attempts to place it on a more proactive footing, further include attempts to pick up and push forward on constitutional revision, a debate first opened up by Koizumi. Article 9 of the so-called 1947 'peace constitution', has been interpreted by the Japanese government as permitting the maintenance of the Japan Self Defence Forces (JSDF) only for the purposes of individual self-defence and as prohibiting the exercise of the right of collective self-defence in support of the US. Koizumi and now Abe have argued that Japan should consider breaching this self-imposed ban on collective self-defence under certain conditions in order to speed Japan's trajectory to becoming a more 'normal' state prepared in certain contingencies to fight alongside its US ally.² Abe has also indicated that Japan should enact a permanent law on 'international peace cooperation' that replaces the current piecemeal and time-bound legislation permitting the overseas dispatch of the JSDF, and thus enables more routine dispatch to support UN Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), US-led 'coalitions of the willing', and even, as hinted at in Abe's visit to Europe in January 2007, NATO missions.³ Abe has presided over the final elevation of the Japan Defence Agency (JDA) to full ministerial status as the Japan Ministry of Defence (MOD) in January 2007, and initiated plans for the

¹ 'Shōten no Kamotsu Kensa, Nihon wa? Keikoku Shageki wa Dame, Settoku Dake', *Asahi Shimbun*, 15 October 2006, <http://www.asahi.com/special/nuclear/TKY200610150064.html>.

² Christopher W. Hughes, 'Why Japan Could Revise its Constitution and What it Would Mean for Japanese Security Policy', *Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs*, vol. 50, no. 4, 2006, pp. 736-737.

³ Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Speech by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the North Atlantic Council "Japan and NATO: Toward Further Collaboration"', 12 January 2007, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/pmv0701/nato.html>.

establishment of a Japanese National Security Council (NSC)—demonstrating continuity from the Koizumi administration in the ever-increasing priority that the Japanese government attaches to a more assertive international security role. In addition, Abe's agenda further down the line may follow on from Koizumi's with regard to Sino-Japanese ties. For now, Abe has seen good sense in the need to paper over the cracks in bilateral relations. However, Abe has a known revisionist stance on history. Although he has denied doing so, prior to assuming the premiership, Abe was accused of putting pressure on NHK, Japan's 'BBC', to cut part of a programme on 'comfort women', a euphemism for the often forced prostitution of Chinese and Korean women by the Japanese military during the Pacific War. Such revisionist views may mean that ultimately he may yet follow Koizumi in being unafraid to antagonise China over issues of history.

It would be a mistake to characterise Abe as anything but his own man, but it is also clear that it is Koizumi who first set the general conditions for ending the entropy in Japanese foreign and security policy by smashing previous security 'taboos', and for launching it upon a more assertive trajectory. Koizumi in many ways should be viewed as the most significant Japanese prime minister since Yoshida Shigeru; the latter establishing in the early 1950s the 'Yoshida Doctrine' that underlay Japan's subsequent foreign policy—to rely primarily on the US for defense and concentrate on rapid economic growth to reintegrate Japan into East Asia and the family of nations.⁴ The changes wrought by Koizumi's tenure in office which came to a close after five years in September 2006 (the second longest period in the post-war period save Satō Eisaku from 1964 to 1972) have fundamentally changed Japan's domestic and foreign politics, and thus shaped many of the constraints and opportunities for Abe's foreign policy, and indeed

⁴ Richard J. Samuels, *Machiavelli's Children: Leader and Their Legacies in Italy and Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 204-211.

potentially Japan's destiny for decades to come.

Domestically, Koizumi had inherited a political system that so inhibited a prime minister's power that Aurelia George Mulgan's characterisations of it as an 'Un-Westminster' system with a 'leadership deficit' seemed apt, even during Koizumi's first few years of his time in office. But when Koizumi led his party to a stunning and overwhelming victory in the September 2005 general election, he completed his task of moving Japan toward a more 'Westminster' top-down model of cabinet government than at any time in the postwar era.⁵

In foreign policy, Japan was viewed as a 'reactive state', passive in security policy, 'free-riding' on US power but refusing to bear the costs or responsibilities of an ally due to the constraints of Article 9, and often humbly placating its East Asian neighbors because of memories of its wartime imperialist aggression.⁶ The most notorious instance of Japan's so-called reactivity was the 1990-1991 Gulf War, when its failure to dispatch the JSDF and provision instead of mere financial support for the war effort was derided as 'chequebook' diplomacy. But under Koizumi, for better or worse, Japan seemed to have transformed itself into a willing and active US ally. Post-11 September, Japan dispatched the JSDF to provide non-combat logistical and reconstruction support for US 'coalitions of the willing' in the Afghanistan and Iraq, and the US and Japan completed in May this year a Defense Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) designed to

⁵ Aurelia George Mulgan, 'Japan's "Un-Westminster" System: Impediments to Reform in a Crisis Economy', *Government and Opposition*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2003, pp. 73-91; Aurelia George Mulgan, 'Japan's Political Leadership Deficit', *Australian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2000, pp. 183-202.

⁶ Kent E. Calder, 'Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State', *World Politics*, vol. 40, no. 4, 1988, pp. 517-541.

strengthen the functions of the bilateral alliance for regional and now global security.⁷ Japan also became less afraid to antagonize South Korea and a rising China over issues of history and disputed territory, demonstrated most sensationally by Koizumi's visit to Yasukuni Shrine on the 15 August 2006, the anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II. Japan under Koizumi also showed a progressively tougher stance in facing down North Korea over the abduction of Japanese citizens and its missile tests in July 2006.

This article discusses Koizumi's legacy, how these structural transformations took place, the impact on the future trajectory of the security policy of the Abe administration and its successors, and the subsequent implications for US foreign policy in East Asia. It argues that Koizumi has undoubtedly left an important legacy of proactivity and strengthened alliance ties. The US must surely welcome this new Japanese stance; and, indeed, has been partly responsible for encouraging it. On some issues, such as the handling of a nuclear North Korea, and possibly China, Japan will more fully support any tougher policy line pursued by the US. Nevertheless, there is a crucial sting in the tail. Japan's new diplomatic and security policy—reflecting the very character of Koizumi as its initiator and setter of its parameters—has entered into a phase of unpredictability that is likely to far outlast Koizumi. Japan in other ways may emerge as a more capricious, obdurate, and demanding US ally, ready to stand up for itself against its East Asian neighbors, and even the US, and conceivably generating or complicating regional tensions that have significant repercussions for the US's East Asia strategy.

⁷ Christopher W. Hughes, 'Japan: Military Modernization in Search of a 'Normal' Military Role', in Ashley J. Tellis and Michael Wills (eds.) *Strategic Asia 2005-2006: Military Modernization in an Era of Uncertainty* (Washington DC, National Bureau of Asian Research, 2005), pp. 114-117.

KOIZUMI'S GAMBLE: THE DOMESTIC TRANSFORMATION

Japan's previous prime ministers and cabinets were inhibited from playing the major role one would expect in a parliamentary system both by legal gaps and most importantly by political rivals. In theory, the Japanese political system resembles the Westminster form of parliamentary government. With a single party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in power for all but ten months of the last half-century and as one that imposes party discipline on its National Diet members, it might be expected that the Japanese prime minister would be powerful indeed.

Legal and staffing shortcomings were rectified by an Administrative Reform in 2001 that gave the prime minister the legal right to introduce new policy initiatives, expanded the cabinet staff, and added several 'Councils' to the cabinet whose heads had cabinet-level status and whose purpose was to advise the prime minister and cabinet on their policy areas.

But the political limitations on the prime minister's power were those that could not be eliminated by legislation alone. The LDP was divided into personal leadership factions whose heads were rivals for the premiership, and with whom the prime minister had to make coalitions with one or more to come to power, then appoint some of their members, as well as rival factions, to the cabinet in order to ensure the party would support the administration. It was less 'cabinet government' and much more 'collective' leadership. Then there were the 'policy tribes' (called *zoku* in Japanese) composed of veteran National Diet (parliament) members who specialized in the party, parliament, and government positions in particular policy areas.⁸ All legislation before it reached the Cabinet had to go through the party's policy organ, the Policy Affairs Research

⁸ Inoguchi Takashi and Iwai Tomoaki, *Zoku Giin no Kenkyū* (Tokyo: Nihon Keizai Shimbunsha, 1987).

Council (PARC), with its multiple policy divisions overseen by these *zoku*, who to a large extent dominated policymaking in their areas.⁹

Some of these limitations began to change even before Koizumi. In addition to the administrative reform noted above that buttressed the prime minister's and cabinet's influence and weakened the bureaucracy's, Japan's electoral reform in the early 1990s weakened factions (although did not eliminate them completely).¹⁰ There was also the enhanced influence of television. Beginning in the 1980s, the party leader began to generate popularity and a personal image to voters separate from that of the party and its faction leaders.¹¹ In foreign policy, the end of the Cold War and the self-destruction of the former major opposition party, the Japan Socialist Party (now known as the Social Democratic Party of Japan), combined with the rise of the more centrist (especially on defence policy) Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) as the chief rival to the LDP, removed several obstacles to a more proactive security stance.¹² Few prime ministers, however, had previously taken advantage of these new institutional and media capabilities.

Then came Koizumi. Despite his very great personal popularity and Koizumi's promises of change and reform, the *zoku* still remained strong. He had to constantly water down his reform proposals on legislation that affected their entrenched interests. Finally, this confrontation

⁹ Nakajima Kuniko, 'Nihon no Gaikō Seisaku Katei ni Okeru Jiyū Minshutō Chōsakai no Yakuwari', in *Nihon no Gaikō Seisaku Kettei Yōin* (Tokyo: PhP Kenkyūsho, 1999), pp. 70-108.

¹⁰ Takenaka Harukata, *Shushō Shihai: Nihon Seiji no Henbō* (Tokyo: Chūō Shinsho, 2006), pp. 139-184, 185-258; Ellis S. Krauss and Robert Pekkanen, 'Explaining Party Adaptation to Electoral Reform: The Discreet Charm of the LDP?' in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2004, pp. 1-34.

¹¹ Ellis S. Krauss and Benjamin Nyblade, "'Presidentialization in Japan'? The Prime Minister, Media and Elections in Japan', *British Journal of Political Science*, vol. 34, 2004, pp. 357-368.

¹² Ellis S. Krauss and Robert Pekkanen, 'Japan's "Coalition of the Willing" on Security Policies', *Orbis*, vol. 49, no. 3, 2005, pp. 429-444.

between Koizumi's 'new politics' and the *zokus*' 'old politics' came to a head over the issue of postal (mail services, banking, and insurance) reform, Koizumi's pet issue for many years. When the postal *zoku* frustrated his efforts to pass his reform bill, Koizumi gambled and called the snap election of the House of Representative on 11 September 2006, and had the party throw out the 'rebels', and then made sure that hand-picked media celebrities were assigned to their districts to run with party endorsement and to 'assassinate' them electorally. Using his media image and harping on the need for postal reform and changing the LDP lest all future reform be scuttled as well, his party won its largest majority in a quarter-century. The LDP with its New Kōmeitō coalition partner now controls two-thirds of the National Diet for the first time in the postwar period. This supermajority, built upon the popularity of the Prime Minister, is significant because it helps build towards the minimum two thirds required in both houses of the National Diet to pass constitutional revision prior to its submission to the people for a referendum.

Immediately after the resounding victory, postal reform was passed and Koizumi and other party leaders took steps to centralize the party and weaken factions even further. As a result of the election results, any *zoku* hoping to resist a party leader on a key piece of legislation will probably think twice. Thanks to these changes and Koizumi, the LDP is now a more centralized, less factionalized, and even somewhat more 'Westminster' type of political party with a stronger prime minister than ever in the postwar. The party can still divide on some issues, its unity founded on the force of the prime minister's popularity, and Abe could yet squander his legacy. But for now Abe has inherited greater power and leadership potential. He also, however, has inherited a much more ambiguous legacy in the foreign policies his new domestic influence can help him pursue.

JAPAN'S GAMBLE: THE FOREIGN POLICY TRANSFORMATION

Koizumi's domestic policy-making revolution has created the conditions for a concomitant revolution in the formulation and execution of Japan's foreign policy. By utilizing the strengthened institutions of the Prime Minister's Office, and by bypassing traditional consensus building within the LDP and amongst the central ministries, Koizumi implemented a new form of 'top-down' decision-making. Koizumi's period of office saw most key foreign policy initiatives entrusted to the premier himself, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary and Cabinet officials, with occasional key inputs from trusted confidants from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and other ministries.¹³ The tight-knit, almost cabal-like, nature of the core executive thus enabled speedy and bold foreign policy-making. Koizumi appears to have been willing to gamble on highly risky decisions—many of which his predecessors might have dared not to touch for fear of domestic political recriminations—calculating that he can appeal over the heads of any opposition from the LDP and the bureaucrats, and secure direct public support.

Consequently, Japan's foreign policy under Koizumi on certain issues swung toward a new proactivity. Koizumi first demonstrated his propensity to gamble in foreign policy following 11 September, with his administration's rapid passing of the Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law (ATSML) in the National Diet by October 2001 to dispatch the Maritime Self Defence Force (MSDF) and Air Self Defence Force (ASDF) to the Indian Ocean to support the US coalition in Afghanistan (the legislation requiring only three weeks and thirty three hours of debate to pass both houses, compared with a matter of months for previous forms of security legislation).

¹³ Shinoda Tomohito, *Kantei Gaikō: Seiji Rīdashippu no Yukie* (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha (Tokyo: Asahi Shimbunsha, 2004, pp. 9-50.

Koizumi gambled again in the wake of the US-led invasion of Iraq, pledging ‘understanding’ of the war aims, and then enacting legislation to dispatch the Ground Self Defence Force (GSDF), ASDF and MSDF to Iraq and the Persian Gulf for non-combat reconstruction missions.

Koizumi further showed a penchant for bold summitry—paying visits to North Korea in September 2002 and May 2004 in an attempt to resolve the issue of the North’s abductions of Japanese citizens, to break the logjam in bilateral normalisation negotiations, and to contribute to a resolution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

In the final stages of his premiership Koizumi continued to gamble by overriding LDP and local domestic political obstacles to the realignment of US bases in Japan. Japan as part of the US Global Posture Review (GPR) and the bilateral DPRI accepted the relocation of the command functions of US Army I Corps from Washington State to Camp Zama near Tokyo. The ramification of this was that Japan would serve as a frontline command post for US global power projection to as far away as the Middle East, thus marking a *de facto* breaching of the interpretations of the scope of the US-Japan security treaty and US bases as covering only Japan and the Far East. Japan and the US also issued through their Security Consultative Committee (SCC) a joint statement in February 2005 which stressed the common global strategic objectives of the alliance, including the eradication of terrorism and prevention of WMD proliferation.¹⁴ In return Japan secured agreements for a reduction in the US Marine Corps (USMC) presence in Okinawa through the relocation of 8,000 personnel (plus 9,000 dependents) to Guam, and to push ahead with plans for the relocation of the USMC air station from Futenma in Ginowan to

¹⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, ‘Joint Statement Security Consultative Committee’, 19 February 2005, Washington DC, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0502.html>.

Henoko in Nago City. The DPRI also includes plans to relocate the US air carrier wing at Atsugi air base near Tokyo to the USMC base at Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture, by 2014. Japan's acceptance comes, though, at a considerable financial cost, estimated as at least US\$7 billion to relocate USMC units from Okinawa (although later estimates have reduced that figure substantially). Nevertheless, Koizumi's reckoning appeared to be that, by trading these concessions for a reduced US presence in Okinawa and a strengthened alliance, the Japanese public would accept the rationale and costs of the realignments.

Koizumi's foreign policy initiatives were audacious, especially measured against the standards of Japan's post-war record of reactivity, and against the debacle of the 1990-1991 Gulf War response. At the same time, Koizumi's foreign policy ambitions extended to challenging many of the other post-war domestic structural restraints and 'taboos' that have barred a more proactive foreign policy. Koizumi fostered a vigorous political debate and actual substantive moves toward enacting legislation for the revision of Article 9 of the Constitution and to lift Japan's self-imposed ban on the exercise of the right of collective self-defense. His administration also began to moot plans for the lifting of the total ban on the export of weapons, and imposing a licensing system for exports and to enable joint development of weaponry with other states.¹⁵

Furthermore, Koizumi committed Japan to the acquisition of Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems from December 2003 onwards. BMD sits squarely at the forefront of Japan's response to 'new threats' in the revised National Defence Programme Guidelines (NDPG) of December 2004; and it is the major procurement item in the Mid-Term Defence Programme (MTDP) for

¹⁵ Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan's Reemergence as a 'Normal' Military Power*, *Adelphi Paper* 368-9 (Oxford University Press/IISS, Oxford, 2004), pp. 90-92

2005-2009. Japan aimed to deploy the terminal phase Patriot Advance Capability (PAC)-3 from 2006 onwards, and to roll out the full panoply of BMD systems by 2011, consisting of sixteen PAC-3 fire units, six *Aegis* destroyers equipped with mid-course phase interceptors, and upgraded sensors and command and control functions. The JSDF, in response to the introduction of BMD and its related demands for enhanced integration of command and control systems, has embarked on a restructuring programme that enables for the first time joint tri-service operational capabilities. BMD's impact on Japan's defence policy has been manifested in the government's need to introduce legislation since February 2005 that begins to fundamentally redesign measures for civilian control over the military in place since the start of the post-war period by handing over greater freedom on operations to the Prime Minister himself and to commanders in the field.

Koizumi's administration argued at the time of the introduction of BMD that the systems would be operated under 'Japan's independent judgement.'¹⁶ But it is clear that BMD is a crucial bilateral project for consolidating the US-Japan alliance. Japan will procure the PAC-3 and *Aegis* BMD systems from the US, and continue bilateral technological cooperation into the upgrading of the *Aegis* BMD's interceptor Standard Missile (SM)-3. Successive Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (SCC) statements have reiterated the importance of bilateral cooperation on BMD. These culminating in the agreements of 2005-2006, as part of the bilateral Defence Policy Review Initiative (DPRI) and US Global Posture Review (GPR), for the establishment of a Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Centre (BJOCC) at Yokota air base to collocate

¹⁶ Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan, 'Statement By the Chief Cabinet Secretary of Japan: On the Introduction of Ballistic Missile Defense System and Other Measures', 19 December 2003, http://www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/tyokan/2003/1219danwa_e.html.

Japanese and US BMD command and control information systems, and for the US to deploy additional and complementary BMD assets around Japan.¹⁷ Koizumi's government, reacting to North Korea's multiple missile test launches on 5 July 2006, then sought to accelerate joint cooperation with the US on BMD deployment. Japan accepted the deployment in Japan of the USS *Shiloh*, one of the US's first missile defence-capable destroyers; and it now has plans to speed up the introduction of PAC-3 from 2006 onwards and the refitting of its existing *Kongō*-class *Aegis* destroyers so that the first will carry BMD-capable SM-3 missiles by end of 2007 instead of March 2008, and the other three of its *Aegis* destroyers will carry SM-3 missiles by 2010 rather than 2011.¹⁸

But while Koizumi moved Japan closer to the US, he also wound up distancing it further from its Northeast Asian neighbors with whom Japan is so economically integrated. Although Koizumi initially started positively in his Asian policy, proposing the establishment of an East Asian community in Singapore in January 2002, and visiting China in October 2001 for a summit meeting and tour of sites commemorating Japan's history of aggression in October 2001, his diplomacy soon foundered on issues of colonial history. Most controversially, Koizumi's proactivity on security issues has helped to foster, or for some incited, a fierce debate on the question of Japan's war responsibility through his annual visits to Yasukuni Shrine, the site of the enshrinement of the spirits of Japan's war dead, including a number of those designated as Class-A war criminals by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East. Koizumi's visits

¹⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 'Security Consultative Committee Document US-Japan Alliance: Joint Statement, 1 May 2006: United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementations, Washington DC, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/joint0605.html> .

¹⁸ 'Missairu Bōei Kasokuron', *Asahi Shimbun*, 11 July 2006, p. 2; 'Four US Ships to Get Missile Interceptors', *The Japan Times Online*, November 27, 2006, <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/print/nn20061127a3.html>.

have raised both domestic and international protests, relating to whether the visits are constitutional under post-war Japan's strict separation of state and religious activities, and how far it calls into question Japan's genuine contrition for its history of colonialism in East Asia. Koizumi justified his visits up as a 'matter of the heart', and therefore as constitutional in line with the right to free thought and expression in Japan; and as a commemoration of Japan's determination never again to start a war. However, it appears that Koizumi's provocative actions had a number of short and long-term ulterior political motives, including: wresting the issue of the control of history away from potential right-wing rivals; stamping his authority on the control of Japan-China relations; and stimulating a fundamental debate on whether it is now time for Japan to move on from allowing history to impede it from assuming a more proactive diplomatic and security role, and to assert Japan's new refusal to automatically placate China or South Korea on issues of history..

Hence, there is no question that Koizumi's accomplishments in the fundamental altering of Japanese domestic politics and security posture will place him in the quite limited pantheon of great modern Japanese leaders.

THE HEIR'S CHOICES

In Abe's first few weeks in office, he has both tacked on Koizumi's course and used his legacy to follow it. Knowing his weak point in both domestic politics and foreign policy was the Yasukuni issue, and experiencing severe criticism from the opposition DPJ, the LDP's own coalition partner, the New Kōmeitō, and big business unhappy at the potential impact on economic ties with China, Abe moved quickly to mitigate problems on that front. His first visits

abroad were to China and South Korea on 8 and 9 October, where the leaders of all three states made a show of their ‘rapprochement’ and desire for cooperation. Abe’s ability to do this of course was made possible by Koizumi’s previous stirring up of the history issue with Japan’s neighbours that had left all eager to avoid further friction lest the problems spiral out of control.

For his part, Abe indicated an unexpected flexibility on the Yasukuni issue. He catered to his right-wing constituents by refusing to say that he would not visit the shrine, but the price he paid for better relations with China and South Korea was essentially to indicate that he was not going to publicly announce whether he visited or not. Effectively in substance, if not in form, it returned the situation with the shrine to the *status antebellum* whereby prime ministers visited the shrine in their private but not public capacities.

It was at this point, perhaps intentionally, that North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il chose to rain on this new Northeast Asian dialogue by first announcing and then executing the North’s nuclear test on 10 October. Nothing could have played more readily into Abe’s hands. If relations with China and the ROK were Abe’s weak points domestically, his known very tough stand toward the DPRK has been his ‘niche issue’ and strength.

Utilising the actual and symbolic powers of the prime minister that he had inherited from Koizumi, Abe has moved quickly to move his party and nation toward quick sanctions against the North. Even before UN Security Council Chapter 7 Resolution 1718 was adopted, the Japanese Cabinet implemented the first of a series of sanctions, the planning for which had first begun under Koizumi’s administration, closing off all Japanese ports to North Korea’s ships and

cargo, as well as visits by North Koreans into Japan. Japan has followed these sanctions with bans on trade in luxury goods as mandated by Resolution 1718, and holds ready a tougher set of sanctions to shut down the flow of remittances from North Koreans resident in Japan to the North.¹⁹

The broader outcome of this crisis will almost definitely be a continuation and enhancement of the Koizumi policy of closer security relations with the US. Contrary to the immediate media frenzy over whether Japan would acquire an independent nuclear weapons capability as a result of North Korea's nuclear test, Abe quickly assured that Japan would not look to review this option and would maintain its Three Non-Nuclear Principles, not to produce, possess or introduce nuclear weapons²⁰ Japan may be experiencing a degree of anxiety over US determination to contain North Korea's future nuclear proliferation, but Japan's principal response will be to further speed up its participation in with the US in BMD, and to augment other military programs designed to work in conjunction with its US ally, as outlined in the introduction to this article.

Koizumi's transformation of the structures and objectives of Japanese foreign policy-making and Abe's utilisation of them must clearly assist US East Asia policy in a number of ways and has made Japan into perhaps the Bush administration's only consistently good news in the management of alliance ties. Japan has revealed itself to be an increasingly 'normal' ally for the

¹⁹ For a full analysis of Japan's sanctions planning and its background, see Christopher W. Hughes, 'The Political Economy of Japanese Sanctions Towards North Korea: Domestic Coalitions and International Systemic Pressures', *Pacific Affairs*, vol. 79. no. 3, Fall 2006, pp. 455-481.

²⁰ 'Jimin Seichōkaichō Kaku Hoyū no Giron Hitsuyō Shushō wa Sangensoku o Kyōchō', *Asahi Shimbun*, <http://www.asahi.com/special/nuclear/TKY200610>.

US, expressing greater solidarity with the US, and willing to provide not just bases but also military assets at the disposal of US-led ‘coalitions of the willing.’ North Korea’s nuclear and missile ambitions only look set to increase the pace and extent of this transformation.

Certainly, Japan’s military commitments to date have been non-combat and logistical, and residual anti-militarism means that we are unlikely in the short to medium run to see the JSDF storming beaches in the front wave of any US-led military operation. However, Japan’s military procurement programs indicate that at the very least it is acquiring interoperable and defensive power projection capabilities, whether in the form of an *Aegis* sea-mobile BMD systems or in amphibious ships and long range refuelling for its aircraft, that can support the US in regional and global contingencies. In many ways, the range of actions Koizumi took toward deeper alliance with the US may be sounding the effective death knell of the Yoshida Doctrine. Koizumi’s diplomacy and the North Korean crisis and Abe’s response to it, are resulting in the near inextricable integration of Japan into US global strategy and depriving Japan of effective strategies to hedge against entrapment—whereas the recovery of sovereignty from the US, trading the provision of bases for any real military support, and cooperation rather than outright dependence on the US, had been the original watchwords of the Doctrine. This will undoubtedly serve as a fundamental constraint on Abe’s ability to give an outright ‘no’ to the US when it requests or demands Japan’s aid in the security realm.

Japan’s new proactivity may thus function to bolster US military primary in East Asia. As expectations for Japan’s cooperation on defense matters have never been higher, there are many

in Washington who relish Japan's transition to becoming the 'Britain of the Far East'.²¹ However, perhaps little recognized is that Koizumi's transformation of Japan is also something of a double-edged sword that may yet undercut US regional strategy for a number of reasons.

JAPAN AS A CAPRICIOUS, OBDURATE AND DEMANDING ALLIANCE PARTNER

First, Japan, as a proactive ally—with a top-down decision-making process resting primarily and precariously on the force of personality of the prime minister and concomitant appeals to public opinion—is also a more capricious ally that can spring surprises. Koizumi already demonstrated this with his diplomatic initiatives towards North Korea. The US was eventually informed shortly before Koizumi's first visit to Pyongyang in 2002 and resigned itself to support the visit as a means to engage the North.²² But it is clear that Japan's secret negotiations, run predominantly out of the Prime Minister's Office and by one MOFA official, Tanaka Hitoshi, came as an unwelcome surprise to the Bush administration. Japan appeared as it might strike out on its own in North Korea policy, just at the time that the US was attempting to coordinate a new international position on the nuclear crisis.

Koizumi's North Korean diplomacy, even though to date it came up short on its full objectives and actually reinforced public antipathy towards the North over the abductions, should be applauded as a bold move that over the longer term may have made headway into resolving bilateral problems. However, just as worrying for the US, Koizumi's premiership showed in

²¹ For early US hopes and predictions of Japan modeling itself on the UK, see Institute for National Strategic Studies, *The United States and Japan: Advancing Toward a Mature Partnership, INSS Special Report* (Washington DC: National Defense University, 2000).

²² Yakushiji Katsuyuki, *Gaimushō: Gaikōryoku Kyōka e no Michi* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shinsho, 2003), pp. 2-39.

regard to North Korea and other issues how top-down leadership can also create the potential for increased inconsistency in delivering on existing alliance promises.

After his last Pyongyang visit in 2004, Koizumi showed a declining interest in pursuing further North Korean initiatives, not just because of the deteriorating crisis over the nuclear issue and missile provocations, but also because of the declining domestic public support for engagement of the North. In the absence of public support to bank on, Koizumi gradually retreated from the North Korea issue, leaving it to hard-liners such as Abe, and meaning that Japan's policy has veered towards a form of containment potentially harsher than anything currently proposed by the US and often seems more concerned—at least in public attention and rhetoric—about past abductions of its citizens than the DPRK's current development of a nuclear capability.

Abe has already indicated that he intends as prime minister to continue his close support and attention to the families of those Japanese abducted by North Korea from the 1970s onwards, and to challenge the North until it provides a full accounting of its actions. One of his five new ministerial 'Advisors' is specifically charged with handling the abduction issue. His minister in charge of telecommunications also has 'ordered' NHK, the public service broadcaster, to carry more coverage of this issue on its overseas broadcasts (which is the only part of NHK's budget the government pays for directly—the rest are provided by receivers' fees that go directly to NHK, not through the government).

Meanwhile, the leaders of the abductee family organisations are shown on the news visiting the prime minister's office or other government agencies for personal briefings on developments in

the issue. Abe on his European tour in January 2007 also extracted from European leaders condemnation of the North Korea over the abductions issue. How the abduction issue and the domestic politics of it plays into and becomes entwined with the nuclear issue and Japan's relations with both the US and its Northeast Asian neighbours' policies toward the DPRK is becoming a complex but important component of the theatre of handling the North in the future. Abe, having climbed to power in part on the back of the abductee issue, has become increasingly beholden to it as a means of maintaining his domestic position. Consequently, Japan's entire diplomatic policy towards North Korea and its ability to play a meaningful role in supporting US and regional multilateral efforts to deal with the nuclear issue are heavily constrained by this essentially bilateral and domestic issue. A portent of Japan's fixation on the issue was provided by Japan's insistence under Koizumi that the abductions be discussed at the Six-Party nuclear talks, and Abe looks set to continue to paint Japan into a diplomatic corner over the abductions issue during future nuclear talks.²³ For instance, even as the US was rumoured in early 2006 ahead of a further planned round of the Six-Party Talks to be preparing a new nuclear deal with North Korea involving freezing its nuclear programme in return for economic concessions, Japanese Foreign Minister Asō Tarō stated on 6 February 2006, in full knowledge that his stand might jeopardise any nuclear deal, that Japan was prepared refuse US and Chinese requests to provide energy, financial or food aid assistance until the North made very significant concessions on the nuclear issue, and certainly not until there was substantive progress towards a resolution of the abductions issue.²⁴

²³ 'Japan and Multilateralism in the North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Roadmap or Dead End?', in Linus Hagström and Marie Söderberg (eds.) *North Korea Policy: Japan and the Great Powers*, London, Routledge, 2006, pp. 151-170.

²⁴ 'Asō Gaishō "Rachi Shinten Nakereba Dame" Kitachōsen Shien ed', Asahi Shimbun, <http://www.asahi.com/politics/update/0206/006.html>.

Likewise, the fact that Abe and his successors can only be guaranteed to follow through on a tough policy decision if it generates positive spikes in public opinion—or have undue confidence in its ability to manipulate those spikes in public attitudes—may mean that Japan ends up retracting on key alliance promises to the US. The US base realignments are a case in point. Koizumi gambled that the Japanese taxpayers and voters will accept the costs when they become more fully revealed at a later date. But the signs are of an increasing domestic political groundswell in opposition to the realignments in Japan that the government will struggle to overcome. The Japanese government was relieved when its preferred candidate Nakaima Hirokazu was victorious in the November 2006 Okinawan gubernatorial election, defeating candidates that had opposed creation of any new facility to replace Futenma and argued instead for the facility to leave the Prefecture altogether. However, whilst Nakaima is willing to discuss plans to create a new facility in Okinawa with the central government, he continues to stress the Prefecture's opposition to the specifics of the DPRI plan agreed by the US and Japanese governments, and especially proposals to build two runways at Henoko.

Okinawa Prefecture's prolonged opposition to the plan now seems to be sapping the confidence of the central government itself. The Minister of Defence Kyuma Fumio has hinted since the end of 2006 that on grounds of securing a quick local political deal for relocation and reducing costs Japan might look to press the US for a new facility with one runway. Kyuma, ironically given the US's insistence on more local autonomy in Japan during the Occupation period, has even publicly criticised the US for thinking that Japanese local government would always easily accept central government decisions as he thought they seemed to do in the US. Koizumi's domestic political gambling on security matters and the problems of actual implementation,

borne of over-confidence in the powers of the prime minister, could thus threaten to rip up US-Japan bilateral agreements that have taken several years to negotiate.

Similarly, other parts of the DPRI relocation are still subject to local political approval with no guarantee of delivery for Japan's alliance promises to the US. The relocation of the US carrier wing aircraft from Atsugi has been threatened by wrangling between the mayor of Iwakuni city and the city assembly: the mayor arguing against the relocation and receiving overwhelming support from the organisation of a city referendum, but the assembly censuring the mayor for his actions and fearful of losing central government subsidies. Japan's pledge to the US, separate from the DPRI process, of the homeporting in Yokosuka for the first time of a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, has also run into opposition. The city mayor and assembly have accepted the deployment, although originally opponents of accepting a nuclear-powered carrier. However, opposition from citizens' groups have forced a debate in February 2007 on the need for a referendum. The central government may eventually get its way on Atsugi and Yokosuka, and maybe even Futenma, through the offering and withholding of large financial subsidies to these communities, but there is as yet no guarantee that it will win through, and that the saga of Futenma will not drag on for another decade (the US and Japanese governments having originally agreed in 1996 on the need for relocation). All this raises questions of whether Abe and his successors can always in the future command the public support to carry through their policy pledges, thereby storing up trouble for the alliance. Moreover, Abe, still has the tricky task of preparing and attempting to pilot legislation through the National Diet in March 2007 order to fund the relocation of US forces out of Japan. This legislation is likely to face a stiff examination from the DPJ uncomfortable at the overall costs of realignment and the

apportionment of the financial burden between the US and Japan.

This potential gap between the Japanese elites and public is linked with the opening up of further potential gaps between US alliance expectations and what the Japanese leadership may be able to deliver. Japanese leaders' recent actions and rhetoric have raised ever higher expectations for future Japanese cooperation both in the functional and geographical scope of alliance. Abe is ratcheting up those expectations even more with his conservative and pro-US rhetoric and his strong stance against North Korea. It is unclear, however, despite ostensible rising nationalism in Japan, if the Japanese public has been fully brought along in understanding the full costs of a deeper alliance partnership. Should a major crisis suddenly occur risking Japan's commitment to military action in support of the US, for example over Taiwan, this may produce a backlash among the public leading to Japan betraying those high expectations. This could fundamentally undermine the alliance.

The second major impact of Koizumi's personal and quixotic stamp on foreign policy and the legacy that Abe inherits has been to effect Japan's transformation into a potentially more obdurate and even a potentially irresponsible ally for the US in East Asia. Japan under Koizumi has been unafraid to stand up to China and South Korea on issues of history, even in the face of mass anti-Japanese protests in these countries. Koizumi's government further took a robust stance against China over its territorial claims to the Senkaku Islets and gas fields in the East China Sea, and against South Korea's claim to the Takeshima Islets.

Moreover, Japan in general under Koizumi showed a declining willingness to engage China, and

instead has sought to balance against its rise through the build up of the JSDF's capabilities and tightening of alliance ties with the US. Koizumi might argue that he merely asserted Japan's national interests as any 'normal' state would, and that he has not sought confrontation with Japan's neighbors. Many in Japan see Koizumi as disingenuous, given that he has made significant domestic political play over his tough stand in relation to China and North Korea.

But at the very least, the most disturbing aspect of Koizumi's foreign policy was the relative indifference to ties with China, South Korea, and indeed Southeast Asia. Koizumi ostensibly as a result of the Yasukuni issue and former Chinese President Jiang Zemin's anti-Japanese attitudes, paid no official visit to Beijing for five years and no official to Seoul for the last sixteen months of his premiership, an unseemly length of time for close neighbors and important economic partners. Japan, despite its early start in 2002, is now perceived as well to be lagging behind China in the leadership stakes to establish an East Asia Community (EAC).

China and South Korea have been hoping for a successor with a more pro-East Asia stance, and indeed, Abe's summit meetings with the leaders of China and North Korea in October his face-saving 'out' to the thorny issue of Yasukuni may indicate that their hopes have been fulfilled. But there have to be doubts as to whether and how long Abe may be able to contain the issue of history and keep Japan-China ties on an even keel. It remains to be seen whether Abe can in fact keep his visits 'private' from the voracious Japanese media, and his visit to Meiji Shrine in January 2007 (an attempt to placate conservatives about his nationalist credentials and respect for Shintoism) attracted media speculation about whether this was an attempt to substitute Meiji Shrine visits for those of Yasukuni or in fact were a precursor to the latter.

Moreover, it is questionable if Abe can keep away from the history and Yasukuni issues due to his own personal convictions. In contrast to Koizumi who often appeared to be driven by sheer political opportunism, it is clear that the need to revisit Japan's past is part of Abe's very political creed and conservative project. Abe has a clearly articulate nationalist and revisionist ideology which is predicated on the belief that for Japan to emerge as a 'normal' power that it must escape from the constraints of the post war period (*sengo dakkyaku*). This means inevitably revising Japan's 'masochistic' view of history, along with revising other post-war constraints such as the 1947 Constitution. In line with this view, Japan should not necessarily see its colonialism in East Asia as exceptional or wholly destructive, and a sense of nationalism should be reinducted in Japan. Japan's war dead should also be commemorated and thus the question of visits to Yasukuni is unavoidable for Abe.

Abe's general political and diplomatic vision will also encumber his policy towards China and the Korean Peninsula in other ways. Abe's position, in the past has been more hard-line on China and the Korean Peninsula and more pro-US-Japan alliance than even Koizumi. Abe in his best-selling political treatise 'Towards a Beautiful Japan' (*Utsukushii Kuni e*), has argued that Japan should follow a diplomacy that upholds the four principles of promoting freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and stresses shared values with the US, Europe, Australia and India.²⁵ Abe's hope is clearly to use these universal values as a means to demonstrate to China that Japan can construct a regional counter-coalition to it, including India. Abe's stress on these principles also means that he remains close to Taiwan's policy elites and has an instinctive

²⁵ Abe Shinzō, *Utsukushii Kuni E* (Tokyo: Bunshun Shinsho 2006), pp. 43-70.

aversion to ties with one-party state of China. Much like his 'Cold War warrior' grandfather before him, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, he sees himself as opposed to the appeasement of authoritarianism in North Korea and China, and that Japan should assert its position as the natural leader of East Asia.

Finally, in addition to his own personal convictions, Abe may find it hard to resist revisiting the history issue and playing upon tensions with China and North Korea because, just as for Koizumi, it continues to hold expedient domestic political benefits. Abe and Koizumi's later successors, in line with the changing nature of leadership in Japan, will have incentives to continue to exploit anti-Chinese or anti-Korean feeling, dependent as they are on appealing to public opinion and new nationalist sentiment to shore up their authority. Thus, Abe's skilful moderation of Koizumi's policies during his first weeks in office to calm relations with China may not yet be the end of the story.

The first months in office have not been kind to Abe. In the wake of his 60 per cent plus popularity ratings after visiting China and Korea, his administration has been hit with a series of personnel scandals in his administration. Despite public opinion that was generally negative on the matter, and a party that was deeply split on the issue, Abe approved the reinstatement of the former postal 'rebels' back into the LDP, provided they publicly and in writing attested to their future loyalty to the party and support of postal reform. Eleven of the twelve rebels who desired reinstatement agreed to the conditions and were reinstated. Two top political appointees of Abe's have had to resign over inappropriate behavior and recently his Minister of Health and Labour also has stirred up a storm of criticism and intra-party conflict for calling women 'birthing

machines'. As a result of these developments, the Abe administration support rate took a nose dive to first hover around 50 per cent by the end of 2006 and by early-February 2007 to fall to 40 per cent, a twenty-five percent drop since he took office.²⁶ The LDP may be more centralised, but it also is not totally unified on several issues, and Abe's initial public popularity promises to continue to be variable.

Abe's popularity ratings are not yet disastrous judged against the historically unprecedented levels that Koizumi's enjoyed, but set against the context of a system of prime ministerial leadership increasingly dependent on strong public support they do threaten to undermine Abe's position. Furthermore Abe's declining public support means that he will also become increasingly desperate to fight off challenges from rivals within his own LDP party. Foreign Minister Taro Asō a former rival to Abe for prime minister, is known to have perhaps even more nationalist and rightist views than Abe. Asō's waiting in the wings for Abe to founder in order to succeed him, makes it difficult for Abe to avoid continuing to placate rightist opinion, possibly reverting to Koizumi's stance of being more assertive vis-à-vis Chinese and Korean views of Japan's historical role. In such circumstances of declining public support and internal party pressures, the temptation to use the 'nationalist card' and to pump up the North Korea threat, to continue focusing on the abductee issue, and to take Koizumi's course of asserting Japan's right to interpret the Pacific War any way it wishes whatever the consequences for regional relations, may become greater. If so, the potential for creating problems for the US in handling the North Korean regime and exacerbating friction with Japan's neighbors will continue to exist.

²⁶ Associated Press, 'For First Time, More Japanese Disapprove of Abe Than Approve: Poll,' *The International Herald Tribune Online*, 4 February 2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/02/04/asia/AS-GEN-Japan-Abe.php>.

Washington might welcome Tokyo's tougher stance on East Asia, given that it means Japan is more willing to strengthen its diplomatic and security ties, to face down China and North Korea, and to disrupt plans for any EAC that might exclude the US. But this is a shortsighted stance. Japanese leaders exploiting of nationalist feeling, and becoming ever more obdurate in picking disputes with neighbouring states, can only be generally destabilising for the region and US interests.

The failure of the Koizumi administration to make inroads into resolving the issues involving Japan's history of aggression in East Asia, and its then exacerbation of these issues by visits to Yasukuni Shrine, means an important opportunity may have been missed. Fortunately for Abe, Chinese and South Korean leaders, for reasons of their own, currently want to mend relations with Japan. Chinese nationalism, however, is on the rise despite or perhaps partially because of China's phenomenal economic success. One can imagine, however, how much more destructive such nationalism can become should the Chinese economic bubble burst, tempting its leaders to use the cards of nationalism and external enemies to maintain some degree of legitimacy. Should this occur, and Abe not grasp the chance fairly soon to settle, and not paper over, the history issue, the window of opportunity for Japan to set these issues to rest once and for all will close, and past failures to address the history issue square on will come back to haunt Japan, and the US even more. There are signs already that US policy-makers are becoming increasingly nervous over Japan and China's standoff over history.²⁷

Indeed, there is a third and reinforcing reason for the US to be concerned about Koizumi's record

²⁷ Michael J. Green and Shinjirō Koizumi, 'US-Japan Relations', *Comparative Connections: A Quarterly E-Journal of East Asian Bilateral Relations*, October 2006, http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/0603qus_japan.pdf.

of diplomacy in East Asia and in general, and that is the fact that as US-Japan alliance ties have deepened, so Japan has become a more demanding ally seeking reciprocation, and expectant of the US to help clean up its foreign policy mistakes. In the past, the US-Japan alliance as a highly asymmetrical construct was something of one-way street in terms of bilateral burdens—the Yoshida Doctrine’s strategy of Japan passively providing bases in return for US protection. As the alliance now transforms itself, with Japan as a more pro-active ally offering to shoulder more of the burden in security in East Asia and beyond, so its leaders likely will now expect even greater reciprocation from the US.

Washington has already been given a portent of this with Tokyo’s expectations that it should have more actively supported its bid for a UN Security Council permanent seat between 2005 and 2006. Similarly, Japan in reacting to North Korea’s missile tests in the summer of 2006 demanded the full backing of the US to impose sanctions, even if this threatens to finally derail the Six Party Talks and the priority attached by Washington to resolving the nuclear issue. Post-Koizumi, it is also likely to expect more back up from the US in dealing with its bilateral disputes with China, including help in getting an accounting on the abductee issue that might complicate attempts to resolve the nuclear problem. There are signs that Japan has certainly been emboldened to more openly challenge China over territorial disputes in the East China Sea because of its enhanced expectations for alliance support from the US.²⁸

Moreover, as Japan’s leaders provide increased military support to the US in the Asia-Pacific, they also may well feel freer to criticise American military strategy elsewhere. A foretaste of

²⁸ Denny Roy, ‘The Sources and Limits of Sino-Japanese Tensions’, *Survival*, vol. 47, no. 2, p. 199.

what Washington may have in store was shown by the public criticism of US Iraq policy by two cabinet members. First Defense Minister Kyuma criticised the US's Iraq War, and then Foreign Minister Asō called the American occupation of Iraq 'very naïve'. While their views undoubtedly reflect widespread opinions around the world and increasingly among the US public as well, they were an unwelcome surprise from a country that is supposed to be the new 'Britain of the Far East', standing by its ally in its global as well as regional policy. The US officially complained about Kyuma's remarks and also rejected a Japanese offer for a defence summit meeting.²⁹

Hence, Koizumi may have been an influential Japanese post-war leader in the sense of breaking taboos and creating the conditions for change, but was he a wise and strategic one in thinking through Japan's next steps in its foreign policy agenda? Where is the guidance of a true 'Koizumi Doctrine' or an 'Abe Doctrine' to replace the Yoshida Doctrine to help guide Japan in the future? No coherent new foreign policy strategic vision has replaced Yoshida's, only a new guideline to follow US and public opinion's demands when expedient, or to stand up to China and the two Koreas over history, or to rail against perceived subordination to US strategy. We will see if Abe and his later successors can construct a new edifice to replace the old one that has been undermined.

²⁹ Kyodo News on Yahoo! News Asia, 'Abe's Gov't Downplays Yet Another Minister Remark on US Policy', 5 February 2007. <http://asia.news.yahoo.com/070205/kyodo/d8n3i1080.html>.

CONCLUSION: WHO IS ENTRAPPING WHOM?

In the post-Koizumi, Abe period, US policy-makers need to consider whether they have shackled themselves to, and in fact in their efforts to foster a more ‘normal’ ally have actively contributed to, a Japan that has become more proactive but also more erratic, obdurate and demanding as an ally. These traits in the future only look to be accentuated by Koizumi’s stripping out of the middle layers of the foreign policy decision-making process in Japan, and the linkages that this has created between the exercise of leadership and nationalistic appeals to raw public opinion. Abe has continued this trend by being the first prime minister to appoint the full complement of prime ministerial ‘advisors’ now allowed under a 1996 reform of the Cabinet Law, including one for national security and one on the abductee issue. He has also made clear that he wishes to establish a ‘National Security Council’ modeled on that of the White House, and possibly staffed with the right-wing figures of his ‘brain trust’.

From Washington’s perspective, there will need to be increased attention and skill in managing ties with Japan, despite and because of its ostensible new-found status as a pro-active ally. On the one hand, Japan will no longer want to be taken for granted and the US will have to work harder to not frustrate its aspirations for international status. It was singularly perceived to have failed to do so in the run-up to Japan’s UNSC bid—Japan at the very least expecting that the US would not stand by and allow China to orchestrate the wrecking of its bid behind the scenes. On the other hand, the US will need to discourage a Japanese proactivity that may entail its leaders once again disturbing East Asian regional ties, and especially with China, and compounding dealing with North Korea on the nuclear issue with its own parochial but domestically popular abductee issue. The alliance will undoubtedly hold, especially as Japan has expended little

energy during the Koizumi years in developing alternative political and security spaces in its own region of East Asia. But contrary to Washington's initial delight over its new found supportive and proactive military partner, the relationship bodes to be replete with irritation, pitfalls, and dangers.

Dealing with these alliance growing pains are essential tasks for Abe, his successors, and George W. Bush's successors. If the US fails to attend to its side of the alliance, then it may regret pushing so hard for Japan to become 'normal', and yearn for the days of the slow but predictable consensus-based decision-making pre-Koizumi. It may also be that rather than the principal feature of the bilateral relationship being Japan's traditional fear of entrapment in an alliance that leads it into conflict, it is the US that ends caught up in regional crises in large part the making of its awkward Japanese ally.