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US-Japan Relations: Convergence and Divergence
in the Post-September 11th World

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US-JAPAN RELATIONS: CONVERGENCE AND DIVERGENCE
IN THE POST-SEPTEMBER 11TH WORLD*

by Brian Bridges

ABSTRACT:

Japan-US relations, which had been drifting in the late 1990s, were given a new lease of life by the new administrations of US President George W. Bush and Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, both of whom argued for strengthening the alliance. This paper argues that, although the new sense of cooperation extended through to beyond the September 11th events, the US designation of an 'axis of evil' has paradoxically caused some divergence in the relationship. Japanese policies towards all three constituents countries of the 'axis of evil', Iraq, North Korea and Iran, differ in emphasis and nature from those of the Bush administration. Even though Japan has come out in support of the US attacks on Iraq, it has subtly different concerns and interests with Iraq and the other two named states which place the Koizumi administration in a dilemma about how far to follow the US lead.

Over a decade ago, in his first meeting with a visiting Japanese prime minister, then US President George Bush started talking about creating a new 'global partnership' with Japan.¹ However, a combination of disagreements over the Gulf War contributions and a lack of real political will on both sides sabotaged attempts to put substance into the rhetoric of enhancing political and security cooperation. The current president, George W. Bush, while eschewing the phraseology of his father, nonetheless came into office in January 2001 putting a positive spin on how the alliance with Japan would be strengthened. From the Japanese perspective, Japan-US relations had seemed to be marking time over the previous year or two - or, arguably, even longer than that - so that at least one commentator had come to use the term 'alliance adrift' to describe what undoubtedly was and still is Japan's major external

* This is a much revised and up-dated version of a paper entitled 'Japan-US Relations: False Start or False Promise?', presented to the International Workshop 'Old Wine in New Bottles?: The Bush Administration's Security Policy and North-east Asia', organised by the Centre for Asian Pacific Studies, Lingnan University, 7-8 May 2001. I am grateful for the comments by Suzuoki Takabumi and Scott Solomon on earlier versions of this paper.

relationship (Funabashi 2000, p. 74). In that sense, despite all the accompanying uncertainties of a new US administration, many Japanese policy-makers felt that they could build stronger ties with a Republican-led US administration than they had had with outgoing Democrat president Bill Clinton and his administration. Two years on, how far has the promise of a revitalised relationship been realised? This paper argues that the signs of convergence displayed during 2001 were dissipated and diluted during 2002 and that, if anything, divergence is once again coming to the fore, in particular over the US extension of the anti-terrorist campaign to Iraq and beyond.

For almost five decades, Japanese interactions with the outside world have been heavily coloured by the one crucial relationship with the United States. The US Ambassador to Japan throughout most of the 1980s, Mike Mansfield, used to refer to the US-Japanese relationship as the most important bilateral relationship in the world 'bar none' and successive Japanese ministers and officials have called it, with more accuracy, the 'cornerstone' or the 'axis' of Japanese foreign policy (for an overview see Hook et al 2001, pp. 82-150). However, from the late 1980s the relationship had been under some strain, partly from repeated disputes about economic issues, partly from the working out of the division of labour in the security dimension in the new post-Cold War era. While accepting that it is difficult to separate economics from politics/security in this complex bilateral relationship (particularly given the Japanese predilection for thinking in economic security terms), this paper endeavours to focus on the evolving bilateral security relationship.

The new Bush administration in 2001 contained several senior figures who were well-known to the Japanese, not least because many of these key personnel also served with Bush's father, who is, on the whole, warmly remembered in Japan. In particular, the appointment of Richard Armitage as the Deputy Secretary of State was picked up by Japanese observers. Armitage, together with the former Clinton administration official and academic Joseph Nye, had headed a bipartisan group of experts which in October 2000 had produced a report calling for greater US openness to Japanese ideas and initiatives and encouragement of an expansion of Japan's security and diplomatic responsibilities in Asia (Green 2000; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 21 December 2000). Although Nye, a Democrat, had co-chaired the bipartisan group, it was

interpreted in Tokyo as a basically ‘Republican’ agenda and the Japanese media invariably refer to it as the ‘Armitage Report’.

The Koizumi Junichiro administration inaugurated in Tokyo at the end of April 2001, by contrast, brought in many new faces who were less well-known to the Americans, not just the new prime minister himself but also the controversial new Foreign Minister, Tanaka Makiko. Neither had had a strong record on foreign affairs previously and Koizumi, at least during his brief campaign to be elected first as president of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and then as prime minister, rarely went beyond expressing his strong support for the Japan-US alliance and hinting that he would like Japan to do more in defence. However, for the Americans, who had become increasingly disillusioned with his gaffe-prone predecessor, Koizumi seemed like a breath of fresh air and a potential kindred spirit.

Managing the bilateral alliance : Ehime-maru and Okinawa:

No alliance relationship is ever built on perfectly symmetrical and identical economic, political and security outlooks. The Japan-US alliance is no exception to this rule. Certainly the relationship is now far from being as asymmetrical as it was even a decade ago, but it still retains mismatches of capabilities and expectations.

The Japan-US Security Treaty, in its revised 1960 form, still provides the basis for the US commitment to defend Japan and to station its forces in Japan. These commitments were reconfirmed by the Clinton-Hashimoto Ryutaro joint declaration in 1996. The Treaty is lop-sided and non-reciprocal in the sense that, while the United States is clearly committed to Japan’s defence, it contains no provision for Japan to come to the aid of the United States in the event of an attack upon it. While the Americans have not requested that this stipulation be changed, they have made increasing demands over the past two decades for Japan to do more in sharing the burden of defending itself and securing stability in the Asian Pacific region. Japan’s response has been to gradually strengthen its own self-defence capabilities so that it has indeed become a major military power, to slowly increase the proportion it paid to the total costs of US forces in Japan and to widen the political-security dialogue with the United States (Araki 1991, 9-11; Akaneya 1998, 1-13).

Although popular support within Japan for both the Self-Defence Forces (SDF) build-up and the maintenance of the Japan-US Security Treaty steadily grew during the 1980s, the Gulf War and the end of the Cold War made the Japanese government more concerned about the relevance of its approach, especially as for the first time a lively debate began within Japan about its international role, including the rationale for the Japan-US alliance. However, despite the confidence implied in the Clinton-Hashimoto declaration, and the subsequent revised guidelines for Japan-US security cooperation for dealing with emergencies ‘in the areas surrounding Japan’, this internal debate has still not been resolved. This continued uncertainty can be put down to the confusing internal political situation within Japan (as the dominant LDP was replaced after 1993 by a succession of weak coalition governments), the more complex and unsettled atmosphere of the post-Cold War regional environment and the Clinton administration’s apparent preoccupations elsewhere.

During the 1990s Japanese self-confidence vis-a-vis the United States was dented not only by the changing economic fortunes of the two countries (Japan in prolonged recession while the US economy powered ahead), but also by the way in which the Clinton administration, especially in its second term, seemed increasingly to by-pass Japan in favour of China as the Asian power with which the US was most interested in interacting and which counted most in regional affairs. For the Japanese this down-grading of Japan was symbolised most clearly by Clinton’s visit to China in 1998, when he not only decided not to call in on Tokyo but also omitted to refer to the US-Japan alliance in his discussions with the Chinese leadership (Funabashi 2000, p. 76). This apparent US neglect was all the more disturbing for the Japanese because they had after all been through what they considered to have been a process of reconfirming the alliance (the Clinton-Hashimoto declaration of April 1996) and strengthening cooperation through the revised defence guidelines (September 1997).

The new Bush administration’s early pronouncements about emphasizing security in Asia more than concerns in the traditional area of Europe ² and about focusing within Asia on Japan as a partner with which an Anglo-American style ‘special relationship’ might be developed were therefore a great boost to those within the Japanese political

leadership and officialdom who favoured maintaining and even strengthening the Japan-US alliance relationship.

Early signs were encouraging. A crisis over the accidental sinking of a Japanese fisheries training vessel, the Ehime-maru, with the loss of life of 9 Japanese, by a US Navy submarine in February 2001 was defused by effusive US apologies.³ The Japanese, albeit cautiously, also came on board with the Bush administration's plans for the development of national missile defence (NMD) and theatre missile defence (TMD) systems, as set out in Bush's May 2001 policy statement. Foreign Minister Tanaka was said to have been privately critical of the NMD plan, but the official Koizumi line was to express 'understanding' of the US project because Japan too has been concerned about missile proliferation (*Japan Times*, 16 May 2001; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 28 June 2001).

With its stated intention to do more to strengthen Japan's defence role, the Koizumi cabinet found itself converging with Bush administration opinion. One of the most controversial conclusions of the Armitage Report was that the Japan government's unwillingness to exercise the right of collective defence was an obstacle to alliance cooperation (Green 2000). The Japanese government has always interpreted the Constitution, especially Article 9, as allowing it the right of self-defence against a direct attack - and thereby by extension the right to maintain the SDF despite Article 9's prohibition of armed forces - but not as conceding the right to collective defence, such as assisting a close ally under attack (Howell 1999, pp.213-17). Koizumi wished to remove the ambiguity by arguing that in the event, for example, of an attack on US forces near Japan the SDF should be allowed to go to their aid (*Asahi Shimbun*, 28 April 2001); he became the first Japanese prime minister to publicly state his position in favour of collective self-defence. Two points should be noted: he stressed strongly that Japan 'must never go to war again' and that the most important thing for Japan's national interest was friendship with the United States (*Asahi Shimbun*, 28 April 2001). These kinds of statements were music to the ears of Bush officials.

The tragic events of 11 September, the US declaration of a war on terrorism, and the subsequent military attacks on Afghanistan raised significant dilemmas for the United

States' premier ally in Asia, Japan. In the short run, they served to strengthen Japan-US relations. Immediately after the 9-11 tragedies, prime minister Koizumi expressed shock and sympathy, but then found himself confronted with the problem of what to do next, as the Bush administration began to construct an international coalition to eradicate terrorism. Koizumi promised to do 'as much as possible' to support the anti-terrorist campaign, but then added the caveat of having to act within the constraints of the Japanese peace constitution (Glosserman 2001). Aware that this could be interpreted abroad as a recipe for inactivity, Koizumi worked on responding to US demands that Japan make 'visible' contributions to the new anti-terrorist campaign. Compared to the situation of one of his hapless predecessors in 1990-91, when Japan found it impossible to do anything more than send 'yen not men' to the multi-national campaign against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, Koizumi was able to play on his tremendously high domestic public support, ignore the politically-decimated pacifist-based parties, and utilise the imagery of the dramatic television pictures of the crumbling World Trade Centre towers and the deaths of some Japanese in them.

With the help of its domestic coalition partners, the Koizumi government acted in a cautious but positive manner. Under new legislation passed in late October 2001, the scope of the SDF's activities were widened, allowing it to dispatch ships to the Indian Ocean and to provide transport and logistical support for the US-led forces involved in the campaign against terrorism. A small flotilla of Maritime SDF ships set out for the Indian Ocean on 25 November and a week later the Air SDF began transportation support activities (*Asian Wall Street Journal*, 5 October 2001; materials supplied by Japanese Consulate-General in Hong Kong). Although this legislation was passed through the Diet remarkably quickly - in only three weeks compared to nearly nine months for earlier legislation in 1992 which allowed SDF participation in UN peace-keeping missions - part of the cost of creating a consensus in its favour was that the law contains provisions that limit it to a two-year lifetime and that the SDF should only be involved in non-combatant tasks. The restrictions on entry into combat zones meant that the Japanese military presence was largely peripheral to the US military campaigns inside Afghanistan,⁴ but nonetheless the symbolism of the Japanese participation was not lost on the Bush administration. Indeed, Secretary of State Powell later praised Japan : 'We could not have asked for a more resolute response

from Japan' (Colin Powell, Remarks at Asia Society Annual Dinner, New York, 10 June 2002; see also the positive comments by National Security Adviser Condoleeza Rice in *South China Morning Post*, 16 February 2002).

'Axis of evil' :

The 9-11 events, it has been argued, have ensured that 'the age of terrorism is a new era in international relations' (Cronin, 2002 p.134), but as far as Japan-US relations were concerned it was Bush's State of the Union speech in January 2002, casting Iran, Iraq and North Korea as countries in an 'axis of evil' which supported terrorism and were developing missiles and weapons of mass destruction (*New York Times*, 31 January 2002), which represented a more significant turning point. The US success in toppling the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was welcomed by the Koizumi government, which pledged support to the continuing war against terrorism, but the Bush administration's designation of the 'axis of evil' and the subsequent focus on Iraq as a target for 'regime change' has meant, paradoxically, that the two allies have once again begun drifting apart.

The initial Japanese reaction to the 'axis of evil' speech was muted. It certainly did not help that the Japanese government was not informed in advance of the intended contents; reportedly, Foreign Ministry officials had to download the key points from the CNN website in order to brief Koizumi (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 24 February 2002). Although Koizumi did later describe Bush as being 'very cool and prudent' concerning the countries of the 'axis of evil' (*Bulletin Quotidien Europe*, 20 February 2002), during the early months of 2002 other Japanese officials warned that Japanese cooperation in any extension of US military operations beyond Afghanistan should depend on convincing explanations of the linkages with the 9-11 attacks. Nakatani Gen, Director-General of the Defence Agency, argued that only after receiving a 'thorough explanation' from the United States as to what the linkages were with 9-11 and Afghanistan would the Japanese government be able to make a judgement about whether to support any US military operations against Iraq or elsewhere (*Hongkong iMail*, 18 February 2002). Abe Shinzo, the Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary and a key foreign policy-maker in the Koizumi administration, also argued that 'All of the allies do not have to line up their shoes with the United States; each has its separate

role' (*Hongkong iMail*, 18 February 2002). It is necessary to review the extent of the differences in emphasis between the Japanese and the Americans over relations with the designated three states.

(a) Iraq

Japan certainly shares with the United States a concern about the apparent development of chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction by the regime of Saddam Hussein and would like to ensure that any such weapons are destroyed, but it has been reluctant to go down the path of military action.

In various meetings between ministers and officials from both sides during 2002, the Japanese pledged to continue close discussions with the Americans on the Iraq issue, but they also placed two caveats. Firstly, they argued that it is important to have United Nations resolutions on weapons inspections and, indeed, any subsequent military action against Iraq. The Japanese government was therefore relieved that the United States did go down the line of obtaining a UN mandate for the weapons inspectors to investigate Iraq through UN Resolution 1441 in November 2002. Secondly, the Japanese stressed that the stability of the whole Middle East region was vital. By this Japan, which has significant economic interests in the Middle East (a region from which it still imports around 70% of its oil needs), meant that the United States should not only ensure that Arab countries were broadly supportive, even if only in private, on military action against Iraq but also that the United States take a more comprehensive view of the Middle East situation and in particular become more involved in trying to settle the Israel-Palestine problem.

Resistance to being dragged into 'an American war' grew within Japan during 2002, not just from opposition parties and groups, but even from within the ruling LDP-led coalition. A leading LDP politician Yamazaki Taku argued that 'unilateral action' by the United States against Iraq was undesirable; as an alliance partner, Japan 'should oppose' such military action (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 29 August 2002). The leaders of LDP's main coalition ally, the Komeito party, also expressed reservations.⁵ However, following the UN resolution in early November 2002 which authorised the weapons inspectors to start work in Iraq, the United States sounded out Japan about what it

might contribute to any campaign against Iraq. The Japanese government was very reluctant to become directly involved, as that would require a domestically-sensitive revision of the 2001 legislation, which specifically limited SDF involvement to the war against terrorism (and, by extension, Afghanistan). Instead it decided to extend its logistical support to US forces in and around Afghanistan for a further six months and to send a high-technology Aegis-equipped destroyer to join those Maritime SDF ships already deployed in the Gulf of Oman (*Japan Times*, 3, 6 December 2002). The range of the Aegis system is such that intelligence from the Persian Gulf could also be gathered, but the Japanese intention was primarily to relieve the US burden in Afghanistan thereby freeing up some US capabilities in the event of war with Iraq. Aware that they could not expect the Japanese to become any more directly involved, the Americans confined themselves to welcoming the Aegis despatch as ‘a splendid example’ of Koizumi’s leadership (*Japan Times*, 6 December 2002).

In the early weeks of 2003, while the Bush administration continued to express scepticism about the compliance of the Iraqi government with the UN inspectors’ demands and argued that technically and legally there was no need for a further UN resolution before initiating military action, the Japanese government continued to argue that, politically, it would make sense - indeed, it was ‘desirable’, to use the phraseology of Foreign Minister Kawaguchi Sawako - to have a further UN resolution specifically mandating such a use of force (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 29 January 2003). However, as differences grew between the Anglo-American position and the French and the Germans in particular over whether UN inspectors should be given more time and whether Iraq was genuine about disarming, the Japanese government has found itself caught in a difficult situation. While publicly expressing cautiously-worded support as a long-standing ally for the US position, privately officials were hoping that military conflict with Iraq could be avoided. Koizumi’s decision to send a special envoy to Iraq in early March and the lobbying that he himself, Kawaguchi and senior diplomats carried out in the first half of March to try to get undecided countries within the UN Security Council to support a second resolution was symptomatic of this feeling that somehow a diplomatic solution must be arranged (see comments by senior policy-maker Abe in *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 27 February 2003).

However, the Japanese government began to realise that, as international opinion increasingly moved against the early use of force and the prospects for successfully tabling a second resolution became dimmer, it was looking increasingly likely that Japan would be left exposed as one of the few countries openly supporting the United States. The Japanese policy-makers had tended to underestimate both the determination of Bush and his advisers to resort to force even without UN backing and the degree to which some other countries would stand up to the United States (Koizumi was reportedly upset that the Japanese Foreign Ministry had miscalculated the position of France, which had not been expected to threaten to use a veto at the UN Security Council. *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 16 March 2003).

The internal debate within Japan has been low-key but nonetheless divisive. The mainstream of the LDP and the ‘American school’ within the Foreign Ministry continued to believe in the alliance with the United States and therefore argued that, if it came to the crunch and war was to come, then they had no option but to support the United States’ actions (see the remarks by several senior pro-Koizumi LDP politicians and one senior Foreign Ministry official quoted in *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 16 and 17 March 2003). However, some LDP politicians, such as former party secretary-general Koga Makoto, expressed the view that precisely because Japan had a close alliance relationship with the United States then it should be able to pass on the message that war should be avoided (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 17 March 2003). More bluntly, the leader of the Komeito, the LDP’s political partner, stated that he was strongly opposed to the use of force without a second UN resolution (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 17 March 2003). Public opinion against the government supporting a US military strike rose steadily, as an early February 2003 poll showed 46% of those Japanese interviewed as saying that Japan should not support any US attack compared with 37% a month earlier; by the time of the outbreak of war those opposed had risen to 49% (*Japan Times*, 14 February 2003; *Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 22 March 2003). In public, Koizumi adopted a rather non-committal attitude and vaguely-worded statements that he would decide on whether to support US military action when the time came did nothing to endear him to either his supporters or the opposition.

When war did break out, Koizumi quickly expressed his ‘understanding and support’ of the Anglo-American attack, but, well aware of domestic public opposition to the war, he carefully avoided using the expression ‘strong support’ which he had used at the time of the opening of the US attack on Afghanistan (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 21 March 2003). The rationale for showing a degree of support was that Iraq had continued to ignore UN resolutions to disarm, that the United States was Japan’s alliance partner, and that Japan had no-one else except the United States to rely on should the North-east Asian security situation deteriorate. The LDP’s wavering ally, the Komeito, moved to support the war, arguing that it could not be helped given Iraqi intransigence, but opposition parties continued to voice their criticisms of both the US actions and Koizumi’s support for them.

Consequently, beyond joining the ‘coalition of the willing’ through its public statements, it is unlikely that the Japanese government will undertake any further, more extensive deployment of the SDF than those steps taken prior to the outbreak of war. Senior LDP officials had already agreed that they would not support any payment to US forces taking part in a war against Iraq (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 27 February 2003). Moreover, in contradiction to US requests as the war continued, the Japanese government refused to close down the Iraqi embassy in Tokyo, arguing that it was important to keep open channels of communication with the Iraqis (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 27 March 2003). However, the Japanese government has already shown willingness to contribute to any post-conflict reconstruction of Iraq, much as it has done with the case of Afghanistan. On the eve of the US-UK invasion of Iraq, in mid-March, the Japanese government announced that it would provide \$ 1 billion of emergency aid to 4 neighbouring countries of Iraq as well as the Palestinian authority to enable them to cope with refugee outflows and economic disruptions (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 17 March 2003). As with the case of Afghanistan the Japanese policy will once again come down to ‘some yen, few men’. But even here there may be differences of emphasis with the Americans, as Japanese officials are arguing that the United Nations should have a clear role in the post-war reconstruction of Iraq, an approach which the Bush administration is more sceptical about.

(b) North Korea

The Korean peninsula - the traditional 'dagger' pointing at the heart of Japan - has long been of particular importance to Japanese security interests and of the three 'axis of evil' countries it is clearly the most problematic for Japan. During the 1990s Japan responded to first the North Korean nuclear weapon crisis of 1993-94 and later the North's food crisis by reinforcing the Japan-US alliance and cooperating more extensively than ever before in a trilateral framework of Japan-South Korea-United States policy coordination. However, the differing pace and manner of these three allies' approaches to normalising relations with North Korea, especially after South Korean President Kim Dae-jung's 'sunshine policy' began to break new ground, proved difficult at times to coordinate (Funabashi 2000, p. 81). As the Americans too moved into a more conciliatory mood towards the North after the historic North-South Korean Summit in June 2000, Japan seemed to be consistently lagging behind the Kim and Clinton administrations in engaging North Korea. Japan had long had a troubled relationship with the North and a renewed round of negotiations after an eight-year interval to establish diplomatic relations had soon been stalemated in October 2000 over a number of issues but primarily the kidnapping of Japanese citizens (for the historical background, see Bridges 1993, pp. 58-61, 143-62; for the 2000 negotiations see *International Herald Tribune*, 31 October 2000; *Japan Economic Review*, 15 December 2000).

The Bush administration began with a considerably tougher attitude towards the North than that of president Clinton towards the end of his period in office, when he had appeared to be on the verge of an unprecedented visit to Pyongyang. With its own negotiations with the North at a stalemate, the Japanese government found that the Bush administration's initial overall line on the North was converging with its own, even though no Japanese leader would have been prepared to use in public the kind of rhetoric employed by, for example, National Security Adviser Rice, who not long before coming into office had described the North as 'the evil twin' of the South (cited in *Pyongyang Report*, December 2000, available on www.vuw.ac.nz/~caplabtb/dprk).

Initially, as Andrew Scobell has noted, the hallmark of the Bush administration policy towards North Korea was one of 'go slow' (Scobell 2002 p. 351) and despite the completion in June 2001 of a US review of its policy towards North Korea there were no signs of a revived US-North Korean dialogue. Preoccupied by the campaign against terrorism, North Korea seemed to disappear off the American radar after 9-11 at least until Bush's 'axis of evil' speech. Although there was little love lost between Japan and North Korea, particularly after Japanese coastguards were forced to chase and then sink an unidentified ship (later raised and confirmed as being of North Korean origin) in December 2001 (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 23 December 2001), the Japanese were wary of the over-simplified rhetoric employed by Bush. Certainly any implication that the Bush administration might have been thinking in terms of military action against North Korea was extremely worrying to the Japanese. The Bush approach to the North Korean issue has clearly differed from that of the South Korean Kim administration and this philosophical gulf has raised new challenges for the Koizumi government in terms of coordination of policies between the three allies.

During 2002, therefore, the Japanese government adopted what seemed to be almost a mid-way position between the US and South Korean governments, until Koizumi made a shift closer to the South Korean position on engagement through his dramatic and unprecedented visit to Pyongyang on 17 September. The Americans had been forewarned, though not consulted, about the announcement of the visit; their appreciation of the visit was cautiously worded. Koizumi's visit, in which he achieved some startling breakthroughs on the issue of the kidnapped Japanese (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 18 September 2002; *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 September 2002), had much to do with the Japanese domestic agenda and, to the chagrin of the Americans, little was said about the US agenda on the re-emerging nuclear issue (despite a US attempt to brief the Japanese prior to Koizumi's departure, see *Oriental Economist*, November 2002, pp. 12-13). Koizumi gained an immediate and significant boost in popularity, but this was soon dissipated as Japanese public opinion rapidly moved against the North as further revelations about the deaths of some kidnapped Japanese and the sympathy for the five survivors brought to Japan increased. The US announcement that the North had admitted to resuming the development of nuclear weapons in violation of the 1994 US-North Korean agreement (the North has

subsequently disputed that it actually said this, although in December 2002 it did threaten to again begin such development) also served to harden Japanese opinion against the North. A follow-up round of Japan-North Korean talks at the official level in late October 2002 made no progress and the negotiations have remained stalemated ever since (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 2 November 2002).

Japanese government officials now say that they will give equal weight to the kidnapping and the nuclear issues, while US officials have expressed their support for Japan on the kidnapping issue. Nonetheless, it is clear that while the Japanese and the US positions have grown closer together, there are still differences of emphasis, with Japan's priority on a final resolution of the kidnapping issue and the US priority on stopping the reopening of the North's nuclear programme.

Efforts have been made at the official level to reconnect the trilateral coordination mechanisms involving South Korea, but the mid-December 2002 election of Roh Moo-hyun as South Korean president on a platform which, if anything, extends outgoing Kim Dae-jung's engagement policy and accentuates South Korean-US policy differences has been making that process more difficult to manage. Although in the run-up to and immediately after his formal inauguration on 25 February 2003, Roh made more conciliatory noises about the need for the alliance with the United States to be maintained, there still remain considerable differences between his approach to the North and the Bush administration's views. Roh argues against economic sanctions on the North and for the resumption of US-North Korean talks.

The Bush administration has remained very reluctant to get involved in negotiations with the North, arguing that the North must first return to compliance with its earlier nuclear commitments. The meeting between senior US, South Korean and Japanese officials in early January 2003 at which the United States agreed to at least express its willingness to 'talk' with the North almost certainly reflected pressure from the Japanese siding with the South Koreans (*SCMP*, 9 January 2003). However, there has continued to be no direct US-North Korean dialogue, 'talks' or 'negotiations'. There is certainly not much immediate prospect either of Japan re-starting its own negotiations with the North. Nonetheless, differences of emphasis remain between the

two allies. As tensions over the North's nuclear ambitions grow, in particular as the rhetoric from the North increases, the Japanese are coming back to worry that the United States might urge imposing economic sanctions on the North, something a Foreign Ministry official has said that Japan does 'not want to step into' (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 7 January 2003), or worse that the United States would once again, consider, as it had done during the 1994 crisis, the option of a surgical military strike against suspect North Korean sites. The fact that the Americans had begun military action against the Iraqis has only served to heighten suspicions in some Japanese quarters about what strategy the Americans might adopt towards the North after the Iraq war is finished. The Japanese government, whatever its grievances with the North Koreans, is certainly going to be closer to the Roh administration than the Bush administration on trying to find a peaceful solution to the North Korean nuclear crisis.

(c) Iran

The greatest divergence between Japanese and US positions comes over Iran. Japan is worried about Iran's potential nuclear programme and the links with North Korean missile exports, but, in contrast to the long-standing tough US line on Iran, has worked steadily and quietly to develop contacts with Iran. Engagement is very much the focus of Japan's policy towards Iran. There are substantial economic ties between Japan and Iran, economic aid programmes to Iran had been restarted in 1993 with a \$3 billion loan for energy development and infrastructure projects, and the Iranian president Mohammad Khatami had actually made a state visit to Japan in October 2000, when he became the first Middle Eastern leader to be asked to address the Diet (Japanese parliament). As Reinhard Drifte has argued, the Japanese government felt, in contrast to the US trade embargo on Iran, that 'economic aid to Iran will be more productive than sanctions in steering Iran away from terrorism' (Drifte 1998, p.130). Continuing contacts were designed both to support the domestic political reform process and to encourage Iran to play 'a more active role toward the peace and stability of the Middle East and the international community' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2001, p. 139); one former Japanese diplomat from the 'Middle East school' within the Foreign Ministry has noted the 'mood of change' within Iran (Katakura 2002, pp. 33-34). This belief in engagement has continued to be the Japanese approach even after 9-11 and the 'axis of evil' speech.

When Bush visited Japan in February 2002, he pointed up the important role that Japan could play in encouraging reform and policy change in Iran, although he added that he did want to see real change taking place there (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*, 19 February 2002). Japanese officials can see a role for Japan to act as an intermediary in bringing about a diplomatic solution to the differences between Iran and the United States, but Japan could just as easily end up being sandwiched between the two. Iran does seem to be less of a priority for the United States, at least compared to Iraq and North Korea,⁶ so the Japanese hope that there will be a certain breathing space before they are forced to make hard decisions. Japan, meanwhile, has continued to strengthen its economic contacts with Iran; in September 2002 Japanese and Iranian ministers agreed on a consortium of Japanese companies participating in one of the world's largest natural gas development projects off the Iranian-Qatari coast (*Jiji Press*, 22 September 2002). Japan is certain to be very reluctant to take tough action against Iran.

Looking Forward

While the 1990s were a 'lost decade' for Japan because of its prolonged and unprecedented economic recession and political uncertainty, it is tempting to apply that terminology to the Japan-US relationship too. The advent of the Bush administration seemed to hold the promise of a newly-reinvigorated alliance relationship. The Bush administration deliberately gave - and, indeed, has generally continued to give - Koizumi the benefit of the doubt on economic policies, playing down the long-standing US policy of 'Japan-bashing' as he was seen as the best bet yet for turning round the economy. At the same time, Koizumi's style of pronouncements raised US expectations of a more robust relationship in security terms. In the months before and immediately after 9-11 the prospects for a more invigorating interaction between the two countries were certainly on the up.

However, the US insistence on extending the war on terrorism into the 'axis of evil' has once again presented the Japanese with a dilemma and also raised doubts as to how strong the 'special' Japan-US relationship really is. As the above analysis suggests, the Japanese have had and continue to have some differences with the Bush

administration over policy towards all three of the constituent members of the so-called 'axis of evil'. Even though in his January 2003 State of the Union speech President Bush failed to repeat the rhetorical phrase of one year earlier, the Japanese were not completely reassured. The war with Iraq has brought very sharp contrasts in the United States' relations with two of its major European allies. Britain has cooperated very closely, resuscitating the Anglo-American 'special relationship', while France has come out clearly and definitively against American actions. Japan has fallen in the middle: it has had reservations about military action, yet ultimately has come on side with the Americans, even though it has not done everything that the Americans would like it to do. Certainly more divergence than the British have displayed, but much less than the French have shown. As the Iraq problem comes to a solution, through military action and occupation, attention will shift to the other two countries of the 'axis of evil'. If anything, the divergence in US-Japanese relations can be expected to increase, but even so it is doubtful whether Japan will go down the road of being a 'second France'. Nonetheless, at the very least, the Bush administration will have to face greater Japanese caution over those two countries where Japanese interests are much more significant than has been the case over Iraq.

A recent chronicler of the Bush administration quotes Bush as outlining to Koizumi his philosophy that history would 'not judge well somebody who doesn't act, somebody who just bides time here' (Woodward 2002, pp. 281-82 - Koizumi's response is not recorded). For many Japanese, however, including many of those in senior policy-making positions, it is that very urge to action which worries them. The dilemma over how far to follow the US lead will continue to plague Japanese policy-makers in the coming months and years.

FOOTNOTES

1. It should be noted that Bush the elder's Secretary of State, James Baker, spent only three nights during his whole period in office in the capital of his 'global partner' and that his massive 600-plus page memoir of that same period carries barely a mention of Japan.
2. The regional commander of US Forces in the Pacific, Admiral Dennis Blair, said: 'There is definitely in the United States a policy of reconsidering the importance of Asia. I think that there is a growing realisation that there is the richest combination

of opportunities and potential threats [in this region]'. *South China Morning Post*, 19 May 2001. See also the Pentagon's *Quadrennial Defense Review* quoted in Scobell 2002 p. 345.

3. Although it has been argued, in a comparison of US actions after the Ehime-maru incident and the April 2001 aerial collision of the US surveillance aircraft and a Chinese fighter, that 'both incidents showed how much difficulty Washington has with the concept of apology' (Wall 2001 pp. 5-6), in fact there is much truth in US Secretary of State Colin Powell's comment two days after the sinking of the Ehime-maru that 'we have apologized every way we know' (interview on CNN, 11 February 2001, www.state.gov/secretary/m2001/index.cfm?docid=548. [accessed 28 April 2001]).
4. Bob Woodward's detailed analysis of US decision-making from 9-11 to the overthrow of the Taliban, *Bush at War* (2002), contains no mention at all of Japan in the index and only two brief references to Bush telling Koizumi about his concerns.
5. Typical of the 'liberal' position in the Japanese debate was the article by the head of one of Japan's major think-tanks, who argued that Japan should 'maintain an appropriate distance from the "justice" of the United States and reestablish [its] own policymaking autonomy' (Terashima: 2002, p. 25).
6. British prime minister and Bush's closest foreign ally, Tony Blair, admitted publicly, in response to a question about who would be next after Iraq, that it was confronting North Korea about its weapons programme (*Guardian*, 29 January 2003, [wysiwyg://16/http://politics.guardian.com/gnaaffairs/story/0,11538,884753,00.html](http://www.wysiwyg.com/16/http://politics.guardian.com/gnaaffairs/story/0,11538,884753,00.html) [accessed 30 January 2003]). However, for an analysis that it is in fact Iran which is next, see Powers 2003.

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