

U.S.-Japan Relations: **Mr. Koizumi's Payback**

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Relations between the United States and Japan were very good this quarter, even though a number of events threatened to derail the solid ties between the two governments. A hostage crisis in Iraq and the discovery of an alleged al-Qaeda network in Japan brought home to Japanese the reality of the war on terror. No longer could they disassociate themselves from events half a world away. By the end of the quarter, both governments could point to their relationship as an example of how an alliance is supposed to work; Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro could finally make the case that his close relationship with President Bush paid tangible dividends. Not only was his strategy vindicated, but he could point to an outcome on a key policy that a majority of Japanese could support.

Jolts from Iraq

This quarter has been an emotional roller-coaster ride for Japan and the government of Prime Minister Koizumi. The jolts began with the seizure of three Japanese hostages by militants in Iraq in early April, confirming the worst fears of many that the Japanese government's decision to follow the U.S.-led coalition into Iraq would produce dangerous results for the nation. The three hostages, Takato Nahoko, an aid worker, Imai Noriaki, an 18-year old high school graduate, and Koriyama Soichiro, a 32-year old photo-journalist, were seized April 7 by the Islamic militant group Mujahideen Brigades, which threatened to kill them if Japan did not withdraw the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) providing humanitarian assistance in Iraq. The government refused to submit to the terrorists' demands and in one week the hostages were released unharmed. One day before their release, two more Japanese civilians were kidnapped, but they too were released unharmed three days later.

The Japanese media uniformly condemned the hostage taking. The *Yomiuri Shimbun* editorialized "We can never succumb to this despicable threat. We must deal with it with a firm attitude." The *Asahi Shimbun* agreed, saying, "an act of this kind should never be forgiven. ... The government should first make every possible effort to rescue them." Public opinion also supported the Koizumi government. According to an *Asahi* poll, 64 percent backed the government's handling of the crisis. Nearly three-quarters (73 percent) agreed with the government's rejection of the demand for the withdrawal of the SDF from Iraq. These results were somewhat surprising given the national debate over the dispatch of the troops. Only 50 percent of respondents in the same poll favored

continuing deployment of Japanese troops; 32 percent said the SDF should withdraw. (Curiously, there was a public backlash against the hostages, who were roundly criticized for putting themselves in harm's way irresponsibly.)

To the relief of all, the situation was resolved peacefully. It could have been catastrophic, however. Not only would the government have been held responsible for the bloodshed, but the kidnappers threatened to kill the hostages on the day that Vice President Dick Cheney was scheduled to make a major speech in Tokyo. Efforts to link the deaths to Tokyo's support for U.S. policy would have been inevitable. Peaceful resolution of the crisis was, thus, a net plus for the alliance.

The next lurch for Japan occurred a month later, on May 27, when Hashida Shinsuke, one of Japan's top freelance combat photographers, and his nephew Ogawa Kotaro were killed when unidentified assailants opened fire on their car. The deaths were another painful reminder of the risks that accompany the Iraq deployment. Here, again, the Japanese public did not indulge in breast beating nor did it demand a reconsideration of the deployment to Iraq. Apparently the country is reconciled to the dangers involved and understands the importance of its commitment to Iraq's reconstruction.

Al-Qaeda at Home?

The realities of the war against terrorism surfaced closer to home when officials acknowledged that Lionel Dumont, a French national believed to be a senior member of al-Qaeda, had been living in Niigata for more than year from July 2002. Dumont entered Japan on a fake passport and traveled abroad frequently even though he was hunted by Interpol. After leaving Japan in September 2003, he was arrested in Germany on suspicion of involvement in an attempted terrorist attack on the 1996 G8 summit in Lyons, France. After Dumont's arrest, eight foreign nationals were arrested in Japan on charges of immigration violations, and they are suspected of being involved in an al-Qaeda network operating in Japan. The *Yomuiiri Shimbun* editorialized that Tokyo "should squarely face the reality that Japan is also being targeted by international terrorist networks" and warned that the country "must not become the weakest link in the international alliance against terrorists."

Smooth Sailing at Sea Island

Koizumi was not going to let that occur. The prime minister set off a domestic tempest when he was reported to have told President George W. Bush at their June 8 meeting before the Sea Island G8 summit that the SDF would participate in the international force that will serve in Iraq after the transfer of sovereignty to the new government in Baghdad. On its face, that comment should have been uncontroversial, if not applauded. Japan's multilateralists should have been pleased that the UN Security Council voted unanimously June 8 to endorse the June 30 transfer of sovereignty to the Iraqi interim government and authorize a U.S.-led multinational force to keep peace there. In other words, they should have seen the move as a victory for UN-centered diplomacy.

But controversy followed as a result of domestic political concerns. The deployment of SDF, even under the UN flag, raises constitutional questions: would this be an exercise of the right of collective self defense, which successive Japanese governments have insisted is not permitted by the Japanese constitution? The prime minister said it wouldn't because the SDF would continue to limit its activities to humanitarian and reconstruction work. Other pundits disagreed and there was a flurry in the press, with Koizumi being attacked, among other things, for unflinching support for the U.S. president. He was quoted as calling the UN resolution "a victory for the cause of the U.S." The multilateralists would have preferred to see "the victory" as that of the UN. The government endorsed the prime minister's decision when it decided a week later to agree to the deployment.

The SDF decision was one on a long list of agenda items discussed by the two leaders during their 80-minute meeting. Recovery in both countries meant that economic issues got short shrift. The two men discussed the continuing ban on beef imports from the U.S. because of mad cow disease, with Bush urging Koizumi to lift the ban as soon as possible. (During their visits to Japan, other U.S. officials, such as Vice President Cheney and Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, pressed the Japanese to resume beef imports, but to no avail. Growing pressure from the U.S. could force some movement as the election campaign heats up. A working-level panel is scheduled to be set up to work out a solution by summer's end.)

Other issues discussed during the bilateral summit included measures to reduce the concentration of U.S. bases on Okinawa – the two leaders agreed to consult closely on the matter – and Japan's bid to host the International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project in Rokkasho, Aomori Prefecture. Bush has backed Tokyo in its battle with France to win the project.

The Soga Saga

High on the agenda was the fate of U.S. Army Sergeant Charles Robert Jenkins. Jenkins allegedly defected from his post on the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea in 1965 and is now living in North Korea. Jenkins is married to Soga Hitomi, one of the five people that North Korea admitted to kidnapping from Japan in 1978. Soga was allowed to return to Japan on a visit in 2002 and then she refused to go back to North Korea (as did all of the abductees), leaving behind her husband and two daughters. Reportedly, Jenkins refuses to leave the North for fear of being arrested on desertion charges.

The Soga issue has taken on additional urgency in the wake of Koizumi's May 22 one-day visit to North Korea, a bid to jumpstart the stalled normalization talks. (For more on this, see Victor Cha's "Engagement from Strength" in this issue of *Comparative Connections*.) Koizumi secured the release of several family members of other abductees, but Jenkins is holding out, fearful of arrest and imprisonment. (In addition to the tangible benefits North Korea gains from reconciliation with Japan, the prospect of Jenkins becoming a wedge issue between Tokyo and Washington is one more reason for Pyongyang to appear conciliatory.)

Koizumi raised the Soga issue at his meeting with Bush (as have most Japanese officials when discussing the bilateral relationship with U.S. counterparts). President Bush is reported to have expressed “sympathy” over the situation, and then repeated the U.S. position that Jenkins is a deserter wanted by the U.S. Army. While leniency makes some sense – four decades in North Korea, separated from family and home, may well constitute punishment enough – U.S. officials are reluctant to let the case go when U.S. soldiers have committed punishable offenses in Iraq for fear of sending the wrong signal.

Fixing the SOFA

As the quarter began, alliance officials were focused on legal issues. In early April, the two governments reached agreement on revising the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The treatment of U.S. soldiers accused of committing crimes in Japan has long bedeviled the bilateral relationship: Officials must balance constitutional protections afforded U.S. citizens serving in the nation’s military with respect for domestic legal procedures in Japan. (The problem is not restricted to Japan: it occurs in every country where the U.S. has deployed forces.)

According to the new agreement, which followed nine months of negotiations, suspects will be handed over to the Japanese police; previously only individuals charged with serious offenses were subject to this provision. The U.S. continues to reserve the right to decide whether to hand over the suspects. Japan agreed to allow U.S. officials to be present during informal questioning prior to handover. During interrogation, suspects will be given an interpreter and can be accompanied by a representative of the U.S. military and an additional official.

The agreements should help soothe bruised feelings brought about by U.S. refusal to hand over suspects. It is unlikely to placate Okinawans opposed to the U.S. presence under any circumstances. Some Okinawa newspapers protested the new agreement, saying it would “guarantee” another “special privilege” for the U.S. military, violating equality before the law.

Global Redeployment Echoes Through Northeast Asia

Regional security planners were taken by surprise by the U.S. announcement that it would move 3,600 troops from South Korea to Iraq. (The issue is discussed in detail in Donald Gross’ chapter in this issue of *Comparative Connections*, “Strains in the Alliance as the U.S. Offers a Nuclear Deal”). The shock was compounded by the subsequent report that the U.S. would permanently shift 12,500 troops from the Peninsula. These changes impact Japan’s security, as a Korean contingency is one of the main concerns of Japanese security planning as well as the focus of U.S. Marine deployments in Okinawa. The *Asahi* noted that changes in U.S. forces “directly affect Japan’s security and military base issues.” During his April visit, Vice President Cheney reassured audiences that the planned reorganization of the U.S. military would not diminish alliance security. Changes may be required, but they “will be a matter of modernizing and updating” the alliance.

Despite those calming words, nervousness was fed throughout the quarter by reports of associated shifts in Japan: in early April, for example, the *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* reported that the U.S. government was considering sharing bases between U.S. forces and the SDF and transferring part of the U.S. Army's headquarters functions to Japan. Japan has been reluctant to accept any new U.S. deployments, and has even been slow to facilitate changes agreed in the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO), a process designed to lighten Okinawa's burden.

The new urgency attached to the global redeployments, part of Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's agenda to transform the U.S. military, has created some tension in the relationship. SACO was the product of intense U.S.-Japanese consultation. But it also predates the Bush administration, which means that new plans will require new negotiations – and is likely to encounter Japanese reluctance to reopen the talks. The uproar last quarter over the reported decision to change the plans for the move of the Futenma Air Station – allegedly the result of Rumsfeld's flyover of the base – showed once again that process is as important as outcome when dealing with these issues. Consultation is key.

Quiet Contributions Continue

Largely unheralded during the quarter – as has been the case since the initial deployments – was the April 22 decision by the Japanese government to continue to extend Maritime SDF (MSDF) support to the coalition operating in Afghanistan for another six months. Less than one month later, on May 17, two MSDF ships set sail to assist in refueling warships in the region.

Three days later, the Lower House passed a package of seven bills that explain government powers in the event of a national emergency; the Upper House passed the bills June 14, which allowed them to become law. The bills supplement three laws passed last year that will help the government respond to an attack against Japan. The most recent legislation passed with support from the government, including the LDP alliance partner, the New Komei, and the opposition Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan).

The bills facilitate U.S.-Japan cooperation in the event of an attack, and allow the SDF to supply provisions to U.S. forces. Other laws in the package deal with protection and evacuation procedures, procedures for ship inspections in and around Japanese waters, use of public facilities to deal with emergencies, protections for prisoners of war, restrictions on travel for foreign nationals, and the protection of cultural assets. Diet approval is required before the government declares a state of emergency.

From Pyongyang to Sea Island

The contingency bills, like the SDF deployment in Iraq, are proof that the U.S.-Japan alliance has entered new territory. There has long been talk of a more equal and more equitable partnership, but Japanese domestic politics often meant that was more rhetoric than reality (although Washington has also been a culprit at times). Prime Minister

Koizumi doesn't deserve all the credit for pushing the alliance into the 21st century, but he still deserves a lot. His political instincts and his ability to create and sustain a personal relationship with President Bush have been instrumental in elevating Japan to the foremost ranks of U.S. allies. As Vice President Cheney noted in his April speech in Tokyo, the alliance is now seen as truly global in scale and reach.

The new reciprocity in the relationship was evident this quarter in the attempts to get North Korea to abandon its nuclear weapons program. The Trilateral Cooperation and Oversight Group (TCOG) process continues, ensuring that the positions of Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul are well coordinated. But efforts to move the negotiations forward got a big boost this quarter from Prime Minister Koizumi himself.

In a bid to overcome the paralysis that had stalled normalization talks between Japan and North Korea, Koizumi on May 22 made a second one-day visit to Pyongyang to meet with "Dear Leader" Kim Jong-il. The trip was something of a gamble, although it was clear that the prime minister would not have gone if there wasn't some assurance of a payoff – in this case, the return of several of the family members of the abductees. Pundits feared the trip would open a wedge between Washington and Tokyo; they worried that Pyongyang would give Koizumi enough to break ranks with Bush. Officially, the U.S. "strongly supported" Koizumi's efforts to solve the abduction issue.

In a face to face meeting with Kim, the prime minister made it clear that the U.S. and its allies were serious about their commitment to North Korea's complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement. Moreover, he argued that Pyongyang's willingness to cooperate would pay benefits for the North. In short, he argued that the U.S. was serious in a way that no one else could, save Bush or Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Koizumi reported on that meeting to the president at their sit down at Sea Island. He argued that Kim too was serious about making a deal and pushed for a credible U.S. proposal at the forthcoming six-party talks to test him – and to satisfy domestic Japanese critics who see the U.S. as the intransigent party in the negotiations.

Koizumi can claim that his close working relationship with Bush, forged on both a personal and policy level, helped move the U.S. on the North Korea issue. The resulting U.S. offer (detailed in Gross' chapter, "Strains in the Alliance as the U.S. Offers a Nuclear Deal") was fully backed by Tokyo and Seoul. The Japanese Foreign Ministry emphasized that a freeze must include 1) all nuclear programs, including uranium enrichment; 2) information on all Pyongyang's nuclear programs; and 3) verification. Japan is ready to offer international energy assistance "only if these conditions are satisfied and if this freeze is part of an agreement to dismantle North Korea's nuclear programs." Normalization will ultimately depend on settling all bilateral issues between Japan and the DPRK, including abductions and the missile issues. Furthermore, noted the Foreign Ministry, Japan will continue to work closely with the U.S. and other countries in anticipation of a fourth round of six-party talks.

It's currently unclear how much Koizumi influenced the subsequent U.S. offer at the Beijing talks, but history may well judge it – and the pressure from the ROK – as substantial, if not determinative. Japan's Foreign Ministry cited Kim Jong-il's statement at the May 22 summit with Koizumi when it described the progress of the six-party talks, noting that "Chairman Kim Jong-il also said that the first step of this denuclearization should be to freeze nuclear programs and this freeze will entail verification." This statement makes plain the linkage between Koizumi's diplomacy and the progress in Beijing.

As Japan heads into a July Upper House election campaign, Koizumi and the Liberal Democratic Party can argue that they have transformed the nature of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Events this quarter provide substantial backing for that claim. It is a remarkable accomplishment and one for which the prime minister deserves substantial credit – but it may not be enough to sway Japanese voters. We will soon find out.

Chronology of U.S. – Japan relations April-June 2004¹

April 2, 2004: - U.S. and Japan reach agreement on SOFA revisions. Those who can be handed over to Japanese police is expanded to suspects for any crime, although U.S. reserves the right to decide whether to comply, and during pre-handover questioning by Japanese police a U.S. official can be present.

April 3, 2004: U.S. and Japan celebrate 150th anniversary of Treaty of Kanagawa, the first treaty between the two nations.

April 5, 2004: A letter from U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Veneman to Japan complicates the lifting of the Japanese ban on U.S. beef, as the proposal for voluntary BSE testing by U.S. meatpacking firms is rejected.

April 6, 2004: Japanese Defense Agency announces suspension of GSDF Iraq activities outside Samawah camp given growing security concerns.

April 6, 2004: NY Mets leadoff batter Matsui Kazuo starts season with a home run in the first official pitch of his major league career, going 3 for 3 in a 7-2 victory over the Braves.

April 7, 2004: Informal talks between high-level U.S., Japanese, and South Korean officials on North Korea open in San Francisco.

April 8, 2004: Three Japanese civilians are kidnapped in Iraq. The captors threaten to burn the Japanese alive if Japan does not withdraw troops from Iraq within three days.

¹ Compiled by Tamara Renee Shie, Visiting Fellow, Pacific Forum CSIS

April 8, 2004: ASDF Chief of Staff Gen. Tsumagari Yoshimitsu acknowledges the ASDF has airlifted U.S. armed military and civilians from Kuwait to Iraq, the first time the ASDF admits to carrying soldiers in addition to supplies.

April 10, 2004: VP Richard Cheney arrives in Japan on the first leg of his Asian tour to Japan, South Korea, and China, his first visit to these countries since taking office.

April 10, 2004: Families of three Japanese held hostage in Iraq urge Tokyo not to seek help from U.S. special forces to assist in the rescue.

April 10, 2004: Poll shows 45.2 percent disagree with Tokyo's rejection of the kidnapper's demands to withdraw troops vs. 43.5 who supported the decision. Support for the Koizumi Cabinet fell 3 percentage points from March to 48.4 percent; the disapproval rate is up 2.6 points to 39.3 percent.

April 12, 2004: In meetings with PM Koizumi, Cheney expresses appreciation for SDF reconstruction efforts and pledges U.S. assistance in resolving the kidnapping crisis.

April 13, 2004: In a Tokyo speech, Cheney urges Japan to lift the ban against U.S. beef, in place since last Dec. 24.

April 13, 2004: At a special lecture to honor the 150th anniversary of U.S. – Japan relations, VP Cheney characterizes the strategic relationship as far more than bilateral but a “global partnership” and one of the “great achievements in modern history.”

April 14, 2004: Two more Japanese nationals working in Iraq, a freelance journalist and a peace worker, are taken hostage.

April 15, 2004: Three Japanese nationals in Iraq are released after a week held hostage.

April 16, 2004: Secretary of State Colin Powell commends released Japanese hostages for their willingness to take risks for the “greater good” and PM Koizumi for not bowing to terrorist demands.

April 17, 2004: Second group of Japanese hostages released unharmed in Baghdad.

April 19, 2004: *Ashahi* poll reveals 64 percent of respondents support the Japanese government's handling of the hostage crisis and 73 percent support rejection of demands to withdraw SDF troops from Iraq.

April 21, 2004: Japan rejects U.S. claim that testing all cattle is unnecessary to protect against BSE and says the import ban against U.S. beef will remain in place until blanket testing is instituted.

April 22, 2004: Japan decides to extend Maritime SDF non-combat naval support to operations in Afghanistan another six months until November.

April 24, 2004: Japan and the U.S. officials meet for first formal negotiations on Japanese ban of U.S. beef since January. They agree to establish a working group to discuss the issue with the aim of lifting the ban by summer.

April 30, 2004: Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan) leader Naoto Kan pledges greater SDF participation in Iraq as part of a UN-led multinational force during meeting with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in New York.

May 3, 2004: Japanese troops resume full operations in Iraq after they were suspended by mortar attacks last month.

May 11-12, 2004: U.S. and Japan hold first round of technical meetings on resolving the dispute over BSE testing of U.S. beef and Japan's import ban.

May 11, 2004: *Asahi Shimbun* opinion poll indicates 73 percent of respondents favor maintaining the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty.

May 15, 2004: *Kyodo* reports Japanese Court orders Japanese government to pay the U.S. share of the noise pollution compensation to Okinawa Prefecture after the U.S. government failed to pay its half.

May 17, 2004: Two MSDF ships leave Japan for the Arabian Sea to support coalition operations in Afghanistan, primarily for refueling of warships in the region.

May 20, 2004: A package of seven security-related bills intended to strengthen war-contingency laws enacted last year passed the Lower House of the Japanese Diet. The bills include provisions for closer cooperation between the SDF and U.S. military.

May 22, 2004: State Department issues statement welcoming the results of PM Koizumi's visit to North Korea.

May 25, 2004: Japan raids 10 locations around the country to search for alleged Al-Qaeda operatives connected with suspected French terrorist Lionel Dumont whose phone records indicate he called 13 individuals in Japan after leaving the country.

May 27, 2004: Two Japanese journalists killed in Iraq in an attack on their vehicle.

June 2, 2004: Osamu Akiyama, director general of the Cabinet Legislation Bureau, tells Diet committee SDF can join a planned multinational force in Iraq as long as the purpose and mission do not involve the use of force.

June 3, 2004: Japanese police arrest eighth foreigner suspected of having links to French al-Qaeda operative Lionel Dumont in a nationwide crackdown.

June 5, 2004: At Asia security conference in Singapore, Defense Minister Ishiba Shigeru assures neighbors that Japan's U.S.-developed ballistic missile defense system will not lead to an Asian arms race.

June 8, 2004: In a bilateral meeting with President Bush before the G8 Summit in Sea Island, Georgia, PM Koizumi pledges full support for U.S. in Iraq and to keep SDF troops in the country after the transfer to Iraqi power at the end of June.

June 13, 2004: *Japan Times* reports during last month's talks between PM Koizumi and North Korean President Kim Jong-il, Kim told Koizumi he desperately wants to hold talks with the U.S. Koizumi passed the message on to Bush at the G8 Summit.

June 14, 2004: Seven bills designed to enhance last year's war contingency legislation pass Upper House of the Japanese Diet to become law.

June 15, 2004: Japan pledges to strengthen measures to stop human trafficking after a U.S. State Department report slams Japan's efforts to combat the problem.

June 15, 2004: Under Secretary of State John Bolton says he hopes Japan will reconsider a deal to develop the Iran's Azadegan oil fields should the IAEA bring a case to the UN regarding Iran's alleged nuclear arms ambitions.

June 23, 2004: Speaking at a memorial service to commemorate the 59th anniversary of the end of the Battle of Okinawa, PM Koizumi pledges to reduce the burden of U.S. military bases on the people of Okinawa.

June 28, 2004: During Japan-U.S. Strategic Dialogue Meeting, Vice FM Takeuchi Yukio and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage discuss Iraq, peace in the Middle East, North Korea, U.S.-Japan security arrangements, and UN reform.

June 29, 2004: Defence Agency head Ishiba and visiting U.S. Asst. Secretary of State James Kelly reaffirm commitment to ending North Korea's nuclear ambitions.