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# China, the U.S.-Japan Alliance, and the Security Dilemma in East Asia

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Many scholars and analysts argue that in the twenty-first century international instability is more likely in East Asia than in Western Europe. Whether one looks at variables favored by realists or liberals, East Asia appears more dangerous. The region is characterized by major shifts in the balance of power, skewed distributions of economic and political power within and between countries, political and cultural heterogeneity, growing but still relatively low levels of intraregional economic interdependence, anemic security institutionalization, and widespread territorial disputes that combine natural resource issues with postcolonial nationalism.<sup>1</sup>

If security dilemma theory is applied to East Asia, the chance for spirals of tension in the area seems great, particularly in the absence of a U.S. military presence in the region. The theory states that, in an uncertain and anarchic international system, mistrust between two or more potential adversaries can

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1. Aaron L. Friedberg, "Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multipolar Asia," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 5-33; Richard K. Betts, "Wealth, Power, and Instability," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 34-77; Stephen Van Evera, "Primed for Peace: Europe after the Cold War," *International Security*, Vol. 15, No. 3 (Winter 1990/91), pp. 7-57; and James Goldgeier and Michael McFaul, "A Tale of Two Worlds," *International Organization*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (Spring 1992), pp. 467-492.

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lead each side to take precautionary and defensively motivated measures that are perceived as offensive threats. This can lead to countermeasures in kind, thus ratcheting up regional tensions, reducing security, and creating self-fulfilling prophecies about the danger of one's security environment.<sup>2</sup> If we look at the variables that might fuel security dilemma dynamics, East Asia appears quite dangerous. From a standard realist perspective, not only could dramatic and unpredictable changes in the distribution of capabilities in East Asia increase uncertainty and mistrust, but the importance of sea-lanes and secure energy supplies to almost all regional actors could encourage a destabilizing competition to develop power-projection capabilities on the seas and in the skies. Because they are perceived as offensive threats, power-projection forces are more likely to spark spirals of tension than weapons that can defend only a nation's homeland.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps even more important in East Asia than these more commonly considered variables are psychological factors (such as the historically based mistrust and animosity among regional actors) and political geography issues relating to the Taiwan question, which make even defensive weapons in the region appear threatening to Chinese security.<sup>4</sup>

One way to ameliorate security dilemmas and prevent spirals of tension is to have an outside arbiter play a policing role, lessening the perceived need for regional actors to begin destabilizing security competitions. For this reason, most scholars, regardless of theoretical persuasion, seem to agree with U.S. officials and local leaders that a major factor in containing potential tensions in East Asia is the continuing presence of the U.S. military, particularly in Japan.<sup>5</sup> The historically based mistrust among the actors in Northeast Asia is

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2. For the original security dilemma and spiral models, see Robert Jervis, "Cooperation under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (January 1978), pp. 167-174; and Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), chap. 3.

3. For writings on the destabilizing influence of offensive weapons and doctrines, see Stephen Van Evera, "The Cult of the Offensive and the Origins of the First World War," *International Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Summer 1984), pp. 58-107; Van Evera, "Offense, Defense, and the Causes of War," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 5-43; and Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Offense-Defense Theory and Its Critics," *Security Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer 1995), pp. 660-691.

4. My understanding of the Chinese perspectives reflects more than seventy interviews, often with multiple interlocutors, that I conducted during four month-long trips to Beijing in 1993, 1994, 1995, and 1996, and two shorter trips to Beijing and Shanghai in 1998. My interlocutors were a mix of military and civilian analysts in government think tanks as well as academics at leading Chinese institutions. The government think-tank analysts are not decisionmakers, but they advise their superiors in the following key governmental organizations: the People's Liberation Army (PLA), the Foreign Ministry, the State Council, and the Chinese intelligence agencies. For obvious reasons, the individual identities of particular interviewees cannot be revealed.

5. In fact, even optimistic projections for the region are predicated on a long-term U.S. military presence. See, for example, Robert S. Ross, "The Geography of the Peace: East Asia in the Twenty-first Century," *International Security*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Spring 1999), pp. 81-118.

so intense that not only is the maintenance of a U.S. presence in Japan critical, but the form the U.S.-Japan alliance takes also has potentially important implications for regional stability. In particular, the sensitivity in China to almost all changes in the Cold War version of the U.S.-Japan alliance poses major challenges for leaders in Washington who want to shore up the alliance for the long haul by encouraging greater Japanese burden sharing, but still want the U.S. presence in Japan to be a force for reassurance in the region. To meet these somewhat contradictory goals, for the most part the United States wisely has encouraged Japan to adopt nonoffensive roles that should be relatively unthreatening to Japan's neighbors.

Certain aspects of U.S. policies, however, including joint research of theater missile defenses (TMD) with Japan, are still potentially problematic. According to security dilemma theory, defensive systems and missions, such as TMD, should not provoke arms races and spirals of tension. In contemporary East Asia, however, this logic is less applicable. Many in the region, particularly in Beijing, fear that new defensive roles for Japan could break important norms of self-restraint, leading to more comprehensive Japanese military buildups later. Moreover, Beijing's focus on preventing Taiwan's permanent separation from China means that even defensive weapons in the hands of Taiwan or its potential supporters are provocative to China. Given the bitter history of Japanese imperialism in China and Taiwan's status as a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945, this certainly holds true for Japan.

In the first section of this article I describe why historical legacies and ethnic hatred exacerbate the security dilemma in Sino-Japanese relations. In the second section I examine Chinese assessments of Japan's actual and potential military power. In the third section I address how changes in the U.S.-Japan relationship in the post-Cold War era affect Chinese security analysts' views of the likely timing and intensity of future Japanese military buildups. I argue that, for a combination of domestic and international reasons, the United States faces tough challenges in maintaining the U.S.-Japan alliance in a form that reassures both Japan and its neighbors. In the fourth section I discuss why certain aspects of recent efforts to bolster the alliance through Japanese commitments to new, nonoffensive burden-sharing roles are potentially more provocative than they may appear on the surface. In the fifth section I detail how China's attitudes about Japan affect the prospects for creating confidence-building measures and security regimes that might ameliorate the security dilemma over the longer term. In the sixth section I discuss the relevance of my analysis for U.S. foreign policy in the region and why, despite the problems outlined above, there are reasons for optimism if trilateral relations between

the United States, China, and Japan are handled carefully in the next two decades.

### *Why China Would Fear a Stronger Japan*

Chinese security analysts, particularly military officers, fear that Japan could again become a great military great power in the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Such a Japan, they believe, would likely be more independent of U.S. control and generally more assertive in international affairs. If one considers threats posed only by military power and not who is wielding that power, one might expect Beijing to welcome the reduction or even elimination of U.S. influence in Japan, even if this meant China would have a more powerful neighbor. After all, the United States is still by far the most powerful military actor in the Western Pacific.<sup>6</sup> However, given China's historically rooted and visceral distrust of Japan, Beijing would fear either a breakdown of the U.S.-Japan alliance or a significant upgrading of Japan's role within that alliance.<sup>7</sup> This sentiment is shared outside China as well, particularly in Korea. Although Chinese analysts presently fear U.S. power much more than Japanese power, in terms of national intentions, Chinese analysts view Japan with much less trust and, in many cases, with a loathing rarely found in their attitudes about the United States.

#### THE HISTORICAL LEGACY

The natural aversion to Japan that sprang from its brutal occupation of China has been preserved in part by Tokyo's refusal to respond satisfactorily to Chinese requests that Tokyo recognize and apologize for its imperial past—for example, by revising history textbooks in the public schools.<sup>8</sup> Chinese sensibilities are also rankled by specific incidents—for example, Prime Minister

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6. One might argue that the geographical proximity of Japan alone would make a new regional power a greater threat to China than the more distant United States. In any case, the decision over what poses a larger threat—a distant superpower or a local great power—cannot be reached by analyzing the international balance of power alone. As in the Chinese case, the assessment of which country poses the greater threat will be based on historical legacies and national perceptions. I am grateful to Stephen Walt for helpful comments on this point.

7. For the classic study, see Allen S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

8. It is possible that the concerns expressed by Chinese analysts discussed below about Japan and the United States are purely cynical tactics designed to prevent the rise of a new regional power by affecting the debate in the United States and Japan. Such a "spin" strategy could also help justify at home and to regional actors more aggressive Chinese weapons development and diplo-

Ryutaro Hashimoto's 1996 visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, which commemorates Japan's war dead, including war criminals like Tojo.<sup>9</sup> Although some fear that Japan's apparent amnesia or lack of contrition about the past means that Japan could return to the "militarism" (*junguozhuyi*) of the 1930s, such simple historical analogies are relatively rare, at least in Chinese elite foreign policy circles.<sup>10</sup> Chinese analysts' concerns regarding Japanese historical legacies, although not entirely devoid of emotion, are usually more subtle. Many argue that, by downplaying atrocities like the Nanjing massacre and underscoring events like the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japanese elites portray Japan falsely as the victim, rather than the victimizer, in World War II. Because of this, some Chinese analysts fear that younger generations of Japanese citizens may not understand Japan's history and will therefore be insensitive to the intense fears of other regional actors regarding Japanese military power. This lack of understanding will make them less resistant to relatively hawkish elites' plans to increase Japanese military power than their older compatriots, who, because they remember World War II, resisted military buildups during the Cold War.<sup>11</sup>

Chinese analysts often compare Japan's failure to accept responsibility for World War II to the more liberal postwar record of Germany, which has franker discussions of the war in its textbooks, has apologized for its wartime aggres-

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macy. Although I believe this probably was the intention of some of my interlocutors, given the large number of interlocutors, the diversity of opinions expressed on various issues over the five years of my discussions, and the controversial positions I sometimes heard expressed on issues such as the Tiananmen massacre or the Chinese missile exercises near Taiwan, I find it difficult to believe that Beijing, or any other government, could manufacture such complex theater over such an extended period of time.

9. Also in that year Japanese rightists built structures on the Diaoyu/Senkaku Islands, which are contested by both Japan and China. Many Chinese analysts saw Tokyo's complicity in their activities, especially after the dispatch of Japanese Coast Guard vessels to prevent protestors from Hong Kong and Taiwan from landing on the Japanese-controlled islands.

10. See Yanan He, "The Effect of Historical Memory on China's Strategic Perception of Japan," paper prepared for the Ninety-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Boston, Massachusetts, September 3-6, 1998. For example, my interlocutors generally did not believe that a militarily stronger Japan would try to occupy sections of the Asian mainland as it did in the 1930s and 1940s.

11. The problem of Japan's lack of contrition was raised in nearly every interview I conducted. See Zhang Dalin, "Qianshi Bu Wang, Houshi Zhi Shi" [Past experience, if not forgotten, is a guide for the future], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [International studies], No. 3 (1995), pp. 6-11. For a critical Japanese perspective on the textbook issue, see Saburo Ienaga, "The Glorification of War in Japanese Education," *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 3 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 113-133. The Chinese view on the generational issue in Japan is similar to the Japanese pacifist view. See Kunihiro Masao, "The Decline and Fall of Pacifism," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January/February 1997), pp. 35-39.

sion, and has even offered financial payments to Israel.<sup>12</sup> Now a new unflattering comparison is sure to arise. During their November 1998 summit in Tokyo, Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi refused to offer an apology to China's President Jiang Zemin that used the same contrite wording as the rather forthright apology Japan offered to South Korea earlier in the year. This divergence in apologies will probably only complicate the history issue between Tokyo and Beijing.<sup>13</sup>

It may seem odd to the outside observer, but the intensity of anti-Japanese sentiment in China has not decreased markedly as World War II becomes a more distant memory. There are several reasons in addition to those cited above. Nationalism has always been a strong element of the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), and opposing Japanese imperialism is at the core of this nationalist story. As a result, Chinese citizens have been fed a steady diet of patriotic, anti-Japanese media programming designed to glorify the CCP's role in World War II. Although far removed from that era, most Chinese young people hold an intense and unapologetically negative view of both Japan and, in many cases, its people.<sup>14</sup> As economic competition has replaced military concerns in the minds of many Chinese, China's basic distrust of Japan has been transferred to the economic realm. Japanese businesspeople are often described as unreliable, selfish, and slimy (*youhua*). As a result, despite five decades of peace and a great deal of economic interaction, chances are small that new Japanese military development will be viewed with anything but the utmost suspicion in China.

Elite analysts are certainly not immune to these intense anti-Japanese feelings in Chinese society. These emotions, however, have not yet affected the practical, day-to-day management of Sino-Japanese relations. On the contrary, since the 1980s the Chinese government has acted to contain anti-Japanese sentiment in the society at large to avoid damaging bilateral relations and to prevent protestors from using anti-Japanese sentiment as a pretext for criticiz-

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12. For published Chinese comparisons of postwar Germany and Japan, see Su Huimin, "Yi Shi Wei Jian, Mian Dao Fuzhe: Deguo dui Erci Dazhan de Fansi" [Take lessons from history and avoid the recurrence of mistakes: Germany's introspection about World War II], *Guoji Wenti Yanjiu* [International studies], No. 3 (1995), pp. 12-16; and Sun Lixiang, "Zhanhou Ri De Liang Guo You Yi Shili zhi Bijiao" [A comparison of the postwar right-wing forces in the two nations of Japan and Germany], *Waiguo Wenti Yanjiu* [Research on foreign problems], No. 2 (1988), pp. 1-10.

13. Nicholas D. Kristof, "Burying the Past: War Guilt Haunts Japan," *New York Times*, November 30, 1998, pp. A1, A10.

14. In 1993 government scholars pointed out that, in many ways, China's youth is more actively anti-Japanese than the government. They pointed to student protests against Japanese "economic imperialism" in 1986 as an example.

ing the Chinese government, as occurred several times in Chinese history.<sup>15</sup> But Chinese analysts' statements about the dangers that increased Japanese military power would pose in the future suggest that anti-Japanese sentiment does color their long-term threat assessments, even if it does not always alter their immediate policy prescriptions. Because they can influence procurement and strategy, such longer-term assessments may be more important in fueling the security dilemma than particular diplomatic policies in the present.

### *Chinese Assessments of Japanese Military Power and Potential*

In assessing Japan's current military strength, Chinese analysts emphasize the advanced equipment that Japan has acquired, particularly since the late 1970s, when it began developing a navy and air force designed to help the United States contain the Soviet Union's growing Pacific Fleet. Chinese military writings highlight Japanese antisubmarine capabilities (such as the P-3C aircraft), advanced fighters (such as the F-15), the E-2 advanced warning aircraft, Patriot air defense batteries, and Aegis technology on surface ships.<sup>16</sup> Chinese analysts correctly point out that, excluding U.S. deployments in the region, these weapons systems constitute the most technologically advanced arsenal of any East Asian power. They also cite the Japanese defense budget, which, although small as a percentage of gross national product (GNP), is second only to U.S. military spending in absolute size.<sup>17</sup>

Despite their highlighting of Japan's current defense budget and high levels of military sophistication, Chinese analysts understand that Japan can easily do much more militarily than it does. While they generally do not believe that Japan has the requisite combination of material capabilities, political will, and ideological mission to become a Soviet-style superpower, they do believe that Japan could easily become a great military power (such as France or Great Britain) in the next twenty-five years. For example, although these analysts often argue that it is in Japan's economic interest to continue to rely on U.S. military protection in the near future, they do not think that significantly increased military spending would strongly damage the Japanese

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15. Interviews, 1996. See also Hafumi Arai, "Angry at China? Slam Japan," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 3, 1996, p. 21. It is clear that compared to students and other members of the public, the Chinese government was a voice of calm during the 1996 Diaoyu/Senkaku affair.

16. Pan Sifeng, ed., *Riben Junshi Sixiang Yanjiu* [Research on Japanese military thought] (Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, October 1992), pp. 388–392 (internally circulated).

17. Multiple interviews, 1993–98.



economy.<sup>18</sup> They have also been quite suspicious about the massive stockpiles of high-grade nuclear fuel that was reprocessed in France and shipped back to Japan in the early 1990s. Many in China view Japan's acquisition of this plutonium as part of a strategy for the eventual development of nuclear weapons, something, they point out, Japanese scientists would have little difficulty producing.<sup>19</sup> Chinese security analysts also have stated that Japan can become a great military power even if it forgoes the domestically sensitive nuclear option. Chinese military and civilian experts emphasize that nuclear weapons may not be as useful in the future as high-tech conventional weapons, and that Japan is already a leader in dual-use high technology.<sup>20</sup>

In particular, Chinese experts recognize that Japan has practiced a great deal of self-restraint in eschewing weapons designed to project power far from the home islands. For example, in 1996 one military officer stated that despite the long list of current Japanese capabilities mentioned above, Japan certainly is not yet a normal great power because it lacks the required trappings of such a power (e.g., aircraft carriers, nuclear submarines, nuclear weapons, and long-range missile systems).<sup>21</sup> For this officer and many of his compatriots, the question is simply if and when Japan will decide to adopt these systems. For this reason, Chinese analysts often view Japan's adoption of even new defensive military roles as dangerous because it may begin to erode the constitutional (Article 9) and nonconstitutional norms of self-restraint (e.g., 1,000-nautical-mile limit on power-projection capability, prohibitions on the military use of space, and tight arms export controls) that have prevented Japan from realizing its military potential.

Interestingly, many Chinese analysts do not consider economic hard times in Japan to be particularly reassuring. On the contrary, in terms of intentions, some fear that economic recession and financial crises could improve the fortunes of relatively hawkish Japanese elites by creating a general sense of uncertainty and threat in Japanese society, by fueling Japanese nationalism

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18. In 1992 an internally circulated analysis of Japan's military affairs points out that Japan could easily spend 4 percent of GNP on its military without doing fundamental harm to its long-term economic growth. The examples of much higher levels of spending in healthy economies in the United States and Europe during the Cold War are cited as evidence. *Ibid.*, p. 499. Similar positions were taken by active and retired military officers in 1996 and 1998.

19. This was a particularly sensitive issue in 1993 and 1994, and remains so today.

20. Multiple interviews, 1996. For written materials, see Gao Heng, "Shijie Junshi Xingshi" [The world military scene], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], No. 2 (February 1995), pp. 14–18. For a similar Western view on Japanese "technonationalism," see Richard J. Samuels, *Rich Nation, Strong Army: National Security and the Technological Transformation of Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994).

21. Interview, 1996.

more generally, and by harming relations with the United States (Japan's main provider of security). In terms of capabilities, some Chinese analysts argue that Japan's technological infrastructure, which would be critical to a modern military buildup, does not seem affected by Japan's recent economic woes.<sup>22</sup>

### *Factors That Would Encourage or Prevent Japanese Military Buildups*

Although almost all Chinese analysts would fear the result, they have differed in their assessment of the likelihood that Japan will attempt to realize its military potential in the next few decades. The more pessimistic analysts have argued that this outcome is extremely likely or even inevitable. Their views are consistent with the predictions of balance-of-power theories, but they do not agree with the analysis of some Western experts on Japan who believe that cultural pacifism after World War II, domestic political constraints, and economic interests will steer Japan away from pursuing such a strategy.<sup>23</sup> Even the more pessimistic Chinese analysts are aware of these arguments about Japanese restraint and do not dismiss them out of hand, but some view such obstacles to Japanese military buildups merely as delaying factors in a long-term and inevitable process. Other more conditionally pessimistic and cautiously optimistic analysts place greater faith in the hypothetical possibility of preventing significant Japanese buildups over the longer run, but have expressed concern over the hardness of the delaying factors that could theoretically prevent such buildups. The most optimistic analysts have argued that these factors should remain sturdy and will prevent Japan from injuring its regional relations by pursuing a more assertive military role.<sup>24</sup>

The vast majority of these optimists and pessimists believe that, along with the domestic political and economic stability of Japan, the most important

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22. This was a consistent theme in interviews from 1993 to 1998, and was repeated in 1998 during the financial crisis.

23. For the realist view, see Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 5-51. For the argument that Japan will likely not remilitarize, see Thomas U. Berger, "From Sword to Chrysanthemum: Japan's Culture of Anti-Militarism," *International Security*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Spring 1993), pp. 119-150; and Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1996).

24. The simplest versions of the most optimistic and most pessimistic forecasts about Japan's future were offered most frequently during my first three research trips from 1993 to 1995. After the Taiwan Strait crisis of 1995-96, one hears less often the most optimistic liberal argument that economic interests will trump security interests in the post-Cold War world. Following the 1995 Nye report, one hears the simplest versions of the pessimists' scenarios less often because they were often predicated on fragility in the post-Cold War U.S.-Japan alliance.

factor that might delay or prevent Japanese military buildups is the status of the U.S.-Japan relationship, particularly the security alliance.<sup>25</sup> The common belief in Beijing security circles is that, by reassuring Japan and providing for Japanese security on the cheap, the United States fosters a political climate in which the Japanese public remains opposed to military buildups and the more hawkish elements of the Japanese elite are kept at bay. If, however, the U.S.-Japan security alliance either becomes strained or undergoes a transformation that gives Japan a much more prominent military role, Chinese experts believe that those ever-present hawks might find a more fertile field in which to plant the seeds of militarization.<sup>26</sup>

#### THE CHINA-JAPAN SECURITY DILEMMA AND U.S. POLICY CHALLENGES

For the reasons offered above, most Chinese analysts fear almost any change in the U.S.-Japan alliance. A breakdown of U.S.-Japan ties would worry pessimists and optimists alike. On the other hand, Chinese analysts of all stripes also worry to varying degrees when Japan adopts greater defense burden-sharing roles as part of a bilateral effort to revitalize the alliance. These dual and almost contradictory fears pose major problems for U.S. elites who are concerned that the alliance is dangerously vague and out of date and is therefore unsustainable, but who still want the United States to maintain the reassurance role outlined in documents such as the 1998 East Asia-Pacific Strategy Report.<sup>27</sup> Especially before the recent guidelines review, the U.S.-Japan alliance had often been viewed in the United States as lopsided and unfair because the United States guarantees Japanese security without clear guaran-

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25. Interviews, 1993–98. See also Pan, *Riben Junshi Sixiang Yanjiu*, p. 501. This book states in typical fashion, “Of all the factors that could compel Japan’s military policy to change, U.S.-Japan relations will be the deciding factor.” See also Wang Yanyu, ed., *Riben Junshi Zhanlüe Yanjiu* [Research on Japanese military strategy] (Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, 1992), pp. 308–310 (internally circulated); and Liu Shilong, “Dangqian Rimei Anbao Tizhi de San Ge Tedian” [Three special characteristics of the current U.S.-Japan security structure], *Riben Yanjiu* [Japan studies], No. 4 (1996), pp. 18–30, at p. 27. One article bases its optimism largely on the author’s belief that, despite economic frictions, the U.S.-Japan alliance is stable. See He Fang, “Lengzhan Hou de Riben Duiwai Zhanlüe” [Japan’s post-cold war international strategy], *Waiguo Wenti Yanjiu* [Research on foreign problems], No. 2 (1993), pp. 1–4.

26. For an early discussion of the two very different potential paths to Japanese buildups, see Cai Zuming, ed., *Meiguo Junshi Zhanlüe Yanjiu* [Studies of American military strategy] (Beijing: Academy of Military Sciences Press, 1993), pp. 218–233 (internally circulated).

27. For the logic of reassurance in official U.S. defense policy, see the Pentagon’s *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region 1998*, which states: “In addition to its deterrent function, U.S. military presence in Asia serves to shape the security environment to prevent challenges from developing at all. U.S. force presence mitigates the impact of historical regional tensions and allows the United States to anticipate problems, manage potential threats, and encourage peaceful resolution of disputes.”

tees of even rudimentary assistance from Japan if U.S. forces were to become embroiled in a regional armed conflict.<sup>28</sup>

Before 1995 some U.S. elites argued that the alliance was overrated and that it had prevented the United States from pursuing its economic interests in the U.S.-Japan relationship. Some even argued that the United States should use the security relationship as leverage against Japan in an attempt to open Japanese trade and financial markets to American firms.<sup>29</sup> In this view Japan had been able to ride free for too long on the U.S. economy because of Washington's concern over preserving an apparently unfair alliance relationship.

Since the publication of the critically important February 1995 East Asia Strategy Report (also known as the Nye report), U.S. leaders have been expressing very different concerns about the U.S.-Japan relationship. The Nye report, and the broader Nye initiative of which it is a part, placed new emphasis on maintaining and strengthening the security alliance and on keeping economic disputes from poisoning it. The report reaffirms the centrality of U.S. security alliances in Asia, places a floor on U.S. troop strength in East Asia at 100,000, and calls for increased security cooperation between Japan and the United States, including greater Japanese logistics support for U.S. forces operating in the region and consideration of joint research on TMD.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the Clinton administration's decision to insulate the U.S.-Japan security relationship from economic disputes, there has been a widely held concern that, purely on security grounds, the alliance could be dangerously weakened if Japanese roles are not clarified and expanded and if the two militaries are not better integrated in preparation for joint operations.<sup>31</sup> Japan's checkbook diplomacy in the Gulf War was considered insufficient support for U.S.-led efforts to protect a region that supplies Japan, not the United States,

28. This common view often ignores the clear benefits to the United States of the Cold War version of the alliance. The United States was guaranteed basing in Japan, and 70–80 percent of those basing costs were covered by the Japanese. Without this basing, the United States would have great difficulty maintaining its presence in the region. For a cost analysis, see Michael O'Hanlon, "Restructuring U.S. Forces and Bases in Japan," in Mike M. Mochizuki, ed., *Toward a True Alliance: Restructuring U.S.-Japan Security Relations* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 1997), pp. 149–178.

29. See Eric Heginbotham and Richard J. Samuels, "Mercantile Realism and Japanese Foreign Policy," *International Security*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (Spring 1998), pp. 171–203, at p. 179.

30. The Nye report, named for former Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph S. Nye, Jr., is *United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, Office of International Security Affairs, Department of Defense, February 1995. For an insider's look at concerns about how acrimonious economic disputes were harming the alliance, see David L. Asher, "A U.S.-Japan Alliance for the Next Century," *Orbis*, Vol. 41, No. 3 (Summer 1997), pp. 343–375, at pp. 346–348.

31. For discussion of these issues, see Mike M. Mochizuki, "A New Bargain for a New Alliance" and "American and Japanese Strategic Debates," in Mochizuki, *Toward a True Alliance*, pp. 5–40, 43–82, especially pp. 35, 69–70.

with the bulk of its oil. It also became clear during the 1994 crisis with Pyongyang over North Korea's nuclear weapons development that, under the existing defense guidelines, in a Korean conflict scenario Japan was not even obliged to allow the U.S. military use of its civilian airstrips or ports. In fact, if the crisis had escalated, Japan might not have provided overt, tangible support of any kind. Even U.S. access to its bases in Japan for combat operations not directly tied to the defense of the Japanese home islands was questionable.<sup>32</sup> Aside from the obvious military dangers inherent in such Japanese passivity, Japanese obstructionism and foot-dragging could undermine elite and popular support in the United States for the most important security relationship in East Asia. It appeared to many American elites that the Cold War version of the U.S.-Japan alliance could be one regional crisis away from its demise. Such concerns were a major driver behind the Nye initiative, which was designed to clarify and strengthen Japan's commitment to support U.S.-led military operations. Fearing instability in Japanese elite and popular attitudes on defense issues, Washington also wanted to increase the number of functional links between the two militaries to tie Japan more firmly into the U.S. defense network for the long run.<sup>33</sup>

Chinese security analysts followed these trends in U.S.-Japan relations with great interest and concern. Before 1995 most pessimistic Chinese analysts predicted and feared Japanese military buildups largely because they sensed the potential for trouble, not strengthening, in the post-Cold War U.S.-Japan alliance. Those analysts posited that, given the lack of a common enemy and the natural clash of economic interests between Japan and the United States, political conflict between the two allies was very likely. This conflict could eventually infect and destroy the U.S.-Japan security relationship, which in turn could lead to the withdrawal of U.S. forces and eventually Japanese military buildups. In this period some Chinese analysts also discussed how domestic factors such as U.S. neo-isolationism, rising Japanese nationalism, the inexperience and lack of security focus in the newly elected Clinton adminis-

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32. For the importance of the 1994 Korean crisis in officials' calculations, see Kurt M. Campbell, "The Official U.S. View," in Michael J. Green and Mike M. Mochizuki, *The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance in the Twenty-first Century* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Study Group Papers, 1998), pp. 85-87.

33. For discussion of these issues, see Bruce Stokes and James Shinn, *The Tests of War and the Strains of Peace: The U.S.-Japan Security Relationship* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Study Group Report, January 1998). For the fear among U.S. officials that the Japanese public was moving away from support for the alliance in the 1990s, see Campbell, "The Official U.S. View."

tration, and domestic instability in Japan could combine with worsening U.S.-Japan trade conflicts to speed the alliance's demise.<sup>34</sup>

By mid-1995 it seemed to an increasingly large group of Chinese analysts that U.S.-Japan trade conflict was being contained and that the Clinton administration was paying more attention to international security affairs and to Asia in particular.<sup>35</sup> Key contributors to this growing confidence in U.S. staying power were the Nye report and the failure of the automobile parts dispute between Tokyo and Washington to escalate.

The news for China was not all good, however. By spring 1996 the Nye initiative had led to harsh reactions in China, exposing the subtle challenges facing the United States in managing the U.S.-China-Japan triangle. China's cautious optimism about trends in the U.S.-Japan alliance turned to pessimism, as concerns about future Japanese military assertiveness grew rapidly. But the new reasons for pessimism were quite different than in the period before 1995. The fear was no longer potential discord in the U.S.-Japan relationship, but concern that the United States would encourage Japan to adopt new military roles and develop new military capabilities as part of a revitalized alliance in which Japan carried a greater share of the burden and risk.<sup>36</sup>

On April 17, 1996, President Clinton and Prime Minister Hashimoto issued a joint communiqué that called for revitalization of the alliance to better guarantee the "Asia-Pacific region." In the communiqué and in the guarantees

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34. In particular, three military officers whom I interviewed in 1994 stressed these themes. For fears about Democrats and neo-isolationism, see Cai, *Meiguo Junshi Zhanlüe Yanjiu*, p. 223; and Liu Liping, "Jilie Zhendanzhong de Meiguo Duiwai Zhengce Sichao" [The storm over contending positions on U.S. foreign policy], *Xiandai Guoji Guanxi* [Contemporary international relations], No. 6 (1992), pp. 15-18. For a similar argument made before Bill Clinton was elected president of the United States, see Li Shusheng, "Sulian de Jieti yu MeiRi zai Yatai Diqu de Zhengduo" [The disintegration of the Soviet Union and U.S.-Japan rivalry in the Asia Pacific], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], No. 7 (July 1992), pp. 56-58. For an article about the emphasis on trade and the lack of strategic focus in Washington, see Lu Zhongwei, "Yazhou Anquanzhong de ZhongRi Guanxi" [Sino-Japanese relations in the Asian security environment], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], No. 3 (March 1993), pp. 23-35, 42.

35. Multiple interviews, 1995. For a published work arguing along these lines, see Yang Yunzhong, "Meiguo Zhengfu Jinyibu Tiaozheng dui Ri Zhengce" [Further adjustments in America's Japan policy], *Shijie Jingji yu Zhengzhi* [World economy and politics], No. 7 (July 1995), pp. 61-65.

36. For elaborations of these arguments, see Thomas J. Christensen, "Chinese Realpolitik," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 5 (September/October 1996), pp. 37-52; and an excellent article by Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, "Chinese Apprehensions about Revitalization of the U.S.-Japan Alliance," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (April 1997), pp. 383-402. From various conversations it is still my strong impression that Beijing would be more fearful of a U.S. pullout if it were to occur. But this is no longer viewed as an imaginable outcome for the foreseeable future in Chinese foreign policy circles, so most analysts seem unwilling to discuss at length their views on such a hypothetical scenario.

reached in the days preceding it, Japan guaranteed base access for U.S. forces and committed itself to increased logistics and rear-area support roles. The two sides also agreed to cooperate in the "ongoing study" of ballistic missile defense.

The joint communiqué was issued one month after the most intense phase of the 1995–96 Taiwan Strait crisis, during which the United States deployed two aircraft carrier battle groups, including one based in Japan, off of Taiwan. The crisis and the joint communiqué triggered fears among Chinese experts about U.S. use of Japanese bases in future Taiwan scenarios. It also suggested that Japan might soon begin scrapping various norms of self-restraint and begin expanding its military operations into the Taiwan area and the South China Sea. In addition to focusing on new logistics roles for Japan and the potential for future joint development of missile defenses, Chinese observers believed that the joint communiqué expanded the geographic scope of the alliance from the area immediately around Japan to a vaguely defined, but clearly much larger, "Asia Pacific."<sup>37</sup> As one leading Chinese expert on Japan recently argued, the U.S. presence in Japan can be seen either as a "bottle cap," keeping the Japanese military genie in the bottle, or as an "egg shell," fostering the growth of Japanese military power under U.S. protection until it one day hatches onto the regional scene. Since 1996, this analyst argues, fears about the "egg shell" function of the U.S.-Japan alliance have increased markedly, while faith in the "bottle cap" function has declined.<sup>38</sup>

In September 1997 Chinese analysts' concerns turned to the announcement of revised defense guidelines for the U.S.-Japan alliance. These guidelines put in writing many of the changes suggested in the joint communiqué. New and clarified Japanese roles in the alliance included those logistics and rear-area support roles mentioned in the joint communiqué and added "operational cooperation" missions for Japan's Self-Defense Forces in time of regional conflict, including intelligence gathering, surveillance, and minesweeping missions. Although Washington and Tokyo quickly abandoned the provocative term "Asia Pacific" following the issuance of the joint communiqué, the 1997

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37. Interviews, 1996. See also Liu, "Dangqian Rimei Anbao Tizhi de San Ge Tedian," pp. 20–22; and Yang Bojiang, "Why [a] U.S.-Japan Joint Declaration on [the] Security Alliance," *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 6, No. 5 (May 1996), pp. 1–12.

38. Liu Jianguo, "New Trends in Sino-U.S.-Japan Relations," *Contemporary International Relations*, Vol. 8, No. 7 (July 1998), pp. 1–13.

guidelines are not entirely reassuring on this score either. They state that the scope of the alliance covers "situations in the areas surrounding Japan," but that the definition of those areas would be determined by "situational" rather than "geographic" imperatives. This only confirmed conspiracy theories among Beijing elites regarding the potential inclusion of Taiwan and the South China Sea in the alliance's scope.<sup>39</sup> Following the issuance of the revised guidelines, Jiang Zemin announced that China is on "high alert" about changes in the alliance.<sup>40</sup>

Chinese analysts view aspects of both the joint communiqué and the revised guidelines as troubling in the near term, mainly because they can facilitate U.S. intervention in a Taiwan contingency. They believe that the United States is currently largely in control of the U.S.-Japan alliance's military policy. But they view Japan as having both stronger emotional and practical reasons than the United States for opposing Taiwan's reintegration with the mainland and a greater stake than the United States in issues such as sea-lane protection far from the Japanese home islands.<sup>41</sup> More pessimistic Chinese analysts often state that Japan's material interests have not changed much from the 1930s to the present. They believe that, because Japan is still heavily dependent on foreign trade and investment, it could again choose to develop power-projection capabilities designed to protect its economic interests in the distant abroad. Vigilant about this possibility, Chinese analysts have reacted negatively to even mild new Japanese initiatives away from the home islands (such as

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39. See "The Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation," in Green and Mochizuki, *The U.S.-Japan Security Alliance in the Twenty-first Century*, pp. 55–72, at p. 65.

40. Interviews, 1996 and 1998. The Jiang quotation comes from a Reuters news service report on October 18, 1997.

41. Interviews, 1996 and 1998. Taiwan is a former Japanese colony (1895–1945). It is near international sea-lanes that are important to Japan. In addition, Chinese analysts argue that, for straightforward reasons relating to relative national power, Japan has a strategic interest in preventing Taiwan's high-technology and capital-rich economy from linking politically with the mainland. Moreover, some Chinese analysts view Taiwan as having geostrategic significance for Japan as a potential ally because of its location near the Chinese mainland. Another issue fueling mistrust of Japan is the feeling that Taiwan's president, Lee Teng-hui, who attended college in Japan and who speaks Japanese fluently, may be more pro-Japan than pro-China. For a particularly alarmist argument along these lines, see Li Yaqiang, "What Is Japan Doing Southward?" *Beijing Jianchuan Zhishi* [Naval and merchant ships], No. 6 (June 6, 1997), pp. 7–8, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report China, September 4, 1997. For a more sober analysis, see Yang Xuejun and Li Hanmei, "Yingxiang Weilai Riben Dui Wai Zhanlüe he Xingwei de Zhongyao Yinsu" [Important factors influencing future Japanese foreign strategy and conduct], *Zhanlüe yu Guanli* [Strategy and management], No. 1 (1998), pp. 17–22, at p. 21.