



## **The United States and Japan in East Asia: Challenges and Prospects for the Alliance**

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**ABSTRACT** The U.S.–Japan alliance today faces a rapidly changing security environment in Northeast Asia and a set of challenges that must be managed well to maintain regional stability. North Korea’s unrestrained missile and nuclear weapons programs mean that the alliance will eventually face a hostile regime that can strike its neighbors with nuclear weapons. A rising China, particularly with its increasingly capable military and uncertain regional aspirations, poses a special challenge. The U.S.–Japan alliance should encourage positive behavior by China and engage constructively and cooperatively with Beijing. If Japan’s troubled relationship with South Korea fails to improve, it could benefit both North Korea and China. The United States will stand firmly by its Japanese ally, and there is every reason to believe that Washington and Tokyo can take their relationship to the next level. But Tokyo must stop undermining its past declarations on history and comfort women. Missteps in this sensitive area are sending the wrong message to Japan’s neighbors, exacerbating regional tensions, and harming Japan’s standing in the region and with the United States.

**KEYWORDS** Abe; Alliance; China; Diaoyu; Japan; North Korea; nuclear; Senkaku; South Korea; Takeshima; Tokdo

### **INTRODUCTION**

As North Korea threatened nuclear attacks on the United States and promised to deliver “sledge-hammer blows” against South Korea recently, it also reminded Tokyo that Japan was in the “cross-hairs of [North Korea’s] revolutionary army” and that the “spark of war” might also “touch Japan first.”<sup>1</sup> The North’s statements were a stark reminder of the threat that Pyongyang poses to Japan and the region beyond. They also underscored one of the main challenges confronting the U.S.–Japan alliance today as this important bilateral partnership works to defend Japan and preserve peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

The U.S.–Japan alliance, a critical pillar of regional stability and a central element of U.S. regional and global strategy, is operating today in a dynamically new environment. The regional security situation in Northeast Asia is at a critical inflection point. Power relationships among the region’s actors are changing and the U.S.–Japan alliance is facing a set of challenges, beginning with North Korea, that have major implications for the alliance itself and for regional stability. How the alliance responds to these challenges will shape the evolution of Northeast Asia’s security situation for decades to come.

As Pyongyang’s actions have reminded us, we are witnessing the unrestrained growth of North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missile programs. We are also facing the prospect that, in

the not-too-distant future, we will confront a regime that will be able to strike its neighbors with nuclear-armed missiles—something that North Korea has stated that it intends to do. North Korea's track record of proliferation will also pose new challenges as the regime expands and modernizes its nuclear and missile programs.

At the same time, the U.S.–Japan alliance also faces the uncertainty created by China's rapid military modernization, the People's Republic of China's (PRC's) strong assertion of its positions on territorial issues, its far-from-clear regional aspirations, and now the added dimension of Beijing's cyberwarfare capabilities.

Meanwhile, problems in Japan–Republic of Korea (ROK) relations linger—a situation that detracts from collective ability to contend with key challenges, particularly the threat from North Korea.

Handling these challenges and other concerns will require the closest possible U.S.–Japan coordination in the months and years ahead. Japan's prime minister, Shinzo Abe, and President Obama are committed to strengthening the alliance. During their February 22, 2013 summit in Washington, they forged a solid working relationship and reaffirmed the fundamental strength and direction of the alliance.

Based on the alliance's sound foundations and shared values, there is every reason to believe that the United States and Japan are well-positioned to take their strategic, defense, diplomatic, and economic cooperation to a new level as they chart a course forward through these difficult times.

## **NORTH KOREA**

At the top of the list of concerns for the U.S.–Japan alliance is North Korea, where the nature of the threat posed by the Pyongyang regime is revealing itself in new and ominous ways. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has made clear that its goals are the permanent possession of nuclear weapons, the development of warheads and missiles capable of delivering those weapons to both near and distant targets, and gaining acceptance, if not recognition, of itself as a nuclear-weapons state.

Pyongyang's successful recent nuclear and rocket tests suggest that it is making important progress in achieving the first two of these goals. The February 12, 2013 nuclear test—the DPRK's third—was its most successful to date, providing further confirmation of North Korea's progress toward developing operational nuclear warheads. That test followed the successful launch in December 2012 of a long-range rocket that most observers believe was a test of a missile that eventually could be used to deliver nuclear warheads over intercontinental distances.<sup>ii</sup>

Meanwhile, in the face of North Korea's assertions that it will never give up its nuclear weapons under any circumstances, some are now arguing that we should set aside for now the idea of denuclearizing North Korea and instead use talks with Pyongyang to pursue other goals, including the conclusion of a peace treaty. Others say we should focus our efforts on limiting the size of Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal rather than eliminating it. Both these proposals suggest that

Pyongyang's pursuit of its third goal—making its permanent possession of nuclear weapons a fait accompli—may not just be a fantasy.

Recently, Pyongyang declared its preparedness to use its nuclear weapons, including against the United States. The DPRK does not yet appear to have developed the capacity to carry out attacks against the American mainland. But the U.S. announcement in mid-March of a plan to deploy additional ground-based interceptors in Alaska suggests that Washington is anticipating the day when North Korea will be able to do so.<sup>iii</sup>

Most assessments put Pyongyang 3–5 years away from developing an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) with a deliverable warhead. The technology required to ensure that such a warhead both survives the stresses of reentry and hits its target is complicated. But some experts suggest that North Korea may already be able to mount a miniaturized nuclear warhead on some of its intermediate-range missiles.<sup>iv</sup>

A recent report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) seemed to confirm this assessment. While the controversial report did not represent the consensus of the U.S. intelligence community, it marked the first time that a part of that community had judged that North Korea might already have the capability to deliver nuclear weapons via ballistic missiles.<sup>v</sup>

If true, this would be a major step forward in North Korean weapons of mass destruction (WMD) development. It would also mean that Japanese population centers and U.S. and Japanese Self-Defense Force bases, including bases and staging areas designated to support a military contingency on the Korean Peninsula, could already be within range of nuclear-armed North Korean missiles.

Today, the failure of past diplomacy with Pyongyang makes prospects for the denuclearization of North Korea through dialogue seem remote in the extreme. Pyongyang has gone out of its way to remind the United States and the international community of this, including by recently declaring that its nuclear weapons are the regime's "treasured sword" and that the United States should not expect denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula until there is global disarmament.<sup>vi</sup>

Nevertheless, and despite Pyongyang's declarations, the importance of the goal of denuclearization, the benefits that would result from achieving it, and the dangers if we fail make continuing to pursue denuclearization essential; in addition, we must actively explore any remaining diplomatic alternatives before turning to other options.

Pyongyang's development of missiles and nuclear weapons and the threat that these programs represent raise important questions for the U.S.–Japan alliance. A central question is whether we can do more as allies to convince North Korea to stop its pursuit of WMD. Are there any additional diplomatic steps that can be taken? Can the alliance develop a more effective approach that would greatly raise the price to Pyongyang if it continues its pursuit of nuclear arms and missiles?

Bilateral dialogue between Washington and Tokyo about dealing with North Korea has been a hallmark of past diplomatic and security cooperation between the allies. But, with North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities moving into new and more dangerous territory, a

renewed and intensified bilateral discussion will be needed to manage the threat and address the questions posed above.

Other questions are no less important: Can we convince China to do more to stop North Korea's WMD programs? Do we believe, as some have suggested, that China's leadership is moving away from its traditional position of supporting North Korea?

Beijing has recently conveyed concern over rising tensions on the Korean Peninsula, including comments by President Xi Jinping and even blunter remarks by China's new foreign minister, Wang Yi who declared that the PRC would not allow "troublemaking" on its border.<sup>vii</sup> Both statements seem to have been directed at Pyongyang and were widely interpreted as warnings to the DPRK that it was going too far in raising tensions.

A number of Chinese scholars and experts have voiced their own, more direct, concerns about North Korea. Retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) Major General Luo Yuan, noted for his outspoken criticism of the United States and Japan, turned his focus on Pyongyang earlier this year. Luo said, "China doesn't have to pay for North Korea's rashness at the cost of its own hard-earned period of strategic opportunities, and China must let North Korea clearly know this."<sup>viii</sup>

Despite this and other expressions of irritation with Pyongyang, it not clear that the PRC is prepared to take dramatically new steps to raise pressure on the regime or to end the assistance that provides Pyongyang with a vital lifeline. Nor is there any indication that China's leadership is prepared to change its long-held strategic view that a nettlesome, nuclear-armed North Korea may be problematic but is still better than the alternatives of allowing the DPRK to collapse, risking chaos on China's border, or allowing the Korean Peninsula to be reunified under the aegis of Seoul.

It is useful to recall that within hours of the passage, with China's support, of UN Security Council Resolution 2094, which imposed additional sanctions on North Korea after its February 2013 nuclear test, then-PRC Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi made a point of distinguishing between China's vote for sanctions and its broader relationship with the DPRK. Yang also reiterated that China's position is that sanctions are not the solution to the problem.

During his April 2013 visit to Beijing, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry reportedly secured China's commitment to work with the United States in stopping North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and to "change the equation" that has seen Pyongyang renege on its past denuclearization commitments.<sup>ix</sup>

Subsequently, the Bank of China announced that it would sever relations with North Korea's Foreign Trade Bank. The latter institution had been sanctioned by the U.S. Treasury Department in March 2013; the Bank of China's move was regarded as a helpful step by many observers.<sup>x</sup>

It remains to be seen whether Beijing is prepared to take other steps to convince North Korea to pursue a different path. Meanwhile, the United States and Japan should consult closely on ways to increase the likelihood that China will be more helpful on North Korea than in the past.

U.S. and Japanese alliance managers will also need to address other pressing questions, including what can be done to improve alliance military preparedness and missile defense cooperation to deal with the emerging threat from North Korea. Are there new U.S. military deployments that would enhance our ability to defend Japan? Is the current level of bilateral training and exercises adequate to the task of preparing for various future peninsular contingencies? Will North Korea's threats make it easier for Tokyo to obtain the local government and popular support needed to implement much-needed changes to U.S. military basing arrangements in Okinawa?

What will be particularly important for alliance managers to deal with is the fact that North Korea's development of a nuclear-strike capability is likely to fundamentally change regional security perceptions. It is already raising questions about the credibility of U.S. commitment to defend our Japanese and Korean allies with the full range of American capabilities, including the U.S. nuclear arsenal.

When the DPRK eventually demonstrates that it has successfully married a deliverable nuclear warhead with an ICBM, the United States will need to take steps to ensure that our Japanese ally's confidence in the U.S. deterrent, including our nuclear deterrent, remains high. But, even before that, if the North is able to show this capability with its intermediate-range systems, the United States will need to take high-profile and credible steps to shore up our Japanese ally's faith in our commitments.

The U.S. response to the upsurge of threatening rhetoric from Pyongyang included a number of measures designed to convey simultaneous messages of deterrence to Pyongyang and reassurance to our Japanese and South Korean allies. The United States highlighted the presence of B-52 and B-2 bombers in the annual U.S.-ROK exercise that ended in late April, noting the nuclear role that these assets could play in a military contingency involving North Korea.

The message was not lost on Pyongyang. Should North Korea choose to elevate tensions again, Washington and Tokyo should consult quickly to determine what additional steps might be needed to underscore U.S. readiness and preparedness to fulfill its commitment to the defense of Japan.

Meanwhile, important lessons can be drawn from the recent intensification of North Korea's rhetoric, its threat to cease abiding by the Korean War Armistice Agreement, and its specific threats against the ROK, the United States, and Japan.

The United States and Japan, as well as South Korea, reacted firmly and quickly to the threats but avoided overreacting. Clear messages of deterrence were sent, as were equally clear signals of alliance solidarity and preparedness. And, Washington reminded Pyongyang that the door to dialogue remained open if North Korea was prepared to return to the negotiating table on the basis of its past denuclearization commitments.

Subsequently, signs emerged that the crisis on the Korean Peninsula is shifting to a new phase. As it had in the past, Pyongyang, having greatly escalated tensions, may now seek talks and try to obtain benefits at the negotiating table in return for ceasing its provocations. This familiar tactic requires the United States and Japan to coordinate carefully their response. This is

why the evidently uncoordinated mid-May visit to Pyongyang by Abe cabinet advisor Isao Iijima represents a setback for U.S.–Japan cooperation on North Korea.

This is not a time to drop one’s guard. The possibility of a missile or nuclear test remains and seems highly likely in light of Pyongyang’s commitment to strengthening what it calls its “deterrent.” And, the intensity of the North’s recent rhetoric, the reality of its growing nuclear and missile capabilities, and the possibility that Pyongyang might miscalculate require Washington and Tokyo to be particularly vigilant and to plan for a range of contingencies, including to conventional military provocations.

## **TRILATERAL COOPERATION WITH THE ROK**

The troubled relationship between Japan and America’s other Northeast Asian ally, the Republic of Korea, is an additional challenge for the U.S.–Japan alliance. Improving cooperation between Tokyo and Seoul should be a goal for both Japan and the U.S.–Japan alliance.

The recent threats by North Korea underscored the logic and necessity of greater trilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea. The threats also reminded us that the ROK is not the only potential target of a North Korean provocation and that Japan remains an indispensable platform for supporting any U.S. effort to defend South Korea from North Korean attack.

In an ideal world, North Korea’s provocative threats would have served as a strong, unifying factor among the three countries and generated new levels of defense cooperation. However, we do not live in an ideal world and the difficult relationship between Tokyo and Seoul remains an area of concern.

Japan and the ROK have yet to recover from the collapse of talks last year aimed at concluding bilateral agreements on military information sharing and logistical cooperation. That failure was a major setback for strengthening ties between the two countries. It also harmed the fabric of trilateral cooperation and complicated U.S. strategy for defending Korea.<sup>xi</sup>

North Korea is the ultimate beneficiary of a problematic Japan–ROK relationship and from any failure by Tokyo, Seoul, and Washington to forge a stronger trilateral cooperative mechanism in support of a stable Korean Peninsula and a secure South Korea. Indeed, the continuing difficulty Japan and the Republic of Korea are having in bridging their differences and expanding bilateral military cooperation could be exploited by Pyongyang if it decided to try to drive a wedge between America’s two Northeast Asian allies.

China also draws unhelpful lessons from the inability of the United States and its two Northeast Asian allies to build a closer trilateral partnership on issues as fundamental as the stability of the Korean Peninsula and dealing with North Korean provocations.

The roots of antipathy and resentment between South Korea and Japan are deep and reflect a complex, troubled history and the legacy of colonization; they extend well beyond the Dokdo/Takeshima Island dispute. Some observers had hoped that the election of a new Korean president and a new Japanese prime minister would provide an opportunity for a reset in bilateral

ties.<sup>xii</sup> Despite some initial outreach by both sides, however, signs of a positive turn in bilateral relations have been conspicuous by their absence.

Even as both Seoul and Tokyo were digesting the implications of the North Korean threats to attack both of them, visits by members of Japan's cabinet and an unusually large number of members of the Diet to Yasukuni Shrine rekindled the dispute between Seoul and Tokyo. Most Koreans view the shrine as a symbol of past Japanese militarism, and the ROK government reacted to the visits by canceling a scheduled trip by the ROK foreign minister to Tokyo.<sup>xiii</sup>

Despite this setback, it is hoped that Prime Minister Abe of Japan and President Park of South Korea will be able to rehabilitate bilateral ties, especially since both countries have a strong interest in managing their differences. It is also to be hoped that the broad range of values shared by South Korea and Japan will serve as a foundation to build better relations. However, Tokyo should not underestimate the damage that has been done to ties with South Korea by the Yasukuni visit—particularly the degree to which the visit has made it difficult for South Korea's new president to move proactively to improve relations with Japan.

In this situation, the onus is on Japan and Korea to see what can be done to resolve their differences. While the United States has only a limited role to play, it does have a major stake in seeing improved ties between its two regional allies. Washington should take advantage of its excellent relations with both sides, urge them to pursue reconciliation, and remind them that our ability to carry out our commitments is greatly enhanced when they are cooperating with each other. The importance of this issue makes it a fitting item for inclusion on the agenda for U.S.–Japan strategic dialogue.

## **CHINA–JAPAN RELATIONS AND THE U.S.–JAPAN ALLIANCE**

China's rapid rise has occasioned a more self-confident approach to the region at large and in relations with its neighbors, several of which have territorial disputes with Beijing. The PRC's economic growth is fueling its ability to acquire increasingly sophisticated military capabilities that could pose a special challenge to these neighbors in the event of future conflict or confrontation. More than any other factor, China's ascension to major power status has introduced a new and uncertain dynamic into the security equation in Northeast Asia and, accordingly, presents a unique challenge for the U.S.–Japan alliance.

China is acting in new, assertive ways in part because it can, thanks to its new military capabilities. But, some in Beijing may also believe that now is the time to redress the accumulated grievances of its “century of humiliation” at the hands of outside powers, including Japan.<sup>xiv</sup> Of importance, China's “patriotic education” campaign and decades of emphasis on China as a victim of the West (and particularly of Japan) have shaped the way many Chinese view their interactions with regional neighbors—and not necessarily in helpful ways.<sup>xv</sup>

At the same time, the growth of Japanese nationalism, the call by some in Japan to revise past official apologies on history-related issues, the return of Japan's conservative Liberal Democratic Party to power, and ongoing Japanese defense enhancements are being portrayed as

threatening by a China that needs little persuasion to view almost anything Japan does through the lens of suspicion and historical resentment.

As we try to understand China's approach on the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands dispute, it is important to keep this background in mind, since it could suggest that the PRC's position is driven not only by China's desire to promote its sovereignty claims, but possibly also by a wish to teach Japan a "lesson" for its past sins. That last point is a potentially complicating factor in the current crisis—it could mean that a Japanese acknowledgment that there is a dispute might not be enough to satisfy China. We also cannot discount the possibility that China's agenda may be even broader than the Senkaku dispute. In this regard, a leading Chinese think tank recently questioned Japan's sovereignty over Okinawa in a move that drew a quick and sharp response from Tokyo.<sup>xvi</sup>

Despite not taking a position on the question of Japan's sovereignty over the Senkaku Islands, the United States has been forthright in its support of its Japanese ally, including reminding both sides that the U.S. treaty commitment to defend Japan would apply if China were to take military action against the Senkakus.

The Obama administration has actually gone beyond past U.S. policy statements in conveying support for Japan. Early this year, for example, then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton warned against "unilateral" actions that might affect Japan's administrative control and laid down a strong cautionary marker that Beijing could not fail to miss.<sup>xvii</sup> During his April 2013 visit to Tokyo, Secretary Kerry repeated Clinton's warning—a useful reiteration of the U.S. caution against any Chinese attempt to coerce or threaten Japan.<sup>xviii</sup>

Warnings against attempts at coercion have been more than warranted. The incident in which a Chinese warship locked on to ("painted") a Japanese vessel with its fire control radar was a reminder that the presence of military and quasi-military forces in such close proximity to each other, together with the emotional content of dispute, create the potential for an accidental confrontation that would be in no one's interest.<sup>xix</sup>

Since that incident, tensions have continued, although each side has made an occasional effort to de-escalate the rhetoric. But, the almost daily "patrols" of adjacent waters by Chinese warships suggest that Beijing is trying to boost its claim to the Senkaku Islands by maintaining a constant naval presence in their vicinity. Such activity increases the risk of accidental confrontation, especially as Japan can be expected to match such patrols with its own. The increase in Chinese transits appears to have raised concerns in Tokyo, prompting Prime Minister Abe to tell the Diet, "it would be natural for us to expel by force the Chinese if they were to make a landing."<sup>xx</sup>

A key challenge going forward for Tokyo and Beijing will be to try to create the conditions for a reduction in tensions around the islands. Also important will be a China-Japan dialogue aimed at preventing any further deterioration in relations and an agreed-on mechanism to avoid accidental clashes between ships and aircraft.

Even under ideal circumstances this would be difficult, but it has probably been made more complicated by the April 23, 2013 visits to Yasukuni by Japanese lawmakers, including several members of Abe's cabinet. Predictably, China has reacted badly to the visits, and Beijing



appears to have taken particular umbrage that Deputy Prime Minister Aso was among the officials at the shrine.<sup>xxi</sup>

Japan urgently needs to determine whether any way exists to recreate the status quo ante. We should not forget that not long ago each side was able to claim the islands; Japan exercised effective control over them; and neither side took any physical steps against the other to enforce sovereignty.

That arrangement unraveled quickly last year after Japan purchased the islands from a private owner. Beijing refused to accept Japan's argument that nationalization of the islands was necessary to avoid a worse outcome.

China chose to interpret this action as a unilateral change to the status quo and responded by aggressively working to establish "facts in the water and in the air" via naval and air patrols to support its sovereignty claim.<sup>xxii</sup> China has now characterized the island issue as being a "core interest"—a term normally reserved for the most sensitive areas of territorial concern, such as Taiwan and Tibet.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Can the two sides reestablish the previous equilibrium during which China and Japan held to their respective "principled positions"? Before the latest dispute erupted in 2012, Japan was able to assert and exercise its sovereignty over the islands, while Beijing could take comfort in the idea that the ultimate resolution of the status of the islands would be left to future generations. Today, it may be naïve to suggest a return to such a formula, but it would appear that anything short of such an approach is likely to be a prescription for a continuing and even more intense dispute.

Ironically, skillful diplomacy between Japan and Taiwan, which also claims the islands, only seems to have complicated matters between Japan and the PRC.

After years of talks, Tokyo and Taipei concluded an agreement in April to allow Taiwanese fisherman to operate in waters near the Senkakus (but not within the 12-nautical-mile limit). In concluding the agreement, neither side yielded on its claim to sovereignty, while both sides understood that allowing joint access to the fishing resources near the Senkakus provided a win-win arrangement and reduced tensions.

Despite the breakthrough and the hope that the Japan-Taiwan agreement might even serve as a basis for similar arrangement between Tokyo and Beijing, the PRC reaction has been quite negative. Part of Beijing's objection related to the fact that Japan had concluded a significant diplomatic negotiation with Taiwan, a step that China views as a violation of Japan's "one-China" policy. At the same time, the fact that the Tokyo-Taipei agreement essentially set aside the sovereignty question did not sit well with Beijing, which has made its claim to the islands a national priority.<sup>xxiv</sup>

The Senkaku/Diaoyu issue seems likely to remain a complicated and contentious factor in Japan-China relations; for that reason, it should continue to be a key topic of U.S.-Japan security discussions. While the United States has made clear its preparedness to defend Japan and those areas under Tokyo's administrative control, what is also true is that Washington is walking a fine line between supporting its Japanese ally and making clear that it has no desire to see the dispute

escalate. Echoes of both these themes could be heard during Prime Minister Abe's February visit to Washington.<sup>xxv</sup>

## U.S. "REBALANCING"

As the United States has sought to reassert its traditional, high-profile role as a major actor in the Asia-Pacific region, clearly the PRC continues to perceive this ongoing U.S. "rebalancing" in almost exclusively military terms. Repeated U.S. explanations notwithstanding, Beijing argues that "rebalancing" is an attempt to stifle and contain China and prevent it from playing its rightful role in the region.

At a private meeting earlier this year in New York City, a leading expert on China told a group of prominent Americans that China's leadership sees its regional security policy through the lens of the rebalancing and that China would be disinclined to cooperate with the United States *even on areas of mutual interest*, such as Korea, because of the rebalancing. That observation underscores the extent to which China has been unwilling to accept the U.S. explanation and rationale for its ongoing shift of resources and attention to the region.

We have numerous accounts of the origins of the Obama administration's policy of renewing, refurbishing, and reemphasizing the U.S.'s role as a major regional power. The one that rings particularly true is that the policy grew out of discussions that took place during President Obama's campaign for the presidency in 2008 and was so crafted because of concerns that America was being increasingly seen in the Asia-Pacific region as distracted, disengaged, and overly committed elsewhere.<sup>xxvi</sup> At that time, a clear understanding seemed to have been reached among the architects of the policy that any effort to reverse this perception should proceed along several paths, including military, diplomatic, and economic and trade.

It is unfortunate that the last areas became de-emphasized as the concept became policy, and it is probably not surprising that the concept took on an added military dimension as the United States began to deal with what was seen as an increasingly assertive China during 2008–2010.

National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon's March 11, 2013 speech served as a useful reminder that rebalancing, as this concept has now come to be called, is a multidimensional endeavor.<sup>xxvii</sup> Donilon's remarks suggested that clarifying the shape, thrust, and content of the rebalancing, or, as some of us call it, "rebalancing the rebalance," was going to be a key U.S. priority in the Obama administration's second term.

This effort is designed to reassure the Chinese that rebalancing is not just about them and is not a primarily military endeavor. Both of those assertions are true, but it is perhaps also the case that China has an interest in characterizing the rebalancing in negative terms, so it remains to be seen how effective this attempt to clarify the scope and intent of the U.S. rebalancing policy will be.

Meanwhile, and ironically, while it is true that rebalancing is not just about U.S. military deployments, what is also true is that America's inability to fund some of its proposed military

activities connected with rebalancing may lead China to draw the wrong conclusions about the U.S. ability to play a leading role in the region.

Finally, on China, it remains to be seen whether the more assertive Chinese stance we have seen since 2008 in the Yellow Sea, the South China Sea, and the East China Sea will manifest itself in new ways. If it does, participants in U.S.–Japan dialogue on strategic cooperation will find particularly important focusing on how to shape China’s choices, how to encourage positive behavior by China, and how to engage constructively and cooperatively with Beijing, even while dealing with the uncertainties and challenges posed by China’s growing strength by building our own capabilities.

## **BILATERAL DIALOGUE**

As the United States and Japan work to strengthen their cooperation and address the array of challenges they face in the region, a valuable and crucial task for the allies will be to review the structure of their current strategic and defense dialogues to ensure that they are in keeping with the seriousness and complexity of the challenges they face.

In recent months, Japanese officials have expressed concern to a number of American experts that there is a noticeable imbalance between the level at which the United States and Japan conduct their strategic dialogue and the level at which U.S.–China strategic and economic discussions take place. Japanese officials have quietly expressed hope that, to strengthen further U.S.–Japan policy coordination and send a strong message about the importance of the bilateral alliance, a way can be found to lift the level and broaden the scope of bilateral strategic consultations with Washington.

## **FINAL THOUGHTS**

As stated earlier in this article, U.S.–Japan efforts to improve bilateral cooperation appear to be on track and prospects are excellent that new leadership in Tokyo and a U.S. administration that has a clear commitment to the defense of Japan will, indeed, be able to take U.S.–Japan ties to a new level. Each of the challenges reviewed here (and I have provided only a partial list), represents an opportunity for Washington and Tokyo to consult, plan, strategize, and work together to steer the alliance successfully through complex and uncertain times.

But any article on Japan–U.S. relations would be doing a disservice if it failed to note that many Americans, including many officials in Washington, continue to be troubled over the calls by some in Japan for a revision or reversal of past official Japanese statements on issues of history, including the 1993 Kono Statement on comfort women and the 1995 Murayama Statement of remorse and apology issued on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II. Since these statements were issued, they have had a highly positive effect and have done much to enhance Japan’s image in the region and the world.

It goes without saying that any attempt to withdraw, amend, or otherwise alter the sentiments conveyed in these important statements would exacerbate tensions with China, Korea, and many of Japan’s other neighbors. Doing so would also damage Japan’s regional standing and

erode the significant soft power that has made Japan a model for the region and the world. And, it would undercut U.S. popular and congressional support for Japan, alienate key constituencies in the United States, and hurt bilateral ties.

It is hard to see how reversing or amending these long-standing positions on historical legacy issues would help Japan. What is very easy to imagine is how doing so would harm Japan's image, which has already been tarnished, including in the United States, by some of the Abe government's statements on the comfort women and history issues.

Many friends of Japan have made it a point to advise the Abe government to tread carefully in these areas. That remains the wisest course of action for Tokyo. In this connection, the recent comments by Japan's chief cabinet secretary and foreign minister that Japan will not revise the Kono and Murayama statements are encouraging and should be welcomed by the United States and by Japan's neighbors.<sup>xxviii</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> For examples of recent North Korean threats, see "North Korea Issues New Threats over Protests in South," Reuters/CNBC, April 15, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/id/100643248>; see also Charlotte Meredith, "North Korea States 'Nuclear War Is Inevitable' as It Declares First Target Will Be Japan," Express, April 12, 2013, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/391376/North-Korea-states-nuclear-war-is-unavoidable-as-it-declares-first-target-will-be-Japan>

<sup>ii</sup> Choe Sang-hun, "North Korean Missile Said to Have Military Purpose," New York Times, December 23, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/world/asia/north-korean-rocket-had-military-purpose-seoul-says.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/24/world/asia/north-korean-rocket-had-military-purpose-seoul-says.html?_r=0).

<sup>iii</sup> David S. Cloud, "Pentagon Plans to Add Missile Interceptors in Alaska," Los Angeles Times, March 16, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/16/nation/la-na-anti-missile-20130316>.

<sup>iv</sup> See David Albright and Andrea Stricker, "ISIS Statement on North Korea Nuclear Test," February 12, 2013, [http://isisonline.org/uploads/isisreports/documents/ISIS\\_Statement\\_on\\_North\\_Korean\\_Nuclear\\_Test\\_12Feb2013.pdf](http://isisonline.org/uploads/isisreports/documents/ISIS_Statement_on_North_Korean_Nuclear_Test_12Feb2013.pdf); see also, David Albright, "North Korean Miniaturization," 38 North, February 13, 2013, <http://38north.org/2013/02/albright021313/>.

<sup>v</sup> Ernesto Londono, "Pentagon: North Korea Has Capacity to Make Warhead for Ballistic Missile," Washington Post, April 11, 2013, [http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-11/world/38458962\\_1\\_doug-lamborn-dia-young-leader](http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2013-04-11/world/38458962_1_doug-lamborn-dia-young-leader).

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