

## Taiwan and the future in the U.S.-Japan alliance

Written by Taiwan News Editorial  
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On January 19, 1960, the U.S. and Japan signed a far reaching "U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security" over the intense opposition of opposition lawmakers and violent demonstrations by leftist labor and student organizations.

Surely, few of the participants in those events believed that the treaty would continue to exist a half century later.

Nevertheless, despite a festering dispute over the relocation of a U.S. Marine Corps Air Station at Futenma in Okinawa Prefecture, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of defense Robert Gates joined Japanese Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya and defense Minister Kitazawa Toshimi in Washington Tuesday to affirm the "indispensable role" of the Cold War era treaty to "ensuring security and prosperity of both the U.S. and Japan and vow to deepen the relationship into "new areas of cooperation."

Perhaps the most well known function of the pact was its role as umbrella under which Japan, which had been devastated after its defeat in World War II, could rebuild its society and record an "economic miracle" without bearing the burden of security during the Cold War period contestation between the "free world" camp led by Washington and the Communist bloc led by the now-defunct Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China.

Moreover, both the U.S. and Japanese governments affirmed the continuation and the adjustment of the arrangement even after the passage of the Cold War in order to ensure that "it continues to be effective in meeting the challenges of the 21st century" and new "transnational threats" ranging from the nuclear threat from the collapsing Communist monarchy in North Korea to global terrorism, natural disaster response and piracy.

While the statement made no mention of Taiwan, it pointedly expressed the desire of the two partners to "advance cooperative relations with China, welcoming it to play a constructive and responsible role in the international arena."

Hedging the PRC risk

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However, the festering flap over the Futenma base indicates that the PRC's growing military clout and Taiwan itself is definitely on the minds of policy makers in both Washington and Tokyo.

President Barack Obama's new Democratic administration has insisted that new centrist Democratic Party of Japan Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio fulfill the commitment made by his conservative Liberal Democratic Party predecessors in 2006 to find another location for the facility in Okinawa.

However, reflecting the desires of the overwhelming majority of Okinawa residents, Hatoyama hopes to both remove the base from the main island of Okinawa and find a mutually satisfactory solution before May.

The most likely new location for the U.S. base is remote Shimojishima Island, just west of Miyakojima Island in Okinawa Prefecture, which already has an international airport.

If this plan is adopted, the U.S. will have a military base within 400 kilometers of Taiwan, a situation that will concretely manifest the appreciation of Taiwan's strategic significance by both Washington and Tokyo.

Indeed, the most decisive factor underlying Tokyo's continuous adjustment of its defense strategy is precisely the rapid expansion of the PRC's military clout and its potential threat to regional peace and security.

In addition to Shimojishima, Japan's defense ministry has recently adopted a positive attitude to the possibility of stationing Japanese Self-defense Forces on Yunaguni-shima, Japan's westernmost island which is just over 100 kilometers east of Hualien and reportedly views such a deployment as an important link in Japan's new strategic deployment in the Asia-Pacific region.

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The importance of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance now lies primarily in safeguarding East Asia from the growing military threat posed by the authoritarian Chinese Communist Party-ruled PRC and move the Marine air forces on Futenma to a site 300 kilometers closer to Taiwan and the China mainland will undoubtedly send a major political signal to Beijing.

Only last week, Beijing protested angrily over Washington's decision to sell advanced Patriot III-C anti-missile missiles to Taiwan and evidently believes that this procurement is part of a scheme to link Japan, South Korea and Taiwan into an East Asian theatre anti-missile defensive network aimed at the PRC, which itself has deployed well over one thousand missiles in its coastal provinces targeted at Taiwan.

Although the joint statement made no explicit mention of Taiwan, its affirmation that the alliance is founded on the basis of common values of "democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law" and the the planned forward strategic redeployment indicates that both Obama and Hatoyama realize that it is necessary to hedge the risk that the PRC will decide not to "play a constructive and responsible role in the international arena" despite their differences with more conservative predecessors.

However, a new source of uncertainty lies within Taiwan itself.

If the restored "former authoritarian" rightist Chinese Nationalist Party (Kuomintang) government of President Ma Ying-jeou draws increasingly closer to the PRC, Taiwan may find itself turning into a gap in the U.S.-Japan security network instead of an unacknowledged partner in this democratic alliance.

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