

## SECURITY ROUNDTABLE

**Richard Samuels and Kenneth Pyle**  
discuss Japan's foreign and defense policies

# Japan in transition

Foreign and security policies have taken center stage in Japan in the wake of last July's Upper House elections. The Democratic Party (DPJ), led by the enigmatic Ichiro Ozawa, promises to use its new-found power to reshape key aspects of the US-Japan security alliance. Immediately at issue are Japanese naval (MSDF) deployments in the Indian Ocean in support of NATO operations in Afghanistan, and air force (ASDF) deployments in Kuwait in support of US forces (and United Nations personnel) in Iraq.

The DPJ stance has intensified a debate that has been underway in Japan since the end of the Cold War. Most agree Japan needs to play a more active role in world affairs. But what should that role be? The outcome of the debate could prove critical to the future security environment in Northeast Asia.

To shed light on the debate, TOE brought together **Richard Samuels** and **Kenneth Pyle**, two of America's most respected analysts of Japan's foreign and security policies, for a roundtable discussion.

Samuels is a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). He currently serves as chairman of the US-Japan Friendship Commission, and is the founder and current director of MIT's Japan Program. His latest book, "Securing Japan: Tokyo's Grand Strategy and the Future of East Asia", was recently published by Cornell University Press.

Pyle is a professor of history and Asian Studies at the University of Washington. He was the founding editor and still chairs the Journal of Japanese Studies. Pyle's 1992 book, "The Japan Question," forecast major changes in Japan's security policy in the wake of the Cold War, and greatly influenced American officials involved in negotiations in the mid-1990s to upgrade the bilateral US-Japan security alliance. Pyle's latest book, "Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose", was recently published by PublicAffairs.

**TOE:** Let's start with the recent Upper House election. You both argue Japan is undergoing a major transition. Where does the election fit in that big picture, and how significant are Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and Democratic Party (DPJ) leader Ichiro Ozawa in this transition process?

**PYLE:** I was struck by the volatility of the voters. We have seen two exceptional elections in the last two years. The LDP and Junichiro Koizumi won a huge Lower House (LH) victory in 2005. Now we have the Upper House election, which was a shattering defeat for the LDP. There is a great deal of fluidity in Japanese politics right now.

The media and the rest of us tend to be caught up in the immediate events. But think

back a year ago. We were talking about Yasukuni and the deadlock between Japan and China. Now, we hear virtually nothing about that. Things are changing very rapidly.

**SAMUELS:** I agree with that. The volatility of the voters is quite striking. Not to be too grandiose, but it is almost a reassurance to all of us about the health of Japanese democracy. It is clear Japanese voters are not going to reward excessive tilts in one direction or another for too long. While defense and security were not in the forefront of issues during the UH election campaign, there was a sense that built up over time that Prime Minister Abe was pulling Japan in a direction that voters were resistant to follow.

Abe and Ozawa really come from the

same side of the security policy discourse in Japan. They are both 'normal nationalists' who argue, for example, that the statute of limitation on Japanese bad behavior during the 1930s and 1940s has long since expired, and that Japan ought to assume a more active and productive role in world affairs.

The term 'normal nationalist' actually refers to at least three very different views of future Japanese security policy. Abe and Ozawa represent two of the three. Abe is more ideological. Ozawa is more globalist. The third is the 'realists' among the 'normal nationalists', such as former defense minister Shigeru Ishiba, who have expressed disagreements with both Abe and Ozawa.

This is all part of a natural sorting out process, a repositioning of Japan in the world through adjustments to foreign and security policies

**PYLE:** Foreign policy had a relatively minor role in the outcome of the UH election. But Abe owed much of his initial popularity to foreign affairs, including his hard line on the abduction issue. When he first took office, he did very well in diplomacy toward China and South Korea through his visits there.

Unfortunately for Abe, foreign policy receded in the minds of voters, and everyday 'bread and butter' issues came to the fore. Abe was simply slow, and weak, in his realization that these were the primary issues for voters. A lull developed regarding foreign policy. As of now, for example, the North Koreans are being conciliatory. China has utterly changed its policies toward Japan, on the surface at least. The UH election really swung on Abe's weak leadership, the string of gaffes committed by Cabinet ministers, and the astonishing scandal surrounding the pension system, which was really bad luck for Abe.

**SAMUELS:** The lull was deceptive. Abe apparently said the right things to the Chinese during his October visit, and the North Koreans returned to the Six Party Talks. But beneath the veneer of calm there was and is strenuous disagreement over policy that, after the elections, we are beginning to see play out. The gaffes, the misreading of economic fears, the mind-boggling bureaucratic mistakes in the pension system – all were proximate causes for change.

The larger discourse over Japan's future direction, and the larger international fac-

tors, never disappeared, and are still at work. **PYLE:** It is fascinating to watch Ozawa operate politically these days. In many ways, it was Ozawa who started this whole process. After the Cold War ended and the Gulf War took place, Ozawa quickly realized that Japan had to change dramatically. He has consistently pushed that agenda for a long time.

The disagreements between Abe and Ozawa over foreign policy are not very big. The situation is quite a contrast to Japan's domestic political scene during the Cold War, when the main opposition party had a foreign policy utterly at odds with that of the LDP. Now, in the big picture, we are talking about shades of difference between the LDP and the DPJ. Ozawa has emphasized the role of the United Nations. But both Abe and Ozawa are strongly in favor of a much more activist and assertive foreign policy.

**SAMUELS:** That is a really important point. Abe and Ozawa come from the same corner of the security discourse in Japan. The press is highlighting the differences between Ozawa and Abe, which are far less than often believed. The really important differences are within each of the two parties themselves.

There are 'mercantile realists' within the LDP, who favor traditional concentration on building Japan's economic might. There are 'realists' within the DPJ who think Japan should continue to play a role in the Indian Ocean for the NATO-led coalition working inside Afghanistan.

We are seeing differences within the LDP and within the DPJ. But in the grand scheme of things, these are differences among a group of security intellectuals who fundamentally agree that Japan should have a higher profile and play a greater role in world affairs.

**PYLE:** It is very interesting to consider Ozawa's motivations in opposing the Special Measures Law and the Maritime Self Defense Force (MSDF) deployment in the Indian Ocean. How did he get to a position of this sort when he is basically friendly to the United States and supports an activist foreign role for Japan?

He initially adopted the UN-centered bent at the time of the first Gulf War, when he first came forward in a leadership role. At the time, Ozawa was secretary general of the LDP. He understood the expectations for

Japan. He knew Japan was facing complaints of 'free riding' on defense. Japan had to do more. He was friendly toward the United States, and had a good relationship with US ambassador Mike Armacost. He was searching for a way to make possible an activist role, but he had to do so in the context of existing restrictive interpretations of the Constitution, and the prevailing reticence among the general public at home and among Japan's neighbors in Asia.

Ozawa thought a UN-centered position would ameliorate concerns. He tried to win approval during the first Gulf War for a UN cooperation bill that would have made possible an active contribution by Japan. He failed, but his efforts paved the way for Japan's subsequent participation in UN peacekeeping operations.

Since then, his motivations for adopting that UN-centered approach have evolved. He came to see the requirement of UN authorization for overseas deployments as a useful tool to help shield Japan from American unilateralism, to avoid 'entrapment' in what Japan might conclude were misguided American ventures.

Then, when he joined the DPJ several years ago, he found the UN-centered policy to be useful politically to help keep together the disparate, diverse elements of the party. Most recently, he has seen his policy stance as a political tactic against Abe and the LDP.

So, his stance has been consistent. But his motivations seem to have shifted and varied over time.

**SAMUELS:** That is a terrific way to characterize the changes Ozawa has gone through. A less generous characterization would be that Ozawa has painted himself into a corner. There was the need to reassure the domestic public and Japan's neighbors when the idea of a more activist Japan became serious. Once he left the LDP, he needed to stake out a claim on security policy that was different from the LDP, even if his fundamental views are not that different from those of the LDP. This goes further back than his joining the DPJ, back to his initial break from the LDP and his subsequent formation of various new parties and coalitions against the LDP.

So, Ozawa finds himself in a very difficult position, particularly if he ever has the opportunity to assume power.

**PYLE:** It is very important for Washington

to maintain some degree of equanimity in this situation. Ozawa is going to have to back down and compromise on the Special Measures Law. He is already under considerable criticism from many editorial writers. Understanding of the fundamental importance of the US alliance to Japan's security is so widespread that if Ozawa continues to stake out an inflexible position he will come in for criticism from within his own party and also from public opinion.

Ozawa will be pushed to compromise. Americans should not lose their heads over this.

**SAMUELS:** For Ozawa, it is unfortunate that the most immediate security policy agenda item is the wrong one for him. It is the Afghanistan war – the 'good war' – rather than the more contentious Iraq war. If it were the Iraq war immediately at issue, Ozawa could point to the series of departures from Iraq of members of the 'coalition of the willing.' The number of nations in the Iraq coalition is now much lower than at the beginning. Afghanistan, by contrast, has moved to a more international plane, with Washington driving the policy somewhat less. NATO is now in charge of forces in Iraq, and more nations participate there than in Iraq.

By his own characterization of the criteria under which Japan would participate, Ozawa has a much weaker case to oppose the Afghan operations than he does in the case of Iraq.

**TOE:** You both argue that Japan is going through a major transition. Is there any broad strategic consensus on Japan's security and foreign policies? If not, where are the dividing lines?

**PYLE:** In the big picture, there has been a coalescence of thinking in Japan about the need for the country to adopt a much more active and assertive foreign policy. The Yoshida Doctrine is crumbling, and there are relatively few influential supporters for sticking with the strategy prevalent during the Cold War.

So, there is emerging a consensus, and we see it in Ozawa and Abe, that Japan has to become more active, and contribute much more directly to the settlement of international issues.

**SAMUELS:** On the other hand, there are

certain pieces of the Yoshida Doctrine that are pretty sticky, fairly deeply institutionalized. Japan was never a 'free rider' in the US-Japan security relationship. But it was a 'cheap rider', able to achieve maximum security for, in comparative terms, a very low level of expenditure and a great unwillingness to put Japanese young men and women in harm's way.

Japanese strategists, in my view, are beginning to worry more about becoming entangled in US misadventures abroad than they are about being abandoned by the United States to fend for itself on security matters.

Japanese strategists are also worrying less about the set of constraints on defense posture inherited from the Yoshida era.

Still, the Yoshida Doctrine is not being abandoned at the pace that some analysts argue. For example, no one is arguing for a lifting of the 1% of GDP cap on defense expenditures. Some aspects of the Yoshida Doctrine are clearly being deserted. But others are proving very difficult to dislodge.

Barring some unforeseen cataclysmic event in Northeast Asia, we are not going to see anytime soon a wholesale reorganization and reorientation of Japanese foreign and security policy. We

will continue to see incremental changes in doctrine and capabilities, with continuation of much of the caution that has characterized Japanese security and foreign policies to date.

**PYLE:** The pace at which the Yoshida Doctrine is abandoned is going to very much be set by events in the external environment. All of the self-binding resolutions that Japan adopted under the Yoshida Doctrine, even the 1% of GDP for defense spending, are being gradually modified.

Japan is already running into real problems with the 1% limit on defense spending. For example, Japan has agreed to bear a large portion of the enormous expense involved in restructuring the US base presence in Japan and Guam. Tokyo evidently will set up a special budget, quite apart from defense spending, to cover that huge

expense.

Also, it will be fascinating to see where the costs for missile defense development are placed in the Japanese national budget.

The Yoshida Doctrine constraints are slowing being eaten away at. The ban on arms exports and military use of space, collective self-defense: these are gradually, incrementally being changed. Even discussion of nuclear weapons is no longer taboo. The pace of change is being set, I believe, by events outside of Japan, and then the conservative leadership responding to those changes.

**SAMUELS:** I agree with that. There are other items that are off budget which should

because it is a police function. It sells with Japan's neighbors for the same reason. Coast Guard forces are not designed or equipped to fight enemies in uniform. They are equipped and empowered to fight bad guys – pirates and smugglers. But the Coast Guard does have significant capabilities, including destroyer-sized ships with helicopter facilities, allowing it to be the first responder in the event of territorial crises, for example. And Japan has territorial disputes with all of its neighbors.

**PYLE:** It is important to watch the Coast Guard and the Navy. I've always felt that a 'red line' for Japan in assessing China's ambitions would be if and when the Chinese

decide overtly to build a blue water navy. That development is one that would be immensely influential in Japan's security thinking. I think there is a real likelihood that, over time, China will move in that direction to protect its oil lifeline and to protect its interests in the Middle East. Concerns about naval issues, including protection of sea lanes, is going to drive Japan's thinking about security to a considerable degree.

Also keep in mind that Japan is now operating under severe financial constraints that will restrain and concentrate the country's defense spending.

**TOE:** What is motivating the transition in Japan toward a more robust, active foreign role? Is it pressure from the outside pushing up against a continuing desire to do as little as possible? Or is there a real desire to do more, driven by national interest and national pride?

**PYLE:** A lot of factors come into play. One of the most important is the 'Heisei generation' of younger leaders. This is the generation born after the Second World War, and one that really looks at Japan's role in the world from a different perspective. For example, they do not look at China so much with a feeling of guilt and remorse for the past. They tend to view China as a rival for leadership in Asia. This younger generation



be paid more attention. When the Guam redeployment figure was announced in Spring 2005, it was a big shock because it was so high. Since then, it has been renegotiated downward somewhat. Still, that expected cost could not fit comfortably underneath the 1% cap.

There has always been a fiscal sleight-of-hand in accounting for defense equipment acquisitions, and this will likely be the case with the costs of missile defense.

Currently, my favorite off-budget defense expenditure is for the Coast Guard, which resides in the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transportation. The Coast Guard has been assigned new roles and missions, new equipment, new budgets, and, much to my surprise, was also touting for itself in its 2006 White Paper new "fighting power." There is a lot of enthusiasm for building up the Coast Guard. It sells at home

does have a new view of what Japan's role in the world should be.

**SAMUELS:** Keep in mind that the rise of China in Asia involves a relative decline of the United States in the region. This is having a big impact on many Japanese security thinkers and strategists. As much as many would like to be able forever to put their eggs in a US basket, they increasingly conclude that this would be irresponsible. The rise of China will require Japan to do more, not just with the United States, but also with the possibility in mind that the US might not be willing or able to forever maintain its commitments to Japan.

This certainly is not official policy. But if you read between the lines of security policy debates in Japan, including in newspaper editorials, you feel an intensification of what has always been a concern: that the United States might abandon Japan.

Japanese security thinkers have carefully watched the problems the United States has found itself in around the world over the past decade or so, and they continue to watch closely the rise of China. Those trends are connected. Many believe Japan will have to do even more of what it has done so well for the past several decades: hedge. That is why we are seeing discussions again advocating greater independence, greater distance from the United States.

That is the vein that Ozawa is tapping, and this perspective is evident across the board of Japanese strategic thinking, not just among young Japanese.

**PYLE:** There is also a good deal of concern in Tokyo about what the changing American political landscape might mean for the alliance. Japanese governments have tended to have closer ties with Republican administrations in the United States. I was in Japan in 1998 when President Clinton spent 9 days in China but did not visit Japan. There are strong memories in Japan about that.

**SAMUELS:** There clearly are uncertainties in Japan about what a Democratic administration starting in 2009 might mean for the alliance.

But many strategists want greater distance from what they consider to be an increasingly unreliable United States. This is happening while a Republican, George W. Bush, occupies the White House. They are not sitting around until next year, waiting to point a finger at a Democratic administration

as being unreliable. Many feel it right now, for example on policy toward North Korea. There is a widespread feeling in Tokyo that the Bush administration made a deal with Pyongyang without sufficiently consulting with Japan, without taking into account Japan's interests, particularly the abduction issue. True or not, advocates of greater distance from the US will point to North Korea and similar cases as added fuel for an engine that would take them further away from the tight hug with which Junichiro Koizumi embraced President Bush.

**TOE:** You seem to reach somewhat different conclusions as to where this transition will ultimately lead Japan. Professor Samuels foresees greater autonomy for Japan, presumably in the context of the alliance. Professor Pyle believes that the logic of the alliance is so compelling that it will emerge from the transition fully intact, though more symmetrical, with Japan assuming more responsibilities and exercising a bigger voice in alliance affairs.

**SAMUELS:** Autonomy in the context of the alliance: This is something I want to emphasize. When I mention greater autonomy and independence, I am referring to capabilities. I don't believe serious strategists in Tokyo think there is a reasonable option apart from the alliance with the United States. The distancing I refer to is all in the context of the alliance. Even Ozawa's recent proclamations about putting distance between the US and Japan is said entirely within the context of the alliance.

I am referring to the creation of options, insuring against catastrophe. The capabilities being acquired, the doctrines and defense postures under debate, are not designed to make Japan separate from the United States, but for Japan to be separable should Japan need to do so. A Japan separate from the United States is the undesirable future against which Japanese strategists are trying to hedge. They don't see separation as a desirable option. But some are increasingly coming to the conclusion that Japan should have options, and that whatever happens with the United States, Japan will not be abandoned without recourse.

**PYLE:** I don't think there is great difference between Dick's conclusion and my own. I absolutely agree that Japan does not want to be hostage to all of America's foreign policy

choices. Japan is always concerned about American unilateralism. There was a certain amount of nervousness when the first so-called Armitage Report was received in Tokyo in 2000. The report argued that Japan should take the UK-US alliance as a model for the future. Many in Tokyo wondered exactly what that would entail.

Historically, Japan has always sought independence and autonomy. The alliance relationship with the US is not an exception to that. In some respects, the alliance with the US is actually a way of strengthening Japan's autonomy. Japan is Japan. It has its own interests, its own imperatives. As an Asian nation, it inevitably will have a different perspective from the US on some important issues. Its close proximity to China will give it a different perspective. There will be issues like Iran that Japan views differently.

The alliance is of fundamental importance to Japan. When push comes to shove, it will take precedence. But there will be issues that arise, not the least of which will be the future of American bases, that will create difficult times.

Let me also emphasize a theme we talked about earlier: the volatility of the Japanese electorate. The democratic element in Japanese politics is clearly at a new level. That will also create problems from time to time in alliance relations. There should be no mistaking that there will be problems in the alliance.

But, I believe, the external environment, such as North Korea and especially the future of China, will reinforce for Japan the importance of the alliance.

**SAMUELS:** Let me underline how important the sovereignty issue is in all of this. For a long time, it has been the hidden 'third rail' in the US-Japan alliance. There has long festered resentment, even in very decorous circles, of the continued nature of the US presence and bases in Japan. Even America's best friends in the Japanese security policy community are questioning the strategy that joined Japan at the US hip. It is not just those who oppose the alliance, but those who understand its importance, who want the base issue to be reconciled in a way that Japanese sovereignty is not sacrificed. This is an issue that has always had the potential to rear its ugly head, and its one we will see more of, sooner rather than later, as Japan ceases to pretend to be following the Yoshida Doctrine script to the letter.