

The Future of the Japan-U.S. Relationship ...Cooperation in the Global Commons

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The QDR2010 stresses the rising tensions in the Global Commons—sea, air, space and cyber—that constitute the fabric or connective tissue of the international system, and the various challenges that the US, its allies, and partners must face. The QDR indicates the need to focus on emerging risks of the Global Commons that cannot be controlled by any single country.

A series of recent events—including rash behavior by Chinese naval ships and aircraft on the open seas and in the skies, satellite missile tests, and attacks in cyberspace—highlight the need for Japan to work closely with the US and reliable partners to maintain peace and stability throughout the Global Commons.

Free access to the Global Commons is not an ancient concept, but significant changes in its meanings have already occurred during last 50 years since the Japan-US security arrangement was ratified. The changes include the security situation, domains of the commons, and the roles, missions, and capability for military cooperation.

Firstly, the security environment has changed drastically from the simple and clear confrontation between the West and East in the Cold War era, to the complex and ambiguous situation in the post Cold War era, like the opening of a Pandora's Box.

Secondly, the domains of the Global Commons were only sea and air until 50 years ago. Space was just added to the Global Commons around that time. The world's first man-made satellite, Sputnik, was launched in 1957, 53 years ago. Cyber is a new face of the Global Commons. While sea, air, and space are natural domains, cyber is an artificial domain. As the world experiences rapid globalization, even older domains of the Global Commons become more complex and difficult to handle. A good example is the sea. As irresponsible stakeholders make self-righteous interpretations of international maritime law, or introduce unilateral legislation to monopolize pending maritime interests, significant friction has developed in terms of free access to open sea.

Lastly, the roles, missions, and capability of military cooperation have also undergone significant changes without reaching the original objectives. In terms of Japan-US military cooperation, only the US provided virtually full deterrence power at the beginning of the Security Arrangement, without Japan sharing a significant burden for the defense of Japan. During the Cold War era, however, Japan became an influential power at the regional and global stages and built up a substantial defense power so that it could proportionately share the military burden.

Now it is time for Japan to seek the creation of a truly “close

U.S.-Japan Symposium
150 Years of Amity & 50 Years of Alliance
June 18-19, 2010, Washington, D.C.

and equal” relationship between two allied countries, including military cooperation.

It must be extremely difficult to predict the path Japan will take for the next 50 years, but it may not be so for the next 10 or 20 years. The regional and global security situation might drastically change and the positions of Japan and the US at the regional and global levels would likely differ. A New Global Domain could become apparent. Nevertheless, Japan and the US should not forget the importance of free access to the Global Commons, and adhere to it for national and allied interests. These two states should prepare for any worst-case scenarios.