

An East Asian Community and the U.S.-Japan Alliance

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Since the end of the Cold War, the most important strategic relationship in East Asia has been and will continue to be the one between the United States and China. Relative to this deep reality, Japan is obviously a less strategic player. As such, Japan's stance towards East Asian regionalism and its interests therein include commitment to non-traditional security issues such as human security, including disaster relief activities, problems common for rapidly evolving civil societies, and issues associated with aging societies.

In Japanese thinking, there still remains a concern about a China-centered process of community-building, possibly developing into a closed region that reflects Chinese preoccupation with "modern" values and interests, including strong nationalism, an unprecedented pace and scale of military modernization, preoccupation with territorial integrity, and a sense of rivalry towards the United States.

The first critical and explicit manifestation of this concern was then Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's policy speech in January 2002, proposing the establishment of an East Asian Community. Koizumi said that Australia and New Zealand would be core members of such a community. In this Japanese conception, the inclusion of Australia and New Zealand holds a double function. First, they provide a venting channel leading to the United States as a security anchor in East Asia, an important foundation of an East Asian Community from the Japanese perspective. Secondly, the membership of Australia and New Zealand is also important from the point of view of universal values that will sustain, as well as keep open, the basis of an East Asian Community to the rest of the world, including, primarily, the United States.

Unfortunately, PM Hatoyama has been busy handling the troubled relationship with the United States. Naturally, the priority of DPJ diplomacy should be given to setting the alliance relationship with the United States back on track, which is indispensable for Japan to cope with and tranquilize the "modern" elements of international politics and security in East Asia, where China plays the key role. There would then be a better chance for Japan to push for an East Asian Community that is open and committed to the values important for human life, which are also to be shared with and sustained by the United States, rather than traditional national security,

Over the long run, Chinese society might continue to evolve, although surely with ups and downs, toward accepting and coexisting with such a Community in East Asia. In order for

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this favorable scenario to be realized, the dual function of the U.S.-Japan alliance to hedge against and engage China remains critically important.