

‘The Shape of Things to Come?’: The decade the US-Japan Security Treaty became a ‘Maritime Alliance’ (1971-1981)

Alessio Patalano

In his capacity as President of the United States-Japan Foundation, George Packard has recently observed that the US-Japan Security Treaty stands as the longest ‘alliance’ between two great powers since the Peace of Westphalia was signed in 1648.¹ This is no small diplomatic achievement. In fact, it is a testament to decades of debates in Washington and Tokyo about the political, economic, and social costs of the alliance against the benefits it provides to both American and Japanese national security.² Why does the alliance matter? What difference does it make? What purposes does it serve? These questions underscored debates that continue to the present day, contributing to the process that allows the alliance to remain relevant.³

Diplomatic historians and political scientists alike have argued that the shape of current debates draws its origins in the period following the Nixon doctrine and the impact that international events in the 1970s had on US-Japan security ties.⁴ In particular, among Japanese scholars the 1970s are regarded as the period when, in light of increasing American pressures, or *gaiatsu*,⁵ on Japan to contribute more to sharing the burden of the alliance, bureaucratic and political elites in Tokyo started debating the merits of the alliance against the need for a degree of independence in defence and security matters.⁶ Indeed, a core component of the Japanese debate on the significance of the alliance during this period has focused pre-eminently on its

¹ George R. Packard, ‘The United States-Japan Security Treaty at 50: Still a Grand Bargain?’, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89, 2010:2, 92.

² Packard provides a brief summary of such cost-benefit assessments. *Ibid.*, 93-98.

³ For example, cf. Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *The U.S.-Japan Alliance to 2030: Power and Principle* (Washington, DC, CSIS: 2015), <https://www.csis.org/programs/japan-chair/us-japan-commission-future-alliance>.

⁴ Yukinori Komine, ‘Whither a “Resurgent Japan”’: The Nixon Doctrine and Japan’s Defense Buildup, 1969-1976’, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol. 16, 2014:3, 88-128. Also, Christopher W. Hughes, *Japan’s re-emergence as a ‘Normal’ Military Power* (Adelphi Paper No. 368-9, Oxford for IISS, 2004); Michael J. Green, *Japan’s Reluctant Realism: Foreign Policy Challenges in an Era of Uncertain Power* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Also, Komine, ‘Whither a “Resurgent Japan”’, *op. cit.*, 88-92. Also, Raymond L. Garthoff, *Détente and Confrontation: American-Soviet Relations from Nixon through Reagan* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1994), 275; Walter La Feber, *The Clash: US-Japanese Relations Throughout History* (New York: Norton, 1997); Kenneth B. Pyle, *Japan Rising: The Resurgence of Japanese Power and Purpose* (New York: Public Affairs TM, 2007); Michael Schaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

⁵ 外圧 (*gaiatsu*, external pressure).

⁶ The notion of an autonomous defence, or *jishu bōei* (自主防衛), came to prominence under the tenure of Yasuhiro Nakasone as Director General of the Japan Defence Agency in 1970.

impact on the question of autonomy versus dependence in Japanese defence posture.⁷

This paper draws upon primary and secondary sources, including a wealth of declassified materials from the Nixon and Ford administrations and US Navy strategy documents, to enrich the contribution of the above literature. It explores how professional interactions among Japanese and American military elites contributed to shape the evolution of the security partnership. It does so to argue that the existing literature does not give enough credit to the impact these interactions had on the evolution of the security treaty. In particular, the paper postulates that military interactions contributed to articulate for the first time a clear ‘operational’ scope for the security partnership – planting the seeds for the military cooperation that distinguished the alliance during the rest of the Cold War. The paper’s contention is that the 1970s witnessed the emergence of a ‘grand strategy’ underpinning the relationship that was essential for the United States and Japan to become military partners.⁸

Further, the paper expands the boundaries of existing literature, arguing specifically that such a strategy rested on a maritime approach that was adopted both in the United States and in Japan to inform national security, one which offered both flexibility and substance to the security ties. For the United States, this strategy sought to take advantage of the inherent flexibility of naval forces to allow to ‘swing’ capabilities across different theatres to meet demanding operational requirements. For Japan, a maritime approach to its defence posture enabled Japanese forces to take greater responsibility to defend the waters of the western Pacific to meet both the country’s defence requirements and alliance burden-sharing ambitions. The complementarity of US and Japanese strategic visions was essential to transform the nature of the security treaty. By the end of the decade, from a political commitment to defend Japan, conventionally and by means of a nuclear umbrella, and a means to retain bases in the western Pacific, the security treaty had become much more. It had become a ‘maritime alliance’ based on a mutually convenient strategy.

In setting forth this argument, the paper aims to link existing work on the evolution of the US Navy and the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Forces to the broader diplomatic history literature, enriching the understanding of this period not merely as one of ‘soul-searching’ and

⁷ Takao Sebata, *Japan’s Defense Policy and Bureaucratic Politics, 1976-2007* (Lanham, Boulder, New York: University Press of America, 2010); Tsuyoshi Kawasaki, ‘Japan and two theories of military doctrine formation: civilian policymakers, policy preference and the 1976 National Defense Program Outline’, *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, Vol. 1, 2001, 67–93; Akihiro Sadō, *Sengo Seiji to Jieitai* (佐道明広『戦後政治と自衛隊』 – Post-war Politics and the JSDF, Tokyo: Yoshikawa Bunkan, 2006). For a critical view of the Japanese debate over defence policy in the 1970s, cf. Donna Weeks, ‘Okita versus Kubo: Duelling Architects of Japan’s Security and Defence Policies’, *The Pacific Review*, Vol. 24, 2011:1, 21-41. For an alternative view of the 1970s as a crucial period for the development of a more independent posture for Japan later known as that of a ‘middle power’, cf. Yoshihide Soeya, ‘Middle Power’ *Gaikō – Sengo Nihon no Sentaku to Kōsō* (「添谷芳秀『日本の「ミドルパワー」外交—戦後日本の選択と構想』—The Foreign Policy of a Middle Power: Post-war Japanese Choices and Ideas – Tokyo: Chikuma Shinshō, 2005), especially chapter 3.

⁸ For a working definition of strategy, cf. Alessio Patalano, ‘Feigning Grand Strategy: Japan 1937-1945’, in John Ferris and Evan Mawdsley (eds.), *The Cambridge History of the Second World War, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 160-62.

transition in the US-Japan bilateral relations.⁹ In so doing, the paper is also the first work to provide a clear understanding about the origins of what some American scholars later regarded as the ‘maritime basis’ of American security system in East Asia.¹⁰ Similarly, the paper provides a context to the broader strategic significance of four policy initiatives that came to define the alliance: the qualitative build-up proposed in the National Defence Programme Outline of 1976, the sea-lanes defence centric character of the Guidelines for Defence Cooperation of 1978, the Japanese decision to participate to the RIMPAC exercise, and Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko’s 1,000 nautical miles sea-lanes defence pledge of 1981.

‘Critical Years Ahead’: Understanding Japan as a Security Partner in the 1970s

During the first half of the 1970s, American assessments of the US-Japan security alliance underwent a non-negligible measure of change. Three factors contributed to define the evolution of US perceptions in the first half of the decade. The first concerned the question of bases access in Japan, an issue that was particularly controversial before the reversion of Okinawa. The second factor regarded the transformation of Japan from a relatively weak state actor recovering from the devastation of war into a major economic power. The third factor concerned the changing international landscape in East Asia – which included the US diplomatic opening to the People’s Republic of China (PRC), the 1970s oil shock, and the American withdrawal from Vietnam. The ensemble of these elements meant that US policy towards Japan remained in flux, requiring regular reviews, if not adjustments.

At the beginning of the decade, the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) 122 had set the tone of the US approach to the relationship. The document sought to build on the content of the previous NSSM 5 adopted in April 1969 by taking stock of two years of significant changes. The NSSM 5 had pre-eminently focused on the issue of the reversion of Okinawa and its implication for the US military presence in the archipelago.¹¹ US policy-makers were indeed concerned about the implication of the negotiations over Okinawa on the future of base facilities in Japan. Government analysts expected that the reversion would prompt considerable political opposition in Japan with public calls for a minimal American footprint on Japanese soil.¹² Yet, as an American intelligence estimate observed, ‘assuming agreement on the issue of Okinawan reversion, the problem of bases in Japan will probably not

⁹ In the naval context, some of the core items in the literature include, James E. Auer, *The Post-war Rearmament of Japanese Maritime Forces, 1945-71* (Boulder, CO: Preager, 1973); Euan Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lanes Security, 1940-2004. A Matter of Life and Death?* (Abingdon, OX: Routledge, 2006), chapters 4-5; Tetsuo Kotani, ‘Presence and Credibility: Homeporting the *USS Midway* at Yokosuka’, *The Journal of American-East Asian Relations*, Vol.15, 2008, 51-82; Alessio Patalano, *Post-war Japan as a Sea Power: Imperial Legacy, Wartime Experience and the Making of a Navy* (London, New York: Bloomsbury 2015), chapter 6.

¹⁰ James E. Auer, Robyn Lin, ‘The Maritime Basis of American Security in East Asia’, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. LIV, 2001:1, 39-58.

¹¹ National Security Council, ‘National Security Study Memorandum 5: Japan Policy’, 28 April 1969, *Digital National Security Archive (DNSA), Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976* (online access).

¹² *Ibid.*, 2-3.

offer major difficulties'.¹³ For this reason, in 1969, the National Security Council (NSC) was recommended to treat the 'Okinawa reversion as the most serious potentially disruptive issue facing the US-Japan relationship'.¹⁴

By 1971, the US ambition to reach a reversion that would be acceptable to both parties had brought about positive results. The agreement on Okinawa had been signed and on its way to implementation, and whilst basing issues were still a source of concern, they were no longer a 'disruptive' matter.¹⁵ This enabled the NSSM 122 to have a clear objective. The US were to improve the relationship with Japan 'seeking an increasing larger Japanese role in Asia'.¹⁶

Such an objective was built on the perception that the Japanese goal to end the 'post-war era' of a large American military presence was now achieved. Japan had fully recovered economically and was on its way to achieve 'near super-power status'.¹⁷ Yet, its elites had still not redefined the country's place in the region and beyond. Public perceptions had contributed to keep defence matters as a low priority. On the other hand, such a state of affairs did not exclude the possibility of a decision to eventually acquire 'the military symbols of great power status', including nuclear weapons.¹⁸ For the United States, therefore, the key aims of its Japan policy were to ensure that it could play a role in shaping such enhanced status and that it could guide how far the procurement of these 'symbols of power' would go.¹⁹

This was not an easy task. When the NSSM 122 was adopted, its implementation depended on the possibility to meet 'continuing strains and stresses from several forces' to the alliance.²⁰ In 1971, these 'forces' were new and 'not anticipated', largely unfolding from the changing nature of Japan as an economic power.²¹ American analysts regarded the risk of more frequent bilateral economic frictions, increased Japanese self-confidence and ambitions on the world stage, and increased Japanese sensitivity towards public perceptions of the country in the US, as core sources of tension.²² Concurrently, the Nixon administration's failure in 1972 to warn the Japanese government of its intention to normalise relations with the PRC, together with a series of economic misunderstandings, nurtured Japanese concerns about the reliability of the US as an ally. In mid-1973, such a perception led Secretary of Defence James R. Schlesinger to observe that the American government needed a decision-making

¹³ Central Intelligence Agency, 'National Intelligence Estimate No.41-69: Prospects for the US-Japanese Security Relationship', 27 February 1969, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

¹⁴ 'Talking Paper for the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff (NSC Meeting, 30 April 1969)', *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

¹⁵ The agreement for the homeporting of the aircraft carrier USS Midway further contributed to dissipate, from a Japanese perspective, any doubt about Tokyo's commitment to allow the United States to consolidate its naval bases. See, Department of State, Memorandum of Conversation: US-Japan Security Relationship, 27 September 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

¹⁶ National Security Council, 'National Security Study Memorandum 122: Policy Toward Japan', June 1971, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*, 1-2, 35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 30.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

²² *Ibid.*, 6.

mechanism that was ‘more responsive to Japanese sensitivities’.²³

By the time Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei and President Nixon met in August 1973 a degree of sensitivity seemed to be in place, with Nixon making a point of it by expressing his appreciation for the Japanese efforts to reduce the great imbalance in bilateral trade.²⁴ The US intention to improve communication between the two governments as a way to enhance the partnership went beyond token words of appreciation. Both sides committed to a renewed phase of cooperation, one in which bilateral consultation mechanisms were going to be a vital component of the partnership to avoid future misunderstandings.²⁵ In the realm of security, in particular, consultation mechanisms were mutually regarded as having a significant role to play in identifying ways to implement greater post-Nixon doctrine burden-sharing.²⁶ Establishing robust ways to communicate with each other seemed to be regarded as a key to a better security relationship.

This seemed a sensitive idea. For the remainder of the Nixon administration, bilateral security relations remained in ‘good shape’, though policy towards Japan underwent further reviews through the NSSM 172, and 210 documents.²⁷ During this time, it is worth pointing out that the Japanese started to become aware for the first time that one of the possible ways to implement burden-sharing included increased navy-to-navy relationships in areas like maritime surveillance, Airborne Electronic Warfare (AEW), and long-range patrolling.²⁸

Yet, one should not rush to the conclusion that a clear ‘maritime strategy’ was in place to inform such suggestions. In the early 1970s, from the United States perspective, the ‘strategy’ underwriting such a pathway to increased burden-sharing emerged in the preparation of NSSM 210 and was chiefly driven by practical considerations. Policy planners aspired to ‘an increased level of complementarity’ between Japanese and US forces. This, in turn, would create the beneficial prospect of industrial opportunities in the areas of ASW and AEW capabilities and reduce pressure on defence commitments in the Western Pacific.²⁹ In that sense, it was an ideal plan and, whilst it did not amount to a ‘grand’ strategy, it offered great appeal. As Kissinger abrasively put it, ‘it has been my experience that the Japanese are not great conceptual thinkers.

²³ Department of State, ‘Memorandum of Conversation: U.S.-Japan Security Relations’, 26 July 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*, 2.

²⁴ The White House, ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, 01 August, 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*, 1. In July, national security advisors had proposed to Kissinger to shift the focus of the meeting away from economic matters in light of the Japanese commitment to improve trade imbalances. Cf. National Security Council, ‘Memorandum on Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka’s Visit: a Proposed Focus’, 05 July 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

²⁵ The White House, ‘Memorandum of Conversation’, 01 August, 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*, 1-2.

²⁶ Department of State, ‘Senior Review Group Meeting, Japan’, 11 November 1974, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

²⁷ For the reference to the ‘good shape’ of the bilateral ties, cf. Department of State, ‘Telegram: Nixon/Tanaka Summit Background Paper – IV: US-Japan Security Relationship: Issues and Recommendations’, 29 June 1973, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ See, Department of State, ‘Memorandum of Conversation: US-Japan Security Relationship’, 27 September 1973. Also, Assistant Secretary of Defense, ‘Memorandum of conversation: Ambassador Hodgson’s Courtesy Call with Secretary of Defense’, 27 June 1974; Department of State, Senior Review Group Meeting, Japan, 11 November 1974, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

You can pretty much tell them what to do and they will follow it'.³⁰

A year later, the conditions seemed ripe for setting in motion a new course for the security ties on the basis of this plan of action. Ahead of a visit by Prime Minister Miki Takeo to Washington, Kissinger pointed out to President Ford that the meeting was taking place 'at a critical moment in the evolution of Japan's post-war foreign policy orientation'.³¹ Factors external to the relationship, chiefly the energy crisis and the collapse of US policies in Indochina, had increased among Japanese elites concerns about security matters and prompted them to reconsider their options. Kissinger felt that the Japanese political leadership was approaching security ties with the US with an eye to three main preoccupations: the more fluid post-Vietnam international landscape in Asia; their positioning between the major powers and the military balance in East Asia; their dependence on the US and profound vulnerability to disruptions of energy supply.³²

Kissinger's understanding of Japanese concerns effectively captured a genuine sense among elites in Tokyo of a phase of transformation in international relations, one that was perceived by them as having significant implications for the US-Japan security arrangements. From Kissinger's perspective, the President had, therefore, to make clear to the Japanese the 'fundamental importance' the US placed on the relations with Japan, but 'allow the Japanese leaders to control the scope and pace of the movement toward greater cooperation'.³³ The United States was not looking for a partner that aimed at substantially increasing its armed forces, nor one pursuing nuclear rearmament and increased overseas responsibilities. It needed one capable of complementing its downsizing military posture in East Asia.

Whither Japan? The Strategy of a 'Trading Nation' and the 1976 NDPO

Japan watchers advising Kissinger on matters of policy and security towards the country were certainly right in assuming that the Nixon doctrine and the withdrawal from Vietnam had cast a shadow over the Japanese belief in the American commitment to East Asian security.³⁴ Similarly, they were correct in considering that the stunning economic revival of the 1960s coupled with the expansion of the national maritime space – including now the Ryukyu Islands – and the oil shock, had prompted the widening of the Japanese debate on the core priorities in national security and of the best means to protect them.³⁵

³⁰ Department of State, 'Senior Review Group Meeting, Japan', 11 November 1974, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

³¹ Department of State, 'Memorandum: The Visit of Japanese Prime Minister Miki', 02 August 1975, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Sadō, *Sengo Seiji to Jieitai*, 84-87.

³⁵ Within the Liberal Democratic Party, the strengthening of Japanese naval and air defences represented a long-term goal supported by politicians like Vice Admiral Hoshina. Hoshina Zenshiro, 'Opinion Regarding Adjustment of American-Japanese Relations from the Strategic Standpoint of the East and West', 12 February 1957, in Ishii Osamu, Naoki Ono (eds.), *Documents on the United States Policy towards Japan. Documents Related to Diplomatic and Military Matters, 1957* (Volume 5, Tokyo: Kashiwashobo, 1998), 134-135.

The Japanese debate of the early and mid-1970s has, however, to be examined within the context of an internal battle for budgetary resources which witnessed the emergence of the Japanese Navy, known as the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF), as the branch of the armed forces providing the more convincing strategic vision to underpin security policy. Equally important is the fact that whilst this internal Japanese debate on defence matters was not of great public visibility in Japan, it was well understood within American naval circles. Since 1968, a young US Navy Lieutenant Commander, James Auer, had been sent to Japan to study defence issues as part of a PhD programme. Commander Auer’s findings benefited from special access granted to him by Japanese defence and military officials and were widely circulated through a series of research articles and a monograph published between 1971 and 1973.³⁶

Auer’s arrival in Japan had been extremely timely since in 1966 the JMSDF had managed to obtain the inclusion within its primary roles of the ‘protection of maritime transportation’ within territorial waters.³⁷ This first expansion of duties beyond the protection of the archipelago from an invasion set the basic tone for the debates of the 1970s.

Indeed, as its duties expanded to include the surveillance and defence of Japan’s main straits, the JMSDF started to evaluate contingency plans to protect Japanese sea trade routes. This was a sensitive choice for two reasons. First, it was consistent with a long-term argument set forth by the JMSDF in regards to trade supplies as a core security vulnerability that was not necessarily covered by the US-Japan alliance. Second, it provided a reassuring answer to the growing concerns within the US Navy of its ability to retain sea control in the face of an expanding Soviet naval force.³⁸ According to an unpublished official document, the third Build-up Plan detailed an emergency scenario in which maritime transportation was to be organised along two main ‘sea route zones’,³⁹ heading towards southwest and southeast of Japan’s principal maritime Pacific hubs. The ‘southwest route’⁴⁰ extended through the Ryūkyū Islands and the Nansei Shotō towards the Bashi Channel for 840nm (1,512km) and was 150nm (270km) wide; the ‘southeast route’⁴¹ moved across the Ogasawara/Bonin Islands to a point north of Guam for 1,000 nm (1,800km) and was 240nm (432km) wide.⁴²

The 1973 oil crisis shook ‘Japan’s economic and social systems at their very foundations’,

³⁶ Author’s interview with Dr James Auer, Tokyo, 09 October 2015. Auer’s first article was published in 1971, James E. Auer, ‘Japan’s Maritime Self-Defense Force: An Appropriate Maritime Strategy?’, *Naval War College Review*, Vol. XXIV, December 1971, 3-20.

³⁷ Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force (JMSDF), *Kaijōjietai Gojū Nenshi* (海上自衛隊『海上自衛隊五十年史』JMSDF’s Fifty Year History, Tokyo, 2003), 31. In 1968, 99.4% of crude oil consumed in Japan was imported, and 91% of it came from the Middle East. Crude oil constituted more than 30% of Japan’s total imports. Hideo Sekino, ‘Japan and her Maritime Defence’, *US Naval Institute Proceedings*, Vol. 97, 1971:5, 115.

³⁸ The US Navy’s concerns in this regard are well explained in the internal study ‘Department of the Navy, Memorandum for All Flag Officers: Project Sixty’, in John Hattendorf (ed.), *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents* (Newport, RI: Naval War College Press, 2007).

³⁹ *Kōrotai* (航路帯).

⁴⁰ *Nansei Kōrotai* (南西航路帯).

⁴¹ *Nantō Kōrotai* (南東航路帯).

⁴² Sadō, *Sengo Seiji to Jieitai*, 146; Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 101. These lines became later referred to as the ‘Nakamura lines’, as Admiral Nakamura Teiji was said to have been one of the first to draw them. Naoyuki Agawa, *Umi no Yūjō* (阿川尚之『海の友情』 – Friendship at Sea, Tokyo: Chūōkōronsha, 2001), 214.

making defence policy-makers more aware of the importance of ‘maintaining the safety of maritime transportation’.⁴³ The ‘oil shock’ highlighted one of the fundamental vulnerabilities of the maritime-oriented nature of Japanese post-war economic power. University of Kyōto Professor Kōsaka Masataka, advisor to Prime Minister Ōhira Masayoshi (1978-1980), was the first to adopt in the 1960s and 1970s the terms ‘maritime nation’⁴⁴ and ‘trading nation’⁴⁵ to explain the distinctive features of Japan’s successful industrial recovery.⁴⁶ As an island-nation poor in natural resources, the archipelago’s dependence on foreign markets and raw materials was a direct consequence of its export-oriented development. This increased ‘both the vulnerability and the influence of Japan’ worldwide. As he pointed out:

Japan could live anonymously twenty, or even ten years ago; but now her exports, because of their volume, create problems in other countries. And if raw materials should become less easy to obtain Japan would suffer more because she now needs them in larger quantities.⁴⁷

Maritime trade had been the source of the country’s rise as an economic power, and for the same reasons it was also fast becoming a potential Achilles’ heel – in a way already shown by the wartime experience. Kōsaka’s views embodied the evolving consciousness of an influential part of Japanese academia vis-à-vis Japan’s future economic security challenges.⁴⁸

His writings did not directly address the role of military and naval forces in the realm of security. Yet, his input on the nature of the Japanese economy likely informed the policy-making process of the time as he joined the consultative body drafting the pilot study for what became the main Cold War defence policy document, the 1976 National Defence Programme Outline (NDPO).⁴⁹ Others informed observers noted the economic connection around the debate on the Japanese naval problem. Defence analyst Maeda Tetsuo stressed that the question of the movement of maritime imports from food supplies to energy was central to the way sea-lanes defence was debated in the country. As he put it, ‘[t]he main questions were how to carry industrial resources and the necessities of life to Japanese ports, how to protect the routes, and how to compose the convoys’. He further concluded that from his perspective, the ‘defence of sea-lanes seemed appropriately commercial for an economic giant’.⁵⁰

By the time the NDPO was officially adopted, an expanding consensus existed on the

⁴³ JDA, *Defence of Japan 1977* (Tokyo: the Japan Times, 1977), 100.

⁴⁴ Kaiyō Kokka (海洋国家).

⁴⁵ Tsūshō Kokka (通商国家).

⁴⁶ Masataka Kōsaka, ‘Kaiyō Kokka Nihon no Kōsō’, *Chūō Kōron*, (September, 1964), 48-80; Kōsaka, ‘Tsūshō Kokka Nippon no Unmei’, *Chūō Kōron*, (November, 1975), 116-140.

⁴⁷ Masataka Kōsaka, *Options for Japan’s Foreign Policy* (Adelphi Papers No. 97, London: International Institute for strategic Studies, 1973, 3).

⁴⁸ Prof Kōsaka was one of Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru’s most authoritative biographers and the first to use the term ‘doctrine’ in reference to Yoshida’s political legacy. Cf. his *Saishō Yoshida Shigeru ron*, *Chūō Kōron*, (February, 1964), 76-111.

⁴⁹ JMSDF, *Kaijōjietai Gojū Nenshi*, 121.

⁵⁰ Tetsuo Maeda, *The Hidden Army: The Untold Story of Japan’s Military Forces* (Chicago: Edition Q, 1995), 230.

critical contribution of a maritime strategy to Japan’s national security. Support from political figures like Nakasone Yasuhiro, head of the defence agency from 1970 to 1972 who supported the idea to enhance a sea-based defence posture for Japan to increase the country’s ‘autonomy’ in security affairs, helped the naval case.⁵¹ In the mid-1970s a Japanese maritime strategy to defend the archipelago against limited, direct attempts to cut the country’s economic lifelines at sea was taking its place within the country’s defence and security policy. As one author put it, the defence of maritime trade became ‘an elegant and useful device towards overcoming the controversy surrounding all aspects of Japan’s post-war maritime rearmament’. In terms of popular resonance too, it was ‘matched by few other potential justifications for the JSDF’.⁵²

Converging Challenges: Evolving Capabilities, Strengthening Opponent

The emerging Japanese consensus over the role that a maritime strategy had on defence policy played to the strength of the US-Japan security relations by addressing growing concerns within the US Navy about its shrinking capabilities. Already in September 1970, the navy’s ‘Project Sixty’ document had highlighted the impact that the US NATO first policy would have on theatres in the Pacific. In case of war with the Soviet Union in a European context, the movement of assets and capabilities in support of NATO’s northern and southern flanks would have required the US Navy to abandon ‘the Pacific area west of Hawaii, and cession of control of those waters – including all of Japan, for instance – to the Soviet Far East Fleet’.⁵³ With this assessment in mind, in the absence of significant changes to US investments in defence capabilities, the US had to ‘encourage the build-up of sea control forces by Japan and by NATO countries’.⁵⁴

The key question was what type of capabilities sea control forces should possess. This was a difficult question at a time where maritime warfare was undergoing significant changes – both in submarine and ASW capabilities. From a naval perspective, the Japanese sought to answer this question by focusing on qualitative improvements to their capabilities. The ‘basic defence force’ concept,⁵⁵ adopted in the NDPO of 1976 reflected this quest in that it sought to strengthen the navy to guarantee an effective force for sea control in the Sea of Japan (especially around the country’s three main straits) to deter Soviet naval adventurism and incursions in the open seas to harass Japanese shipping.

The Japanese decided to focus on specific tasks to conduct in strategically key areas as a way to maximise their build-up efforts. This was a sensitive choice given that in a narrow sea like the Sea of Japan, chokepoint control in peacetime was crucial to guarantee the blocking of

⁵¹ In the literature, Nakasone – who later served as Prime Minister – is generally described as a political maverick that adds to the difficulty of assessing the extent of his commitment to naval affairs. During the Pacific War, Nakasone served as junior officer in the Imperial Navy through the *Tangen* system and in its aftermath, he never hesitated to admit his affiliation with the imperial service and remained in contact with the Japan Naval Association. Sadō, *Sengo Seiji to Jieitai*, 87-96; Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 102-104. Watanabe, ‘Has Japan Crossed the Rubicon’, 239.

⁵² Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 121.

⁵³ US Navy, ‘Project Sixty’, Hattendorf, *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s: Selected Documents*, 12.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵⁵ Kibanteki Bōeiriyoku Kōsō (基盤の防衛力構想).

the Soviet fleet based in Vladivostok. For similar reasons, it was an essential prerequisite for gaining control in the adjacent sea areas in case of escalation of military tensions. This was to be a primary mission of the navy. Surface, air and subsurface patrol operations along the routes in the East China Sea were to complement chokepoint control and were to be conducted within 500nm from Japanese shores.⁵⁶

In cases of military crises, these peacetime operations would likely constitute the basis for the organisation of escorted convoys. To meet these missions, the Japanese were to aim for a more balanced fleet, one that could perform peacetime surveillance and deter aggressions in narrow seas, whilst retaining a degree of blue-water capabilities to perform ASW in open waters to preserve the flow of goods to and from the archipelago.⁵⁷ In this respect, the new national policy rewarded two decades of efforts by the naval authorities to secure the navy's place at the heart of Japanese national strategy by directly linking its existence with the country's vital maritime interests.⁵⁸

The Japanese engagement with the question of the right size and shape of the fleet was not conducted in isolation and indeed, it was closely followed by American observers. In 1973, Commander Senō Sadao, an officer working the historical branch of the National Institute for Defence Studies undertook a research project on the 1941 memorandum written by the then chief of the navy ministry's Naval Aviation Department, Admiral Inoue Shigeyoshi. In 'On Modern Weapons Procurement Planning',⁵⁹ Admiral Inoue had been the first flag officer to warn the navy of the need to drastically redirect its procurement policy so to provide the fleet with assets designed to secure transportation routes. Equally, he denounced the potentially disastrous consequences from the fixation on a fighting force conceived to seize sea control by means of a decisive battle without complementing this endeavour with considerations concerning how to maintain it.⁶⁰

Commander Senō, a 1944 Naval Academy graduate, had studied under Admiral Inoue at the Academy, was trained to serve on midget submarines, and reassigned to a minesweeper operating in home waters after the end of the war.⁶¹ He was the ideal candidate for the task, having both the professional skills to analyse the subject and a personal knowledge of the officer who conceived the original text.⁶² Commander Senō's findings found an interested audience in the then President of the US Naval War College, Vice Admiral Stanfield Turner. He offered Commander Senō the opportunity to publish the results of his work in the college journal. In a letter to Senō, whom he had met during a tour of duty in Japan, Admiral Turner

⁵⁶ For a description of these types of missions, see Turner, 'Missions of the U.S. Navy', 94.

⁵⁷ Akio Watanabe, 'Has Japan Crossed the Rubicon? Defence Policy since the Higuchi Report', *Japan Review of International Affairs*, 2003: Winter Issue, 242-243.

⁵⁸ For an in-depth analysis of Japan's dependence on shipping for trade and energy security from the mid-1970s to the second half of the 1980s, cf. Tsuneo Akaha, 'Japan's Response to Threats to Shipping Disruptions in Southeast Asia and the Middle East', *Pacific Affairs* (Vol. 59, No. 2, 1986), 255-259.

⁵⁹ Shin Gumbi Keikaku Ron (新軍備計画論).

⁶⁰ Sadao Senō, 'A Chess Game with no Checkmate: Admiral Inoue and the Pacific War', *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 26, 1974: January-February, 26-39.

⁶¹ Senō, interview with the author, 05 August 2005.

⁶² Commander Senō remained on friendly terms with Inoue Shigeyoshi until the time of the Admiral's death. Senō, interview with the author, 05 August 2005.

recognised the merits of his work because:

The lessons from the rejection of Admiral Inoue’s forward thinking are very applicable today. The Admiral pointed out that the battleship was no longer the principal naval weapon. Are we looking seriously today at whether the carrier is still the principal naval weapon? The Admiral rejected the idea that major fleet engagements would be the way the next war would be fought. Are we looking at whether our current concepts of naval warfare fit the likely shape of things to come? I particularly liked his comment that ‘(...) the control of the sea is not as absolute in the days of submarines as it was in the old days’. That thought was way ahead of his time. I do not believe we have fully absorbed it even today.⁶³

Debates around the right mix of capabilities to meet a variety of missions remained a core theme of interest of Admiral Turner, eventually prompting him to prepare one of the core doctrinal documents of the Cold War. In ‘Missions of the US Navy’, Admiral Turner argued that sea control was the necessary precondition for the navy to retain freedom of movement and action. Thus, the capabilities necessary to meet such a core function had to be a fundamental priority. In an age where command of the sea was not absolute as it had been in the past, focusing on achieving such an objective with a mind to core operational theatres was an equally important task. That was exactly what the JMSDF were trying to achieve.

In the western Pacific, however, this task was made more complex by the development of the Soviet challenge. In clear contradiction with the spirit of détente of this period, Soviet naval capabilities in the region were fast and substantially expanding. The evolving nature of the Soviet military build-up in East Asia, regarded by Japanese experts as the archipelago’s primary security challenge, complicated Japanese calculations as to how to best implement their strategy.⁶⁴ From the second half of the 1960s, the Soviet navy had been acquiring ‘blue-water’⁶⁵ capabilities that were eroding the margins of western supremacy in the control of the oceans. The Soviet Pacific Fleet had the largest operating area of all Soviet fleets and in the 1970s it started conducting more frequent forays and temporary deployments in the South China Sea and in the Indian Ocean.⁶⁶ The Soviet Pacific Fleet had started operating in Southeast Asia as it observed operations in Vietnam War, deploying surface and submarine assets, and flying patrol aircraft in reconnaissance missions from Da Nang over the South China Sea.

Throughout the 1970s, the unsettled political situation in Southeast Asia as well as continued unrest along the eastern coast of Africa prompted more modernisation and expansion. Front-line units were added to the fleet and regular visits conducted well beyond the borders of

⁶³ Vice Admiral Stanfield Turner, USN, letter to Commander Senō, 1973. Courtesy of Commander Senō.

⁶⁴ Maeda, *The Hidden Army*, 199-200.

⁶⁵ Term used to describe a naval force capable of operating across the deep waters of open oceans, as opposed to green and brown water navies, which operate within coastal areas to 200 nm.

⁶⁶ Norman Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy – Third Edition* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1980), 20.

Northeast Asia with access to naval logistics in places like Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam.⁶⁷ The iconic moment of this build-up occurred in June 1979 with the transfer to Vladivostok of the carrier *Minsk* and of the *Ivan Rogov*, the largest amphibious ship in the Soviet Navy, of four guided missile cruisers, and several submarines.⁶⁸ By the beginning of the 1980s, land-based air power was similarly being enhanced to the point that in 1982 US Navy Admiral Robert L. J. Long, Commander in Chief Pacific Command, voiced his concerns for the threat Soviet bombers posed to carrier strike groups.⁶⁹

In all, evidence clearly suggested an increase in Soviet naval and air capabilities and activities in areas with direct impact on Japan and on the US military forces based in the archipelago. In 1976, more than twenty Soviet warships were observed operating in areas used by Japanese oil tankers, whilst more than three hundred warships of various kinds were sighted passing through Japan's major straits.⁷⁰ Paraphrasing another authoritative estimate of the time, the Soviet Pacific Fleet was growing at a steady pace and included between one-half and one-third of the entire Soviet surface and sub-surface assets.⁷¹

This rate of growth continued well into the 1980s, and by 1984, the Pacific Fleet could count on another carrier, the *Novorossiysk*, a nuclear-propelled battle cruiser, 28% of the total of major surface vessels, and the largest air arm with 32% of the total naval aircraft.⁷² Numerical increases were coupled by more regular training, including the *Okean* exercises – held twice in the 1970s simultaneously by the entire Soviet navy across different theatres. In *Okean* 1975, the Soviet Pacific Fleet was reported to have four operational task groups whilst 126 aircraft were detected approaching the Japanese air space.⁷³ These large exercises were constrained to the Sea of Japan and the Sea of Okhotsk, though smaller task forces conducted other extended manoeuvres in the Pacific. These included different types of operations, including long-range air strike operations.⁷⁴

Based on Soviet estimates of 1974, Japanese naval planners considered the ASW capabilities of the fleet to be half the level required to secure sea areas around Japan. Exercises conducted off Ōshima the following year further confirmed deficiencies in this area.⁷⁵ To fulfil its missions, the NDPO had set the JMSDF's fleet target goal at approximately 60 major surface vessels, some 220 aircraft to patrol Japan's maritime space and 16 submarines to hunt potentially hostile naval assets.⁷⁶ These levels were short of what in some naval circles was considered necessary for sea-lanes defence.

These views seemed to be shared within US naval circles. As late as 1981, during a senior

⁶⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 25. For reference to Admiral Long, cf. Graham, *Japan's Sea Lane Security*, 126.

⁷⁰ JDA, *Defence of Japan 1977*, 17, 29.

⁷¹ Brian Ranft, Geoffrey Till, *The Sea in Soviet Strategy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1983), 120.

⁷² Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy – Third Edition*, 20-21.

⁷³ Kazutomi Uchida, 'Naval Cooperation and Security in East Asia' in Johnathan Alford (eds.), *Sea Power and Influence: Old Issues and New Challenges* (London: Gower and Allanheld for IISS, 1980), 107.

⁷⁴ Polmar, *Guide to the Soviet Navy – Third Edition*, 40-41, 43.

⁷⁵ Graham, *Japan's Sea Lane Security*, 127.

⁷⁶ JDA, *Defence of Japan 1977*, 64-65.

level meeting with American counterparts, US Navy officials recommended the Japanese to boost the fleet to 70 surface ships, 25 submarines and 125 P-3C (as opposed to the NDPO’s 100).⁷⁷ Observers later noted that these figures were very similar to those the JMSDF was considering in the preparations for the NDPO. In the aftermath of the adoption of the NDPO, the main question to address was how to maximise the yield of Japanese choices in defence matters.

Converging Arguments: ‘Sea Plan 2000’ and Alliance Requirements

It is against these specific military developments that one should consider the adoption of key documents that redefined the partnership for the remainder of the Cold War.

This is not to suggest that the later part of the 1970s did not present political challenges of a broader nature. On the contrary, the two-year period preceding the adoption in 1978 of the *Guidelines for US-Japan Defence Cooperation* was underscored by political interactions that both tested the alliance and reconfirmed its importance to both Japanese and American policy makers. In 1976, the relationship was first tested by the Lockheed bribery scandal, an affair that rocked the Japanese political arena. On 24 February, days after the vice-chairman of Lockheed had admitted to a Senate subcommittee that the company had paid bribes for some 3 million US dollars to the office of Prime Minister Tanaka, Prime Minister Miki wrote to President Ford in the spirit ‘of permanent friendship’ and of ‘full confidence in each other’ with the aim to confront the problem together.⁷⁸ As he later explained, he wished the affair not to ‘allow any harm, real or imagined, to affect Japan-United States relations’, a point further emphasised by Foreign Minister Miyazawa Kiichi in senior meetings with US officials.⁷⁹

By the end of the year, the US Embassy in Tokyo was relieved to report that whilst the ruling party in Japan had taken a hit because of the revelations about business corruption, the overall expectation for the new year was one of a return to a period of ‘relative political calm’.⁸⁰

The second half of 1976 had, on the other hand, offered also an opportunity to further consolidate mutual perceptions about the significance of the alliance by highlighting the need for increased cooperation in times of crisis and the importance of Japan’s own military role in them. The defection of a Soviet pilot landing a Mig-25 aircraft in northern Japan raised the profile of national defence in Japanese domestic politics; similarly, it exposed the cumbersome nature of some of the existing procedures for crisis management in Japan; and it confirmed – to US officials – the privileged access that Japanese authorities granted to American counterparts and the good working relationship between defence officials in the two countries. In this respect, whilst the Japanese government remained in control of the affair, it treated the question

⁷⁷ Graham, *Japan’s Sea Lane Security*, 136; also Matsumae, *The Limits of Defense: Japan as an Unsinkable Aircraft-Carrier*, 38.

⁷⁸ Office of the Prime Minister, ‘Letter to President Ford’, 24 February 1976, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

⁷⁹ Department of State, ‘Memorandum of Conversation: Prime Minister Miki Call on President Ford’, 30 June 1976, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*; also, ‘Notes of a Meeting Between Senator Manfield and Japanese Foreign Minister Kiichi Miyazawa’, 12 July 1976, *DNSA, Japan and the U.S., 1960-1976*.

⁸⁰ Department of State, ‘Telegram 19002 from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State’, 30 December 1976, in *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1968-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976*.

as a mutual security matter, allowing US intelligence to examine the aircraft.⁸¹

During this period, therefore, both American and Japanese defence and military planners grew aware of the imperative need to develop a framework that would allow the military partnership to be fully implemented. The signing of the 1978 Guidelines made this point by creating a legal framework for a division of labour. Within this context, Japanese missions to secure sea control in the Sea of Japan and in the East China Sea were formalised and included the ‘conduct of maritime operations for the defence of the surrounding waters and sea lines of communication’ in coordination with the United States Navy.⁸² The document emphasised the complementary nature of the two navies, pointing out that the United States were ‘to supplement functions that the Self-Defense Forces do not have’, including ‘mobile striking power’.⁸³ Arguably though, the pre-existence of a longstanding military dialogue over the changes in naval warfare and its requirements for the western Pacific was a critical precondition for the Guidelines to develop concrete recommendations for military cooperation.

The Guidelines approached for the first time important operational issues critical to the implementation of military cooperation. In terms of command structure, the Guidelines pointed out that in case of conflict the Japanese navy was not subordinate to its powerful ally. Both navies were to operate in combat ‘as ordered by their respective command systems’ with an eye to maintain adequate mechanisms of coordination.⁸⁴ To that end, the Guidelines prompted the establishment of research and liaison institutions with the responsibility to look after joint operations, planning and exercises. From a naval perspective, the Guidelines allowed the security treaty to be implemented as ‘though it were a two-nation version of NATO’.⁸⁵

Within this context, a key factor for this working partnership to be operationally viable was the ability of the US Navy and the JMSDF to train and test skills and doctrines. Already in March 1975, Japanese naval planners had envisaged to use the alliance to this end.⁸⁶ One main target was the possibility to join the Rim of the Pacific Exercise (RIMPAC), a multilateral exercise held since 1971 that involved the US Navy, the Royal Navy, the Royal Canadian Navy and the Royal Australian Navy. In 1978, the signing of the Guidelines created the ideal conditions for the JMSDF to take advantage of this important training opportunity.⁸⁷

Japanese naval ambitions were met favourably in American naval circles. Indeed, they came at an appropriate time to provide a much needed breathing space in what George Baer called the ‘disarray’ of the 1970s. Then, ‘bloc obsolescence’ – the need to replace a sizeable component of the entire navy –, combined with the impact of the high costs of the war in

⁸¹ Department of State, ‘Telegram 16298 from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State’, 02 November 1976, in FRUS, 1968-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976.

⁸² Sadō, *Sengo Seiji to Jieitai*, 144.

⁸³ Maeda, *The Hidden Army*, 207-208.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁸⁶ In this respect, as early as 1973, Admiral Uchida was voicing in a lecture at the US Naval War College the importance that the JMSDF attributed to its navy-to-navy relation with the USN and its intention to strengthen it. Kazutomi Uchida, ‘The Rearmament of the Japanese Maritime Forces’ *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 26, 1973:3, 41-48.

⁸⁷ JMSDF, *Kaijōjietai Gojū Nenshi*, 141-142.

Vietnam and of the development of new naval systems on procurement were fast reducing the size of the United States Navy and putting pressure on its worldwide commitments.⁸⁸ From 976 ships in 1968 the fleet dropped to 477 in early 1976 and by 1982, Secretary of Defence Caspar Weinberger was reporting to Congress that the force level in the Pacific had fallen to half the 1965 level.

In addition, by 1979, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had expanded the operational area of responsibility of the Seventh Fleet, the United States’ main force in western Pacific, to include the entire Indian Ocean, further stretching American capabilities.⁸⁹ At the strategic level this meant also that throughout this period, sea control was becoming an increasingly more relative concept and the navy was to accept an understanding of it that pointed to ‘the use of a limited area for a limited time’.⁹⁰ Against this background, the presence of a potentially strong naval ally with a clear operational sphere, both in terms of missions and area of responsibility offered a real contribution for the western Pacific to remain firmly within American maritime control – a fact recently acknowledged in the first complete history of the Seventh Fleet.⁹¹

In 1979, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Thomas Hayward emphasised the Japanese contribution to American operations in the Pacific, pointing out that:

The United States Navy and the Maritime Self-Defense Force coordinate so that they do not duplicate each other’s efforts. This enables American warships to operate independently. The Maritime SDF’s submarine P-3Cs are deployed so as to fulfil this duty.⁹²

In a force planning study published in 1978 as *Sea Plan 2000*, Admiral Hayward argued that in the Pacific, the United States Navy had to take an offensive posture, taking advantage of the fact that Soviet fleets and bases were exposed to prompt action – isolated as they were logistically. This offensive posture had significant global implications, as it would have tied down Soviet forces that could be otherwise used against NATO flanks.⁹³ This ‘Pacific model’ represented an important stepping-stone towards what became in the 1980s the American ‘Maritime Strategy’, that argued for a 600-ship navy poised for offensive missions.⁹⁴ Within the strategic vision proposed by *Sea Plan 2000*, one key goal for the US was to ‘keep secure links’ to overseas allies – most notably NATO and Japan.⁹⁵

In the Pacific, the implementation of such a ‘Pacific model’ de facto rested upon the

⁸⁸ Lawrence J. Korb, *The Fall and Rise of the Pentagon: American Defense Policies in the 1970s* (Boulder, CO: Praeger, 1979), 34, 37.

⁸⁹ Edward J. Marolda, *Ready Seapower: A History of the U.S. Seventh Fleet* (Washington, DC: Naval History & Heritage Command, 2012), 89.

⁹⁰ George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Seapower: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1994), 404.

⁹¹ Marolda, *Ready Seapower*, 89-90.

⁹² Quoted in Maeda, *The Hidden Army*, 234.

⁹³ Baer, *One Hundred Years of Seapower*, 424-426.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 430.

⁹⁵ ‘Sea Plan 2000’, in Hattendorf (ed.), *U.S. Naval Strategy in the 1970s*, 112.

Japanese pursuit of regional sea control. The Japanese bid to secure a more capable fleet to operate within, and in conjunction with, this framework did not come without sacrifices. The ability to devise a strategy that could meet national security priorities masked one of the main limitations of naval policy in this period, the ability to secure adequate capabilities for fleet air defence to conduct operations on the high sea. Beyond the range of land-based air power, the JMSDF would have to rely on the United States for over the horizon air cover. In implementing this strategy, the JMSDF amounted *de facto* to a ‘shield’ of the western Pacific (a metaphor often used in subsequent years in which the United States Navy – with its carrier-centred battle groups – was depicted as the ‘spear’).⁹⁶ In 1980, Admiral Uchida, a retired Chief of Maritime Staff who remained quite influential in the 1970s, explained the Japanese naval strategy in this period as follow:

An anti-submarine capability must be the first charge on the resources of any nation precipitately faced with the possibility of starvation and exhaustion by hostile blockade. A force structure based upon the overall striking force of the United States and the regional defence forces of various nations must be the basic military concept in East Asia.⁹⁷

Conclusions: The Foundations of the ‘Fabulous’ 1980s?

In the following years, the maritime core of the US-Japan security arrangements did not pass unnoticed at the highest political level. In fact, it was emphatically restated in the aftermath of Prime Minister Suzuki Zenko’s pledge to commit Japan to the protection of its sea lanes out to 1,000 nautical miles (nm). In his 1983 visit to Washington, Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, who endeavoured to implement the 1,000nm policy throughout the rest of the decade, remarked that one of Japan’s chief objectives was ‘to have complete and full control of the three straits that go through the Japanese islands so that there can be no passage of Soviet submarines or other naval activities’.⁹⁸ Japan was now a core military contributor to the US global strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the alliance was no longer just a political arrangement for the defence of Japan. It was a military alliance with a clear operational focus.

The 1970s had been an incredibly dynamic decade for the US-Japan security relationship. In the United States, perceptions of Japan as a security partner had changed considerably. From a country that offered bases to logistically support the American military machine in the pursuit of Washington’s policies in East Asia, Japan had become a military partner with core strategic responsibilities. In the waters of the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea, the Japanese were to ensure that the US-Japan alliance could retain sea control and with it, the strategic initiative vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Crucially though, burden sharing was not merely limited to political and financial support to the American presence in the region. It was part of

⁹⁶ Senior Japanese naval officers often used this metaphor to describe the JMSDF’s role in the Cold War when addressing an American audience.

⁹⁷ Uchida, ‘Naval Cooperation and Security in East Asia’, 107.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Kimura, ‘The Soviet Military Build-up: Its Impact on Japan and its Aims’, 110.

a grand strategy that served US global responsibilities and ambitions and met the requirements of Japanese defence.

One of the most interesting aspects of this evolution concerns the process that enabled this grand strategy to emerge. How was this result achieved? This is a significant question especially because it is too often underexplored in the current literature focused as it is on the question of the alliance as a tool shaping the boundaries of Japanese dependence or independence in defence matters. From a strategy perspective, instead, three factors seem to have contributed to the emergence of a common ‘vision’. First, across the decade, the international circumstances of East Asia changed dramatically forcing elites in Washington and Tokyo to review and reconsider the role and functions of the alliance. The willingness to enhance bilateral communication mechanisms to reduce misunderstandings enabled the emergence of a mutual awareness of respective security priorities and the development of complementary security strategies.

A second element of vital importance in shaping the transformation of the alliance was the constant and substantial military to military interaction – especially in the naval context. The professional dialogue between the JMSDF and the US Navy on matters of capabilities, balance of the fleet, as well as on the changing nature of the main security challenges, was very important in allowing exchanges of views over matters of capabilities procurement, doctrines, and missions. As the political debates evolved, and the recognition for stronger more substantial ties consolidated, the existing military interactions represented the software upon which the alliance mechanisms were built upon.

Last but by no means least, this paper has shown that the evolution of the alliance was a two-way process. External pressures mattered, but they would have not produced a military cooperation in themselves. The United States wanted to contribute to shaping a changing security posture, but it rested upon the Japanese to identify how and in what ways such a contribution was to take place. In the United States, options for policy towards Japan were developed with the understanding that desired outcomes had to find receptive audiences in Tokyo. The relationship became a maritime alliance because both in Japan and the United States key stakeholders understood that practical cooperation in naval affairs would have been an ideal development for both actors. In that sense, the 1970s are a remarkable period showing how American perspectives on the significance of the alliance did not try to merely shape it; they were informed by a genuine interaction with Japanese counterparts, eventually setting the foundations of a military posture that ensured the stability of maritime East Asia until the end of the Cold War and beyond.

