

The abrogation of the Japan-USA security agreement would open up a Pandora's Box of bilateral and multilateral problems. Japan-bashers in the United States and those in Asia Pacific who fear Japan would be united in their criticism, although for different reasons.²⁴

Virtually all Asia Pacific governments have vivid memories of Japanese militarism, and many regional actors' determination to retain a stabilizing American military presence is designed as much to keep a lid on Tokyo's suspected military aspirations as to guard against Russian encroachment. These suspicions have made much more difficult Japan's attempts to satisfy American requests for greater burden-sharing and those international critics who demanded that Japan assume a greater and more activist political role in world affairs. Increases in the Japanese defence budget (necessary to provide increased host nation support to American forces stationed in Japan) have been criticized by China, Korea and others. Debates in Tokyo over Japanese participation in United Nations sanctioned peacekeeping operations have been viewed suspiciously and commented on disparagingly by many in Asia Pacific.

It is unlikely that Japan will drastically alter its security policy in the near to mid-term. Japanese strategic thinking will continue to be based on the absolute necessity of maintaining strong defence links with the United States.²⁵ The continuation of a formal bilateral security arrangement, which brings with it a "lifeline" of support in an increasingly unfriendly U.S. Congress, and a measure of stability to Asia Pacific (Japan contained) will continue to be more valuable to Japan than the political survival of Yeltsin's Russia or an enhanced relationship with Germany.²⁶ With Yeltsin's hold on power seemingly as precarious as that of Gorbachev when he failed to bring a solution to the Northern Territories dispute during his visit to Tokyo in 1991, it is uncertain whether a decisive move on the issue (if only Russia's acknowledgement of Japanese sovereignty with dates for reversion to be settled later) will take place during Yeltsin's planned September visit to Japan. After all these years, the saga of the Northern Territories might not yet have reached its last chapter.