

From the United States perspective Japan, with its recent high defence budgets and more vigorous espousal of its community of interests with the West, more fully shared Washington's strategic appreciation of Asia Pacific issues and accordingly continued to play a strategically important role. In practical terms, Japan-United States joint planning expanded in several areas, the most commented on being the defence of Japan's vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs) to 1000 nautical miles offshore.

Japan continues to be of central importance to Washington's Asia Pacific strategy which continues to stress forward deployment (although at reduced levels) and the requirement for secure bases, especially in the absence of stability in the Korean Peninsula and the uncertain situation in China, the growing influence of India, and the question of finding effective substitutes for American naval and air bases in the Philippines.

While current Japan-United States defence cooperation is based on a concurrence of views of changing strategic realities, there are longer term problems of burden-sharing in Japan and the role of the Self Defence Forces within Asia Pacific. The Japanese response to these questions will largely shape their defence posture and their military mission in the coming years.

A review of the Japan-United States security relationship illustrates that, even in periods of tension arising from the political or economic dimensions of the bilateral relationship, Japan never entertained an alternative to maintaining the American security umbrella. From the early 1980s until the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States, there had been little divergence between Japanese and American assessments of the nature of the threat to Japanese and regional security.⁹

Threats to National Security

For Japanese defence planners, Russia now poses the principal potential military threat to Japan and to East Asia. The JDA estimates that the Russian Federation/CIS¹⁰ maintains one fourth to one third of its strategic missiles, one sixth of its ground troops, one quarter of its aircraft, and over one quarter of its naval forces in the Far East. In addition, Backfire bombers capable of carrying nuclear armed air launched cruise missiles (ALCMS) have been deployed in the region. The JDA views Japan's strategic position, denying the Russian Pacific Fleet free access to the open ocean, and astride air and sea lanes which link eastern Russia with North and East Asia, as providing a geographic basis for a possible Russo-Japanese military confrontation.¹¹

The strong negative public reaction to the old Soviet Union by the Japanese and, in the current global resource supply situation, the lack of interest by the business community in Siberian development leave only a small (if growing) domestic Japanese constituency pressing for improved bilateral relations. Gorbachev's early arms reductions