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Japan May Withdraw Support for Afghan War

Yukio Hatoyama took office on September 16 as Japan's new prime minister, following an August 30 electoral victory in which he led the Democrat Party of Japan to victory over the Liberal Democratic Party, which had governed Japan for more than 50 years. The change of government may bring with it a reassessment of Japan's support for the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan as well as other changes in the Asian nation's relations with the United States.



A report in Britain's *Times* on September 16 noted that Hatoyama's choice of Toshimi Kitazawa as Defense Minister suggests "he will keep an election pledge to withdraw from the Afghanistan campaign." The report observed that Kitazawa "is a strong opponent of the country's military support for the U.S., making it more likely than ever that the government of Yukio Hatoyama will withdraw its naval ships from the war in Afghanistan early next year."

Japan's support for NATO operations in Afghanistan has so far been more symbolic than significant. It currently has a supply ship and a destroyer deployed through February to provide fuel and water to U.S. and British naval vessels in the Indian Ocean. When that deployment ends, it is likely that the new government will bring the vessels home.

A report in the *Washington Post* for September 16 noted that soon after taking office, Hatoyama said that he wants to change Japan's "somewhat passive" relationship with the United States and reassess the large U.S. military presence in his nation. "It is important to spend time on the comprehensive revision" of Japanese-U.S. military agreements, he said.

Hatoyama has also proposed that Japan should gradually shift the focus of its trade and foreign policy to build stronger ties to East Asia, notably China. However, he noted on his first day in office that such a change in direction should not be interpreted as ending its close relationship with the United States. "That doesn't mean to exclude the United States or the U.S. dollar," he said. "Rather, I see the concept of an extended Asia-Pacific community. I don't believe we can do things without the U.S."

During the election campaign, Hatoyama's Democrat Party platform called for such changes in Japanese foreign policy with the United States as getting the U.S. Marine Corps to vacate Futenma Air Station and move to a new location in Okinawa. The platform also called for Japan to reconsider a commitment to pay \$6 billion to the United States to relocate about 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam.

But during a September 16 news conference, Hatoyama offered a softer position to his nation's most powerful ally. He said that he does not "intend to change our basic policy" toward the United States and



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that he wants "to build a relationship of trust" with President Obama. However, he qualified these comments by stating that he wants Japan to establish a relationship with the United States "in which I can actively and frankly voice our thoughts."

The day before Hatoyama took office, Japan's Kyodo news agency reported that Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell had praised Japan's role in the US-led war on terror, and described Tokyo's contribution to the war in Afghanistan as "vitaly important."

"I am stating something which I think is obvious to all of us: that their contributions have helped, and we would very much like to see them continue it," Morrell emphasized.

A September 16 report by the Iran-based PressTV quoted the top U.S. military commander for Asia, Admiral Timothy Keating, who said the previous day that he will travel to Tokyo next week for discussions with officials of Japan's new government.

Despite Hatoyama's pledge to consider the withdrawal of some U.S. troops', Keating seemed confident that ties with Japan's new left-leaning government would remain strong. "We've had a treaty with Japan for over 50 years. They're a strategic lynchpin for [the] U.S. in the Western Pacific and I'm not concerned about any big changes," said Keating.

A Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan was signed between the two nations in Washington on January 19, 1960. Under the treaty, both nations assumed an obligation to assist each other in case of armed attack on territories under Japanese administration. However, Japan could not come to the defense of the United States because its 1947 constitution prohibits it from sending armed forces overseas.

If Japanese pride is offended by its dependence upon the United States for guaranteeing its military security, conversely, the relationship is not beneficial for the United States in several respects.

Primarily, the 1960 treaty (like the earlier 1951 treaty it replaced) established just the sort of "entangling alliance" that our Founding Fathers warned against. Thomas Jefferson said in his first inaugural address on March 4, 1801:

It is proper you should understand what I deem the essential principles of this government, and consequently those which ought to shape its administration. I will compress them in the narrowest compass they will bear, stating the general principle, but not all its limitations. Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state of persuasion, religious or political; peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations, entangling alliances with none.

The treaty not only increases the potential for the United States to be dragged into a future war, but the cost of maintaining a military presence in Japan (and in countless other nations) has been a severe financial burden on the United States since the end of World War II.

Most importantly of all, our Constitution was established to provide for the common defense of the people of the United States, *not the entire world*, and it mandates that the United States shall protect every state in the union (*not every nation in the world*) from invasion.

The people of both Japan and the United States would be better served if Japan provided for its own defense, like the United States, and if the United States kept its troops at home, like Japan.

Photo of Yukio Hatoyama: AP Images



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