

The U.S. and Japan, Unlikely Bedfellows

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Introduction

During World War II, Americans viewed the Japanese as mortal enemies, the same may be said of the Japanese themselves. How could anyone guess during that time that these two countries and cultures would eventually come to depend upon each other to survive the later half of the 20th century? With the rise of the Soviet Union, the United States sought out allies to prevent the flow of communism and communist ideology. Japan's communist threat existed in the form of the newly converted China. China, once idolized by Japan and heavily influencing Japanese culture, now posed a serious threat to Japan's peace and security.

It is rare in history that former enemies unite in order to fight a common enemy under the circumstances like those that presented the world during the post World War II years. By studying the relationship between Japan and the United States, we can observe the differences and similarities both before and after these two cultures became allies and friends. It may also be observed the actual changes that these societies must endure, and the stresses and strains placed on their relationship from global policies existing during that time. This basically may serve as a guide or a blueprint for future alliances between former enemies in our world.

Throughout their long relationship, compromise has been a central issue for the Japanese and Americans. It has kept them together, and reinforced their commitment to each other through the years. Compromise has been the binding force holding these two

powerhouses together. Without compromise the world may be much different today than the way we recognize it now.

Nature of Relationship

The countries of Japan and the United States are very different from each other. The peoples of Japan were forced to make up their own culture, however neighboring China heavily influences upon their culture. China has proven to be a model that Japanese society looks up to, and measures it against. The U.S. itself formed its own culture too, except our culture is comprised up of the various cultures and backgrounds that make up its ethnic diversity. This melting pot of culture has formed to be its own identity. These differences while appearing similar in nature are separate in their detail. These differences extend to all facets of both countries culture, including government. For example in Japan, “in the parliamentary system, the bureaucracy is much more influential on decisions.”¹ While in the United States, the “President is undoubtedly in a position to assert a sort of individual leadership, that would be quite inappropriate for a Prime Minister.”² These differences in ruling help to differentiate both of these countries cultures. One prefers to govern by the influences of many, while the other prefers the influences of one whose image is projected to be powerful.

The differences between these two countries also continue in the actual make up of their geography. Japan is an archipelago, composed of many islands. The western coasts of the main island, Honshu, are almost uninhabitable due to the high mountains existing on that side of the island; also the northern regions of the island are also very cold, and poor for settlement and farming. As a result the majority of the islands population has settles in the southern and eastern portions of the island. Many of the

citizens have clustered themselves into metropolitan cities on the coast, where as a result the majority of the country's population now resides. As for life in the U.S., we have established ourselves across our continents eastern and western boundaries through war, purchase, and annexation. We have major metropolitan cities, which have sprung up, across the nation, mostly due to commerce and artistic centers. Farming is suitable in most areas of our nation, and many smaller communities and towns exist across the nation, especially on the outskirts of our major cities.

The economies of both countries have evolved as well. America used to be at the center of the industrial revolution and farming, with many factories and large farms across the nation. However as time has passed, large industry has seem to pass by the wayside as well. Today many factories shut down, and farms are plowed over. The commerce industry has taken hold of America, with smaller companies and higher amounts of competition. In Japan, natural resources are not important, in fact the only two resources which are abundant in Japan are rice and its people. Today Japan as well has moved to more commerce dominated economy, as efforts and relationship with the U.S. have strengthened it over time. In fact Japan's people have proven to be a valuable resource, as they have dug deep to strive and improve Japan, making Japan a strong figure in world affairs and economics.

The relationship between the United States and the islands of Japan began in 1853. That is when U.S. Commodore Matthew Perry sailed into Tokyo Harbor with U.S. naval steamships. Commodore Perry's mission was to secure a refueling station in Japan so U.S. ships could refuel and re-equip themselves for voyages in the pacific region. A side goal of Perry's was to open up Japan for trade with the U.S. Perry gave the Japanese

one-year to decide whether or not they were willing to comply with the United States wishes. In 1854 Perry sailed back into Tokyo harbor and the Japanese signed a treaty allowing the U.S. limited trading and use of a refueling station.

The next confrontation between the United States and Japan occurred in 1941. Japan was a member of the axis powers; it sought a way to spread their influence over new areas of Asia. However some of Japan's officials felt that the U.S. would interfere and join in the war against them in order to save European allies who had colonies in Asia. Eventually Japan decided on strategy that would take the U.S. out of the war right away. The Japanese devised an attack that all Americans remember best as Theodore Roosevelt put it, a day which will live in infamy, of course I mean the attack on Pearl Harbor. This attack did lead to U.S. involvement in World War II, and the eventual defeat of Japanese due to the awesome industrial might of the American war machine. This set the stage for future relationship of two of the worlds strongest powers.

Political Relations (1952-1980's)

The political relations of the United States and Japan are basically determined by the post war occupation of Japan by the United States, and the rise of the Soviet Union and China as a superpowers and as threats to the security of the United States and its allies.

After the defeat of Japan, the Japanese had a new constitution drafted which forbade them from ever possessing offensive military forces. Also during this time the civil war in China was ending, and eventually the communist forces would take power there. Japan and the United States now felt threatened, they decided that the best way to survive was to co-operate together.

After the elections of Japan's new government the U.S. and Japan embarked on two peace treaties which solidify their relationship, and declared to the world their relationship as well. In September 1951, the San Francisco Peace Treaty Conference were held. This conference was attended by 52 countries. This treaty stresses three main points: "(1) peace with Japan will bring further reconciliation and peace; (2) the most important thing is to ensure that Japan never resorts to aggression but rather opts for protection, while at the same time refraining from disturbing the security of other countries; (3) in the event that Japan establishes its own self defense force, the force should be integrally linked to the forces of other countries."³ This treaty was signed by 49 of the 52 countries that attend, the three countries who do not sign it are the Soviet union, Poland, and Czechoslovakia. As a side note, China was not invited to this conference. Two years later the U.S. and Japan sign a second treaty, the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Friendship Commerce and Navigation. Signed in April of 1953, the treaties goals are; "to promote close economic and cultural ties between the peoples of both countries, to foster commercial relations, and to facilitate investment that would be advantageous to both countries."⁴ These treaties effectively announced to the world they were allying itself with the United States, during the time when ever nation was deciding which side of the iron curtain they wanted to be on. This commitment by Japan was extremely powerful, "interpreting statements of power balance as in discovering a willingness to 'sacrifice some of the partnership relations with her allies in order to negotiate with her ex-enemies' and see the U.S. need for Japan to 'reinsure' existing treaty relationships, even to consider 'at least hypothetically' coming under a Soviet nuclear umbrella."⁵

Another step in the healing and compromise process between the U.S. and Japan was the restoration of islands in the Pacific back to Japanese control. Some of these islands include the Amami Islands in 1953, the Ogasawara Islands in 1968, and Okinawa in 1972.

In December 1956, Japan receives unanimous approval from both the U.N. Security Council, and the U.N. General Assembly for admission into the United Nations. Japan official becomes the 80th member of the U.N. on the 18th of December. Later in 1961, Japan's Prime Minister Ikeda, meets with U.S. President Kennedy in Washington D.C. They issue a joint declaration at the end of their two-day meeting declaring that both countries intend to develop new cooperative mechanisms. Both parties also agreed to establish a Japan-U.S. Joint Committee on Trade and Economy.

With the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, and continued Soviet and Chinese involvement in that region as well, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is renewed automatically. Both countries decide to drop the fixed ten-year expiration period of the previous treaties. This solidifies the security commitment between the two countries. In 1974, President Ford visits Japan and becomes the first U.S. president to visit both the Emperor and a Prime Minister of Japan. At the end of President Ford's visit both governments' issue a Joint Summit statement "stressing that the Japan-U.S. cooperative relationship is of vital and lasting importance to Asian security."⁶ Both countries will continue to meet to stress their relationship for both economic and security success in the future. Eventually both sides will meet to discuss trading practices, especially involving the automobile industry. These discussions will be highlighted later in this report under the Trade Relation's section.

Military Relations (1952-1980's)

During the U.S. occupation of Japan after World War II, the U.S. had approximately 260,000 troops stationed in Okinawa and the main islands of Japan. These forces “took control of and assumed responsibility for all land, air, and naval bases in Japan.”⁷ On the 23rd of June 1960, The U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security came into effect. Under this treaty Japan received defense support from the following units, “a carrier group, III Marine Expeditionary Force, the 5th Air Force, and elements of the Army’s I Corps.”⁸ Today there are approximately 40,000 troops still stationed in Japan today, including 28,000 in Okinawa. These troops are just a part of the approximate 100,000 stationed in the Asia-Pacific region today. The security relationship has been beneficial to both parties involved. On the surface, it may seem like Japan make out like a bandit, however the U.S. benefits too, “This joint defense effort provides enormous dividends to both countries. The U.S. will defend Japan if the need ever arrives. By the same token, the increased complement of Japan’s own defense forces have allowed the U.S. to stretch its resources to other parts of the immense Pacific Basin area.”⁹ Under the Security Treaty between the Japan and the U.S., Japan is allowed to have a Self-Defense Force, which assumes the primary responsibility for immediate conventional national defense.

This Self-Defense Force is Japan’s only answer to a national army. This force is very limited but capable. “they (SDF) will be able to repel a limited, small scale attack and defend sea-lanes out to a distance of 1000 nautical miles”¹⁰ As a matter of policy, Japan and its Self-Defense Force have forsworn nuclear armaments and forbid arms sales

abroad. However the Japanese may export defense and dual-use technology to the United States.

During these years in world history, many international conflicts erupted. For the most part, both sides supported the other. The United States would become involved in Korea and Vietnam; two Pacific Asian countries near Japan, Japan's role with the U.S. would become even more vital. With involvement in both Korea and Vietnam, Japan served as an important jump point for U.S. troops as well as base for support. Japan during this period kept its distance from the U.S., many in Japan did not support the U.S. actions in Vietnam, but afterward continued on like nothing ever occurred. "Tokyo kept a certain distance from the U.S. in the 60's, in part because of widespread opposition within Japan toward American policy in Vietnam. But once the war was over, both nations opened up relations with Mainland China,"¹¹ After the Vietnam era, Japan saw its role increase in the Pacific, in terms of peace promotion and security. "Japan's political and security agenda in Asia is now more extensive at any time since World War II. It includes efforts to promote peace and reconciliation in both the Indochinese and Korean peninsulas."¹²

Trade Relations (1952-1980's)

After World War II the Japanese economy was in ruins, one of General Douglas MacArthur's duties was to restore this economy. Without an economy Japan would become financially dependent on the U.S., something it did not need at the time. "The centerpiece of this effort was the breakup of the *zaibatsu's*, the large holding companies that had dominated the Japanese economy."¹³ By breaking up these *zaibatsu's* a free enterprise, capitalistic system was allowed to set up in Japan. This new system

eventually allowed the Japanese economy to grow and become prosperous again. A lot of this success can be attributed to two factors. First the U.S. troops stationed in Japan since World War II have spent a vast amount of money in the domestic Japanese economy for various goods and services throughout the years, especially during the years of the Korean war and the Vietnam war. A second reason that can be attributed to Japan's success is the free trade agreements made with the U.S. With the U.S. allowing Japanese products into the country with no tariff, Japanese exports into America were very cheap for the average consumer. Unfortunately this did have a backlash in the U.S., especially with American automobile makers. As Japanese goods were being let into the country, the quality levels were much higher than their American counterparts. This forced U.S. manufacturers to improve upon their existing and future products in order to compete with their Japanese counterparts in the future.

However as American firms were becoming competitive in their domestic markets once again, they noticed that their products were not selling in Japan at all. This problem was especially evident during the 1980's. During this time many trade negotiations took place, eventually Japan realized for it to succeed in world affairs and global relations it had to open up. "Japan must take further steps in its initiative to remove impediments that hinder foreigners from doing business there or enjoying access to Japanese research and technology."¹⁴

While analyzing the economic and trade practices of Japan, it is important to realize the differences in business practice between both countries (U.S. and Japan). The Japanese learned that efficiency and product quality was the best way to break into a new market. After the war, many of Japan's products were poor quality and hence gave

Japanese manufacturing a bad reputation. During the sixties, these changed and Japanese firms invested heavily in quality control, and product durability. Soon they began to export automobiles that were extremely fuel efficient (especially during the oil embargo of the late seventies). Japan also began to export electronics and other hardware of impeccable quality and affordability. Soon Japanese companies were again making profit, and they began to enjoy market leader status.

While the Japanese had been on the rebound, many U.S. firms were very 'lazy' in their business practices. Giving the customer what the manufacturer wanted became the practice. As a result, quality levels were poor, and durability was low. It was common too see an American product last only half as long in useful life while its Japanese counterpart would be continue to operate normally. This forced many U.S. manufactures to spend more of their efforts to redesign themselves and become efficient and durable with lasting product quality. Only in recent times has this been true of American goods.

Conclusion

As I stated in the introduction to this paper, compromise has been a central issue in the post World War II relationship between the U.S. and Japan. Despite the different international, political, and trade conflicts over the years; both countries have realized that separate they stand to lose in the rapidly evolving world, however together they stand a chance to survive. If the U.S. had not taken a chance to resuscitate life back into Japan, who knows what condition Japan may lie in today. Japan might have turned into a third world nation without the U.S. aid and military defense after World War II. But the same may be said about the United States as well. After World War II the Soviet Union emerged as a prominent power next to the U.S. What if the communists invaded Pacific

Asia? Or if their doctrine spread throughout the world as feared by the Americans. Where would the U.S. be? Fortunately we do not have to contemplate that answer. By Japan and the United States cooperating and compromising both nations have become superpowers in their own right, Japan an economic superpower and the U.S. a military superpower.

Each country has supported the other in this relationship during its first thirty years. Each country has sacrificed a little, and each has gained a little as well. Both countries have learned a lot from each other, and have influenced themselves through their relationship. It may seem at first glance that Japan has gained more from this relationship the U.S. However it is important to note that at the time, the United States gained a lot as well, not in material wealth but something much more. By being allied with Japan the U.S. was able to closely survey its rivals, the Soviet Union and China, up close with reasoning to be there. I doubt that the United States could easily make an excuse by being so close to Chinese and Russian water's without claiming they were protecting Japan. Also the U.S. has benefited with the ability to actually use parts of Japan for military installations. Thus being able to keep a military presence in the region, as well as being ready for possible emergencies or crises in the area (Korea and Vietnam). The military gains by the U.S. from this relationship are clear and beneficial, without them the world may be a different place today.

In history, rare occasions exist when two former enemies become close allies like Japan and the United States. What intrigues me most is how in the short span of only a few years, both countries managed to cooperate with the other, and at least for a while forget their feelings of hate toward each other. Old feelings die hard, and in both

countries there are still some old feelings held about the other. Older generations still remember the war, carnage, and hatred that existed between the two nations only 50 years ago. However these feelings will hopefully pass with the newer generations growing in each of the two countries.

Endnotes

- 1 Reischauer, Edwin o. Pg. 144
- 2 Reischauer, Edwin o. Pg. 144
- 3 MOFA Pg. 8
- 4 MOFA Pg. 8
- 5 Wohlstetter, Albert Pgs 188-189
- 6 MOFA Pg. 6
- 7 United States-Japan Security Relations
- 8 United States-Japan Relations
- 9 Mansfield, Mike. Pg. 9
- 10 Baker & Frost, pg. 105
- 11 Holbrooke, Richard Pg. 46
- 12 Baker & Frost, Pg. 104
- 13 Fingleton, Eamonn Pg. 75
- 14 Mansfield, Mike Pg. 7

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