

Americans Support Expanded Japanese Role in Solving International Problems

October 2008

As Americans prepare to go to the polls to elect a new president and a new Congress, events in Asia have ranked well behind the economy, energy prices, and the war in Iraq as major issues of concern. Some observers expected that China might become a significant focus of the campaign after the Olympics, yet neither major presidential candidate even mentioned China in his convention speech in the days and weeks after the closing ceremonies in Beijing. Japan has also escaped criticism of the kind that characterized American elections in the 1980s and early 1990s, such as presidential candidate Richard Gephardt's famous line in the 1988 election that "the United States and the Soviet Union have fought the Cold War, and Japan has won."

If anything, the U.S. presidential candidates have gone out of their way to demonstrate their fealty to the U.S.-Japan relationship. When Japanese media criticized Senator Hillary Clinton's foreign policy manifesto in *Foreign Affairs* for ignoring Japan and calling China the most important U.S. bilateral relationship in Asia, the Clinton campaign dispatched former UN Ambassador Richard Holbrooke to give a press conference calling Japan an "indispensable" partner.¹ Republican candi-

1. Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Security and Opportunity for the Twenty-first Century," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2007), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20071101faessay86601/hillary-rodham-clinton/security-and-opportunity-for-the-twenty-first-century.html>; "Clinton's Foreign Policy Advisor Dismisses 'Japan Passing,' Calls Japan an Indispensable Ally," *Nikkei Shimbun Evening Ed.*, January 22, 2008, p.2 (in Japanese).

date John McCain and his close ally Joe Lieberman coauthored an article in *Yomiuri Shimbun* in June 2008 promising to focus on the U.S.-Japan alliance. Senator Barack Obama's surrogates Richard Danzig and Joe Nye answered with an article in the *Asahi Shimbun* promising not to forget about the U.S.-Japan alliance either.² Conservatives and veterans of the Bush administration have characterized U.S.-Japan relations as the strongest ever, and former Clinton administration officials have generally agreed that the Bush Japan policy is worth continuing.³

In spite of this strong momentum behind the U.S.-Japan alliance, many Japanese analysts and commentators have worried that the United States is losing interest in Japan. Japanese anxiety about the American commitment to the alliance has grown out of the Bush administration's active (and to many Japanese, unconditional) engagement of North Korea since 2007 as well as Japan's

2. John McCain and Joseph Lieberman, "Putting Our Allies First," *Yomiuri Shimbun*, May 28, 2008; Richard J. Danzig and Joseph S. Nye, "POINT OF VIEW/ Richard J. Danzig and Joseph S. Nye: Japan dialogue key to U.S. interests in Asia," *Asahi Shimbun*, June 28, 2008, <http://www.asahi.com/english/Herald-asahi/TKY200806280083.html>.

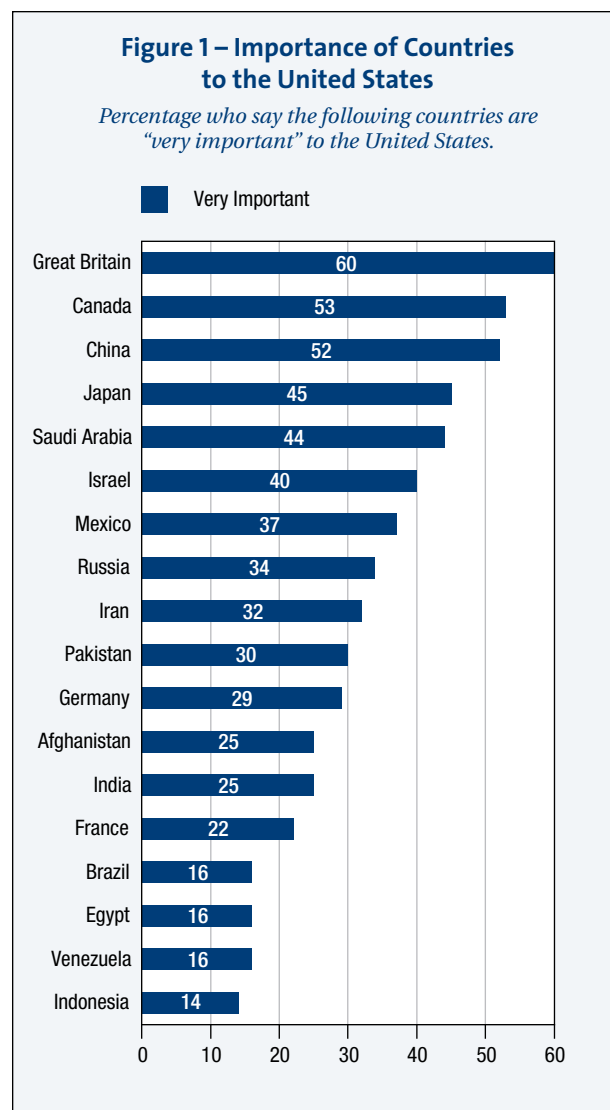
3. Michael J. Green, "The Iraq War and Asia: Assessing the Legacy," *The Washington Quarterly*, (Spring 2008), http://www.twq.com/08spring/docs/08spring_green.pdf; Victor Cha, "Winning Asia—Washington's Untold Success Story," *Foreign Affairs* (November/December 2007), <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20071101faessay86607/victor-d-cha/winning-asia.html>; Kurt Campbell and Nirav Patel, *The Power of Balance: America in Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Center for New American Security, 2008), 56.

own inability to take decisive action in international affairs because of the impasse in the Diet between the LDP-controlled Lower House and the opposition-controlled Upper Chamber. This new dynamic has evoked memories of “Japan passing,” a phrase coined during President Bill Clinton’s nine-day visit to China in 1998 on a trip to Asia that did not include a stop in Japan.

In a new Chicago Council on Global Affairs poll of American views of Japan taken in the summer of 2008, it is clear that the American public continues to see Japan as an influential partner in the international system. Rather than causing “Japan passing,” the rise of Chinese power is increasing the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the view of the American public. But while Americans see Japan as influential and important, they also want to see Japan do more to contribute to international security at a time when Japan’s domestic politics are leading to a decrease in international operations by the Japan Self Defense Forces. One question Japanese policymakers will have to ask themselves when viewing these results is whether the American public’s strong confidence in Japan’s role will continue once the public realizes that Japan is not living up to expectations on the security side.

With the rise of China, Americans continue to see Japan as a critical partner.

Forty-five percent of Americans say that Japan is “very important” to the United States, placing it fourth internationally (see Figure 1) behind the “special relationship” with Britain (60%), our close neighbor to the north, Canada (53%), and China (52%). When asked whether Japan or China is more important to the United States in terms of “vital interests,” a majority of Americans say China is more important (51%), while 44 percent say Japan is more important. The fact that Americans believe China is more important than Japan when the two countries are placed in direct comparison provides further evidence that Americans recognize the increased importance of China in terms



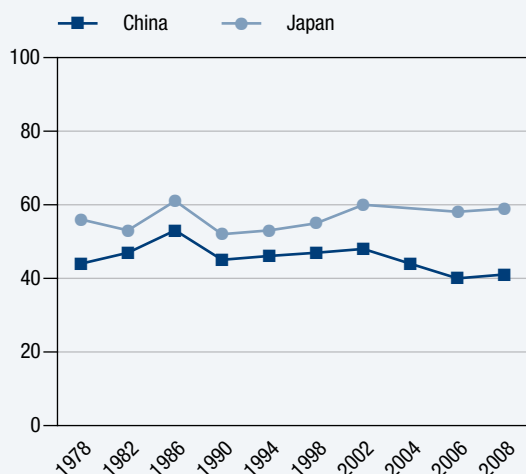
of U.S. interests. However, several important caveats should be noted before concluding that “Japan passing” has returned.

First, Japan’s fourth place ranking in terms of importance to the United States is still ahead of other close allies like Israel (40%) and Germany (29%) and is also ahead of nations with significant impact in world affairs such as Russia (34%) and Saudi Arabia (44%).

Second, on a barometer of how Americans feel towards other nations (with 0 meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, 100 meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, and 50 being neutral), Japan ranks well ahead of China, with a mean rating of 59 compared to China’s 41 (see Figure 2). Positive feelings toward Japan today are close to

Figure 2 – Feelings toward Japan and China

Ratings of American feelings toward Japan and China since 1978 on a 100-point scale, with 100 meaning a very warm, favorable feeling, 0 meaning a very cold, unfavorable feeling, and 50 meaning not particularly warm or cold.



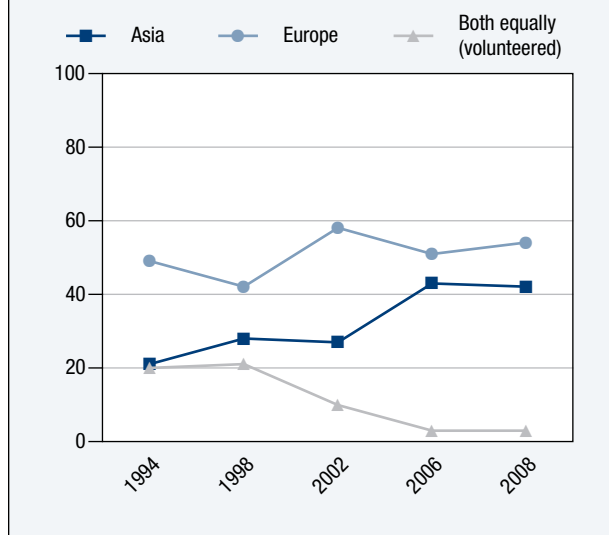
the highs of 61 and 60 reached in 1986 and 2002, respectively, and higher than in the 1990s when Japan was considered a fierce economic competitor to the United States. Feelings towards China, although always lower than those of Japan, have gone in the opposite direction since the turn of the millennium as the perceived threat from China has increased. These diverging trends in feelings toward China and Japan parallel the changing perception of economic and overall threat faced by the United States from these countries. The survey findings suggest that Japan has benefitted from concerns over the rise of China. They also demonstrate that Americans recognize the importance of relations with both countries and the qualitative difference between an increasingly close ally and an increasingly important new power in the international system.

Americans see Japan as an influential player in the international system, even with declining relative economic power.

On a ten-point scale of overall influence in the world (with 0 meaning not at all influential and 10 meaning extremely influential), Japan receives an

Figure 3 – Importance of Asia vs. Europe

Percentage who say Europe or Asia is more important to the United States.



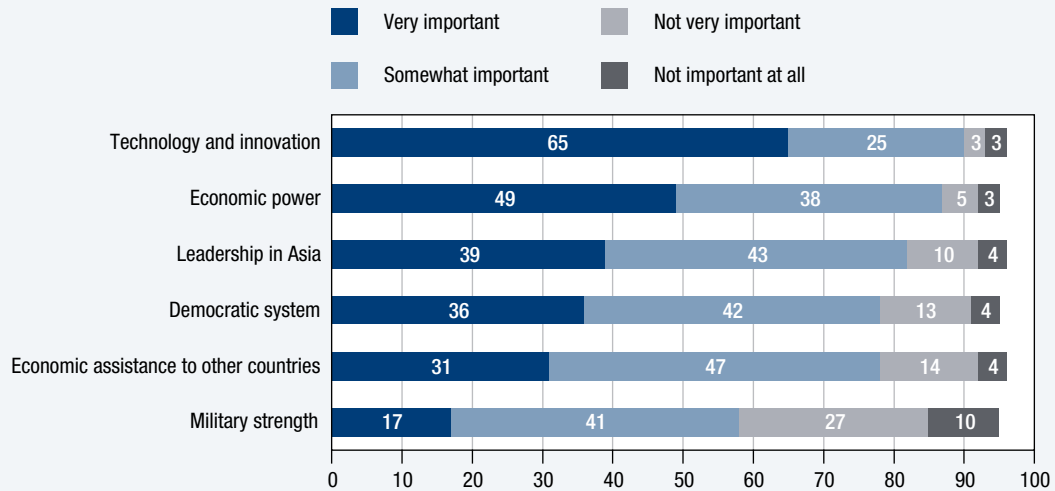
average of 7.5 (up from 6.4 in 2006), while China receives 7.9 (up from 6.4) in 2008. Americans certainly think Japan has a great degree of influence in the world and do not perceive that this influence has decreased in an absolute sense. However, they perceive China as having gained a slight advantage in terms of overall influence. These numbers show an increase for both countries and are consistent with a larger trend since 1994 of increasing numbers of Americans saying Asia is more important to the United States than Europe (from 22% in 1994 to 42% today), even though a narrow majority still sees Europe as more important (54%—see Figure 3). In The Chicago Council's June 2008 Asia Soft Power study, Japan came out ahead of China and South Korea on an index ranking cultural, economic, diplomatic, political, and human capital influence in Asia.⁴

Japan's declining relative economic weight internationally has clearly not led to a decline in

4. Citizens in the United States, China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Vietnam were surveyed regarding their perceptions of American, Chinese, Japanese, and South Korean soft power in Asia. See Christopher B. Whitney and David Shambaugh, eds., "Soft Power in Asia: Results of a 2008 Multinational Survey of Public Opinion," The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, June 2008, http://www.thechicagocouncil.org/UserFiles/File/POS_Topline%20Reports/Asia%20Soft%20Power%202008/Chicago%20Council%20Soft%20Power%20Report-%20Final%206-11-08.pdf.

Figure 4 – Factors in Japan’s Influence

Percentage who say each of the following is very, somewhat, not very, or not at all important to Japan’s influence in the world today.



the American public’s view of Japan’s overall international influence. Americans view Japanese technological innovation as a key source of its power and influence. Sixty-five percent of Americans listed technological innovation as a “very important” source of Japan’s relative power, compared to 49 percent who say this about Japan’s economic power (see Figure 4). Other factors are viewed as less important to Japan’s influence, including its leadership in Asia (39% very important), its democratic system (36% very important), its economic assistance to other countries (31% very important), and its military strength (17% very important). While very few Americans see Japan’s military power as “very important” to Japan’s influence, Americans are supportive of a stronger Japanese military and an increased Japanese role in managing international conflict.

Americans see the U.S.-Japan alliance as important in hedging against Chinese power and are ready for limited adjustments to the security relationship.

Americans seem to understand the complex mix of cooperation and competition in U.S.-China relations as well as the strategic importance of Japan

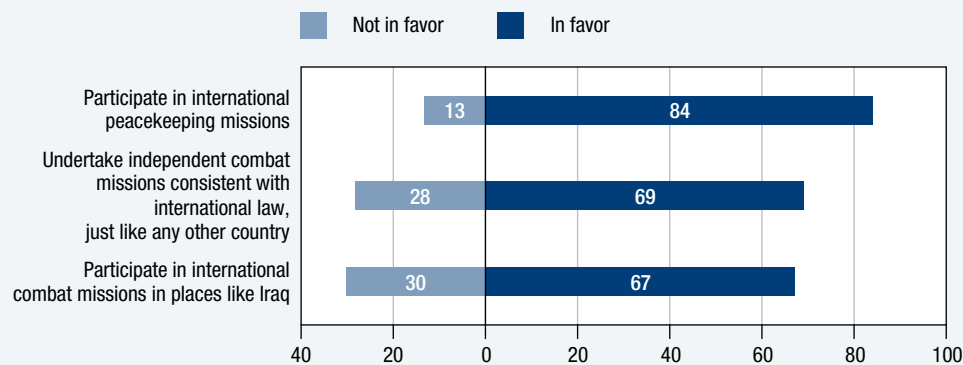
in that regard. While 64 percent of Americans prefer to undertake friendly cooperation and engagement with China rather than actively attempt to limit the growth of Chinese power (33% favor this), a majority (54%) believes that the United States and Japan *should* work together to limit the rise of Chinese power in the years ahead. This gap suggests that Americans see the importance of hedging against Chinese power and the centrality of the U.S.-Japan alliance to that strategy. Yet in a show of ambivalence, 54 percent of Americans prefer to make no change in its alliance with Japan rather than seek to strengthen the alliance to offset China’s power (32%). In any case, only 9 percent would downplay the alliance with Japan so as to improve U.S. relations with China.

Americans do appear ready to let Japan increase its military capabilities to balance China’s rising power rather than taking on that task alone. A significant majority (66%) agrees that because of China’s growing military power and the threat from North Korea, Japan needs to be freer to project its own military power, even though a plurality of 49 percent also agrees that a Japanese military buildup would probably lead to an arms race with China and be destabilizing for Asia.

In view of these and other arguments for and against a change in Japan’s Constitution that would

Figure 5 – Support for an Expanded Military Role by Japan

Percentage who would favor or oppose Japan being able to do the following military activities under a changed Japanese Constitution.



allow Japan to engage in a wider range of military activities—including the idea that if Japan were able to engage in a wider range of military activities it could more effectively help the United States in dealing with areas of instability or potential conflict around the world—57 percent of Americans favor the change. When asked about Japan’s participation in specific military activities that could be allowed under a changed Constitution, support is even higher. Eighty-four percent favor Japan’s participation in international peacekeeping operations. Sixty-seven percent favor its participation in international combat missions in places like Iraq, and 69 percent even favor its undertaking independent combat missions consistent with international law, just like any other country (see Figure 5).

Overall, 57 percent of Americans are prepared to see Japan change Article Nine of its Constitution to allow Japanese forces to engage in the military activities noted above. That is higher than support for Constitutional change among the Japanese public,⁵ and the American expectation that Japan can do more in combat operations far surpasses the Japanese public’s views.

The discrepancy in views between Americans and Japanese on Japan’s military role could lead

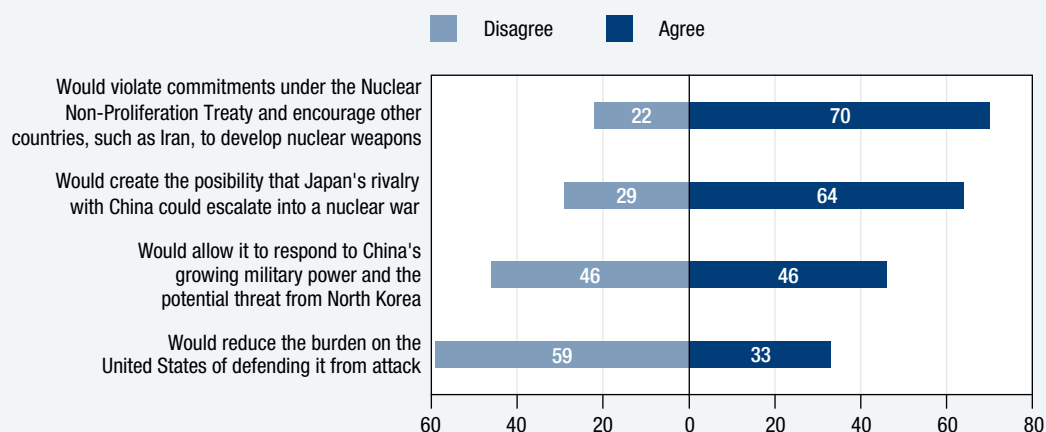
to a significant “expectations gap” about what military burdens Japan should share with the United States. Whether that gap leads to a weakening of American views of Japan’s importance is more uncertain, though, given the relatively low percentage of Americans who think Japan’s military is an important source of its influence. It may be that the low importance attributed to Japan’s military influence reflects a perception based on Japan’s present lack of military strength and inability or unwillingness to project that power rather than the effort Americans expect from Japan, which is far beyond Japan’s present capabilities and desires.

One area where American and Japanese public views on security are almost identical is in opposition to Japanese possession of nuclear weapons. Eighty-three percent of Americans are opposed, a number identical with the most recent polling on the question in Japan. Majorities of Americans agree that Japan’s pursuit of nuclear weapons would violate commitments under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and encourage other countries such as Iran to develop nuclear weapons (70%) and would create the possibility that Japan’s rivalry with China could escalate into a nuclear war (64%—see Figure 6). A majority also *disagrees* that Japan’s development of nuclear weapons would reduce the burden on the United States of defending it from attack (59%). Americans are evenly divided on whether nuclear weapons in Japan would allow it to respond to the rise of China

5. The Mansfield Asian Opinion Poll Database, “Yomiuri Shimbun March 2008 Opinion Polls,” The Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, March 2008, <http://www.mansfieldfdn.org/polls/poll-08-06.htm>; “66% Opposed to Revising Article 9, 23% in Favor,” *Asahi Shimbun*, May 2, 2008 (in Japanese), <http://www.asahi.com/special/08003/TKY200805020272.html>.

Figure 6 – Arguments for and against Japan Building Nuclear Weapons

Percentage who agree or disagree with the following arguments for and against the idea of changing Japan's Constitution to allow Japan to build nuclear weapons.



and the threat from North Korea (46% agree, 46% disagree). Americans foresee mostly negative consequences of Japan's possible development of nuclear weapons for the region and the world.

American desire for Japan to increase its military role—short of nuclear weapons—is accompanied by the desire for the United States to reduce its troop commitment in Japan. While 58 percent of Americans think the United States should have long-term bases in Japan—numbers comparable with support for U.S. bases in Korea, Germany, and Iraq—55 percent agree that there are “too many” U.S. troops in Japan (39% say the number is “about right”). These numbers are similar to Japanese opinions on the same question and suggest support for relocation of Marines to Guam and other efforts to relieve the U.S. military footprint in Japan, while keeping a strong presence overall.

Americans are ready for expanded economic cooperation with Japan.

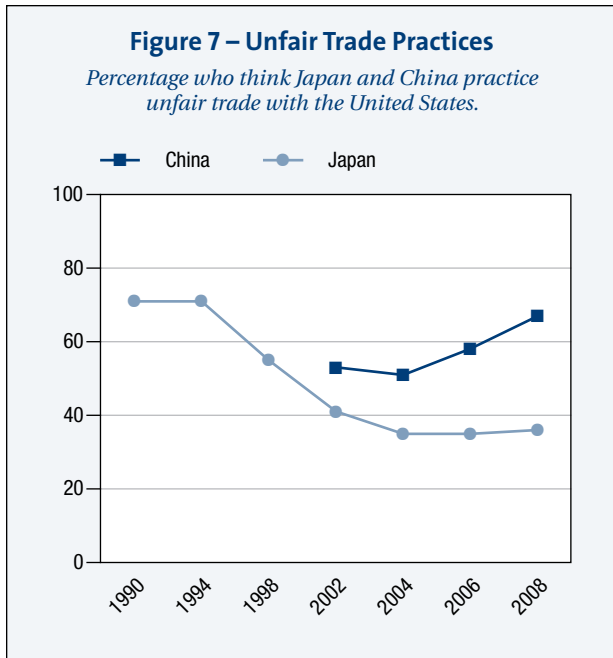
This Chicago Council study demonstrates that there is support for expanding economic relations between the United States and Japan. With 57 percent of Americans believing that Japan engages in “fair trade” with the United States, 59 percent support a free trade agreement between the two countries, higher than U.S. public sup-

port for trade agreements with China and South Korea.⁶ Set against the overall lukewarm public attitudes toward free trade—34 percent oppose agreements to lower trade barriers, 49 percent favor such agreements only if there are government programs to help workers who lose their jobs, and only 13 percent favor lowering barriers outright—Japan is a noteworthy exception. This is all the more surprising given the negative views about trade with Japan that appeared in Chicago Council surveys a decade ago. In 1990 and 1994, 71 percent of respondents thought Japan practiced unfair trade. This has gone down over the years to 36 percent this time (see Figure 7).

Conclusion: Survey supports a positive agenda for U.S.-Japan relations

The greatest challenge to U.S.-Japan relations that emerges from this poll is the “expectations gap” between the American and Japanese publics on Japan's military role. Finding a mutually acceptable role for the Japan Self Defense Forces in the coming years will be tricky. Americans expect more, yet Japanese are becoming more reluctant

6. See The Chicago Council on Global Affairs 2008 Soft Power report.



to send forces abroad again. Narrowing the expectations gap and finding the right missions in places like Afghanistan will be a critical alliance management issue for the next U.S. administration. It will also be important for Japan’s relations with other nations deploying to Afghanistan such as Canada, France, the United Kingdom, and Australia. And, of course, there is a great deal that Japan can do to help stabilize Afghanistan and aid recovery through coalition or UN efforts on the ground.

The greatest opportunity for U.S.-Japan relations that emerges from the poll is in the area of bilateral economic cooperation. The U.S. and Japanese economies are the first and second largest in the world today. Common approaches on trade liberalization, regulatory issues, and standards would have a significant impact on China, the European Union, and other players attempting to take the lead in setting new rules and standards in the global economy. U.S.-Japan economic integration would also help both nations take the lead in creating an open and inclusive trans-Pacific economic architecture in Asia.

Another potential area for increased cooperation between the United States and Japan is in strengthening democratic institutions, the rule of law, and governance in Asia. While only 36 percent of American respondents listed Japan’s democracy

as a “very important” source of its national power, Japan can certainly strengthen its influence by taking a more active role in this area. It would be particularly helpful to U.S. policy if democracy promotion were not being driven in Asia by “Western” powers alone. And given the steady progress in democratic governance in Asia over the recent years, Japan is well positioned to help build on that momentum.

Finally, the American public’s readiness for Japan to play a larger security role—in the context of the rise of China and a recognition that there is the possibility of an arms race—suggests that the United States and Japan should find strategies to work together to engage China. Despite the skepticism and pessimism among Japanese about their country’s relations with China,⁷ the United States and Japan share common interests based on a similar mix of military, diplomatic, and economic relations with China. Coordinated strategies could increase the opportunities to enjoy mutual economic benefits and to address critical challenges such as North Korea. Integrating various policies into a single national strategy is difficult enough for one government. It will prove even tougher for the U.S.-Japan alliance unless an effective mechanism for strategic dialogue and the coordination of China policy is established. Given the American public’s nuanced appreciation of the complexity of relations with China and high level of trust and expectations vis-à-vis Japan, the next U.S. administration can expect support for a joint U.S.-Japan effort to coordinate strategies toward China.

Methodology

The survey of the United States was conducted by Knowledge Networks (KN), a polling, social science, and market research firm in Menlo Park, California. The survey was conducted between July 3 and July 15, 2008, with a total sample of 1,505 American adults who had been randomly selected

7. Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister of Japan, *Gaiko ni Kansuru Yoron Chousa* (Public Survey on Diplomacy), December 3, 2007, <http://www8.cao.go.jp/survey/index.html>.

from KN's respondent panel and answered questions on screens in their own homes. Some questions were given to the entire sample population and others were given to a random two-thirds. The margin of sampling error is between plus or minus 3.7 percentage points and plus or minus 2.5 percentage points.

The survey was fielded using a randomly selected sample of KN's large-scale, nationwide research panel. This panel is itself randomly selected from the national population of households with telephones. These households are subsequently provided Internet access for the completion of surveys (and thus the sample is not limited to those in the population who already have Internet access). The distribution of the sample in the Web-enabled panel closely tracks the distribution of United States Census counts for the U.S. population eighteen years of age or older on age, race, Hispanic ethnicity, geographical region, employment status, income, education, etc. To reduce the effects of any nonresponse and noncoverage bias in panel estimates, a poststratification raking adjustment is applied using demographic distributions from the most recent data from the Current Population Survey (CPS). The poststratification variables include age, race, gender, Hispanic ethnicity, and education. This weighting adjustment is applied prior to the selection of any client sample from KnowledgePanelSM. These weights constitute the starting weights for any client survey selected from the panel.

Once the study data are returned from the field, the final qualified respondent data are subjected to an additional poststratification process to adjust for any nonresponse and noncoverage as a result of the study-specific sample design. The primary purpose of this poststratification adjustment is to reduce the sampling variance for any characteristics highly correlated with the representative study population's demographic and geographic totals (these are referred to as the population benchmarks). This adjustment also helps reduce bias due to survey nonresponse.

The panel is recruited using stratified random digit dialing (RDD) telephone sampling. RDD pro-

vides a nonzero probability of selection for every U.S. household with a telephone. Households that agree to participate in the panel are provided with free Web access and an Internet appliance (if necessary), which uses a telephone line to connect to the Internet and uses the television as a monitor. For more information concerning the methodology of the U.S. sample, please visit the KN Web site at www.knowledgenetworks.com.

Acknowledgments

The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, founded in 1922, is a prominent, independent, and nonpartisan organization committed to influencing the discourse on global issues through contributions to opinion and policy formation, leadership dialogue, and public learning. The Chicago Council has been conducting nationwide public opinion surveys on American views on foreign policy since 1974. These surveys provide insights into the current and long-term foreign policy attitudes of the American public on a wide range of global topics.

Christopher Whitney, now former executive director for studies at The Chicago Council, and Gregory Holyk, project consultant for the 2008 public opinion study, served as project directors. Silvia Veltcheva, program officer at The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, managed all aspects of the project.

Dr. Michael J. Green, senior advisor and Japan chair at CSIS and associate professor at Georgetown University, was the lead author of this report and worked with the study team on producing the final copy. Other contributors included Marshall M. Bouton, Rachel Bronson, Catherine Hug, Steven Kull, Benjamin I. Page, and Thomas Wright.

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