

A Pacific Alliance for Peace

By William R. Hawkins

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As the left-leaning news media relish reports that President Barack Obama is seeking to temper the image of the United States as the world's preeminent power, it can be forgotten that there are overseas allies who want and need America to remain strong and vigilant against rising threats. They want America to continue its leadership role in forging coalitions to meet global dangers. This message was very clear at a conference April 17 in Washington sponsored by two Japanese think tanks, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Ocean Policy Research Foundation.

The theme of the conference was the U.S.-Japan Maritime Alliance and how it can be expanded. Japan's ambassador Shotaro Yachi opened the session by reading a message from Prime Minister Taro Aso calling for Washington and Tokyo to take the lead in building an "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity" which would sweep across "Japan, the Republic of Korea, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, the Middle East, Central Asia, Guam, Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic region and Scandinavia roughly speaking." This geographical description is of the opposite side of the "Arc of Instability" that has been used since the 1970s to describe the main trouble spots in the Eurasian landmass. The positive concept of the Arc would be founded on the values of "freedom, democracy, basic human rights, the rule of law and the market economy" according to Aso. The Asia-Pacific section of the Arc, extending as far as the Persian Gulf, would be backed by a "Seapower Network" that should expand beyond the current U.S.-Japan alliance to include Australia, India and the United Kingdom.

In this formulation, it is not difficult to understand from where the threats to those protected by the Arc alliance are expected to come. For diplomatic reasons, Aso had to say that the Arc "is not intended to contain China or Russia," but his extended remarks were filled with examples of the dangers Beijing and Moscow pose to peace, stability and economic development. The Prime Minister noted

China's advancement to the ocean is particularly spectacular. The Chinese Navy is proactively modernizing. We also have information that China is working to build aircraft carriers. China's opaque expansion and modernization of its military, including the Navy, may greatly impact the maritime security environment which is so important to both Japan and the U.S. Moreover, Russia is increasingly more actively engaged in military activities in the Far East.

A major element in the "Japan-United States Seapower Alliance for Stability and Prosperity on the Oceans" paper presented at the conference by the Ocean Policy Research Foundation is development of seabed resources, both minerals and energy. The proposal calls for joint research and the sharing of new technology that can reach these untapped resources. But it is also clear that ocean wealth will also have to be protected from rivals. Prime Minister Aso pointed out that Japan and China have conflicting claims in the East China Sea, and that "China continues to carry out unilateral development based on its own claims. This cannot be considered to be an action of a responsible major power." He also noted "excessive claims of jurisdiction by coastal states. This is a problem the U.S. Navy has faced from Chinese harassment of its ships in international waters. Beijing claims that the Exclusive Economic Zones awarded by the UN Law of the Sea Treaty confer sovereignty over large ocean expanses and not just a limited right to exploit resources.

Japan also has territorial disputes with Russia, and Aso mentioned the construction plan Moscow has for a strategic nuclear submarine base on the Kamchatka peninsula. China has recently built a similar base on Hainan Island menacing the South China Sea.

Former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe appeared in person to deliver the keynote address at the Sasakawa conference. He echoed Aso's arguments, and even compared, without naming names, the rising Chinese threat to that posed earlier by the Soviet Union. He stated that during the Cold War, Japan was the "cap in the bottle" past which the Soviet fleet could not pass from its Pacific base at Vladivostok. He then observed that the "Japanese island chain can fulfill the same role against another power if it pushes the envelop." Geographically that chain could be seen as extending all the way south to Taiwan and the Philippines, forming a base for containing China's naval ambitions.

Beijing is well aware of island geography. In the 2005 report on *China Military Power* issued annually by the U.S. Defense Department, General Wen Zongren, Political Commissar of the elite People's Liberation Army Academy of Military Science, is quoted as saying that taking control of Taiwan is of "far reaching significance to breaking international forces' blockade against China's maritime security....to rise suddenly, China must pass through oceans and go out of the oceans in its future development." Chinese strategists have discussed the creation of their own "string of pearls" naval bases to control the sea lanes of the Pacific Rim.

The OPRF paper urges Washington and Tokyo "to cooperate with all nations opposing the emergence of any aspiring hegemonic state that could disrupt the balance of power on the seas and create instability in the security environment" another thinly veiled reference to the rise of China. "The process of building the new seapower alliance will also serve as a new challenge for the Japan-U.S. alliance that many believe is beginning to waiver," says the OPRF document.

An example of those who believe the alliance should not just waiver but dissolve was presented during the question period following Abe's speech. Stanley Kober, a research fellow at the libertarian Cato Institute, cited out of context George Washington's warning against "entangling alliances." He then claimed such alliances only serve to keep the world divided. He asked the former Prime Minister, "If the U.S. and Japan strengthen their alliance, what will Russia and China do?" Kober also thought it was a mistake to try to include India in the alliance. Cato has a history of trying to undermine American defense policy, and has been exhibiting a growing pro-Chinese bias.

Cato Vice President Gene Healy made the same reference to "entangling alliances" in a recent op-ed calling for "genuine, and deep, cuts in military spending" in which he also cited the "counterintuitive claim" of Christopher Preble, Cato's Director of Foreign Policy Studies, that "our military dominance actually makes us less safe." Last summer, Malou Innocent, another Cato foreign policy analyst, wrote an op-ed criticizing presidential candidate Sen. John McCain for "talking too tough on Russia and China." She called on the next president "to continue cooperating with China and Russia." Cato pronouncements are obsessed with trade and investment in China, reflecting the views of corporate interests who hope to profit from helping Beijing rise as a great power without regard for the impact on world politics or American security.

Abe responded to Kober by restating that the U.S., Japan and India "are democracies with shared interests" who also believe in human rights and the rule of law. Next year will mark the 60th anniversary of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Abe declared, "The United States has no better friend in the world than Japan." Other Japanese speakers at the conference reinforced this point. Shunji Yanai, an advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and professor at Waseda University argued that the Iraq War has helped pull Washington and Tokyo closer together, as has the crisis over North Korean nuclear and missile programs. Japan sent military engineers to Iraq to help with reconstruction and has deployed naval units to support coalition operations in Afghanistan. Yanai also believes that North Korea has a secret uranium enrichment program that has not been addressed by the Six Party Talks orchestrated by China.

Naoyuki Agawa, a Dean at Keio University, joined Yanai in support of changes in Japanese constitutional interpretation to allow Tokyo to play a more active role in collective security operations. He agreed that joint

operations in the Middle East have pulled the two fleets together and proclaimed, “Despite legal and constitutional restraints, the Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force is willing to fight alongside its fellow sailors” in the U.S. Navy.

It may not come to that. A strengthened and expanded alliance of maritime nations can serve as a powerful deterrent to the ambitions of China, Russia and their dangerous prodigies in Iran, Burma, North Korea and elsewhere. It will, however, take more than proclamations. Words must lead to actions.

The lunch speaker at the conference was Deputy Chief of Naval Operations Vice Admiral William Crowder, who had been commander of the U.S. 7th Fleet in the Pacific. He was dismayed by how much the size of the U.S. Navy has declined in recent decades. Today it has less than half the warships that were at sea when Ronald Reagan was president. The cuts in naval programs announced April 6 by the Obama administration, along with other cuts in high end programs involving aviation and missile defense that are part of the proposed 2010 defense budget, will undermine the favorable balance of power now enjoyed by the United States.

A warning from Japanese leaders of what is at stake in Asia could not have come at a more important moment.

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