



December 20, 2004

## **Difference of Strategic Views?: Japanese Loss of Confidence in the U.S. but Continuing Support for the Alliance.**

**William Breer, Japan Chair, CSIS**

A joint Yomiuri Shimbun-Gallup survey released on December 15, 2004 indicated a changing public opinion in Japan and the United States. The telephone survey was conducted in November, with 1,006 respondents over the age of 20 in Japan and 1,000 over 18 in the United States.

- U.S.-Japan alliance: 64 percent of the respondents in Japan and 75 percent in the United States shared the view that the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty in the Asia-Pacific region was effective. 49 percent of Japanese respondents said their relationship with the United States was good, a nine percentage point increase from 2003. 53 percent of American respondents shared this view.
- North Korean threat: Both Japanese and American respondents identified North Korea as a security threat in East Asia with the figure of 72 percent of Japanese and 81 percent of Americans.
- Mutual Trust: 53 percent of Japanese respondents said they did not trust the United States, a figure far higher than the 29 percent of Americans who said they distrusted Japan. The number of Japanese who said they distrusted the United States exceeded those who said they trusted it last year, and the gap has widened from four percentage points to 15 percentage points.
- Governing of Iraq: 75 percent of Japanese respondents said they were more or less dissatisfied with the governing of Iraq led by the United States, and among those who said they were not satisfied, 61 percent said they did not trust the United States. 61 percent of Japanese said they did not hold a favorable feeling toward Bush since his reelection, and among them, 71 percent said they did not trust the United States. On the other hand, 60 percent of American respondents expressed their support for Bush.
- U.S. Forces in Japan: A gap also exists between the two countries respondents over the number of U.S. forces stationed in Japan under the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty. 42 percent of Japanese respondents said the number of U.S. forces in Japan should be reduced. Meanwhile, 59 percent of American respondents said the number should be maintained at the current level. Although the number of Japanese respondents who called for a reduction accounted for the largest percentage of the responses to this question, the increase is only 1 percentage point from last year.

### **Interpretation (William Breer, Yomiuri Shimbun, December 16, 2004)**

The Yomiuri survey of public opinion in the United States and Japan confirms many of the impressions I have gained from talking to Japanese, both in Japan and in the United States. While the findings do not indicate a crisis in our relationship they raise a number of issues that are cause for concern and should be recognized by both nations. Whether that will be the case or not is problematic. The U.S. side is likely to remain oblivious to the future risks involved in its present course.

In my 45 years experience observing and working on U.S.-Japan relations, there has never been a period of less bilateral controversy, either over trade or national security issues. Trade friction is largely a phenomenon

of the 80s and 90s. Defense cooperation is being smoothly implemented. We are coordinating closely on Korean peninsula issues. And, Japan is providing strong support for reconstruction in Iraq.

Nevertheless, the survey indicates that Japanese trust in the United States has declined over the past two years. This may be the most important consequence of the decision to go to war against Iraq, especially in view of the fact that the intelligence base upon which the decision was made has since proven to be highly questionable. That single fact has brought to a new low confidence in the analytical abilities and judgment of the U.S. intellectual class that had been a pillar of the relationship since 1945. America is again led by the “best and brightest” of the Vietnam era, and it turns out that they are less smart than the average American – or Japanese. I hope the fallout is short-lived, but the decline in confidence in American moral leadership and ability to make wise choices is encouraging leaders in other countries to start thinking about hedging against future American failures of leadership. This has already affected America’s relationship with Europe and could have grave consequences for other alliances. America’s concentration on establishing democracy in Iraq has strained our resources to the point that our allies might start worrying about our ability to meet commitments elsewhere.

While, as noted above, there has been a decline in Japanese confidence in American leadership, the poll shows that Japanese attach as much importance as Americans to having the international community take a firm stand against international terrorism. It also demonstrates that Japanese and Americans share the view that North Korea presents a threat to the peace and stability of Northeast Asia. This is probably the main reason support for the U.S.-Japan mutual security arrangements has increased slightly from 2003, and that tolerance for the U.S. military presence in Japan, which rose sharply in 2001, has remained remarkably consistent.

In summary, it appears that, while there has been some erosion in the Japanese public’s confidence in American leadership, most Japanese continue to believe that the best assurance for Japanese security in the future will continue to be a close alliance with the United States.

*The Yomiuri-Gallup Survey summary at the top of this issue is brought to you by Naoko Noro, Intern Scholar, Office of the Japan Chair*

*For comments or inquiries on Japan Watch, please contact Eri Hirano at (202) 775-3144 or by e-mail at [ehirano@csis.org](mailto:ehirano@csis.org).*

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