Recently I was having lunch with a group of Japanese professors and government officials at the Hotel Del Coronado, an old and famous landmark in San Diego in the most southern part of California, which is also home to many American military bases. We were sitting outside on the terrace, and a large number of U.S. Navy aircraft kept interrupting our conversation with noise from their engines as they landed at a nearby naval air base. I commented that “Now you begin to understand what the Okinawans have had to put up with for the past fifty years.”

San Diego is comparable to Okinawa in terms of its military installations, but it is very different in that it is able to determine to some extent how intrusive the military will be in its community. In the wake of the Cold War, the United States created an official body called the “U.S. Defense Base Closure and Realignment Commission” to study what military installations were no longer needed. During 1995, this Commission decided among other things that the Marine Corps Air Station on the outskirts of Los Angeles should be closed and its 112 helicopters moved to Miramar Naval Air Station in San Diego.

Miramar is located in the suburbs of San Diego, about the same distance from the city center as Kadena is from Naha. It is situated between residential suburbs on both the East and the West. The Miramar take-off pattern goes directly over the University of California, San Diego, and the area is generally built up with homes, schools, hospitals, golf courses, and shopping malls (although not nearly so built up as the cities surrounding Futenma and Kadena in Okinawa).
Some 7,000 people in northern San Diego county signed petitions against the “unacceptable noise and safety problems” that these proposed helicopters will cause. In response, the Marines ran some very carefully controlled flights around the area to test the noise levels, but people said that these still shook all the windows in their houses and made it impossible to talk or do anything else. Property values are in steady decline around Miramar.

By law in the United States, the Marines are required to conduct a serious investigation of the environmental impact of the helicopters on people’s lives and the local ecology. This three-volume, 6-inch thick “environmental impact statement” says that noise from helicopters and jets “would result in significant unavoidable impacts on off-base communities,” but that it “is not enough to stop the planned change.” In other words, the Pentagon is no more concerned about the effects of placing warplanes among its own civilians than it has been in Okinawa.

But this did not stop the citizens of San Diego. The United States is in the midst of a presidential election campaign, and California is very important to the outcome. In mid-June, when President Bill Clinton visited San Diego, the voters delivered to him petitions from the mayor of San Diego, one of California’s two Senators, and two local members of Congress asking that he move the helicopters somewhere else. The reasons they gave are that “increased noise and vibrations would disrupt peoples’ lives and lower the quality of life.”

In Tokyo in April the President pretended to respond to the problems of Okinawa after the rape incident, but nothing will actually change there for some five to seven years, if ever. But in San Diego he could not just paper over the situation. Instead, the President ordered the Pentagon to reexamine its decision to move the helicopters to Miramar and report back to him. He knows that if he had not done that, the people of San Diego would vote against him in November.

This is in sharp contrast to the situation in Okinawa. At no time over the past fifty years has either the American or Japanese government ever considered whether the noise, accidents, prostitution, sexual violence, diminished economic prospects, or continuous inconvenience were “acceptable” to people who live a lot closer to the American bases on Okinawa than anyone in San Diego county does to the base at Miramar.

Governor Ota’s tactic of not forcing local Okinawan landowners to continue to lease their property to the American military is similar to the pressure the people of San Diego are putting on President Clinton and should be applauded. The difference is that in San Diego the pressure is felt directly in Washington through the political process. This does not work in Japan because Japanese politicians are delighted to have all the bases kept in a small southern island far from their own homes and supporters and because the Americans go along with Tokyo on these policies.

However, in a recent election for the Okinawan prefectural assembly, Governor Ota’s coalition for the first time won a small majority. The prefectural assembly has also voted to
hold a plebiscite (perhaps as early as September) on the issue of curtailing the U.S. military presence on the island and on the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement.

Neither of these developments has been reported in the mainstream American press, but their results will ultimately create the same sort of political pressures we see at work in San Diego.

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**No Double View of Japan**

by Glen S. Fukushima

President Bill Clinton’s April trip to Japan focused primarily on the security relationship between the United States and Japan. Trade issues were downplayed by both sides for a variety of reasons, giving the impression to the casual observer that they have taken a permanent back-seat to security issues. To the uninformed, it almost appeared to be a regression to the Cold War era, when the U.S. willingly sacrificed its commercial interests in return for Japan’s cooperation in the struggle against Communism.

This curious flaw in the U.S. approach toward Japan--the bifurcation of the relationship into two distinct components, security and trade--is also symbolized in the title of former U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Armacost’s recent book: *Friends or Rivals? The Insider’s Account of U.S.-Japan Relations*.

The prevailing view is that the U.S. and Japan are friends on the security side but that the alliance is being threatened by rivalry on the trade side. According to this view, the two aspects of the relationship must be kept separate so that trade problems will not spill over to “contaminate” the amicable security relationship.

This bifurcation has at least three negative consequences:

First, it allows for wide and unstable swings in U.S. policy toward Japan. When trade issues are at center stage, the relationship becomes adversarial and confrontational. When, on the other hand, security issues are highlighted, the relationship becomes harmonious and cooperative (at least, until recently).

Second, the bifurcation allows Japan to divide and conquer. When U.S. policymakers are divided into two communities with totally divergent visions of Japan, the Japanese can--and often do--easily play off Americans against each other.
Third, the bifurcation prevents the United States from formulating a coherent, consistent and comprehensive policy toward Japan—something desperately needed in the post-Cold War world.

During my stint at USTR from 1985 to 1990, I encountered numerous examples of the U.S. tendency to view Japan as two countries. During the 1987-88 beef and citrus negotiations, for example, the State Department prepared a report on scenarios for resolving this dispute. When I asked a State Department colleague for a copy, his reply was, “Sorry, but this is an internal State Department study; we can’t share it with USTR.”

But later that afternoon, the same individual told me with a straight face, “On second thought, I guess it’s OK to share it with you, since we gave it to the Japanese last week.” For him, the Japanese Foreign Ministry was a closer ally than USTR.

Contrast this view of Japan to that of a senior U.S. Commerce Department official, who told me during the 1986-88 construction services negotiations, “Frankly, Glen, I prefer dealing with the Soviets, because at least they don’t lie to us as much as the Japanese.” This person, too, was deadly serious.

Perhaps the most dramatic case I witnessed of this schizophrenia toward Japan was in 1989, in the midst of the controversy over FSX, Japan’s next generation fighter-interceptor. During a meeting at the Pentagon, a senior Defense Department official said to me, “You people from USTR and Commerce are so suspicious about Japan that you believe MITI is behind everything. Well, let me assure you that in the case of FSX, it is entirely a Japan Defense Agency issue; MITI has absolutely nothing to do with it.”

Imagine my surprise when I heard this. The chief Japanese negotiator on FSX at the time was a person I knew well, for he had been my negotiating counterpart on semiconductors only two years previously—a 25-year career MITI official and a veteran of numerous trade negotiations who had been seconded to the Defense Agency. He later returned to MITI and eventually “descended from heaven” to a major gas company, where he is now a senior executive.

That a leading U.S. negotiator on FSX did not realize his counterpart was a MITI official was truly mind-boggling. But it revealed the naively trusting mindset of some U.S. security officials, in stark contrast to that of some U.S. trade officials, whose views on Japan had become jaded, jaundiced and deeply skeptical.

That was seven years ago, at the end of the Cold War. But attitudes die hard. Remnants of the Cold War world views are surprisingly strong. In the minds of U.S. policy makers, there are still two Japans—one, our most trusted and reliable security ally in Asia; the other, our most formidable global economic competitor. Both are aspects of reality; they cannot remain separated as if by a firewall. In the post-Cold War era, they must be reconciled into a coherent view of Japan as one country.
The truth is that we are not “friends or rivals”; we are simultaneously both. The profound challenge confronting the United States is to comprehend this fact, manage the relationship accordingly, and shed once and for all the illusion that if we just try hard enough we can be friends rather than rivals--as if we had a choice.

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