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Underplaying the ‘Okinawa card’: how Japan negotiates its alliance with the United States¹

H. D. P. ENVALL*

The US military bases in the Japanese prefecture of Okinawa have long been a source of domestic political opposition to the US–Japan alliance. As an alliance management issue, the ongoing troubles surrounding the bases raise questions as to when and why states adopt particular bargaining strategies when dealing with allies. Why, for instance, has the Japanese government not made greater use of this ‘Okinawa card’ when negotiating alliance issues with the USA? Even though highlighting particular domestic problems as a part of a negotiating strategy (known as tying hands) should appeal to a weaker ally such as Japan, this article argues that in the Okinawan case the reverse has been true. Japan has generally, though not always, sought to minimise or downplay domestic opposition to its alliance agreements, essentially preferring a cutting-slack to a tying-hands approach. The Japanese experience suggests that when states which are directly dependent on an alliance for their security see their security environment as unstable, they view tying-hands strategies as too likely to undermine their bargaining credibility. Maintaining credibility is important in an alliance bargaining context because it is a way for such states to signal their commitment to an alliance and so guard against abandonment.

Keywords: alliance management; military bases; Okinawa; tying-hands strategy; US–Japan alliance

Introduction

The US military presence in Okinawa has long been controversial. Fairly or unfairly, much of the local population resents the bases and wants them moved. For the US–Japan alliance, the base issue brings together a range of societal, economic and political challenges that cannot be resolved by the two national governments alone, but must also involve domestic actors (see, for example, Cooley and Marten 2008; Tanji 2006). So why has the government of Japan (GOJ) not sought to play this ‘Okinawa card’ more forcefully in order to get a better deal from the US government (USG) in the context of the US–Japan alliance?

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Such an approach would, after all, be in accordance with a *tying-hands* strategy, which is where domestic constraints on agreements are deliberately increased or highlighted in order to obtain greater bargaining advantage (Putnam 1988; Schelling 1980). The opposite, a *cutting-slack* strategy, is where domestic constraints are reduced or downplayed so as to make agreements more likely (even if a bargaining advantage is lost). At first glance, alliance managers should find a tying-hands strategy appealing. Weaker allies might struggle to argue plausibly that they will defect from an alliance agreement if their demands are not met, owing to their likely fear of being abandoned. But they may be more credible if they highlight how domestic constraints will force them to defect, despite their own intentions. By citing (or manipulating) domestic constraints in this way, alliance managers are thus able to close certain policy options without explicitly opposing them. It is a way to avoid being 'pushed around': 'I'd like to accept your proposal, but I could never get it accepted at home' (Putnam 1988, 440).

Considerable scepticism exists, however, about the viability of tying-hands strategies. Even though there is little evidence to suggest that countries are punished for such actions (Kimball and Alatassi 2009), the damage that such a strategy could do to an established alliance may be a sufficient deterrent (Evans 1993). In Japan's case, domestic political inertia focused on a security consensus (in support of the US–Japan alliance) may make such strategies problematic (Grimes 2003). Indeed, Andrew Yeo (2011) argues that an elite consensus in support of the alliance stymied the efforts of Okinawans to reduce the US's base presence during the 1990s. The consensus, according to Yeo (2011, 85), was based primarily around 'the norms and domestic institutions' that have shaped Japanese strategic thinking since the end of World War II, although it was also formed by 'actors' external threat perceptions'.

This article argues that the Okinawan base issue confirms this scepticism regarding the utility of tying-hands strategies. In contrast to more domestic- or norm-focused explanations (see, for example, Katzenstein 1996; Yeo 2011), however, the article seeks to explain why the more specific relationship between a state's external threat perceptions and its awareness of its alliance bargaining power has been the key influence on Japan's alliance bargaining strategies. In examining these issues, the article focuses on two case studies. The first is the base-leasing dispute of the 1990s, when the central government was dominated by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP). The second is the Futenma airbase relocation controversy of the late 2000s, when the central government was led by the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ). It is undoubtedly difficult to determine conclusively the strategic thinking of alliance managers, although Japan is often viewed as a nation closely attuned to shifting international circumstances (Pyle 2007). Nonetheless, as well-documented instances of alliance bargaining, these case studies provide many insights into Japan's alliance bargaining behaviour, whether tying hands or cutting slack, as well as the context in which this behaviour occurred.

Why does the relationship between threat perceptions and bargaining power provide a convincing explanation for Japan's reluctance to adopt tying-hands strategies? Compared to broader concepts, such as the domestic security consensus, the relationship between a state's threat perceptions and awareness of bargaining power is more specific and more easily discerned. It is also underpinned by a compelling alliance logic based on the dilemma states face over their alliance commitments. States may signal a strong commitment to an alliance in order to protect themselves against abandonment, but this weakens their bargaining position and may result in suboptimal agreements. Alternatively, they may push for more beneficial agreements (for example, involving less chance of entrapment), but in doing so increase their risk of abandonment. In this case, abandonment would stem from the possible damage a state might do to its reputation and credibility within the alliance due to a poor choice of bargaining strategy. Such a miscalculation would effectively signal to their ally their weakening alliance commitment. When external security conditions are deteriorating, this risk increases, and so states become more reluctant to attempt such strategies. The question, then, is whether such trends are evident in the behaviour of Japan's alliance managers during the mid 1990s and late 2000s.

Understanding alliance management

According to Glenn Snyder (1997, 165), alliance management 'involves pursuing both common interests and competitive interests and thus is essentially a process of bargaining, either tacit or explicit'. Bargaining power in such a context is a function of three general factors: dependence, commitment and interests. *Dependence* refers to the net benefit a state receives from an alliance—the greater the benefit, the greater the dependency. *Commitment* refers to 'an arrangement of values that dispose one to act in a certain way' (Snyder 1997, 169). It is derived from such things as verbal promises made in the alliance contract, along with extra outside incentives. *Interests* refer to how highly a state values certain objectives in a given context—for example, security from an adversary or increased influence over one.

Alliance managers can be expected to make use of their bargaining power to maximise the benefits of an alliance while minimising the costs. They must therefore be able to balance security and autonomy by continually evaluating how strongly to commit to the alliance. The dilemma is that if they weaken their commitment to minimise the costs of the alliance, they risk *abandonment*; however, if they strengthen their commitment to the alliance to maximise the benefits, they risk *entrapment*. If allies know they can 'count on being supported', notes Glenn Snyder (1984, 467), they will be 'less influenceable'. The abandonment–entrapment (or commitment) dilemma has long been a feature of the US–Japan alliance and of Japanese strategic thinking (Samuels

2007; Wilkins 2011). The extent to which alliance managers are likely to risk abandonment or entrapment is thus seen to depend on the nature of their security interests and their perceptions of the relative balance of dependence on the alliance. Dependence can be both direct, in terms of how much a state depends on another for its security, and indirect, in terms of how much a state values the independence of its ally from potential adversaries (Snyder 1984).

Credibility and *reputation*, along with *information* management, are three areas where alliance management strategies can go awry. Information gathering, especially ascertaining the preferences of domestic actors as well as alliance counterparts, is known to be difficult (Evans 1993). Reputational costs may be incurred even if it is possible to carry out a tying-hands strategy successfully. Alliance cheaters mostly appear to be forgiven, at least in terms of not being prevented from making alliances in the future (Kimball and Alatassi 2009). Yet alliance managers may fear that deliberate cheating will cause damage to an alliance in other ways, such as through a downgrading of the alliance's importance. As Evans (1993, 402) notes, when 'potential gains based on misinformation in one round must be balanced against the loss of credibility in future rounds, credibility usually weighs more heavily'.

Such analysis assumes that domestic and international politics interact, an idea that is now well established in the literature. Following Putnam's (1988, 434) initial observation that this process could 'usefully be conceived as a two-level game', numerous other scholars have sought to test the two-level framework (see, for example, Evans et al. 1993; Lantis 1997; Milner 1997). A key challenge for alliance managers seeking to make use of the domestic side of this equation concerns the problem of increasing one's bargaining power without undermining an alliance. Manipulating domestic constraints, which are often beyond direct control, risks destabilising the alliance. Still, such risks can be mitigated by *cutting slack* in various ways. States may make *side payments* to key domestic actors—that is, allocate benefits to constituents in unrelated areas in return for their agreement. They may also engage in *enfranchisement*, which is to introduce new domestic actors into the political process so as to reshape the domestic balance, or *disenfranchisement*, which is to remove actors from the process for the same purpose (see, for example, Evans 1993). Calder's (2007) base politics paradigm uses different terms—*compensation* and *coercion*—to refer to similar policies.

The 1990s: the US bases and the land-lease controversy

The rape of a young girl in September 1995 by US military personnel transformed the debate on the size, and even the existence, of the US military presence in Okinawa (Inoue 2007; Johnson 1999). The Okinawa Prefectural Government, led by then governor Ōta Masahide, called for a review of the Status of Forces Agreement, which covers the treatment of US military

personnel in Japan. Ōta also decided to block the leasing arrangements used for the US's military bases in the prefecture.

Nonetheless, the subsequent dispute between Ōta and the GOJ over the leases cannot be viewed as resulting from one incident alone; Ōta was also responding to changes in wider Japan alliance policy. In the early 1990s, the GOJ had begun to consider a more autonomous foreign and security policy. A key government report of the time, known as the Higuchi Report, recommended that Japan should 'extricate itself from its security policy of the past' and 'play an active role in shaping a new order' (Advisory Group on Defense Issues 1994, 30). Following the Korean nuclear crisis, however, the GOJ and USG announced that the two countries would maintain the existing Japan-US security arrangements. The USA then released its own report, known as the Nye Report, which argued that US troop deployments should be maintained in the region at around 100,000 troops 'for the foreseeable future' (Eldridge 2004, 199). These decisions represented a renewed commitment by both parties to the alliance in the face of regional uncertainty. But for Ōta, these decisions meant that there would be 'very little likelihood of any base realignment, consolidation, or reduction in Okinawa' (quoted in Funabashi 1999, 251).

The dispute should also be viewed in the context of the GOJ's and USG's piecemeal legal approach to base management in Okinawa (Egami 1994). Central government solutions found little local support and subsequent, often temporary, resolutions led to greater uncertainty and resentment across the prefecture (Eldridge 2004; Hirota 1996). In obtaining land for the bases, the GOJ made use of the Special Measures Law for Land Use by US Forces, or, more simply, the Special Measures Law (*Tokusohō*). The procedures of the *Tokusohō* were relatively straightforward when there was general agreement on the leases. Even when landowners did not comply with acquisition orders, the power to approve leases rested in the end with the governor (Eldridge 2004; George Mulgan 2000; Hirota 1996; Taira 1997). On this occasion, the lease renewal process had begun when anti-base landowners refused to sign the appropriate documents in March 1995. After various officials then refused to approve the renewals, the matter was taken to Ōta, who was still to announce his decision when the three US military personnel abducted and raped the young girl in early September. In late September, Ōta rejected the applications (*Asahi Shinbun*, March 25, 1996).

Alliance management under the LDP

Ōta's rejection of the applications provides a textbook example of domestic opposition that might be used as part of a tying-hands strategy. Had the GOJ sought to implement such a strategy in response to Ōta's decision, it might be expected to have supported the governor more strongly at an early stage. Instead, the GOJ sought to pressure Ōta to change his mind and approve the leases, but its attempts to coerce the governor caused even further unrest in

Okinawa (Funabashi 1999, 303–304; Ōta 2000, 174). This forced the GOJ to attempt a reconciliation with Ōta when Prime Minister Murayama Tomi'ichi and the governor met to discuss the base issue in November 1995. Although at the head of a coalition government dominated by the LDP, Murayama was not a member of the conservative LDP but a socialist, and might have been expected therefore to be sympathetic to Ōta's position. Even while accepting the government's responsibility for many of the problems, however, Murayama reportedly told Ōta that if he failed to sign the documents, the government would have 'no choice but to file suit' (quoted in Funabashi 1999, 136–137). The government carried out Murayama's warning and filed suit against Ōta in December. In March 1996, Ōta was ordered to sign by the courts, but again refused, appealing instead to the supreme court. This meant that Hashimoto Ryūtarō, Japan's new LDP prime minister (replacing Murayama), was forced to sign in his place ('Hashimoto Signs Documents' 1996).

The dispute occurred during a period of deteriorating regional security, which included the 'nuclear crisis' on the Korean Peninsula in 1994, worsening Sino-Japanese relations in 1994–1995, and the Taiwan Straits crisis in 1995–1996 (Green and Self 1996; Tow 2001). Thus, when Murayama and US vice-president Al Gore established the Special Action Committee on Okinawa in November 1995 to study ways to realign the bases and review the Status of Forces Agreement (Taira 1997), they did so in a climate of rising regional tensions. The GOJ was clearly perturbed by the worsening regional environment. In March 1996, when Hashimoto met with Chinese premier Li Peng, he enjoined China to be restrained in its approach towards Taiwan and expressed his hope that the issue would be 'resolved in a peaceful manner' ('Hashimoto Urges China's Restraint' 1996). Meanwhile, the LDP began drafting legislation to deal with emergencies in East Asia, noting in the process that the Chinese military could be a factor affecting national security ('LDP Proposes Legislation' 1996). In its defence program outline for the period after 1996, which was published in late 1995, the GOJ committed Japan to 'maintaining firmly the Japan–U.S. security arrangements', while also seeking 'to implement various measures to facilitate [the] smooth and effective stationing of U.S. forces in Japan' (JDA 1995).

The GOJ sought to demonstrate its negotiating credibility, and thus its commitment to the alliance, by engaging in a cutting-slack strategy towards Okinawa. In particular, it sought to increase the political pressure on Ōta to change his mind on the leases. By making use of good communication channels into Okinawa (Brooks 2010; Interview with Former Official, March 19, 2010), the GOJ applied a stick and carrot strategy to the prefecture. In a January 1996 policy speech, Hashimoto spoke of achieving 'tangible improvements' in various problems relating to the bases in Okinawa. While the GOJ would act 'in harmony with the objectives of the Japan–US Security Treaty', he argued, it would also pay 'maximum consideration to the sorrow and suffering of the people of Okinawa' ('New Prime Minister Hashimoto' 1996). A raft of

committees, projects, discussion groups and councils focusing on Okinawan affairs was established in accordance with a side-payments approach. As George Mulgan (2000) explains, spending on Okinawa rose from 465 billion yen in 1994 to 679 billion yen in 1998.

Much of this suggests that the GOJ's strategy was concerned primarily with cutting slack. Nonetheless, the government did open up the possibility of further alliance bargaining over Okinawa, as illustrated by Hashimoto's reference to paying 'maximum consideration' to the prefecture's problems. In particular, the GOJ considered raising the issue of the Futenma airbase, with the proposal being increasingly canvassed in the lead-up to the February 1996 summit between Hashimoto and Clinton in Santa Monica. Hashimoto, who chose to discuss the issue despite being advised against it (Tanaka 2009), played a leading role in these negotiations (Funabashi 1999). 'Were I to pass on the demands of the Okinawan people', Hashimoto reportedly told Clinton, 'it would be for the complete return of Futenma', even as such demands were 'extremely difficult' (quoted in Funabashi 1999, 21; see also Hashimoto 2005). Later, Hashimoto stated only that he had 'made reference to Futenma as an illustration, as an example ... [and that t]he people of Okinawa Prefecture do have a very strong demand for the reversion of Futenma' (MOFA 1996). Nonetheless, the idea gathered momentum during subsequent negotiations, especially between Hashimoto and US ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale (Brooks 2010). Eventually, the Special Action Committee on Okinawa released an interim report in 1996 announcing that the two governments would cooperate to '[r]eturn Futenma Air Station within the next five to seven years, after adequate replacement facilities are completed' (Eldridge 2004, 215–216).

Still, Ōta retained considerable power to disrupt the alliance. By refusing to sign these other outstanding documents, the governor actually allowed the lease of one piece of land to expire. Under intense pressure to find a broader solution, the GOJ made further efforts to persuade Ōta to sign. Usui Hideo (then head of the Japan Defense Agency) began to refer to the possibility of amending the Special Measures Law, although this was described by Hashimoto as a possibility of 'last resort' ('Defense Chief' 1996). The GOJ also persisted with its strongly litigious approach, filing new suits against Ōta (*Asahi Shinbun*, March 25, 1996) and, in August 1996, winning the case appealed by Ōta to the supreme court (Taira 1997). Perhaps persuaded by Hashimoto's plans for economic development in the prefecture, and seemingly vulnerable to the GOJ's attempts at coercion, Ōta met with the prime minister in September and agreed to sign the several sets of outstanding lease documents, so ending the dispute ('Hashimoto Drops Suits' 1996). Ōta would later comment that: 'the course of "rejection" had been cut off by the supreme court decision' (Ōta 2000, 241). The meeting with Hashimoto did, however, provide Ōta with the opportunity to hand over the results of a prefectural referendum, held earlier that month, in which an overwhelming majority of voters had supported base reductions (Eldridge 2004).

This was not the end of the GOJ's efforts to protect its alliance credibility. In February 1997, with a further protracted lease dispute seemingly possible, Hashimoto announced in the Diet (national parliament) that: 'If a situation develops in which we are unable (to procure the land), it could cause a rift in Japan–U.S. relations' (quoted in 'Okinawa Base' 1997). Officials began to consider amending the *Tokusohō* ('Hashimoto Aide' 1997) and, in April, the GOJ quickly passed legislation enabling it to continue the leases ('Okinawa Forced' 1997). The GOJ could now override any objections to lease renewals at lower political levels. It was thus the first step in a longer disenfranchisement process, whereby the GOJ sought to remove the Okinawa Prefectural Government from its involvement in lease renewals. In the short term, the changes allowed the GOJ to reassure the USG regarding the bases when Hashimoto met with Clinton in late April, and so signal its commitment to the alliance.

The 2000s: the Futenma relocation controversy

Although central to the GOJ's strategy for dealing with the base issue, actually finding a new location for the Futenma airbase proved altogether more difficult than the initial relocation decision. The USG and GOJ pushed for relocation within the prefecture, with one option being an offshore heliport. But there was little enthusiasm in Okinawa: in December 1997, a plebiscite was held in Nago City, in which a majority (52 percent) of those who voted opposed the heliport idea; and in February 1998, Ōta publicly announced his opposition (Inoue 2007). The GOJ responded by breaking off talks with Ōta (Eldridge 2004). Okinawa Prefectural Government officials, who had been meeting with GOJ officials regularly, suddenly found government doors literally slammed in their faces (Interview with Former Official, March 19, 2010). Although Ōta lost the 1998 gubernatorial election (Eldridge 2004), it still took until 2005–2006 for the two national governments to develop a 'Roadmap' agreement for a Futenma replacement facility. Although many factors—domestic and international—contributed to this delay, it was only with the crash of a US helicopter in 2004 that the relocation planning process was reinvigorated (Brooks 2010).

The Futenma agreement

Under the plan entitled 'United States–Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation' (Rice et al. 2006), the Futenma replacement facility would be located in the Camp Schwab area and based around two 'V-shaped' runways across Cape Henoko (protruding into the Oura and Henoko Bays). Construction would be completed by 2014—18 years after the relocation was initially raised at the Santa Monica summit. This would then be followed by a consolidation of remaining facilities, enabling the return of 'significant land

areas' to the south of Kadena Air Base. In addition, roughly 8000 Marine Expeditionary Force personnel and 9000 dependents would be relocated to Guam (also by 2014).

Yet there was confusion over whether the GOJ had 'won Okinawa's "understanding" for the relocation', despite its extensive attempts at persuasion ('Futenma Relocation Agreement' 2006; Calder 2007). The challenge of gaining this acceptance meant that Ōta's successor as Okinawan governor, Inamine Kei'ichi, who had the authority to approve various public works necessary for the Futenma replacement facility's implementation, was central to the agreement's success. However, Inamine had wavered in his support for the agreement. Having earlier opposed the plan and then supported it, he appeared once again to hesitate. In late 2005, even as the GOJ and some local governments attempted to persuade Inamine to support the plan, anti-base residents in the affected areas, as well as the Okinawan Prefectural Assembly, attempted the opposite (see, for example, *Yomiuri Shinbun*, December 15, 2005). The prefectural gubernatorial election set for November 2006 complicated this process, as did the resignation of then prime minister Koizumi Jun'ichirō in September (Fukumoto and Imai 2006; Imai and Onitsuka 2006; Johnston 2006).

Indeed, subsequent instability within the LDP proved a major distraction for the GOJ, while, in Okinawa, Nakaima Hirokazu (Inamine's successor) initially opposed the 'Roadmap', but later moved closer to the GOJ's position. Relations between Okinawa and the central government then worsened when, in 2007, the Ministry of Education announced history textbook revisions that excised sections on the role played by the Imperial Japanese Army in Okinawans' mass suicides (*shūdan jiketsu*) during World War II ('110,000 Rally' 2007; *Asahi Shinbun*, September 30, 2007). Finally, when the LDP-led conservatives lost their majority in June 2008, the Okinawan Prefectural Assembly swung further against the agreement ('Okinawa Assembly' 2008; 'Ruling Camp' 2008).

Alliance management under the DPJ

These developments provided another opportunity for the GOJ to pursue a tying-hands strategy regarding the alliance. Further, the LDP's loss at the September 2009 lower house election, which led to a change in government, raised the possibility that a new GOJ with a new policy program might make use of this opportunity. Hatoyama Yukio, the new prime minister, had gone to the election with the slogan of 'Putting People's Lives First', an agenda which listed a range of key policy promises on areas such as wasteful government spending, pensions, education and regional autonomy (DPJ 2009b). In foreign policy, the DPJ promised to strengthen ties with Asia and build a more 'equal' relationship with the USA—one that would involve a kind of equidistant balancing between Asia and the USA. In what appeared to constitute a weakening of Japan's commitment to the alliance, the new GOJ would focus on revising

the Status of Forces Agreement and realigning US military forces in Japan (ibid.).

Moreover, as part of its effort to distinguish itself from the LDP, the DPJ had decided even before the election on a policy of renegotiating the 2006 agreement. Transferring the base outside the prefecture or even overseas was seen as preferable to the status quo; indeed, it had been listed as a goal in party policy in 2008 (DPJ 2008). In July 2009, Hatoyama had visited Okinawa and promised that, 'if everyone agrees on a relocation [of the Futenma base] out of the prefecture', it would be necessary to 'act assertively in that direction' (*Asahi Shinbun*, July 20, 2009). Upon entering government—and sweeping Okinawa in the national election (Sneider 2009)—the party issued a basic policy reaffirming its intention to 'frankly discuss the outstanding issues between the two countries' (DPJ 2009a, sect. 13; see also Matsumura 2011). The stage seemed set for a tougher round of negotiations.

Indeed, this apparent weakening of commitment brought an immediate response from the USG. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Japan to explain that the USA would not renegotiate the plan and, in subsequent months, Hatoyama sought to draw back from his earlier position. It was widely reported that, when he met with President Obama in late 2009, Hatoyama told the president to 'trust me' on Okinawa, a statement that was seen in the USA as committing Japan to the 2006 agreement (*Daily Yomiuri*, January 23, 2010; Katz 2010). But Hatoyama decided to defer any decision on the plan until May 2010, further disrupting the alliance and undermining Japan's bargaining credibility. The USG now believed that Hatoyama was 'not following through' on his commitments, while Okinawans came to see the prime minister as lacking in policy coherence or consistency (Consulate General of the United States in Naha 2009; Embassy of the United States in Tokyo 2009a).

In addition to the goal of distinguishing itself from the LDP, the DPJ had other (two-level game) reasons for its approach, particularly the need to build a majority coalition in the Diet (Matsumura 2011). The party had been forced after the election to include the left-wing Social Democratic Party (SDP) in the government in order to form a majority in the upper house. This meant that the SDP was able to prompt Hatoyama and Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya to link the re-examination of the 2006 agreement with the wider policy of balancing between the USA and Asia. Indeed, with origins in the Japan Socialist Party, the SDP sought to push the DPJ further towards the left on a range of issues, including relations with North Korea and the 'comfort women' question (Arase 2010). The SDP's leader, Fukushima Mizuho, had stated in December 2009 that the party would leave the coalition if the Futenma base remained in Okinawa ('The Truth' 2011).

The DPJ was itself also divided. Even as Hatoyama adopted his relocation position, others, such as Okada, initially argued that the facilities could, in fact, remain within the Kadena Air Base (although Okada later changed his mind). Conversely, Minister of Defence Kitazawa Toshimi supported the 2006

agreement or a modified version thereof ('No Kadena Switch' 2009; Sneider 2009). The party then began to try to strike a balance between its domestic and alliance commitments. According to the Wikileaks cables, even while considering alternatives to the 2006 plan, DPJ leaders were prepared to drop the party's coalition partners and continue with the original plan if necessary (Embassy of the United States in Tokyo 2009a; 'The Truth' 2011). Significant differences existed between the DPJ and the bureaucracy, with the latter even telling their USG counterparts that the 'firmer the United States stays on FRF [the Futenma replacement facility], the smoother the process will be' (Embassy of the United States in Tokyo 2009c). 'Alliance hands' within the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defence were deeply frustrated with the DPJ's approach, arguing to the USA that they (the DPJ) 'just didn't get it' and that the USA should continue its tough stance (Embassy of the United States in Tokyo 2009d).

Although the DPJ's approach owed much to the ideological backgrounds of key members, when compared to the LDP-led governments of the 1990s and 2000s, the DPJ clearly saw the region as increasingly benign. The party's policy framework, established by the 2009 election, emphasised Japan's moving closer to Asia, welcomed open regional cooperation and an East Asian Community in which the USA's membership seemed undecided, and sought a foreign policy focused more on the country's relationship with China (Envall and Fujiwara 2012). This optimistic view of the region and more distant approach to the USA is well illustrated by Okada's statement regarding the East Asian Community in October 2009. While Okada included Japan, China, South Korea, India, Australia, New Zealand and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations countries as potential members of this proposed body, he omitted the USA (quoted in Alford 2009).

However, the DPJ's optimism was to be undermined by deteriorating regional circumstances, which, in turn, were to affect its attitude towards the alliance. North Korea's sinking of the *Cheonan* corvette (which would be later reinforced by an attack on South Korea, as well as the Senkaku Islands incident between China and Japan) highlighted Japan's direct dependence on the USA and made finding a compromise on Okinawa more important. By this stage, however, the GOJ was unable to find a suitable site to meet the May deadline set by Hatoyama. The prime minister was forced to retreat from his earlier promises and announce that the relocation would continue as originally agreed—*within* Okinawa ('Futenma Farce' 2010). The 'presence of the US military bases', he was forced to acknowledge, 'is imperative for the security of Japan' (Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet 2010). Hatoyama's backflip led to uproar within the DPJ-led coalition, and the prime minister was forced to sack Fukushima after she refused to support the decision. In the conservative *Yomiuri Shinbun* the following day, it was observed that: 'After the confusion he caused to Japanese politics and the Japan-US alliance, he [Hatoyama] violated his "promise to the people"' (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, May 29, 2010; my

translation). Hatoyama resigned in June and his successors as prime minister quickly returned Japan to a more orthodox alliance policy (Envall and Fujiwara 2012).

Explaining Japan's approach

Alternative explanations

What might be the alternatives to explaining Japan's alliance strategies through the relationship between a state's external threat perceptions and its awareness of its (limited) alliance bargaining power? One might be that, despite the alliance's power inequalities, mutual dependence has made this imbalance inoperative. In other words, the USA's indirect dependence on Japan—as a strategic asset in the region—offsets Japan's direct dependence on the USA for security. Were this true, however, Japan should have found a tying-hands strategy a less risky proposition. But the case studies suggest that deteriorating regional conditions repeatedly demonstrated to Japan the considerable risks involved in signalling a weakening commitment to the alliance. Furthermore, this argument relies on punishment being conceived only as abandonment (see, for example, Kimball and Alatassi 2009), and so does not adequately account for alliance coercion below this threshold. If the USA only had the option of abandoning the alliance, it would be constrained by the concern that this could push Japan into China's strategic orbit or, more likely, set off a security dilemma spiral and regional arms race.

However, the USG could conceivably persuade Japan in a way that fell below this threshold but would nevertheless create concern amongst the country's alliance managers. Regional circumstances that appeared more threatening to Japan could provide the context for such diplomacy. Were the USG to announce that its security guarantee did not, after all, apply to the Senkaku Islands, the diplomatic message to Japan would be obvious (compare 'Clinton' 2010). Indeed, Secretary Gates' visit to Japan to reject renegotiations over Futenma might have involved such a message. A more subtle approach may have been taken by Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell at the height of Hatoyama's East Asian Community controversy. Campbell noted that were US officials to make comments similar to those made by Japan's officials—and suggest that the USA 'wished to devote more attention to China than Japan'—it would lead to a crisis in the relationship (quoted in Embassy of the United States in Tokyo 2009b).

Alternative explanations for Japan's behaviour can also be found at the domestic level. One potential argument might focus on the question of Japanese incompetence—that the GOJ, especially under the DPJ, consistently bungled its alliance bargaining and possessed little in the way of strategy. Japan's recent politics has indeed been described as 'confused' (Green 2010), and there are different views on whether Japan has a 'grand strategy' (Pyle 2007; Rozman

2003; Samuels 2007). Yet even as these case studies reveal a range of mistakes, they do not support the suggestion of widespread incompetence or negligence. Rather, they underline the normal messiness of foreign policy making and the difficult task of balancing competing interests across multiple political levels—all of which is typical of the two-level games described by Putnam (1988) and others.

Another possible explanation might be that Okinawa was not a major factor in Japanese politics and thus the credibility of any tying-hands strategy was always negligible. The logic here is that, in the lead-up to the July 2010 elections, foreign policy and security issues, such as Okinawa, were of less concern to the public than worries about economic conditions, pensions, Japan's ageing society and tax reform, at least according to public opinion polling (see *Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 5, 2010). In the two cases examined here, however, Okinawan politics clearly played a key role in alliance politics and so required significant central government involvement. Moreover, the Futenma issue was controversial throughout Japan and was a major factor behind the DPJ's declining popularity during 2010 (*Yomiuri Shinbun*, April 5 and May 29, 2010).

Domestic-focused arguments citing the presence of a security consensus provide more persuasive explanations. As discussed earlier, Yeo's (2011) argument that a consensus at the elite level of Japanese security policy making impeded Okinawan efforts to resolve basing problems falls into this category. The argument here is that a pro-alliance consensus amongst Japan's alliance managers was formed around common norms and structures stemming from Japan's historical legacy and the US-imposed political system (see also Katzenstein and Okawara 1993). Alliance managers were therefore resistant to Okinawan demands and inclined to block Okinawa from gaining any concessions at the expense of the alliance. This consensus understanding of the GOJ's decision making can explain many aspects of the two cases presented here. Japan's preference for maintaining a strong alliance was apparent in the actions of Hashimoto and many others during negotiations with Governor Ōta; it also appeared in the actions of Hatoyama's successors in the DPJ after the failed Futenma negotiations. Still, this 'catch-all variable' (Yeo 2011, 17) has some important limitations.

Two stand out in particular. First, given the sometimes quite different views presented in debates over Japanese strategic thinking (see, for example, Hirata 2008; Hughes and Krauss 2007; Samuels 2007), it is not always clear that there was a Japanese security consensus during this period. The alliance undoubtedly remained central to most Japanese strategic thinking, with the exception of the DPJ in 2009. But the wider historical and ideological dimensions of the consensus began breaking down shortly after the cold war ended. By the mid 2000s, LDP revisionists such as Koizumi and Abe Shinzō were seeking to transform Japan's security politics (Samuels 2007). In trying to replace the Yoshida Doctrine (Envall 2008b), they reformed Japan's security-related

institutions, outlined a more nationalist vision for the country and promoted significant legal reform, such as amending the constitution (Envall 2008a, 2011). Even their support for the USA was not based simply on inertia or ideology. These leaders can be said to have adopted a 'paradoxical logic' of cooperating with the USA rather than acting against it, in order to increase the country's autonomy and independence in world affairs. The policy would work so long as the USA shared their perceptions of 'North Korea and China as the primary threats to Japan' (Mochizuki 2007, 11).

Second, because of its 'catch-all' nature, the security consensus concept can be easily applied to a variety of governmental responses to domestic-level constraints. This is almost inevitable when a concept is defined to include institutions, historical legacies, ideology and identity, as well as both material and non-material threat perceptions (Yeo 2011). A number of these factors can be said to have influenced the GOJ in its behaviour towards Okinawa. Institutional inertia, for example, was particularly prominent in the treatment of the Okinawan issue in the early 1990s. Yet it is difficult to identify changes in most of these factors and then link them with particular instances of governments trying to influence domestic constraints on alliance bargaining. Numerous ideological positions were advocated by different political actors during these cases, for instance, without a correlation between ideology and action really becoming apparent.

Threat perceptions and alliance dependence

By contrast, there were numerous instances in the two case studies of heightened threat perceptions coinciding with decisions to cut slack rather than tie hands. In the first case, the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994, the Taiwan Straits crisis of 1995–1996 and the residual trauma from Japan's diplomatic failures in the Gulf War (Hughes 2004) highlighted in the minds of Japan's alliance managers the country's direct dependence on the USA for national security, and thus the importance of signalling a strong commitment to the alliance. The Taiwan crisis, in particular, occurred in the midst of the Okinawa controversy and immediately prior to the signing of the 1996 joint declaration (Japan-U.S. Joint Declaration on Security – Alliance for the 21st Century, see MOFA 1996b). In the second case, Hatoyama's retreat from his earlier policy of having Futenma relocated outside Japan followed the sinking of the *Cheonan*. Subsequent events in the region then reinforced to Hatoyama's successors the soundness of this policy reversal.

The relationship between states' threat perceptions and awareness of their alliance bargaining power is vital to understanding Japan's reluctance to use tying-hands strategies. As noted earlier, were the junior ally to make use of such a strategy in a situation where its direct dependence was increasing, it could face a higher risk of abandonment as a result of projecting a weaker commitment to the alliance. In Japan's case, the benefits the country received from the alliance

dropped substantially following the cold war and the demise of the Soviet Union, as the regional environment appeared to become more benign. Yet the events of the mid 1990s changed this equation, making the region more threatening and thus increasing Japan's direct alliance dependence. Japan not only became more dependent on the USA for national security, but it also became more dependent on the alliance for providing strategic reassurance to the region (Midford 2002). Concerns over this issue even crossed ideological lines, as illustrated by Murayama's response to the base issue. Murayama's reasoning was that a breakdown in the alliance over such issues would undermine this reassurance function and make Japan appear more threatening to its neighbours (Murayama and Tsujimoto 1998). In the second case study, because the DPJ clearly viewed the region in more benign terms, at least initially, the GOJ again saw Japan as less directly dependent on the alliance. Under Hatoyama, the DPJ clearly questioned Japan's commitment to the alliance (Hatoyama 2009a, 2009b). However, when regional circumstances changed once more for the worse, the GOJ came to appreciate Japan's dependence on the alliance and reversed its approach, moving from a tying-hands to a cutting-slack approach.

Reflecting the alliance's power imbalance, the cost of failure in establishing credibility and reputation in the bargaining context appeared consistently higher for Japan than for the USA. In the first case study, GOJ negotiators—especially Hashimoto—were largely successful in maintaining Japan's bargaining credibility, albeit at the expense of a number of issues important to Okinawans. By contrast, Hatoyama not only failed to maintain credibility with the USG, but also arguably undermined Okinawan interests. At the alliance level, Hatoyama's reputation was damaged, in particular, by his 'trust me' promise to Obama. Interestingly, both sides struggled with information failures during the two cases. Both failed to appreciate the actions and statements not only of each other, but also of members from their own side, and both were especially slow to manage the complexities of Okinawan politics (see, for example, Brooks 2010; Curtis 2011).

Conclusion

This article has focused on a key issue in alliance management: how alliance managers make use of domestic constraints in their intra-alliance bargaining. In particular, it has sought to address the question of alliance managers' apparent reluctance or inability to make use of tying-hands strategies. Notwithstanding the difficulties involved in determining the strategic thinking of alliance managers, the two case studies presented here have highlighted the GOJ's strong preference for cutting slack and its general reluctance to tie its hands with domestic constraints or, in other words, play the 'Okinawa card'. Still, Japan's alliance managers did raise domestic constraints in the context of

alliance bargaining in both cases. The DPJ's controversial position on the Futenma relocation was consistent with a tying-hands strategy and, indeed, led to significant tensions with the USG before the DPJ reversed its approach.

Alternative interpretations of Japan's overall reluctance to adopt tying-hands strategies—for instance, Okinawa's supposed minor role in domestic politics or an elite security consensus in Japan—do not offer entirely satisfactory explanations for this behaviour. The article has instead argued that the most consistent factor shaping Japan's general reluctance, as well as its occasional shifts in approach, was the relationship between the threat perceptions of alliance managers and their awareness of Japan's rising direct dependence on the alliance. In terms of alliance management, this rising dependence was played out in Japanese worries about the country's credibility and reputation, and how these affected its capacity to signal a strong ongoing commitment to the alliance.

A final feature of the case studies was the fact that sustaining a credible position appeared both tougher and riskier for Japan, the more dependent partner. This seemed true even as the tasks of interpreting conflicting signals and complex political environments were substantial for both nations. In both cases, a worsening regional threat environment demonstrated to Japanese leaders the country's declining bargaining power within the alliance. A failure on the part of Japan to signal a continued commitment to the alliance in such circumstances may have led to speculation over the possibility of alliance abandonment. According to this logic, Japan had to maintain its reputation and credibility by avoiding confrontational bargaining strategies, a bargaining necessity that made domestic constraints on the alliance—such as those presented by Okinawa's problems—appear less like opportunities than risks. In sum, the relationship between changing external threat perceptions and declining bargaining power provides a clear account of Japan's reluctance to make use of Okinawa in a tying-hands strategy when bargaining with the USA.

Note

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