

# Japan Analysis

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– *Raphaël Languillon-Aussel*

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1. Kitaoka Shinichi, « Can the Noda government retain power? – How can the debacle of Japanese politics be avoided », – article appearing in the journal *Chûô Kôron*, November 2011, p. 52-60. (*translated from Japanese by Amélie Corbel*).

2. Interview with Abe Shinzô by Okazaki Hisahiko, « Noda's diplomatic approach subject to approval. Some advice based on our experience in foreign diplomacy », *Voice*, November 2011, pp. 42-52. (*translated from Japanese by Adrienne Sala*).



## CLOSE UP ON THE NEWS

### **1. Post 11 March disaster waste management.**

**- Raphaël Languillon-Aussel**

#### **Introduction. Waste management: a question of cynicism or a sad return to reality?**

Societies afflicted by natural disasters have the perfectly understandable reaction to concentrate on loss of human life, material damage and related costs, salvage operations and reconstruction efforts. There is, however, an often under-estimated aspect of these disasters, which, whilst trivial on the face of it, is actually crucial for post-cataclysm management and good resilience of the areas concerned, namely waste management. It is an issue that has cropped up very recently in official reports; indeed, as fate would have it, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) published its French-language version of a document entitled “Disaster Waste Management Guide”<sup>1</sup>

1 [The English-language version of this document, dating from January 2011, can be consulted at the following address: \[http://www.ochanet.unocha.org/p/\]\(http://www.ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/DWVG.pdf\)](http://www.ochanet.unocha.org/p/Documents/DWVG.pdf)

as fate would have it, on 15 March 2011, just a few days after the series of disasters that befell Japan.

The problem posed by waste management in Japan is principally the result of the tsunami and, to an altogether different degree, of the Fukushima radiation emissions. According to the UN reports, the disasters of 11 March 2011 resulted in 25 million tonnes of waste in total – including that scattered out at sea – compared with 25 million tonnes of waste for the Kobe earthquake (in 1995) and 90 m<sup>3</sup> million of rubble and waste in New Orleans (2005)<sup>2</sup>. This is not only a huge amount of waste, but it is also very varied, which makes it difficult to process. In this paper we will consider the specific problems posed by the post-disaster management of waste to the Japanese regions ten months after March 11th.

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[Documents/DWVG.pdf](http://www.robindesbois.org/GEIDE/Dechets%20Post-cata_GEIDE_sept07_v3_partie1.pdf).

2 These are the figures quoted by the report [http://www.robindesbois.org/GEIDE/Dechets%20Post-cata\\_GEIDE\\_sept07\\_v3\\_partie1.pdf](http://www.robindesbois.org/GEIDE/Dechets%20Post-cata_GEIDE_sept07_v3_partie1.pdf) page 29 (secondary source in French)

## Clearing of affected areas and waste removal

In the case of Japan, the post-disaster waste falls into four main categories.

1. The first category concerns the urban and suburban areas that were destroyed. This waste is made up of building materials (houses, dykes) and urban equipment (principally wood, concrete, steel and metals), vehicles, consumer items that Japanese society produces and purchases in great quantity, and mud. Thus, in Ishinomaki, for example, the amount of urban waste has been put at nearly six million tonnes. Japanese law stipulates that the treatment of urban waste, in particular rubble, is the responsibility of the municipal authorities. This makes it a long and difficult process, given that these very municipalities were themselves badly affected by the tsunami, even suffering up to 50% destruction, as happened in Ishinomaki. Clearing an area of 200m<sup>2</sup> alone requires three to four days' work. The task takes all that much longer in that these municipalities, which are lacking in means, are calling on local construction firms to remove the building waste. These local firms in turn have only modest material and human means at their disposal. Whilst the central state anticipates that these cleaning up operations will be concluded during the course of 2012, they could in fact well exceed this schedule.
2. The second category of waste products linked to the 11 March natural disaster concerns rural areas. Here, besides the populated zones which pose the same problems as the urban ones, the main issue at stake concerns the

mudslides that the tsunami left in the fields and rice paddies in the wake of the poor flow of sea water at the time of the ebb tide, owing to the presence of anti-tsunami dykes and breakwaters that hindered the clearing of the water. This salty mud covering the fields was sometimes more than 30 cm<sup>3</sup> thick, making it hard to clear in a region where there was no heavy equipment available for treating it, and where the high salt content of the mud, which may well remain there for a decade or more, has rendered the agricultural soil sterile.

3. Sea waste represents a third category, taken from the affected areas by the tsunami and carried out to sea by the ebb tide during the discharge of the water. This type of waste is difficult to measure. Nonetheless, two researchers from the International Pacific Research Center have published a simulation of what happened to it<sup>3</sup>. Once out at sea, this waste was carried off by the sea current, in particular the subtropical current of the North Pacific, to drift towards Hawaii and North America at a speed of 5-10 miles a day, which means that it is likely to affect Hawaii by March 2013, and the Californian coastline by March 2014, where it is thought it will remain for several years.
4. Radioactive waste forms the final category, within which we have to distinguish three sub-categories. There is of course the waste that came from the damage to the nuclear

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3 See the work by Nikolai Maximenko and Jan Hafner, published in April 2011: "Where Will the Debris from Japan's Tsunami Drift in the Ocean?", Report of the International Pacific Research Center 5 April 2011, University of Hawaii. [http://www.soest.hawaii.edu/iprc/news/press\\_releases/2011/maximenko\\_tsunami\\_debris.pdf](http://www.soest.hawaii.edu/iprc/news/press_releases/2011/maximenko_tsunami_debris.pdf).

reactors and the fuel /combustibles. This waste material will be treated as the dismantling of the Fukushima Dai Ichi nuclear plant continues, something that seems to be well under way at present. How this dismantling will actually be carried out, on the other hand, is still very unclear, as is the starting date for the operations. Each of the six reactors is likely to have a different fate depending on the damage it underwent. A second sub-category is made up of the radioactive elements that were let loose into the atmosphere or cast out to sea at the time of the explosions of hydrogen and the cooling down operation. These elements cannot all be treated. The volatile ones, equivalent to 10% of the radioactive emissions caused by the Chernobyl accident<sup>4</sup>, were carried away by the West-East winds (which are the dominant winds in winter in Tōhoku, interspersed from time to time with North-South winds due to the arrival of a cold anti-cyclone from Eastern Siberia), forming a cloud that has already made flashed around the globe in the upper layers of the atmosphere<sup>5</sup>. This cloud is not thought to present a danger for people's health once it reaches the upper atmosphere, which is not the case while it is still at a low level, or when it is sent earthwards by the spring rains, in particular to the north of Tōkyō. The last sub-category of waste concerns goods

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4 Figure put forward by Olivier Isnard, a specialist at the Institut français de radioprotection et de sûreté nucléaire (IRSN) who went to Japan following the Fukushima accident.

5 According to the Centre d'étude atomique (CEA), which bases its measurements and simulations on the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO). This has a world surveillance network of 270 stations for measuring radioactive particles in the atmosphere.

contaminated by the radioactive fallout around the Fukushima plant. Whilst this waste may be comparable to that of the urban and rural areas in Tōhoku, it cannot be treated in the same way, due to its high concentration of radioactivity.

### **The delicate task of waste processing: waste collection in the aftermath of the disaster**

The rebuilding of the areas affected by the disasters of 11 March requires a clean-up process. Yet the clean-up operations have been made difficult by the amount and different types of waste produced. The real difficulty lies, however, in the processing and recycling of this waste, processes that the central government hopes to see complete by March 2014.

In order to absorb the massive amount of waste, the Tōhoku authorities have had to open, or indeed re-open, public rubbish tips. By way of example, the waste generated by Cyclone Katrina corresponded to a rubbish tip the size of a 5 000 m<sup>2</sup> football stadium 16.5 km high<sup>6</sup>. The main issue is therefore to limit the burying of waste as far as possible, but also to avoid unauthorised processes such as open-air incineration which causes severe atmospheric pollution. In such circumstances, the strategies adopted by the various local authorities differ considerably. The Iwate prefecture, for example, intends to use the building timber that represents 75 % of the debris to create electrical energy or to make plywood. The Miyagi prefecture (where Sendai is located) hopes to sell the metals that are recovered to iron and steel mills. Other local authorities, like those of Iwanuma, are opting to use the concrete to construct new anti-

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6 See the report: [http://www.robindesbois.org/GEIDE/Dechets%20Post-cata\\_GEIDE\\_sept07\\_v3\\_partie1.pdf](http://www.robindesbois.org/GEIDE/Dechets%20Post-cata_GEIDE_sept07_v3_partie1.pdf).

tsunami barriers, in the knowledge that up to 450 new types of material can be used to make a tonne of concrete. Scandals have already been brought to light concerning this process, in particular in relation to projects for the recycling of radioactive sludge to make concrete. A project for construction of a processing plant in Kawasaki for radioactive debris from the Fukushima prefecture had to be aborted due to opposition from the local inhabitants.

in temporary disposal areas, like the parking area of the main Nissan centre, near Sendai. While the waste recovery companies may be proposing a package cost of 150 euros to cover the costs of transport and compression, this does not solve the problem of the re-processing of the compressed car bodies, nor that of the vehicles of deceased persons who will never come forward to recycle what belonged to them. The example of the vehicles illustrates the unwieldiness of some administrative measures in the management of waste in the aftermath of the disaster.

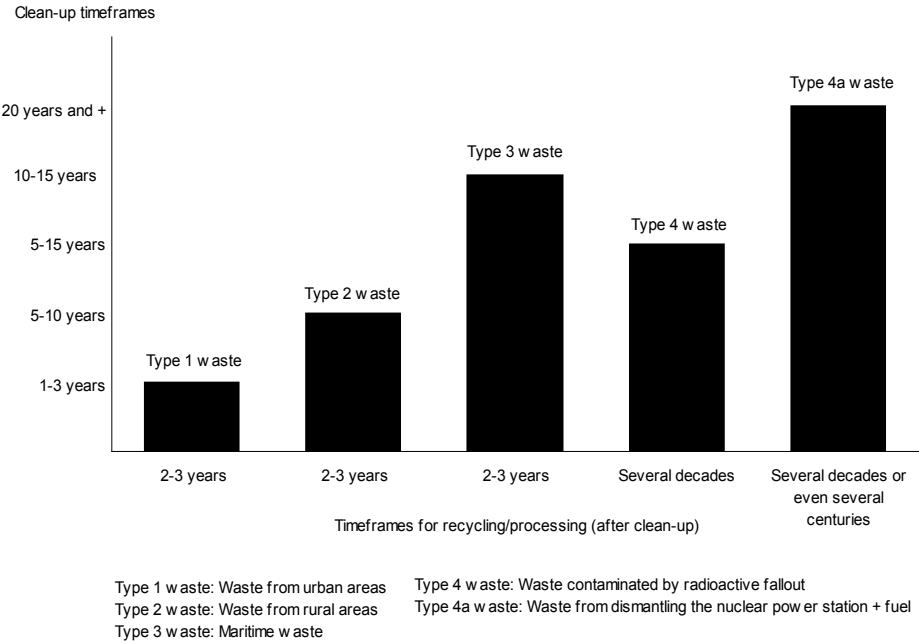


Diagram: Comparison of the timeframes potentially required for the clean-up and processing of the different types of waste caused by the earthquake of March.

The processing of radioactive waste is not the only concern, however. The law in Japan in fact makes the recycling of vehicles the responsibility of the owners, who must provide their agreement. While awaiting the identification of the vehicles, millions of tonnes of cars and other vehicles have been stockpiled

Finally, the timeframes for the processing and recycling of the waste after its recovery differ considerably depending on the four types of waste identified. These differences in timeframe are an indicator of the slowness and of the difficulties that the rebuilding of the areas affected on 11 March will pose. The diagram

below summarises the different timeframes in the processing (removal) and recycling (elimination) of the waste according to its type. If the rebuilding of the areas affected by the disasters of 11 March proceeds through these two necessary stages, it is evident that this process of rebuilding will be slow and difficult.

## **2. What to Do with Futenma? Five Options for the U.S. Military Base in Okinawa.**

**- Yuko Kawato**

Tôkyô and Washington plan to build a new airfield in Henoko to replace Futenma Air Station, despite strong opposition in Okinawa. The two governments stand at the crossroads. Around June 2012, the Japanese government will formally request the governor of Okinawa Nakaima Hirokazu to give permission to construct the new facility by landfill. It is possible that the governor will refuse to give permission due to the strong public opposition to the Henoko plan. Will the Japanese government construct the facility anyway, by creating a special measures law (*tokubetsu sochi hō*) or using other legal means to construct without gubernatorial consent? Or will the two governments renounce the Henoko plan? In anticipation of the decision, politicians, scholars, policy analysts and the press are starting to offer various answers to the question: "What to do with Futenma?" Five options emerge from their discussion. This article evaluates the options and considers some possible scenarios for 2012 and beyond.

### ***Option 1: Constructing a Relocation Facility in Henoko as Planned***

Henoko surfaced as a relocation site for Futenma soon after the two governments announced their decision to close the air station in 1996. The Henoko plan became official in 2006. The plan received support from some local officials and residents who expected economic assistance from Tôkyô. Governors of Okinawa Inamine Keiichi (1998-2006) and Nakaima (2006-present) also accepted the plan albeit with demands for modification.

However, the plan was never a popular one in Okinawa. A survey in 1997 by the *Okinawa Times* showed that 55% of Okinawan respondents opposed relocation to Henoko, while 22% supported it. Since then, opposition to the Henoko plan grew steadily. Many remain convinced that the new construction through reclamation of a bay would cause environmental damage. There is also an increasing awareness that economic assistance from Tōkyō tends to create fiscal dependence which is inimical to independent development. Anti-war and anti-military beliefs also influence some people's opposition to the Henoko plan. In sum, although Tōkyō and Washington aim to reduce the alliance's burden on Okinawa by closing Futenma in the densely populated area and relocating it to less populated Henoko, many in Okinawa perceive that the Henoko plan represents an added burden on Okinawa. The people of Okinawa shoulder a disproportionate amount of burden for the alliance. They demand burden reduction through Futenma's relocation outside of the prefecture.

Opposition to the Henoko plan strengthened during Hatoyama Yukio's premiership. Hatoyama promised to move Futenma "out of Japan if possible, but out of Okinawa at the very least." Yet he reaffirmed the Henoko plan in May 2010. A joint survey by *Ryukyu Shimpō* and *Mainichi Shimbun* in May 2010 showed that 84% of the respondents in Okinawa opposed relocation to Henoko.

Opposition to relocation within the prefecture spread to all levels of government in Okinawa. All 41 mayors, town and village chiefs are against relocation within the prefecture. Especially important was Inamine Susumu's election as the mayor of Nago in January 2010. He declared opposition to the Henoko plan and defeated an incumbent who supported it. The Liberal Democratic Party's branch in Okinawa and conservative

business organizations used to support the Henoko plan, but the strong public opinion pushed them to change their position. As a result, in February 2010 the Okinawa Prefectural Assembly passed a unanimous resolution to oppose Futenma's relocation within the prefecture. Inamine's election and the prefectural assembly's unanimous resolution pushed Governor Nakaima to revise his acceptance of the Henoko plan. The prefectural government now pursues Futenma relocation out of Okinawa as its formal policy.

Despite the opposition in Okinawa, Tōkyō seeks to make progress on the plan by submitting the Environmental Impact Assessment for construction in Henoko by the end of December 2011. If subsequent procedures move forward as expected, around June 2012 Tōkyō will apply for Nakaima's permission to build the new airfield by landfill. Nakaima is likely to reject this application given the strong opposition in Okinawa. Will Tōkyō then create a special measures law to take away the gubernatorial authority to grant or deny permission for reclamation, and commence construction?

Today, government officials say that they are "not considering such a law," but we will see their reaction if Nakaima refuses to grant permission for landfill. There is a precedent of Tōkyō taking away gubernatorial authority regarding U.S. military bases through legal changes. In 1995, Okinawa's governor Ota Masahide refused to participate in a procedure to expropriate some base land after landowners refused to sign leases. Prime Ministers Murayama Tomiichi and Hashimoto Ryutaro sued Ota for his failure to carry out his "delegated functions" (*kikan inin jimu*) and amended the Special Measures Law for Land Used by American Forces in 1997. The amendment permitted the continued use of base land after expiration of leases, if a renewal procedure is under way. Then, in another

law that passed in 1999, Tōkyō took away local governments' authority to administer expropriation procedures. Similarly, the Japanese government might force Nakaima to approve construction in Henoko through legal processes, or change the law to make his opposition irrelevant.

However, such actions will certainly meet great opposition in Okinawa and reduce public support for the U.S. presence there. The two governments would face fierce opposition to the Henoko plan, which will most likely include physical obstruction of construction in Henoko. People of Okinawa will be much less willing to host other key U.S. facilities like Kadena Air Base, and will fight vigorously against any attempt to increase their burden in the future. The two governments should not force the Henoko plan upon the people of Okinawa. Doing so will go against democratic principles by overriding the strong local consensus against the plan. It will also shock the broader public in Japan, which generally supports Futenma relocation out of Okinawa. Furthermore, communities in the rest of Japan would be less willing to host U.S. military bases and training in the future, as they would see that their preferences would be ignored. This will make it more difficult for Tōkyō to relocate bases and training from Okinawa to other prefectures.

The Henoko plan, which includes relocation of 8,000 Marines to Guam, is very expensive. If some factor besides the local opposition would make the two governments rethink the Henoko-Guam plan, it would be the sweeping cuts in the U.S. defense budget and the tight economic situation in Japan, especially given the needs for reconstruction of northern Japan.

### ***Option 2: Cancelling the Henoko Plan***

The fate of the Henoko plan remains to be

seen, but some analysts have declared it unrealistic given Nakaima's probable refusal to allow reclamation and the difficult budget situations in both countries. If the Henoko plan is cancelled, it will be a major victory for the people of Okinawa. However, the cancellation may result in continued use of Futenma, which is a great concern from the standpoint of public safety.

Futenma Air Station is in the middle of a crowded residential area where about 84,000 people live. Local residents suffer from noise pollution and fear plane crashes that can happen outside of the base. A U.S. military helicopter crashed in the Okinawa International University campus in August 2004.

If the Henoko plan is cancelled, Futenma is likely to remain open while the two governments devise and implement an alternative plan. Policy-makers should work quickly to close Futenma to prevent accidents involving local residents. Closing Futenma quickly will also insure against damage to the security alliance, because a major accident around Futenma that cause death or injury to local residents will be sure to undermine not only the Okinawan support for the U.S. military presence but also the support for the alliance in the rest of Japan. The two governments will face a crisis of the alliance, and Tōkyō may face a crisis of government.

In fact, the two governments must reinforce their effort to reduce risk and noise pollution today. Especially important are reducing visits to Futenma by aircrafts belonging to other military bases, relocating more exercises from Futenma, adhering to flight routes that are more likely to ensure public safety, and limiting flights between 10pm and 6am as agreed in the bilateral agreement of 1996. The deployment of MV-22 Osprey which will start in 2012 is also a large concern for surrounding communities in terms of safety and noise



pollution. Communities around Futenma consider this deployment as an increase in local burden which goes contrary to the two governments' promise of burden reduction.

### ***Option 3: Moving Futenma Functions to Kadena and Other Existent Bases in Okinawa***

If the Henoko plan is cancelled, what to do with Futenma functions? U.S. Senators Carl Levin, Jim Webb, and John McCain have proposed moving Futenma functions to Kadena, arguing that the Henoko-Guam plan is too expensive. The idea to consolidate Futenma with Kadena was raised in 1996 as the United States and Japan searched for a relocation facility for Futenma. Kadena resurfaced in 2009-2010 as a potential relocation site for Futenma as well. However, in each instance the proposal was rejected. There was concern that risk of accidents would increase by operating helicopters from Futenma together with existent aircraft that move faster. Another concern was about surge capacity in conflict situations. The U.S. Air Force that operates Kadena has argued that integrating Futenma aircrafts into Kadena would reduce available space, and this would not permit the base to accept sufficient number of additional aircraft in conflict situations.

The idea of relocating Futenma functions to Kadena has also met fierce opposition from surrounding communities. They have consistently demanded burden reduction and fought any plans to increase their burden. In fact, there is an ongoing lawsuit to stop flights in Kadena between 7pm and 7am. It is the largest collective lawsuit ever in Japan, with over 22,000 participants from around the air base. In addition, the two governments have acknowledged the burden on local communities and agreed to relocate some training from the air base to other prefectures in Japan and Guam. Given the already heavy

burden, town assemblies of Kadena and Chatan passed unanimous resolutions against the U.S. Senators' recent proposal to move Futenma functions to Kadena.

It is unlikely that Futenma functions will be integrated into Kadena in full. The two governments might consider, however, partial relocation to Kadena in combination with relocation to other U.S. bases in Okinawa, other prefectures in Japan, and abroad. For example, Ogawa Kazuhisa has proposed relocation of Futenma's fixed-wing aircraft to Kadena as an immediate solution to reduce safety risk around Futenma, and eventual relocation of all Futenma functions to Camp Hansen in Okinawa. Yet any relocation within Okinawa is likely to meet strong opposition from the public.

### ***Option 4: Relocating Futenma Functions to Other Prefectures***

Making Okinawa shoulder the disproportionate burden for the alliance is discriminatory and wrong. The events of 2009-2010, however, showed that Futenma's relocation to other prefectures is difficult to achieve. At the time, public opinion in the main islands supported Futenma's relocation out of Okinawa and a more equitable burden-sharing among prefectures. Nevertheless, people opposed relocation to their own communities. Candidate sites for relocation expressed their "not in my backyard" sentiments in demonstrations as well as prefectural and local assembly resolutions. Governors from other prefectures rejected Hatoyama's request to accept some of Okinawa's burden in a meeting in May 2010. Hatoyama's explanation that he was looking for alternative sites to reduce Okinawa's burden was not sufficient. What then, will facilitate relocation to other prefectures?

Communities that do not host U.S. military facilities know by observing Okinawa and other

hosts of U.S. bases that various problems persist despite host communities' repeated plea for improvement. Governors of prefectures that host U.S. bases have long requested a revision of the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) but the two states have agreed only on a few administrative improvements that the governors consider insufficient. Furthermore, communities without U.S. facilities are now observing Tōkyō and Washington's attempt to override the strong Okinawan consensus against the Henoko plan. Indeed, in many instances local governments that host U.S. military bases appear powerless. Tōkyō appears unwilling or unable to improve the various base problems, and the U.S. forces at times act in ways that "good neighbors" would not. In order to facilitate relocation to other prefectures, a significant improvement of the SOFA and the way it is implemented will be necessary. Tōkyō and Washington must treat host communities as true partners that enable the two countries' security alliance.

### ***Option 5: Relocating Futenma Functions Abroad***

Some analysts have supported relocation of Futenma's marines and functions abroad, not only to reduce friction in Okinawa but also to improve U.S. force protection and operational resilience through geographical dispersion. For example, Eric Heginbotham, Ely Ratner and Richard Samuels write in *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2011) that the United States should continue working to relocate marines from Okinawa to Guam "or elsewhere," as agreed in 2006. They also suggest that the United States pursue improved access and basing agreements with South Korea, Australia and other partners in Southeast Asia. They argue that this would allow the United States to reduce its footprint in Japan, and establish a more dispersed regional posture which would "reduce the vulnerability of U.S. forces and complicate the political and military

calculations of potential adversaries."

In November 2011, the United States and Australia announced that U.S. marines will deploy to northern Australia by rotation of six months starting in 2012, to conduct exercises with the Australian Defense Force. The initial deployment will be about 250 marines, but the number will eventually go up to 2,500. Although this agreement does not allow relocation of marines from Okinawa to northern Australia, the prefecture will have a reduced presence during the deployments. Joseph Nye, in his opinion piece on the New York Times on November 21, welcomed this initiative: "Moving Marines to Australia is a smart move because they will be able to train and exercise freely without inadvertently signaling a withdrawal from the region." The U.S. Department of Defense spokesperson has also said that this initiative will not affect the current plan to relocate 8,000 marines to Guam.

Meanwhile, Mike Mochizuki and Michael O'Hanlon argue in an article on CNN online (November 4, 2011) that the United States should relocate the 8,000 marines from Futenma to California, instead of Guam. They point out that the U.S. Marine Corps will downsize due to budget cuts, and this will create room in existing bases in California. They calculate that relocating the marines to California would be much cheaper than building new facilities to accommodate them in Guam. They also propose maintaining maritime prepositioning vessels in Japanese waters, which would quickly send equipment to regional conflicts while the marines in California fly over to meet them. Mochizuki and O'Hanlon argue that this would sustain—if not enhance—the American capabilities in the region.

Finally, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote in *Foreign Policy* (November 2011) that

the United States needs to pursue a “more geographically distributed, operationally resilient, and politically sustainable force posture” in Asia-Pacific. In light of this, the proposals to relocate Futenma’s marines and functions abroad are worth considering.

alliance better.

## **Conclusion**

We will see what will happen to the Henoko plan in 2012. Will Tōkyō and Washington insist on the plan despite the strong local opposition, or will they renounce it? If the latter, will the two governments keep Futenma open or manage to come up with workable alternatives to close it? What would those alternatives be? Will it be relocation to existent facilities in Okinawa, to other Japanese prefectures, abroad, or some combination of these?

As Tōkyō considers the alternatives, it will be good to keep two things in mind. First is that the situation surrounding Futenma relocation is more fluid and uncertain than ever before. The difficult budgetary situation in both countries has introduced a great degree of uncertainty and led influential politicians and analysts to explore alternatives to the Henoko-Guam plan. Okinawa’s prefectural assembly election and the U.S. presidential election in 2012 may also complicate the political situation surrounding the current plan. Given this, it might be in Tōkyō’s interest to start considering a broader set of potential relocation sites for Futenma.

Second, it is good to remember that fulfilling military needs for deterrence is only one part of keeping an alliance strong. Securing public support for the alliance and the U.S. military presence is just as important. Tōkyō and Washington must strike a better balance between these two components of an alliance, as they continue to work on Futenma’s closure. Solutions that take into account both operational requirements and local preferences will be easier to implement and will serve the

## POINTS OF NEWS

**Kitaoka Shinichi, “Can the Noda government retain power? – How can the debacle of Japanese politics be avoided”, [*Noda naikaku wa fumitodomareru ka? Nihon seiji no hôkai wo sakeru tame ni*] – article appearing in the journal *Chûô Kôron*, November 2011, p. 52-60. (translated from Japanese by Adrienne Sala).**

*Kitaoka Shinichi, Professor at the University of Tōkyō, was Japan's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Head of Japan's Mission to the United Nations from 2004 to 2006. He provides an overview of the major problems facing Japanese politics: government instability, lack of “political will”, economic difficulties, etc. He elaborates particularly on the challenges awaiting Prime Minister Noda, a politician whom he appears to hold in high regard.*

Japanese politics have reached a serious impasse. For more than twenty years now, we have found ourselves in a situation of economic stagnation, the balance of the government debt has reached levels even more enormous than before, and the growing influence of China is damaging the international security climate.

Yet still we are incapable of implementing effective policies, and meanwhile Japan's presence on the international stage continues to decline.

The government response to the earthquake on the Pacific coast of Tōhoku is remarkable for its clumsiness. Thus, even within the majority, there were voices expressing distrust in the former Prime Minister, and the problems caused by the events and by the circumstances of his resignation led to a situation of total confusion.

Five governments have come and gone in the five years following the resignation of Prime Minister Koizumi: the Abe, Fukuda, Asō, Hatoyama and Kan governments. This is not normal. Given the difficulties the country is

experiencing, we could fear that Japan is on a path to ruin. Yet there is no political power capable of reviving Japan. Since 2007, the majority government's loss of control of the upper house has paralysed politics. The power held by Japan's upper house is too great when compared to that of the upper houses of other governments in the world. The opposition is thus taking advantage of this power and attacking the government by means of staffing appointment in both houses and by censure motions, methods that are normally prohibited. In principle, in order to obtain agreement within the two houses – when their respective majorities are different, as is the case at present – collaboration between the majority and the opposition is required. But today, we are a long way from that.

As a consequence, how can we begin to comprehend the Noda government, born in such circumstances?

[...]

### **Behind the support for Noda, the hope of an obstinate Prime Minister**

Noda's victory fundamentally expresses a change of political direction and style.

The Minshutô (Democratic Party of Japan) changed direction in June 2010, at the time of the resignations of Prime Minister Hatoyama and the Secretary General of the Party, Ozawa Ichirô. Up until then, the new majority had been working towards the creation of an "East Asia Community" and towards achieving the relocation of the U.S. Futenma Base at least out of the Okinawa prefecture. Since then, the policy has changed to that of a firm desire to maintain the security treaty with the United States, this being translated to a less "radical" position in relation to the Futenma Base, with greater emphasis placed on reaching common agreement on the subject. This change has

resulted in a progressive distancing from the content of the platform presented by the Minshutô in 2009 at the time of the general elections. Despite the importance accorded to respect of the 2009 manifesto, the Minshutô's platform has changed tack by being reoriented towards the need to control public finances by increasing VAT.

This political approachlinpoach adopted by Hatoyama's successor, Mr Kan, had been affirmed at the time of his re-election as president of the party in September 2010. After the earthquake on the Pacific coast of Tōhoku, the three main parties, the Minshutô, the Jimintô and the Komeitô reached agreement at the end of April on the second supplementary budget, through review of the 2009 government programme. It was already possible to detect evidence of the refocusing of the Minshutô's new political line on budgetary control. While this new political line may be more realistic than the former one, it is important, however, to question whether Kan himself really had the intention and abilities to implement it. Indeed, he briefly proposed a coalition and, in June, although having already obtained the agreement of the three parties, he chose to poach members of the opposition and put them in ministerial positions. In summary, he took extraordinary steps.

In this regard, Noda gives the impression of devoting all his energy to the implementation of his promises, something that cannot really be said of his predecessor. Max Weber said that "politics is like drilling holes in hard boards: you need a good eye and patience". It can be said of Noda that he has great strength of obstinacy, much more so than Hatoyama or Kan. Support for the current government can quite definitely be explained by the sincere and sober character of Prime Minister Noda.

From Koizumi to the recent Prime Ministers Hatoyama [...], the public have had enough

of showy politicians. That this cease and politicians do their jobs honestly, such is the wish, or indeed the cry of despair voiced by the majority of Japanese. It is vitally important not to betray this expectation.

[...]

### **How can harmony within the majority be made compatible with a stronger government?**

Apart from the individual weaknesses of the preceding Prime Ministers, problems of a more structural nature led to the downfall of the respective governments. One of the weaknesses of the earlier governments has its origins in a lack of harmony within the government and more generally within the party. The war of the clans must come to an end. The match is over; Noda has been elected. It is now time to strengthen the internal cohesion of the party. The Minshutô has to be careful not to revive the divisive line of questioning "for or against Ozawa Ichirô". In this regard, here is some advice to strengthen Noda's Cabinet.

Firstly, officials whose conduct and abilities are inadequate must quickly be replaced, as the former Economy Minister, Mr Hachiro was. Such measures help to establish the Prime Minister's leadership. The Abe government, for example, protected a Minister whose conduct was inadequate, which led to the fall in popularity of the whole of the government.

Secondly, greater importance should be given to the Cabinet and to strengthening solidarity within the government. To date within the Minshutô governments, the Cabinet has not really served its purpose. Taking the example of the Hatoyama government, each of the Prime Minister, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for Defence successively made several contradictory statements on

the issue of the U.S. bases in Okinawa. There should be a return to the original rule of principle that dictates cohesion of intent within a government. Cooperation should also be strengthened with the investigative committees into the public policies of the party.

Next, support must be obtained from outside the party. Among other things, support needs to be obtained from financial circles, and the national strategy committee strengthened as was done previously for the consultative committee on finance and the economy, its predecessor. This is all the more necessary for the Minshutô as its relations with the financial world are historically weaker than those of the Jimintô and as the recovery of the Japanese economy will require a good relationship between these two sets of players.

Finally, it seems important to me that the government take greater heed of the opposition. In the present situation, while the Minshutô does not hold the majority in the upper house, nothing can proceed without the agreement of the three main parties. For the moment, while a major coalition would appear to be difficult to achieve, the government can nevertheless not get away with ignoring the opposition. Politics is governed by the emotions. In view of the strategy of approach adopted in relation to the Komeitô in particular, it is not impossible that the Jimintô could seek to collaborate to a greater extent with the government.

In addition, there can be no question whatsoever of revisiting the matter of Ozawa's exclusion. The issue of Ozawa's political funding [...], is clearly inappropriate from a political point of view. Mr Ozawa has given no explanation on the matter. By including the issue of the political funding of Hatoyama, such scandals in the West would bring about the end of a politician's career, all the more so since public criticism would be more severe [...].

## **The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), in opposition, does not seem to be taking a fresh look at itself**

The opposition's attitude is also problematic. Indeed, when Prime Minister Kan proposed a coalition to the president of the party, Mr Tanigaki, the Jimintô (LDP) should have accepted it, at a time when the great Tōhoku earthquake represented the greatest national peril Japan had experienced since the end of the war. While the terms of the proposal made by Kan may have presented several problems, it would nevertheless have been better for the Jimintô to participate in the government and to demonstrate its abilities, on the supposition that it was more competent than the Minshutô to solve the problems. The media calculated that the refusal to achieve a coalition was probably a beneficial strategy for the next elections. If this really was the case, it is insane. To begin with, the inadequacy of the anti-tsunami policies and defects in the safety of the nuclear power stations both have their origin in the years of domination by the Jimintô. While blaming Prime Minister Kan's clumsiness, the Jimintô should at the same time have taken the opportunity to have a long hard look at itself and begin to seek solutions.

There were probably no bases within the party upon which President Tanigaki could accept the offer of a coalition. In order to retain his position as president of the party, Tanigaki considered it necessary for the opposition party to put up more of a fight. Mr Tanigaki himself is a very sensible politician, which makes his reaction all the more regrettable.

The Jimintô should at least display greater impartiality towards the Noda government. I was very surprised by Secretary General Ishihara's statement, at the time of the announcement of Noda's candidature, that things would remain the same whoever was the representative of the party. Yet, was it not

conclusive and important for the Jimintô to know if Noda would be a leader who would give priority to agreement between the three parties?

In addition, when the scandal broke surrounding the Economy Minister Mr Hachiro, the Jimintô questioned the Prime Minister's responsibility in the matter and demanded the immediate consultation of the people. But was it really the right moment for this? What had happened to the pride of the Jimintô who had until then led Japan for many years? This is one of the main reasons why, even today, the party has not been able to regain the confidence of the people.

## **Setting a course according to the major directions and carrying out small steps in a determined way**

I would now like to turn to matters of public policy. What should the priorities of the new government be?

The long-term tasks that the Noda government will have to tackle are clear. Rebuilding the areas affected by the earthquake, settling the problem of the Fukushima power station, implementing social security reforms, standardising the taxation system, and strengthening the competitiveness of the Japanese economy at the international level are all matters of domestic policy that will have to be dealt with rapidly. In respect of foreign policy, there is a growing number of matters to be dealt with, from the strengthening of U.S.–Japan relations to the building of a relationship of trust with China.

I believe for my part that it is desirable for the government not to lose sight of these broad directions, while developing more policies of smaller scope. In the first instance, tackle the problems of the rebuilding and the power station, then promptly introduce a number of

policies of immediate effect on the revival of Japan's economic power: these should be Noda's priorities. As an example, instead of widely extolling the virtues of the construction of an East Asia Community, would it not be better to facilitate processes to welcome nurses from Southeast Asia? Similarly, it is desirable that the process be continued of making Haneda airport an international airport.

Recently the Minister for Health, Labour and Welfare, Ms Komiyama Yōko, proposed increasing the price of a packet of cigarettes, which would rise to 700 yen (7 euros). Since the announcement, criticism has raged and it would appear that the project's days are numbered. The main criticisms focused on the general lack of vision and the hasty nature of the approach. Yet health improvement and an increase in tax revenue are clear targets. Even if an increase in tax revenue could not really be guaranteed, as long as it is a step that has health benefits, should it not be implemented?

I personally support Japan's intention to become a party to the Trans-Pacific Strategic Economic Partnership Agreement (TPP) even if, for the time being, we need to strengthen our agricultural policy.

Last year the Minshūto designed the agricultural benefit of price regulation in parallel to the system of global liberalisation. Originally, it was to have been a policy designed to assist productive, thoughtful farmers. However, it was broadened to include all farmers when Ozawa Ichirō was Secretary General. Yet the future of Japanese agriculture can only lie in the direction of strategic strengthening by means of an increase in agricultural land. We should remove from this system any farmers for whom agricultural activity is not the main source of revenue. This tendency can even be detected within the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries: the TPP or the farmers? Let us therefore avoid this type of antagonistic binary

debate which is completely unproductive and pursue the directions outlined above.

On the matter of VAT, it is important above all to accord priority to the introduction of tax file numbers. It would similarly be appropriate to simplify the tax collection system and to review the procedures for tax deductions, which are unnecessarily detailed and complex at present.

As for assurances of diplomatic security, rather than undertaking high-level debates, we should create the Japanese equivalent of the National Security Council (NSC – U.S. administration) and pursue a relaxation of the three principles related to arms exports. To return to the NSC, it could be created by the formation of a team with, as one of its core members, the current personal adviser to the Prime Minister, Nagashima Akihisa, a specialist in matters of security.

If we pursue such changes and reforms, it is certain that people will be quick to point out their disadvantages. Others again will criticise the gaps in procedure and the sudden nature of the reform. These types of arguments reflect only the conservative position of those raising them. Japan no longer has the resources to continue down this track; conservative positions like these are no longer tenable. If the policy seems the slightest bit effective and the opportunity presents itself, we must not hesitate to leap in and assert ourselves.

[...]

**Japan... a country where the legislative elections are considered "unconstitutional" by the Supreme Court ...**

Right now, I would like the matter of reform of the electoral system to be taken up seriously. Just in March this year, the Supreme Court handed down a ruling concerning the 2009



general elections. While the Supreme Court did not go so far as declaring the election null and void, it nevertheless determined the imbalance of the quorum to be unconstitutional in nature. More precisely, the distribution of the quorums is not determined by reference to the population of the electoral constituency. The current system that from the outset allocates each constituency a parliamentary seat creates a problem. It is a problem that hits at the very principle of our current electoral system: a mixed ballot comprising electorates with a single seat and electorates with multiple seats awarded according to the rules of proportionality. It cannot be treated lightly. The senatorial election of 2007 had also been ruled as unconstitutional.

The current set of politicians does not realise the gravity of the crisis. From the strictly legal viewpoint, the elections that took place within the framework of an electoral system of an unconstitutional nature are null and void. As a consequence, even if these elections took place, the election of the members of parliament would be invalidated. Their parliamentary allowances would not be paid and the laws and budget they had passed would also be declared null and void. Put this way, it could seem excessive, but if the rule of the separation of powers is taken into account, are such assertions not self-evident?

Further to this matter, the presidents of the two houses must bring this reform to successful conclusion by requesting rapid deliberation by each party and entrusting the reform itself to an independent committee. Without such a move, the confidence of the people cannot be regained.

## **Conclusion**

Japan is currently in a critical situation, one in which it already found itself even before the earthquake disaster. Since 11 March, the

situation has become all the more urgent. Many reforms are essential. One of the first requirements is to regain the confidence of the population and to build a clear consensus within the political parties on the social security reforms and the reform related to the standardisation of the taxation system. Elections for the upper house will take place in 2013. Until then, the government must remain in place. It should thus be the case that elections for the upper and lower houses will occur on the same day. The party that wins the majority, whether it be the Minshutō or the Jimintō, will need to implement strong policies. Until then, the task of the Noda government is to regain the political confidence of the people and to remain in place.



**Interview with Abe Shinzô by Okazaki Hisahiko, “Noda’s diplomatic approach subject to approval. Some advice based on our experience in foreign diplomacy.” [*Noda gaiko no shiren. Waga gaikôkeiken no chûkoku*], Voice, November 2011, pp. 42-52. (translated from Japanese by Amélie Corbel).**

**Abe Shinzô** was Prime Minister from 26 September 2006 to 25 September 2007. **Okazaki Hisahiko** is a former diplomat who has been in retirement since 1992. He is a well-known personality from the conservative right.

**There was no need to tell journalists “I will not be going to the the *Yasukuni* Shrine to pay homage to the memory of the prisoners of war.”**

The last two Prime Ministers to come in succession from the DPJ (Democratic Party of Japan) had virtually no experience in diplomatic relations or concerning the Japan-US security treaty.

Although hopes had been placed in Mr Noda’s as Prime Minister, it turned out that he has made some verbal gaffes in recent times. On 2 September last year, shortly after being appointed Prime Minister, he made the following statement during a press conference: “While I am in office I will not be going to the Yasukuni Shrine to pay homage to the memory of prisoners of war, and neither will my cabinet”.

**Mr Abe:** It seems to me as if all the criticism addressed by foreign countries to the rule of a country, when the latter organises a ceremony in honour of those who sacrificed their lives in war, is an inappropriate form of interference in its internal affairs. I take the view that the visit that is owed to the Yasukuni Shrine is normal, and something I defended when I was Prime Minister myself and already well before that, in my capacity as a senior civil servant.

Announcing as soon as he took office that “[he] would not go to the Yasukuni Shrine” is tantamount for a political leader to somehow recognising the sway China holds over Japanese politics”. Mr Noda then went over his statement, correcting it by saying that: “Class-A war prisoners are not recognised by the law as war criminals, so the Prime Minister’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine should not be a cause for concern”. In the future, I think that it would be better if foreign countries did not interfere in our internal affairs, in particular regarding visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. On account of this statement, however, Mr Noda abandoned our country’s right not to let itself be put upon importuner.

**Mr Okazaki:** I agree with you. Mr Noda’s real

intention when he made his statement about visits to the Yasukuni Shrine was no doubt quite different. But every time a new Prime Minister is appointed, journalists rush to ask him whether he will go to visit the Yasukuni Shrine or not. It seems that this particular statement he made was a faux pas.

**Mr Abe:** When I was Prime Minister, every time I was asked about my intentions to visit the Yasukuni Shrine, I opted for a strategy of ambiguity. I decided that refraining from responding was the best policy, since for every answer or statement I made a diplomatic issue ensued.

Besides, when Mr Koizumi was Prime Minister, the deterioration in China-Japan relations was such that some compromises were required for a diplomatic thaw. At the time China was opposed to Japan's application to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. What's more, Japan needed China's cooperation to solve the problem of the Japanese prisoners held as hostages in North Korea. It is obvious that China would have been pleased to learn that Mr Noda "would not visit the Yasukuni Shrine", but I think this was something I just could not have brought myself to say [...]. I merely used to reply that I would not pay any ostentatious visit. But it was impossible for me to do more. I also replied that it was different period to that when Mr Koizumi was Prime Minister, and that China-Japan relations were not so tense.

Although as Prime Minister I defended my position, which was to visit the Yasukuni Shrine – which I had already done moreover as a senior civil servant – the reasons why I did not pay a visit on 15 August 2007 can be explained by the LDP's defeat (Liberal-Democratic Party) in the elections for the Upper Chamber on 29 July. Some have imagined that my behaviour showed my fear that people would believe that I would try and exploit my visit to the Yasukuni

Shrine, to respond to the electoral defeat that we had suffered. But that is not true. For one thing, this is a visit that you make only once your political situation is firmly anchored, and for another I am deeply sorry that my functions as Prime Minister came to an end after just one year in office.

**Mr Okazaki:** I had suspected that you would pay a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine during your term as Prime Minister. I had also understood that your predecessor Koizumi was hoping that you would be going to the Shrine before too long without specifying either the date or the modalities involved. It seems to me that such words spoken about a future situation are pointless. It is similar for South Korea and China, as these countries have no right to ask whether the Prime Minister of Japan is going to visit the Yasukuni Shrine. Nor should we respond to this question when journalists ask us. This is a decision for politicians to make as they see fit. The whole thing is a clear reflection of the bad habits that have taken root in the political area and the media.

**Mr Abe:** When Mr Hatoyama was still in opposition, he used to say that if he became Prime Minister he would not pay a visit to the Yasukuni Shrine. Moreover, once he was appointed Prime Minister he asserted his intention to "reconsider the nature of Japan-US relations and to strengthen relations with China, and avoid anything that could upset China". In saying these words, he did a huge favour to China. I would like to know what he got back from this country in return, as that is really the issue. We can wonder if the aggression by a Chinese fishing trawler off the Senkaku islands in Japan's territorial waters on 7 September 2010 was not the result of the diplomatic tack taken by Hatoyama. I am not sure about Mr Noda's position, but generally speaking the DPJ has no overall strategy for dealing with China. It lacks a capacity for fundamental thinking about the means for

keeping peace and the stability of our country. It is obvious that such a diplomatic approach, applied in this kind of context, can provoke incidents like the one of the attack on Chinese pirate boats.

[...]

### **Pointing out the mistakes made by predecessors**

**Mr Okazaki:** On 20 September last year Prime Minister Noda made an official trip to the United States, yet the question of a new beginning for Japan-US relations still remains up in the air. The military bases of Futenma are still one of the major stumbling blocks preventing these relations from moving forward in a positive way. Shortly after the Noda government took office, President Obama advised in a telephone link-up that he had decided to speed up the plan to relocate American military bases, including those of Futenma. In 2003, when Donald Rumsfeld, then Defence Secretary, had talks at a Summit meeting with the Governor of Okinawa, he told him that the presence of the American military was a problem for his fellow citizens. Following this, Rumsfeld accepted the idea of reducing the number of American military personal stationed on Okinawa with their families. As *Sankei Shinbun* mentions in an article, when the question of the reorganisation of the military bases comes up, one must seize the occasion to reconsider the situation as a whole. It is also important to know what decision to take in case the presence of the American army, which is in Japan's security interests, became more restrictive.

**Mr Abe:** In essence, Japan's request concerns the reduction of the burden that falls to Okinawa, by finding a solution to this issue once and for all. In this respect, the talks held between the two countries have a long history. The problem of the Futenma bases goes back to the Hashimoto government

and, as there seemed to be no change in the situation, Mr Rumsfeld came to see for himself in 2003. He then became aware of the urgency of the situation when he noticed that the military bases were close to residential districts and schools, and he was afraid that a serious accident might occur if there was ever a helicopter crash. Mr Rumsfeld judged it to be important not to set up a military camp in an area where the army was not welcome. That is why he closed the American military bases in South Korea and reduced the contingent stationed on Okinawa. The DPJ had no reason to break with this Japan-US experience.

**Mr Okazaki:** Indeed, Mr Hatoyama, who did not understand all the ins and outs of the current situation, merely duplicated an already existing situation, and its evolution will, once again, not be easy. I do not think that the (current?) haste of the United States to solve this problem is really to for the best. The major problem for the United States today concerns the country's financial position. In spite of the lack of support from the Defence Secretary Leon Panetta and the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, President Obama has decided to cut the defence budget by more than 100 billion dollars over the next ten years. In this context, we may wonder whether the considerable investment required to relocate the American bases that are currently on Okinawa makes any real sense.

**Mr Abe:** Within the space of twenty years, China's military budget has increased by 200%, representing a more and more significant threat. At the same time the United States are reviewing their global strategy, particularly though bringing their troops home from Iraq and Afghanistan, and are giving their priority to a focus on Asia. Japan should be pleased with this change of direction. As you have mentioned, however, the state of American finances is the critical factor. It is hence difficult to foresee how in the future stability of Asia

and peace in the region can be guaranteed unilaterally through American might. I think that the contribution of Japan and India, among others, will be necessary. Until now, Japan has, for financial reasons, been able to maintain a modest military budget, but in the future it will have to plan for a budget increase.

**Mr Okazaki:** A reorganisation of military arrangements between the United States and Japan requires a budget in excess of 200 billion yen. Japan must assume responsibility for over half this budget, but it seems to me that the country should be doing more to use the budget to augment its defences. This is also what the United States has observed, hoping that Japan improves its defensive capability with regard to China, and more especially its air force fleet.

**Mr Abe:** Twenty years ago, Japan had 200 fourth-generation fighter planes, whereas China had only ten. But today, when Japan still has 200 planes, China now has 380. In the near future, the fifth generation F-35 fighter plane will come on line, and Japan will acquire it, but it will have to redress the military balance with China by strengthening its alliance with the United States. For Mr Noda, strengthening Japan-US relations rests first and foremost on correcting the errors committed by his predecessors. It seems to me that is what he wanted to convey when he said that, "The Japan-US relationship is a very important one, and it is therefore vital to re-establish relations based on trust. With this in mind, Japan must do everything within its power for the United States".

**Amélie Corbel** is a student undertaking a Master of Political Science at Sciences Po, majoring in comparative politics in Asia.

**Yuko Kawato** graduated from the University of Washington with a Ph.D. in Political Science in March 2010. She received a M.A. in Political Science from the University of Washington and a B.A. with honors in International Relations from Brown University. Her expertise is in Asian security, alliance politics, and civil-military relations.

**Raphaël Languillon-Aussel** is a former student of the École normale supérieure de Lyon, and holds the agrégation (competitive state examination for teacher recruitment) in geography. He is currently writing a thesis at the University of Lyon (Lumière Lyon 2) and is in the second year of the institutional Diploma in the Contemporary Far East (DEMEOC) at the Lyon I.

**Adrienne Sala**, PhD applicant at École des hautes études en sciences sociales (EHESS, Paris), attached to its Japan Research Centre (CRJ), works on the Political economy of consumption in Japan. Her dissertation analyses the regulation of the consumer credit market.

**AUTHORS:**

Yuko Kawato, Postdoctoral Researcher at the France-Japan Foundation of the EHESS-Paris

Raphaël Languillon-Aussel, University of Lyon

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71 boulevard Raspail,

75006 Paris - France

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[japananalysis@centreasia.eu](mailto:japananalysis@centreasia.eu)

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