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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BRIEFING PAPER

Japanese Public Opinion on Important Issues

This section describes Japanese public opinion on the general state of U.S.-Japan relations, with emphasis on security and economic issues. The findings are drawn from recent USIA-commissioned opinion surveys in Japan, the latest taken in early October.

Overall U.S.-Japan Relations

After lower than usual readings in the past two years on the key indicator of belief in a commonality of basic interests between Japan and the U.S., Japanese public opinion this summer showed an upturn to the point of matching the previous high of the past 15 years (September 1969). A majority (54%) now see agreement, as against 18 per cent who see difference in these interests. When viewed in conjunction with other evidence available to the foreign affairs community, the findings suggest that most Japanese again see the U.S. as their most valuable partner. The soundings prior to last year's oil crisis and changes in the international monetary picture had indicated that the Japanese were going through a period of doubts and uncertainties engendered among other things by the opening of detente, U.S. dollar devaluation, the import surcharge, and the soybean embargo of 1973.

Problems With the U.S.

In early October, only about one in ten Japanese (11%) believed there were "important problems or differences" between Japan and the U.S., the same as the proportion perceiving problems with the Soviet Union. With the U.S., the entry of U.S. nuclear weapons into Japan, an issue sparked by Admiral La Rocque's Congressional testimony, was the problem most cited. Public concern over this issue, at least in the early stages of the controversy, was less than might have been expected considering the outpouring of generally critical media coverage on the subject at the time.

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U.S.-Japan Security Ties

In October, as in the past, public attitudes toward Japan's defense posture and security relationship with the U.S. were marked by a lack of consensus.

1. Sense of external military threat. Only a minority (27%) see an external military threat, 15 per cent from the Soviet Union, 9 per cent from the U.S., and 6 per cent from China. Equally as many (28%) saw no threat from any country, while almost half (45%) expressed no opinion.

2. Trust in the U.S. defense commitment. Polls have shown the U.S. as the only country appreciable numbers of Japanese believe they can count on to help defend Japan's security, but mentions of the U.S. have declined during the unfolding of detente from 41 per cent in March 1972 to 27 per cent in February 1974, a level which held steady in October. In the latter survey, one-third (33%) said Japan could count on no country, and the remainder (38%) expressed no opinion.

3. Views on the Security Treaty. In the October survey, more Japanese considered the Security Treaty to be useful for safeguarding Japan (44%) than felt it useless or dangerous (14%). Four in ten, however, were either unaware of the treaty (23%) or expressed no view (20%).

4. Japan's need for nuclear weapons. A majority (57%) felt possession of nuclear weapons unnecessary to protect Japan's security; 19 per cent thought the opposite (25 per cent expressed no opinion). Asked for their views in case the U.S. alliance through the Security Treaty were not in force, the proportion feeling nuclear weapons unnecessary dropped to a plurality (45%), with a corresponding rise in those who thought such weapons necessary (22%) and those expressing no opinion (33%).



5. Acquisition of nuclear weapons. Compared to four years ago, the Japanese in October 1974 seemed less ready to reject the idea that Japan would get nuclear weapons "in the coming 5 to 10 years." Those who thought it likely rose from 24 to 28 per cent; those finding it unlikely dropped from 41 to 32 per cent, with the level for no opinion rising from 35 to 41 per cent.

Energy, Food and Raw Materials

In July, the public showed a widespread awareness of Japan's lack of raw material and energy resources and a deep concern with the country's ability to acquire enough of them to keep the economy going.

1. Raw materials. Three-fourths of the public felt Japan had either a "very serious" (34%) or "fairly serious" (42%) problem in getting enough raw materials other than oil. Among this large majority, opinion prevailed by five to one that the greater problem for Japan is access rather than payment -- suggesting fears of Western competition for scarce industrial raw materials and the unwillingness of producing countries (such as the U.S.) to sell food and raw materials that are becoming scarce at home.

2. The U.S. as a supplier. Opinion prevailed, by a moderate margin, that the U.S. was a dependable source of food and raw materials. Forty per cent expressed confidence in the U.S. as a supplier, as against 28 per cent with little confidence. The low confidence stems mainly from doubts that the U.S. will sacrifice to help others when resources are becoming scarce at home, negative past experiences with the U.S. such as the soybean embargo, and uncertainty whether Japan's friendly ties with the U.S. can be expected to continue into the future.

3. Oil. As with raw materials, three-fourths of the public felt Japan had either a "very serious" (38%) or "fairly serious" (40%) oil problem, but no consensus existed on the best way to deal with it. As



an overall strategy, a third (34%) favored joint action with oil-producing and oil-consuming countries to work out an agreement. A fourth (23%) were for Japan making its own agreements with the oil producers, but only 15 per cent favored acting jointly with major oil consumers like the U.S. and Western Europe to seek an agreement with the oil producers.

Trade With the U.S. and the Common Market

Public attitudes in July toward trade with the U.S. and the Economic Community (EC) were mixed.

Awareness of the value of the U.S. as a trading partner was widespread, but the importance of the EC as a trading partner seemed underestimated. Although the EC took close to half the volume of Japan's exports to the U.S. in 1973, seven in 10 of those Japanese aware of the EC (45%) either thought Japan had little trade with the EC or expressed no opinion.

Among those with opinions on the subject, the view prevailed that the amount of Japan's trade with the U.S. was "about right", whereas for the EC, by a narrower margin, it was believed that Japan should "import more." This outlook undoubtedly reflects both the widespread public awareness of Japan's massive imports from the U.S. (with a relative undervaluation of Japan's rapidly expanding trade with the EC) and the belief that Japan has become too dependent on the U.S. as a trading partner. In addition, the public is more likely to think Japan gets the worst of the deal in trading with the U.S. but comes out ahead in trading with the EC.

Among those with opinions the view narrowly prevails that the U.S. supports free trade (32%) rather than protection (25%). Both the EC and the Japanese Government itself are predominantly seen as protectionist.

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