

But that response should be viewed in the context of Japan's evolving relationship with the U.S. and the rest of the Asian region in 2001.

Early in 2001 the George W. Bush administration entered office, bringing with it a determination to emphasize the centrality of the bilateral security relationship with Japan as the core of its Asia policy. Officials entering the administration had criticized the preceding Clinton government for allegedly downplaying the U.S.-Japan relationship and turning toward China. The determination of these officials to reemphasize the U.S.-Japan tie pleased the Japanese government, worried as it had been in the 1990s by so-called Japan passing.

The enhanced embrace between Japan and the U.S. unfortunately was marred in February by an American submarine's accidental sinking of a Japanese fishery training vessel carrying high school students off the coast of Hawaii. Nine Japanese lost their lives in the incident. The American government moved swiftly to apologize extensively at all levels (including that of the president), ensure that the Navy inquiry into the accident would be an open proceeding, and accommodate Japanese desires to have the bodies recovered from the sunken vessel. Therefore, although the accident provided an obvious opportunity for many in Japan to criticize the U.S. and the bilateral security relationship, the Bush administration behaved in a manner to minimize longer term negative consequences.

The first meeting between Prime Minister Koizumi and President Bush occurred in June. This occasion was devoted primarily to creating the image of both a close U.S.-Japan relationship and an emerging close personal relationship between the two leaders. The meeting occurred at Camp David (a more informal setting than the White House) and featured small image-building actions like playing catch with a baseball. On substantive issues, the two sides emphasized continuity and closeness. Koizumi could have criticized the Bush administration for pulling out of the Kyoto Protocol on carbon dioxide emissions but did not. On the economic side, the two governments announced a new bilateral agenda called the Economic Partnership for Growth, but did so without emphasizing any differences on economic policy. For his part, Bush could have emphasized the need for Japan to deal aggressively with nonperforming loans but chose not to.

While this initial meeting did little other than to reaffirm a close bilateral relationship (common for an initial meeting with a new U.S. administration), the terrorist attack of September 11 provided an occasion to test the relationship. The Japanese government's behavior in the wake of this attack provided a considerable contrast to its actions during the Gulf War a decade earlier. Prime Minister Koizumi expressed condolences and contacted President Bush quickly within hours of the attack. The Japanese government also quickly and firmly announced its support for the Bush administration's ac-