

Could a US-Japan “Green Alliance” Transform the Climate-Energy Equation? 日米間の「緑の同盟」 気候とエネルギー資源の均衡、来たらすことができるか

Andrew DeWit

US President Barack Obama’s April 23-25 visit to Japan unfortunately went pretty much as expected. Obama asked for concessions on a Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) free trade agreement, and received a souvenir “key milestone” whose content and location remain a mystery. Abe asked for exports of fracked gas, kind words about nuclear power, and promises on the Senkaku-Diaoyu Island dispute, and – for what they are worth – got commitments on paper.¹ The US-Japan Joint Statement² and Obama’s comments to the Yomiuri newspaper emphasized collaboration, including “coordination between our militaries.”³ But on energy, Team Abe and the nuclear village won out and the official depiction of collaboration was limited to “working together to promote the development of clean energy, including by facilitating business cooperation and deepening civil nuclear cooperation.” Japan’s April 11, 2014 “Strategic Energy Plan” – a plan without any targets for anything – was “welcomed,” whereas the US military’s target of 25% renewable energy by 2025 remained one unnoticed elephant among the herd in the room. Another elephant was the US military and “climate change,” which got three boilerplate mentions in the Joint Statement. There was no emphasis on US-Japan military cooperation on climate change, even though the US military itself has for years identified climate change as the mother of all threats, including fully 8 detailed references to “climate change” and its consequences in its March 4,

2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR 2014).⁴ Indeed, the American green military-industrial complex is openly calling for NATO to focus even more on climate change and greening, and not get unduly distracted by the Ukraine, Syria and Afghanistan.⁵ As for the assurance of fracked gas that Abe got, Navy Secretary Ray Mabus recently dismissed relying on it rather than renewables and efficiency as “prohibitively expensive.”⁶

But Japanese energy politics and Team Abe’s preferences apparently led to ignoring these pertinent items, as well as the fact that there is already a “Green Alliance” between the US and Japan. The Joint Statement’s inattention to this alliance, as well as the way it is being mismanaged, indicates that the framework desperately needs top-level attention, particularly on military collaboration. Expanding and escalating US-Japan green collaboration would surely do more to foster both countries’ energy and military security than any other move. Considering the geopolitical stakes in East Asia, it is bizarre that years of US military green leadership⁷ and open collaboration with just about every other partner except the Japanese Self Defence Forces goes without comment in the relations between the two nations and in the press.⁸

Climate Change and the Greening US Military



Arguably, the most significant backdrop to the Obama visit was the flood of evidence of accelerating climate change and resource crises along with rapid movement in energy paradigms. Over the past few months, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) delivered several reports on climate change that spotlighted the scale of the challenge and need for rapid deployment of renewable energy, especially solar power, and efficiency.⁹

And though the IPCC's reports are enormously informative and the biggest ever international scientific collaboration, even they are not the full picture. The IPCC cost-benefit assessments neither examine the benefits of an energy-paradigm shift nor explore the reality that the costs of renewables and efficiency are falling rapidly. LSE economist Dimitri Zenghelis rightly derides that approach as "insane."¹⁰ Indeed, research released in late March by Citigroup made a persuasive case that the "age of renewables" has already begun because the rapidly declining costs of renewable power sources makes them even more attractive than increasingly volatile gas, even in the US heartland of unconventional gas.¹¹ And as environmental expert Fred Pearce pointed out in a recent article on the IPCC study and its misinformed concern about costs of renewables, the "UN Environment Programme revealed that almost half of all new generating capacity added to grids around the world last year was from renewable energy sources,

overwhelmingly wind and solar."¹²



California's drought perhaps the most severe in 500 years.[Source.](#)

Note also that the IPCC reports also underestimate and at times overlook (generally because the research results are too recent) the gravity of the water-energy-food crisis and the role of such positive feedbacks as changes in the jet stream, accelerated melting of Greenland ice, and the power of albedo shifts in the Arctic region.¹³ Nor do the IPCC reports examine the rising pecuniary and other non climate-related costs of the conventional, resource-intensive economy whose extraction costs are increasing.¹⁴ In short, the IPCC report series' warning is very likely insufficiently assertive. Worse yet, the IPCC's April 2014 summary report, a 33-page overview for policymakers that is what most people actually read, was "gutted at the insistence of government officials" according to report co-author Harvard University Professor Robert Stavins.¹⁵

Compared to the IPCC, the US military is both more forthright in its assessments of climate change risk and realistic in its appraisal of the cost-cutting merits of renewable energy and efficiency. Consistent with several years of military-centred analyses, the QDR 2014 warns that the multiplicity of effects produced by climate change "will influence resource competition while placing additional burdens on economies, societies, and governance institutions around the world." The QDR 2014

also points out that the US military’s ambitious programs “to increase energy and water security, including investments in energy efficiency, new technologies, and renewable energy sources, will increase the resilience of our installations.”¹⁶ These programs, which include the US Navy’s goal of 50% renewables by 2020, were detailed by the Pew Charitable Trusts, in partnership with Navigant Research, in a January 16, 2014 assessment. Importantly, in light of the reigning “common sense” that renewables are expensive, the study’s emphasizes that the programs reduced costs.¹⁷

The US military is not independently generating these analyses and cutting-edge mitigation-adaptation programs, but rather in cooperation with other federal agencies (especially the Department of Energy), the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), the American Council on Renewable Energy (ACORE), Sandia National Laboratories, and other elements of what can legitimately be described as a green military-industrial complex.¹⁸

The direct relevance of this to Japan is that since November of 2009 there have been high-level US-Japan agreements to cooperate on clean-energy technologies and build a “Green Alliance.” One important step was taken in mid-November of 2009, when Hatoyama Yukio was the Prime Minister of a Democratic Party of Japan government (ironically, Hatoyama was - like all previous and sitting PMs, when ensconced in the nuclear village - eager to act on a nuclear-centred vision).¹⁹



In the wake of 2010, the US-Japan Green Alliance initiatives have included cooperation on greening US bases in Japan, according to the 2013 “Defense of Japan” white paper by Japan’s Ministry of Defense.²⁰ Other collaboration includes Okinawa-Hawaii energy cooperation.²¹ The efforts to deploy renewable power and efficiency on Japan-side US bases got caught up in the Japanese left-right polarization over the very legitimacy of the bases, a longstanding issue in Japanese politics.²² On March 15, 2012, Akahata, the newspaper of the Japanese Communist Party (JCP), delivered a stinging blast at use of YEN 2.85 billion Japan-side fiscal support (Omoiyari-yosan) to green US bases, deriding it as a plot to legitimate their presence.²³ Greening military bases as well as the economy of Okinawa itself, however, offers multiple positive externalities.²⁴ Just as centre-left dislike of the military per se leads to a global cognitive dissonance concerning military green activism on energy and climate change,²⁵ For ideological reasons, Japanese progressives are unwilling to recognize and use the greening US military as one of the most potent arguments in their fight for sustainable, decentralized smart power.

Yet JCP and Akahata outrage about solar panels at US bases fails to explain why the green alliance, rather than a few flowers, was not on

the table between Abe and Obama. The big stumbling block confronting the green alliance is Team Abe's clear reluctance even to talk about green power.



Some green on the table, in this photo, but not the green we need...[Source](#).

Moreover, the US-Japan green initiatives that are underway are all largely controlled by the Ministry of Economy Trade and Industry (METI), which appears less than keen to accelerate their slow pace. The METI appears to be managing the US-Japan cooperation on the green alliance in a way that avoids disruption to the energy vested interests in Japan. Hence, even on the US-Japan Renewable Energy Roundtable (whose second annual event was held in December of 2013²⁶), the Japanese side did not include - among several striking omissions - Softbank-founded Japan Renewable Energy Foundation, even though it links renewable energy industries with 36 of Japan's 47 prefectures and 17 of its 20 designated cities (cities with over 500,000 residents).²⁷ Nor did the US side include the American Council of Renewable Energy (ACORE), which links the US renewable industry, the states, and the military. ACORE is for example key to what the April 26 Washington Post described as a state-by-state "battle" over renewable energy that the "fossil fuel interests are losing."²⁸

METI's approach evidently excludes potentially disruptive actors from a process that, similar to METI's smart cities effort,²⁹ aims at the difficult, often contradictory, object of pursuing

innovation within a network of vested interests. One great risk here is that potential synergies are forfeit to a quest for stable, predictable change, even as competitors globally hone their organizational and technological resources so as to gain advantage in growing markets. The Japanese themselves, such as in the Innovation-Promotion Commission in the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, know of the patent need for disruptive innovation and the institutional barriers that hinder it.³⁰ The Japanese are also increasingly aware that the Israelis, with the world's top innovative potential, are now deliberately using their military - at about 7% of GDP the largest organization in the country - to disrupt their own deeply monopolized power sector.³¹ Israel is, as Michigan University Mid-East expert Juan Cole notes, adding solar and related technologies to their impressive list of competitive export industries and modes of regional collaboration.³²

Another risk in not bolstering the green alliance is posed by the current Abe Shinzo administration's focus on redefining the Japanese military's role in the context of great economic, geopolitical, and climate instability. The Abe efforts emphasize military initiatives with a surprisingly "hawkish" stress on being "battle oriented."³³ Yet green would seem the geopolitically safer and economically more rewarding option, as the US military's QDR 2014/2010 and other analyses indicate. Greater US-Japan collaboration on the test-bedding development and deployment of the most advanced green technologies, such as Ambri's liquid metal batteries,³⁴ centred on military bases and extending through to the private economy, can not only help repurpose the military per se in fraught times.³⁵ Substitution of conventional inputs with renewables, as well as the destruction of unnecessary demand with radical efficiency, can help alleviate the pressure on water and other resources that the US military warns lead to or exacerbate conflict.

Moreover, closely linking the US and Japan, the world's number 1 and number 3 economies, would almost certainly amplify synergies and accelerate the ongoing rollout of resilient and smart communities. What seems most crucial and doable in the short run is to expand the relatively closed circle of METI-led green collaboration. The METI control over the US-Japan collaboration on green has apparently led to exclusion of ACORE, JREF, ISEP, and other US-Japan actors that would seem essential to getting closer and comprehensive collaboration among subnationals in the US and Japan as well as between those subnational governments. Rather than leaving METI in charge, and able to exclude participants, it would seem better to open these initiatives up. Japan's regional blocs, such as Kanto and Kansai,³⁶ are notably more aggressive on renewables and efficiency than the central government and could be given a larger role. Kanagawa Prefecture's April 2014 revision of its smart, ICT-centred green energy program,³⁷ in light of rapid technological change, suggests it would be best to drive the initiatives more towards the prefecture and city level. Subnational actors, especially cities, generally have political distance from energy vested interests and thus more enthusiasm to grasp the opportunity for disruptive change that must be embraced in the face of existential threats. The METI, by contrast, is part of the compromised central government mechanism that drafted and passed a "Strategic Energy Plan" without targets, even in the midst of accelerating climate change and smart energy revolutions. If METI were actually serious about renewables and efficiency, then the energy plan would have targets and Obama and Abe would have had expansion of "green alliance" initiatives on their plate.

The importance of the US-Japan green alliance initiatives transcends partisan politics. The reality in the US is that while the Obama administration talks of "all of the above" on energy, at the spearpoint of innovative

deployment they are actually mobilizing the deliberately disruptive green military-industrial complex. Among a multitude of moves, their 2013 appointment of former ACORE head Dennis McGinn, an impressive exponent of renewables, to Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Energy and Installations, was a potent indicator of intent.³⁸

By contrast, the Japanese cabinet and the METI are trying to protect Tepco and other giant firms in its YEN 16 trillion power economy, feeding an increasing number of them bailouts.³⁹ So Team Abe ignore the dynamism, disruption and opportunity that Citigroup, the Washington Post, the US military, and a host of others describe. Team Abe views dynamism as a threat, as it most certainly is for the complacent common sense shared by the circle of bankers, nuke villagers, gas fans and others who dominate Japan's energy monopolies. Their collective ambitions on energy and the alliance was concisely summarized on April 25 by Kobayashi Yoshikazu, of the Institute of Energy Economics, in an article that highlights nuclear and LNG as the core "areas of bilateral energy cooperation between Japan and the United States."⁴⁰

The Japanese sense of vulnerability on energy is grounded in the reality of possessing virtually no conventional resource endowments. It is now compounded by the desperation of extant vested energy interests. These actors' political clout has impaired the country's capacity to, as Bloomberg editor James Gibney exhorts, "make disaster the mother of invention" by using the Fukushima shock as a spur to "achieving sustainable, smart-energy self-sufficiency."⁴¹ Failure to take this resource-lite road could lead the Japanese further towards the risk of conflict. Imagine for example that the Japanese follow Team Abe's lead and lock themselves into reliance on depleting conventional resources, with or without the smidgeon of nuclear power they can realistically expect.⁴² And then ask what

might happen if the Americans do not have the fracking abundance that their boosters claim to possess, a likelihood already gnawing at the banks and other players who have bet big money on the “shale revolution.”⁴³ One patent risk is conflict with the Chinese over conventional resources as well as - warns Keith Johnson in the April 25 Foreign Policy - over the East China Sea methane hydrate deposits that the Japanese are also trying to develop.⁴⁴

As retired Navy Rear Admiral David Titley, an expert on climate change, wrote in a Fox News editorial in an effort to shake some sense into the heads of denialists: “The parallels between the political decisions regarding climate change we have made and the decisions that led Europe to World War One are striking - and sobering. The decisions made in 1914 reflected political policies pursued for short-term gains and benefits, coupled with institutional hubris, and a failure to imagine and understand the risks or to learn from recent history.”⁴⁵ That pretty much summarizes the irresponsibility of leaving green off the table between Obama and Abe. The risks exacerbated by re-affirming the status quo are precisely the kinds of risks that the US green military-industrial complex is aimed at. So the Obama regime and other players should think of how to push the promising arrow of an expanded green alliance into the Abe and METI bubble of complacency. And perhaps the Japanese and international media should be asking why green collaboration was not at the centre of that Abe-Obama negotiating table at this historic time, when an embryonic green alliance already exists.

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(Routledge, 2014), “Japan’s renewable power prospects,” in Jeff Kingston (ed) [Critical Issues in Contemporary Japan](#) (Routledge 2013), and (with Kaneko Masaru and Iida Tetsunari) “Fukushima and the Political Economy of Power Policy in Japan” in Jeff Kingston (ed) [Natural Disaster and Nuclear Crisis in Japan: Response and Recovery after Japan's 3/11](#) (Routledge, 2012). He is lead researcher for a five-year (2010-2015) Japanese-Government funded project on the political economy of the Feed-in Tariff.

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Notes

¹ Indeed, even as the two leaders spoke, Japanese utility Tohoku Electric Power concluded an agreement to buy 300,000 tonnes per year of liquefied natural gas (LNG) for 16 years from 2022 on the basis of US Department of Energy February 2014 approval of exports from a currently proposed Cameron LNG project. See [“Japan's Tohoku to buy US Cameron LNG from M'bishi,”](#) Reuters, April 24, 2014.

² The English text is available at [“Full text of the Japan-US joint statement,”](#) Mainichi Newspaper, April 27, 2014.

³ See Mel Gurtov, [“Obama's Japan Visit and US-Japan-China Relations: A Missed Opportunity for Conflict Prevention,”](#) *Asia-Pacific Journal*, Apr. 26, 2014:

⁴ The Quadrennial Defense Review 2014, like its 2010 predecessor and a slew of other US military documents, emphasizes the threat from climate change and the need to respond by renewable energy, efficiency and other elements of resilience. See [here](#).

⁵ See Sheri Goodman et al [“Commentary: Can](#)

Stoltenberg Tackle NATO's Climate Mission?," Defense News, April 14, 2014. Goodman is executive director of CNA Military Advisory Board. Her co-authors, Francesco Femia and Caitlin Werrell are co-founders and directors of the impressively activist Center for Climate and Security, whose advisory board is largely former military officialdom. See [here](#).

⁶ See Chris Braswell, "[Secretary of Navy Talks Energy Security at ASU Event](#)," Modern Times Magazine, April 25, 2014.

⁷ The highly regarded Rocky Mountain Institute's Cameron M Burns declared in June 2010 that the Institute has long worked with the military because "[t]he military, especially the American military, has a huge influence on what we as a culture ultimately adopt." Cameron M Burns, "[Using Military Might for a Cooler World](#)," Rocky Mountain Institute Solutions Journal, Spring 2010 (Vol. 3, No. 2).

⁸ One recent example was the April 11, 2014 agreement between the island nation of Tonga and the Nevada National Guard in a "State Partnership Program" centred on education and renewable energy. The US Department of Defense has 68 such partnerships involving 74 nations globally. See Dennis Fournier, "[Nevada National Guard joins forces with Tonga in State Partnership Program](#)," National Guard, April 16, 2014.

⁹ Jonathan Leake and Sally Wardle, "'Solar Power is 'world's best hope,'" Sunday Times, April 6, 2014.

¹⁰ See Alex Morales, "[The Two Numbers Climate Economists Can't Stand to See Together](#)," Bloomberg News, March 28, 2014.

¹¹ A succinct overview of Citigroup's report can be found at Giles Parkinson, "[Citigroup says the 'Age of Renewables' has begun](#)," RenewEconomy, March 27, 2014.

¹² Fred Pearce, "[UN Panel Looks to Renewables](#)

[As the Key to Stabilizing Climate](#)," Yale Environment 360, April 17, 2014.

¹³ The albedo shift (a measure of radiation frequency) alone - decreasing from 0.52 to 0.48 between 1979 and 2011 - has been calculated as a feedback equivalent to 25% of the effect of CO2. See Kristina Pistone, Ian Eisenman, and V. Ramanathan, "[Observational determination of albedo decrease caused by vanishing Arctic sea ice](#)," PNAS, February 18, 2014.

¹⁴ The best, recent examination of this is Ugo Bardi, [Extracted: How the Quest for Mineral Wealth is Plundering the Planet](#). Chelsea Green, 2014: paperback

¹⁵ See Pilita Clark, "[Climate change report was watered down says senior economist](#)," Financial Times, April 26, 2014.

¹⁶ See QDR 2014: pp. iv and 8 [here](#).

¹⁷ See Pew Charitable Trusts, "[Power Surge: Energy Security and the Department of Defense](#)," January 16, 2014.

¹⁸ One of the best followers of this phenomenon is [Tina Casey](#) at Clean Technica. See also Andrew DeWit, "[The US Military, Green Energy, and the SPIDERS at Pearl Harbor](#)," The Asia-Pacific Journal, Volume 11, Issue 9, No. 5, March 4, 2013.

¹⁹ Because of friction over US bases in Okinawa, Hatoyama and Obama were left to stress energy and environmental cooperation at the November 15, 2009 summit. For the details, see "[Obama and Hatoyama Pledge Success at Copenhagen Climate Summit](#)," Environmental News Service, November 13, 2009.

²⁰ See p 211, Ministry of Defense Japan, [Defense of Japan 2013](#). Government of Japan.

²¹ See the listing of initiatives in "[Japan-US Island Grid Project in Maui](#)," New Energy and

Industrial Technology Development Organization, February 2013.

²² On this, see the excellent analysis by Annmaria Shimabuku, “[Who Should Bear the Burden of US Bases? Governor Nakaima’s Plea for a Relocation Site Outside of Okinawa Prefecture, but within Japan](#),” *The Asia-Pacific Journal* Vol 9, Issue 45 No 1, November 7, 2011.

²³ See (in Japanese) “[The Real Aim of the ‘Eco-Measures’ is to Legitimate Continued Presence: Sympathy Budget Even to be used For Solar Power on US Bases](#),” Akahata, March 15, 2012.

²⁴ See the analysis by Patrick M. Cronin, Daniel M. Kliman and Abraham M. Denmark, “[Renewal: Revitalizing the US-Japan Alliance](#),” Center for a New American Security, October 2010.

²⁵ One example is seen in Annie Isabel Fukushima, Ayano Ginoza, Michiko Hase, Gwyn Kirk, Deborah Lee and Taeva Shefler, “[Disaster Militarism: Rethinking U.S. Relief in the Asia-Pacific](#),” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, March 11, 2014.

²⁶ On the Rountable and its participants, see the METI [press release](#).

²⁷ The Japan Renewable Energy Foundation web site is [here](#).

²⁸ See Steven Mufson and Tom Hamburger, “[A battle is looming over renewable energy, and fossil fuel interests are losing](#),” *Washington Post*, April 26, 2014.

²⁹ Andrew DeWit, “[3-11 and Japan’s Shift to Smart, Distributed Power](#),” *NBR Asia Policy* 17 (January 2014).

³⁰ On this, see (in Japanese) the preliminary draft final [report](#) (April 11, 2014 version) of the Innovation-Promotion Commission in the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

³¹ See, for example, “[A Clean Tech Air Force By 2033: That’s the IAF’s Green Goal](#),” December 13, 2013.

³² See Juan Cole, “[Israeli Kibbutz uses Robots To Combat Desert Dust that obscures Solar Panels](#),” *Informed Comment*, March 26, 2014.

³³ Sabine Fruhstuck, “[A ‘Dynamic Joint Defense Force’? An Introduction to Japanese Strategic Thinking](#),” *Asia-Pacific Journal*, March 18, 2014.

³⁴ See Christopher Martin, “[MIT’s Liquid Metal Stores Solar Power Until After Sundown](#),” *Bloomberg*, March 7, 2014.

³⁵ On this, see Andrew DeWit, “Climate Change and the Military Role in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Response,” in Paul Bacon and Christopher Hobson (eds) *Human Security and Japan’s Triple Disaster* (Routledge, 2014).

³⁶ See, for example, “[Union of Local Governments in Japan to Triple Renewable Energy Output in 2020](#),” *Japan for Sustainability*, April 19, 2014.

³⁷ See (in Japanese) “[Kanagawa Smart Energy Programme](#),” Kanagawa Prefecture Industry and Labour Bureau, April, 2014.

³⁸ On McGinn’s background and critical role in developing the ACORE “National Security and Defense Initiative,” see “[ACORE Recognizes and Thanks Past CEO and President, Secretary Dennis McGinn for His Leadership on and Service to Renewable Energy and the Organization](#),” *Globe Newswire*, January 17, 2014.

³⁹ See Aaron Sheldrick and Osamu Tsukimori, “[As Japan weighs energy options, costs mount for idled reactors](#),” *Reuters*, April 8, 2014.

⁴⁰ Kobayashi Yoshikazu, “[Enhancing Japan’s Energy Resilience: The Role for the U.S.-Japan Alliance](#),” Center for Strategic and

International Studies, April 25, 2014.

⁴¹ Bloomberg's James Gibney for example argues "[Japan should make disaster the mother of invention](#)," March 14, 2014.

⁴² Andrew DeWit, "[Japan's Energy Policy Impasse](#)," The Asia-Pacific Journal, Vol. 12, Issue 14, No. 1, April 7, 2014.

⁴³ Concern about this has reached the

mainstream, as in Tom Zeller Jr, "[Is the US Shale Boom Going Bust?](#)" Bloomberg, April 22, 2014.

⁴⁴ See Keith Johnson, "[Burning Ice and the Future of Energy](#)," Foreign Policy, April, 2014.

⁴⁵ David M Slayton and David Titley, "[Time for real leadership on climate change, energy, national security](#)," Fox News, March 31, 2014.