

JIAP OBSERVATION

IDES OF MARCH

*This was first published on 3/3-9/02 edition of the **Japan Washington Watch B (JWWB)**, a weekly review of important news, reports, opinion, and primary source documents for Japan analysts produced for members of the **Japan Information Access Project** [<http://www.jiaponline.org>]*

Japan likes to be seen as an American ally in the current phase of the war on terrorism. Japan wants acceptance from the United States. The United States wants a powerful ally in Asia. These sentiments aside, Japan has demonstrated, lately, an interesting independence in its foreign policy.

Four recent examples suggest further scrutiny. First, note Japan's equivocal response to Australia's request for refueling of its ships in the Indian Ocean. The JDA believes that servicing this request for Australian ships that help enforce the blockade against Iraq is outside the current requirements of their mission. Second, watch the whaling issue as Japan proceeds to reenter commercial whaling. Although Japan has a short tradition (maybe 200 years) of whaling and it is an occupation that affects a very small number of people, Japan is using the issue to define both its national identity and an independent foreign policy.

Third, observe how Japan's Environment Ministry finally found proof of dugongs (a rare sea mammal that is mistaken for mermaids) near Futenma Air Station. Now, the Ministry is trying to determine if the dugongs are endangered and how to protect them—a marked contrast from the whales. Fourth, follow the current negotiations over the financial replenishment of the World Bank's Global Environmental Fund (GEF). The usually passive Japanese negotiators have stalled the negotiations by their aggressive insistence that the US be penalized over delinquency of its contributions. The Japanese not only want harsh punishments imposed upon the US, but also do not themselves want to be seen as the single largest contributor to the GEF.

Japan has never been a good follower. Their leaders, always skeptical of American leadership, are becoming even more so. The Japanese look inward for their responses to international situations. So what matters in the Japan-US alliance? What is the future? As Brutus explained on this day in 44 BC:

*If there be any in this assembly, any dear friend of
Caesar's, to him I say, that Brutus' love to Caesar
was no less than his. If then that friend demand
why Brutus rose against Caesar, this is my answer:
--Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved
Rome more.*

The Life and Death of Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare
http://classics.mit.edu/Shakespeare/julius_caesar/index.html

“Whale meat trade leaves conservationists blubbling,” Asia Times Online, 3/7/02. “In defiance of an international ban on trade in whale products, Japan intends to import Norwegian minke whale meat beginning as soon as next month. Japan will also expand its whaling program in the North Pacific to include endangered sei whales. Conservation groups are up in arms.” <http://www.atimes.com/japan-econ/DC08Dh01.html>

“Environment Ministry's Dugong Survey: Can Japan Protect the Sea of Mermaids? Futenma Alternative Closing in on Waters Off Nago,” Tokyo Shimbun, 3/1/02, p3. [US Embassy Translation].

Summary of the Co-Chairs Meeting on the Third Replenishment of the GEF Trust Fund, PARIS, FRANCE, FEBRUARY 27-28, 2001, http://www.gefweb.org/Replenishment/Joint_Summaries/Summary_of_Co_Chairs.doc

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