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JAPAN, U.S. AGREE ON BROAD COOPERATION

At their final summit at the White House, Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and U.S. President George W. Bush produced their joint statement, which not only reaffirmed the importance of the two nations' security alliance but also called for a cooperative framework covering a wide range of global issues.

The statement symbolized the extended honeymoon between Japan and the U.S. under the two leaders. Specific implementation of the cooperative agreements, however, was left to the post-Koizumi administration, which is slated to be formed in September.

The joint statement, titled "The Japan-U.S. Alliance of the New Century" is the first since June 2001, when Koizumi and Bush held their initial summit. It frames the bilateral alliance within a global context, underpinned by mutual interests and such shared values as freedom, human rights, democracy and a market economy.

The range of issues suitable for global cooperation envisioned by Koizumi and Bush reaches far beyond security concerns, such as the war on terrorism.

In addition to coordinated responses to major natural disasters and climate change, the framework covers such efforts as clean-energy development as well as devising countermeasures against the spread of avian influenza and other potential pandemics. Japan and the U.S. hope to promote reforms in other Asian nations through these measures, thus helping to foster shared values.

Clear message

In a joint news conference after the June 29 summit, Bush stressed the importance of sending a clear message that a missile launch by North Korea would be unacceptable. Koizumi said the leaders discussed potential responses, including possible sanctions, if Pyongyang goes ahead with a launch.

Bush also expressed his gratitude for the contributions to rebuilding Iraq made by Japan's Self-Defense Forces.

The leaders also discussed energy policies, touching on such topics as mutual efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and providing assistance for fast-breeder reactors and other technologies.

The two countries, however, remained apart on the specifics of how to handle such

diplomatic issues as Iran's nuclear development program and relations with China. Despite strong pressure from the international community to halt the program, Iran insists on its right to proceed with uranium enrichment.

However, the Japanese government is hesitant to take a hard-line stance along with the U.S. Japan relies on Iran for 13.8% of its oil imports.

Japanese interests hold large concession rights to oil fields in the country. The joint statement only mentions that Japan and the U.S. will cooperate on nuclear counterproliferation activities, including on Iran.

The U.S. in March agreed to share nuclear fuel and power-plant know-how with India. There remains strong opposition voices in Japan to the agreement, as India has not joined the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

On China, the U.S. stance is to build shared interest, while calling for transparency in its defense and other policies.

Some in U.S. political circles have expressed concern over deteriorating Sino-Japanese relations stemming from such factors as Koizumi's controversial visits to Yasukuni Shrine, which honors Japan's war dead including convicted Class-A war criminals from World War II. Should Koizumi's successor exacerbate relations with China, discontent among U.S. politicians could grow.

Moving forward with plans for the realignment of U.S. armed forces stationed in Japan is also fraught with potential pitfalls. The transfer of U.S. forces from Okinawa's Air Station Futenma is scheduled to be complete by 2014. However, the approval of the communities affected has not been secured, and the funding source for the estimated 3 trillion yen (\$25.8 billion) to be shouldered by Tokyo remains unsettled.

Currently, Japan and the U.S. enjoy a good relationship in terms of economic policies. But the environment surrounding trade could worsen for Koizumi's successor.

Bush thanked Koizumi at the press conference for lifting the ban on imports of American beef, but such factors as a delay in resuming shipments or lackluster sales could fuel renewed trade friction.

A bill before the U.S. Congress calls for imposing high tariffs on Japanese products if beef imports from the U.S. have not resumed by the end of August. Even after American beef returns to the Japanese market, U.S. lawmakers are likely to voice their discontent if exports to Japan fail to grow as expected.