

# Japan to withdraw ships from Afghanistan support role

By [Richard Lloyd Parry](#)

Global Research, October 16, 2009

[The Times](#) 15 October 2009

Region: [Asia](#)

In-depth Report: [AFGHANISTAN](#)

Japan will withdraw its naval ships from their support role in the war in Afghanistan, in the first concrete sign of the new government's willingness to say no to the United States.

The country's defence ministry confirmed this morning what had been expected since the election victory of the prime minister, Yukio Hatoyama – that Japan will withdraw its naval forces from the Indian Ocean in January after eight-years in support of anti-terrorism operations.

The announcement comes six days before the visit to Japan of the US defence secretary, Robert Gates, and a month before that of President Barack Obama, and underlines the new tone adopted by Mr Hatoyama's centre-left government in its dealings with the US.

Japan's Maritime Defence Forces deploy a supply ship and a destroyer to provide fuel and water to US and British naval vessels in the Indian Ocean. Compared to other international contributions, the "floating petrol station", as it was cynically called, is small. But for Japan, which has taken part in only a handful of overseas military operations since the Second World War, it is an important and controversial commitment.

Throughout his campaign for August's election, which was won overwhelmingly by his Democratic Part of Japan (DPJ), Mr Hatoyama repeated his wish for a "more equal" relationship with the US. In essays and speeches, he acknowledged the importance of the Japan-US alliance, but insisted that East Asia "must be recognised as Japan's basic sphere of being" and that Japan and its smaller Asian neighbours must "restrain US political and economic excesses".

He appointed as defence minister Toshimi Kitazawa, an opponent of the country's military support for the US. The question is now what Japan will offer its ally in place of ships and troops, and how Mr Hatoyama will reconcile his new approach to the US with his stated wish for a close and friendly relationship with Mr Obama.

The answer is likely to be a combination of grass roots aid projects and the dispatch of civilian personnel such as aid officials and trainers. "Sending troops is not necessarily the only way to provide support," Japan's foreign minister, Katsuya Okada, said this month. "There are many people that are joining the Taliban because they have no other ways to support their livelihoods. To allow them leave the Taliban, I think it is effective to guarantee their livelihoods."

According to Akihisa Nagashima, a junior defence minister who officially informed his

American counterparts, the US department of defence accepted the decision. Much trickier will be another item in Mr Hatayama's manifesto – the question of where to relocate Futenma airbase on the island of Okinawa.

The current site is close to densely populated civilian areas. Previous Japanese and US governments negotiated and finalised a plan to relocate it to another part of Okinawa. But Mr Hatoyama has indicated that he wants to review the scheme, and to consider moving out of Okinawa and onto the Japanese mainland, an idea which is causing quiet consternation among US defence officials.

The original source of this article is [The Times](#)  
Copyright © [Richard Lloyd Parry](#), [The Times](#), 2009

---

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Richard Lloyd Parry](#)

**Disclaimer:** The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)  
[www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca) contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: [publications@globalresearch.ca](mailto:publications@globalresearch.ca)