



Twenty-Five Years On, America Reads the Names Again

A seventh moment of silence, added this year for those still dying of 9/11-linked illness, marks how the day's toll continues to grow a quarter-century later

By Jonathan Mercer | Senior Editor, International Desk

Today marks twenty-five years since nineteen men hijacked four commercial airliners and turned them into weapons, killing 2,977 people in New York, at the Pentagon, and in a field outside Shanksville, Pennsylvania, in the deadliest terrorist attack in modern history. At the National September 11 Memorial in Lower Manhattan this morning, family members will again read aloud the names of the dead, a ritual now in its twenty-fifth year and one that this year carries an addition organizers say reflects an uncomfortable truth about how the attack's toll has never actually stopped growing.

The ceremony begins at 8:30 a.m. Eastern time, with the first of what are now seven scheduled moments of silence falling at 8:46 a.m., the exact minute American Airlines Flight 11 struck the World Trade Center's North Tower. Six of the silences mark the same fixed points in the timeline this newspaper's readers have seen observed every September for a generation: both towers struck, both towers' collapse, the strike on the Pentagon, and the crash of United Flight 93 after passengers stormed the cockpit. The seventh, introduced for the first time at this 25th anniversary, honors those who have died in the years since from cancers, respiratory disease and other illnesses tied to their exposure to the toxic dust and debris at Ground Zero.

That new addition is, in its way, the starkest single fact of this anniversary. The names read today will include not only the 2,977 killed on the day itself — plus six more from the World Trade Center's earlier 1993 bombing, bringing the memorial's total to 2,983 — but a rising count of first responders and survivors whose deaths came years or decades later, a delayed casualty toll that medical registries tracking World Trade Center-linked illness continue to update. The Fire Department of New York alone has confirmed that more than 400 of its members have died from World Trade Center-related illness since 2001, a figure that has now surpassed the 343 FDNY members killed in the towers' collapse on the day itself.

Access to this morning's ceremony on the memorial plaza is restricted to credentialed family members, who began arriving at 7 a.m.; the wider public will be admitted only after the private service concludes. The scale of this particular anniversary has drawn commemorative programming well beyond the reading of names itself. The New York Philharmonic, under incoming music director Gustavo Dudamel, joins the U.S. Army Field Band Soldiers' Chorus for an afternoon concert at the Perelman Performing Arts Center, built on the former World Trade Center site. St. Patrick's Cathedral holds a memorial Mass this evening. And beginning at 8 p.m. Eastern, broadcaster ABC and its parent company will air a live special built around the Tribute in Light, the two vertical columns of light that have marked the fallen towers' footprint on the skyline every anniversary since 2002.

The New York Fire Department held its own official 25th anniversary commemoration Wednesday at the Staten Island stadium now home to the FerryHawks, a private ceremony for the families of the 343 members lost that day and the hundreds more who have died since. The department has built a full year of remembrance programming around this anniversary, including a specially designed 25th Anniversary patch, a documentary film honoring FDNY chaplain Father Mychal Judge — killed while administering last rites at the scene — and a health report documenting the department's ongoing WTC-illness burden in full for the first time.

For Japan, the anniversary carries its own, less widely discussed weight. Twenty-four Japanese citizens were among the nearly 3,000 killed on Sept. 11, 2001, part of a toll that ultimately claimed victims from 91 countries beyond the United States. In the years immediately following the attacks, American residents and Japanese citizens gathered for candlelight vigils outside the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo, and a memorial was later placed near the United States Fleet Activities base in Yokosuka, home to the U.S. Navy's forward-deployed Seventh Fleet, where it remains today as one of the only dedicated 9/11 memorials in Japan.

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9/11: TWENTY-FIVE YEARS LATER, CONTINUED

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Japan's response in the attack's immediate aftermath was swift and, by the standards of the country's postwar security posture, unusually direct. Then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi called the attacks "extremely vicious and unforgivable acts of violence" within a day of the attacks and, within a week, had announced a seven-point package of support that included expanded security cooperation for U.S. forces and facilities in Japan, humanitarian assistance, and \$10 million in emergency relief funds — measures the Bush administration publicly welcomed as, in the White House's own words at the time, evidence of Japan's "compassion and sympathy for the victims of terrorism in the United States, which included many Japanese nationals."

That episode marked a genuine inflection point in the U.S.-Japan security relationship, providing the political momentum behind legislation that authorized Japan's Self-Defense Forces to provide rear-area logistical support to U.S. operations for the first time since the country's postwar constitution took effect — a legal and political precedent that outlasted the specific crisis that produced it and that scholars of the alliance still cite as a hinge point in Japan's gradual, incremental expansion of what its self-defense forces are permitted to do abroad.

This newspaper has not identified any specific public statement from the Takaichi government marking today's 25th anniversary as of press time, though officials in Tokyo have, without exception, issued messages of solidarity on every prior anniversary since 2001, and diplomats in both capitals describe the U.S.-Japan alliance's shared response to that day as foundational to the relationship's current shape. The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo has historically hosted its own remembrance events on the anniversary, typically drawing American expatriates, Japanese officials and alliance partners for a smaller-scale version of the ceremony unfolding in Lower Manhattan today.

Today's edition of this newspaper devotes its editorial page to an extended meditation on what this particular anniversary demands of how the attacks are remembered, a subject our own staff cartoonist Taro Suzuki addresses directly in today's cartoon. We return, elsewhere in this section, to the broader question of how the war that began in response to Sept. 11 reshaped the security environment this newspaper covers daily, twenty-five years and, this newspaper would argue, a great many subsequent headlines later.

For the families gathering on the memorial plaza this morning, the ceremony's basic form has not changed across twenty-five years: names, in alphabetical order, spoken aloud by people who loved them, punctuated by silence at the moments that mattered most. What has changed, organizers acknowledge, is the ceremony's relationship to time itself. A quarter-century removed from the attacks, a growing share of the readers were small children, or not yet born, when the towers fell — inheriting a ritual of memory built by a generation for whom September 11 remains a lived memory rather than a historical date.

TODAY'S TOP STORIES

The Alliance 9/11 Built: How One Morning Reshaped What Japan's Military Does

A quarter-century later, the legal and political precedents set in the weeks after the attacks still shape the Self-Defense Forces' overseas role

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

The seven-point support package Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi announced eight days after the Sept. 11 attacks reads, a quarter-century later, like a modest list: expanded security for American bases in Japan, humanitarian assistance, information-sharing, economic support measures. But tucked inside it was a provision that quietly reshaped what Japan's Self-Defense Forces have been legally permitted to do ever since, and this newspaper's Washington-Tokyo desk has spent this anniversary week examining exactly how much of today's alliance architecture still traces back to that single autumn.

The Anti-Terrorism Special Measures Law, rushed through the Diet within a month of the attacks, authorized Japan's Maritime Self-Defense Force to provide refueling and logistical support to the U.S.-led coalition operating in the Indian Ocean in support of the Afghanistan campaign — the first time since Japan's 1947 constitution took effect that its forces had provided direct operational support to a foreign military engaged in active combat, even in a strictly non-combat logistical capacity. The law was explicitly temporary, requiring periodic Diet reauthorization, and expired for good in 2010. But alliance scholars this newspaper consulted this week describe its passage as the moment the postwar taboo against any Self-Defense Forces role in foreign combat operations, however indirect, was first meaningfully broken.

Everything that followed, in this reading, flows at least partly from that opening: the 2003 Iraq reconstruction deployment, the gradual reinterpretation of Japan's constitution to permit limited collective self-defense actions under the 2015 security legislation, and the considerably more expansive defense posture Japan has adopted in the years since, including the current government's own defense-spending trajectory and the deepening industrial cooperation with Washington this newspaper has covered extensively in recent editions. None of these later developments required Sept. 11 specifically to occur — Japan's security debate had been evolving for years before 2001, driven by North Korea's missile and nuclear programs and China's rising military spending — but alliance historians argue the 2001 precedent provided both the political permission structure and, just as importantly, the practical experience of Japanese forces actually operating alongside American ones in a live security context.

Rachel Kim's own conversations with retired Self-Defense Forces officers this week surfaced a consistent theme: the refueling mission, however limited in its combat exposure, gave a generation of Japanese military planners their first sustained experience coordinating logistics with U.S. forces under genuine operational conditions rather than joint exercises, experience several officers described as directly informing how today's much deeper industrial and operational cooperation — the shipbuilding partnership, the munitions production coordination this newspaper reported on last week — was able to move as quickly as it has.

The domestic politics of that original 2001 decision remain instructive for understanding Japan's security debates today. Koizumi's government faced genuine, substantive opposition from lawmakers who argued the refueling mission violated the spirit, if not the strict letter, of Japan's constitutional renunciation of the use of force to settle international disputes — an argument that echoes, in updated form, in current debates over how far the 2015 collective self-defense legislation can be stretched without amending the constitution's Article 9 outright, a question the current Takaichi government has approached cautiously despite the prime minister's own long-standing personal sympathy for formal constitutional revision.

Washington's side of the ledger looked different, and in some ways simpler: American officials in 2001, and in the years since, have consistently described Japan's post-9/11 support as evidence the alliance could function as something more than a static basing arrangement, a demonstration this newspaper's own archive shows Bush administration officials cited repeatedly in subsequent years when pressing Japan for further security cooperation on matters ranging from ballistic missile defense to, eventually, the current investment and defense-industrial framework with the Trump administration.

Twenty-five years on, the specific legal mechanism Koizumi used — a time-limited special measures law requiring periodic reauthorization — has itself become something of a historical curiosity, superseded by the more permanent 2015 legislative framework. But the underlying pattern it established, of crisis-driven incremental expansion of what Japanese forces are permitted to do in support of allied operations, remains, in the assessment of nearly every alliance scholar this newspaper consulted this week, the dominant model through which Japan's security posture has evolved for a quarter-century — one crisis, one special measure, one modest expansion at a time, each one making the next slightly easier to justify than it would otherwise have been.

Whether that incremental pattern continues, accelerates, or eventually gives way to the kind of more fundamental constitutional revision Takaichi has long favored personally remains, alliance watchers say, one of the genuinely open questions hanging over Japanese security policy for the remainder of her time in office — a question this newspaper expects to keep returning to long after this particular anniversary's headlines fade.

Okinawa Votes Sunday as Race Remains Deadlocked

By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

With two days remaining before Okinawa Prefecture chooses its next governor, incumbent Denny Tamaki and challenger Genta Koja remain locked in what every available poll continues to describe as a genuine toss-up, with cost-of-living concerns still outpolling the base-relocation dispute that has defined the prefecture's politics for a generation.

Reshuffle Now Days Away as Takaichi Finalizes Lineup

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle, expected within the coming week, entered its final planning stretch Thursday with Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's retention considered all but certain and speculation intensifying over several other senior posts.

Kumamoto Recovery Enters Eighth Week

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

BOJ Meeting Now One Week Away

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Bank of Japan's Sept. 17-18 policy meeting is now exactly one week away, with interest-rate futures continuing to price in a high probability of a quarter-point increase to 1.25% amid this week's wage data and sustained yen strength.

Full market report, Page 11.

WORLD NEWS

Gulf Conflict's Sharpest Escalation Yet Rattles Markets, Deepens Seven-Month War

Iran's ballistic missile strike on a US base in Jordan marks the most direct exchange since fighting began in February
By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

The Gulf conflict this newspaper has covered for seven months took its sharpest turn yet Wednesday, when Iran fired ballistic missiles at a base in Jordan used by the US military and struck ten ships, hours after Washington said it had destroyed five Iranian oil tankers — an exchange markets and diplomats alike treated as categorically different from the shipping-lane skirmishes that have defined most of the conflict's earlier months.

Tokyo markets registered the shift immediately. The Nikkei 225, which had risen as much as 0.8% earlier Wednesday on renewed enthusiasm for AI-linked shares, reversed course to close down 0.19% at 65,142.78 as the news broke, before falling further Thursday to 64,534, down 0.93%, as the market continued digesting the implications of direct state-to-state military contact between Iran and the United States for the first time in this particular conflict's seven-month history.

Brent crude, which had already climbed toward \$100 a barrel on the conflict's earlier escalations, traded near \$101 in the immediate aftermath of Wednesday's strikes before easing somewhat Thursday as the initial shock began to fade without immediate further escalation, a pattern of sharp spike followed by partial retracement that has now repeated several times over the conflict's duration without ever fully returning oil prices to their pre-conflict baseline.

Japanese officials have offered carefully calibrated public comments, continuing a pattern this newspaper has tracked since February: expressions of concern and calls for de-escalation, paired with a studied reluctance to take any unilateral step, such as an early strategic petroleum reserve drawdown, that might be read as signaling alarm disproportionate to the actual state of physical crude supply through the Strait of Hormuz, which has not yet been meaningfully disrupted despite the conflict's persistence and now its sharpest single escalation.

Energy security specialists this newspaper consulted this week describe Wednesday's exchange as a genuine inflection point rather than simply the latest entry in an already long list of strikes and counter-strikes, given that it marks the first time either side has struck a target on the other's home soil or a military installation actively hosting American forces, as opposed to commercial shipping or the more limited proxy engagements that have characterized most of the conflict to date.

The ten ships struck Wednesday add to a running tally maritime security firms have maintained since the conflict's outset, a toll that continues to be dominated by vessels registered under flags of convenience — Panama, Liberia, the Marshall Islands and Malta chief among them — a pattern that has held constant regardless of which side's claims have driven a given week's additions to the total.

For Japan, which imports the overwhelming majority of its crude oil through the strait, Wednesday's escalation sharpens what has, for seven months, been the most direct point of economic contact with a war being fought thousands of miles from Japanese shores. Japanese shipping companies with vessels transiting or operating near the strait said this week they have not altered their routing in response to the latest strikes, a decision executives at two of the largest lines attributed to insurance arrangements that already price in the conflict's baseline risk rather than an assessment that Wednesday's escalation represents a qualitatively different threat level to Japanese-flagged or Japanese-operated vessels specifically.

Diplomatic sources in Tokyo describe growing internal debate within the Foreign Ministry over whether Japan's traditionally cautious public posture — vigilance and coordination readiness, without unilateral action — remains adequate to a conflict that has now directly involved an exchange between Iran and the United States rather than the more diffuse regional tension the posture was originally calibrated to address, though no change in Japan's official position had been announced as of Thursday.

Whether Wednesday's exchange proves to be a ceiling on the conflict's escalation or a floor for a new, more dangerous phase remains, by every account this newspaper has gathered from regional security specialists, genuinely unresolved. What is clear is that a conflict this newspaper's editorial and news pages have covered for seven months as a grinding, attritional maritime dispute now carries the possibility of direct state-to-state military confrontation in a way it did not carry as recently as Tuesday.

General Assembly Opens Amid the Most Crowded Global Agenda in Years

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

World leaders begin converging on New York later this month for the United Nations General Assembly's high-level session against a backdrop this newspaper's diplomatic desk describes as more crowded than any in recent memory: the Gulf conflict's sharpest escalation yet, the currency and trade stories dominating this newspaper's business coverage, and a 25th anniversary of Sept. 11 whose commemorations in New York this week will still be fresh in delegates' minds as they arrive in the same city roughly two weeks later.

Japanese diplomats are expected to use the session to renew Tokyo's long-standing push for Security Council reform while also seeking bilateral meetings to discuss the Gulf escalation directly with counterparts from across the Middle East and Washington, according to Foreign Ministry officials familiar with preparations, who describe this year's planning as more intensive than in recent cycles given how many simultaneously live crises now intersect with Japan's own diplomatic priorities.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's own attendance plans remain unsettled given the coming Cabinet reshuffle's compressed timeline, with officials declining to confirm whether she will travel to New York personally or send Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi to lead Japan's delegation in her place.

Security planning around the session is expected to be unusually extensive this year given the combination of the Gulf conflict's latest escalation and the sheer number of foreign ministers and heads of state the session will draw to a single venue in the weeks immediately following New York's own 25th anniversary commemorations.

The General Assembly's high-level week has, over recent cycles, increasingly become a venue for substantive bilateral diplomacy conducted on the margins rather than through the formal plenary speeches themselves, with dozens of leaders and foreign ministers packing brief, consequential meetings into the crowded schedule. Japanese officials say they have been working for weeks to secure sideline sessions with counterparts from across the Indo-Pacific, Europe and, given this week's developments, the Gulf region specifically, well beyond what the formal agenda alone would require.

This year's session arrives at a genuinely unusual moment for the institution itself, with the Security Council's structural paralysis on the Gulf conflict — a paralysis rooted in the same permanent-member veto dynamics that have long frustrated Japan's own reform ambitions — likely to draw renewed attention precisely because Wednesday's escalation represents exactly the kind of direct state-to-state confrontation the Council was originally designed to help prevent or contain.

Japanese officials have signaled they intend to use the session's climate and development tracks, alongside the more headline-grabbing security discussions, to advance longer-running priorities including Japan's continued support for Ukraine's reconstruction and its own contributions to global health security funding, areas officials describe as offering more tractable near-term progress than the security architecture questions currently dominating the session's informal agenda.

The scheduling overlap between this year's General Assembly and the immediate aftermath of both the Sept. 11 anniversary and Wednesday's Gulf escalation has drawn comment from several veteran diplomats this newspaper consulted, who describe the session's timing as placing unusually heavy symbolic weight on a gathering whose formal agenda was set months before either the anniversary's specific 25-year milestone or this week's military exchange were fully anticipated.

Prime Minister Takaichi's own delegation, whoever ultimately leads it, is expected to face considerably more pointed questions from foreign counterparts about Japan's own posture toward the Gulf conflict than in a typical year, given the conflict's direct bearing on the currency and energy-cost stories this newspaper's business pages have covered extensively in recent days.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's own attendance plans remain unsettled given the coming Cabinet reshuffle's compressed timeline.

Washington, Allies Weigh Response as Iran Defends Wednesday's Strikes

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

Iranian officials defended Wednesday's ballistic missile strike on the Jordan base and the attacks on ten ships as a proportionate response to the destruction of five Iranian oil tankers hours earlier, framing the exchange as retaliation rather than a unilateral escalation — a characterization Washington and its regional allies have rejected as failing to account for which side struck first in the specific sequence of Wednesday's events.

US officials have not announced a further military response as of Thursday, with the administration instead emphasizing continued diplomatic coordination with regional partners, though several officials speaking on background described the range of options under active consideration as considerably broader than at any prior point in the conflict's seven-month duration.

Gulf allies including Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates issued measured statements calling for restraint from all parties, a diplomatic posture regional analysts describe as consistent with both governments' interest in avoiding a wider regional conflagration that could threaten their own energy infrastructure and economic diversification plans regardless of which side any given observer considers more responsible for the conflict's continuation.

European governments have offered a similarly cautious public response, with several foreign ministries issuing statements calling for de-escalation without explicitly assigning blame to either side — a diplomatic balancing act that mirrors, in miniature, the same careful calibration Japanese officials have maintained throughout the conflict's seven-month duration, and one that reflects Europe's own significant exposure to any sustained disruption of Gulf energy supply.

Military analysts this newspaper consulted this week describe the specific target Iran selected — a base in Jordan rather than a facility on Iraqi, Syrian or Gulf-state territory more directly associated with the conflict's earlier phases — as itself significant, given Jordan's comparatively more peripheral role in the conflict to date and the signal its selection sends about the geographic scope Tehran may be willing to consider for future retaliation.

Congressional and parliamentary reaction across involved and allied nations has broken along familiar lines, with hawks in Washington calling for a forceful response and more cautious voices warning against any escalatory spiral, a debate this newspaper expects to intensify considerably once lawmakers return from recess in the coming weeks to a conflict that has now directly touched American forces stationed abroad.

Financial markets beyond Japan's own have registered Wednesday's escalation with comparable concern, with US and European equity indices posting their own modest declines Thursday and safe-haven assets including gold extending gains that had already been building for weeks amid the conflict's slower-burning earlier phases.

Japan's Security Council Push Continues Ahead of General Assembly

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

Japanese diplomats are expected to renew Tokyo's decades-long push for Security Council reform when world leaders gather in New York, continuing coordination with Germany, India and Brazil under the so-called G4 framework even as officials acknowledge near-term structural change remains unlikely given the same permanent-member resistance that has stalled the effort for a generation.

Japan's case rests on familiar arguments: its status as the U.N.'s second-largest historical financial contributor, its extensive peacekeeping and humanitarian record, and the argument that a Council whose permanent membership still reflects the geopolitical map of 1945 no longer adequately represents the world it is meant to help govern, an argument that has gained little additional traction despite eight decades of Japanese advocacy.

This week's Gulf escalation has, if anything, sharpened the reform argument's practical edge, according to Japanese officials who note that a Security Council capable of more decisive collective action might, in principle, have offered channels for de-escalation that the current structure's veto-bound paralysis simply does not provide — though these same officials acknowledge the argument has been made, in various forms, after nearly every major crisis the Council has failed to meaningfully address across the reform push's multi-decade history.

China and Russia, both permanent Security Council members, have historically expressed reservations about specific aspects of the G4 reform push, with Beijing in particular voicing consistent opposition to Japan's own bid given the two countries' broader strategic rivalry — a dynamic that gives Japan's campaign a genuinely uphill diplomatic character distinct from, and in some respects more difficult than, the reform arguments India, Germany and Brazil separately advance.

The G4 nations' coordination has itself evolved considerably over the two decades since the group first formed, from an initial push for a specific, jointly drafted reform resolution toward a looser, more flexible alignment in which each country presses its own case while avoiding direct contradiction of the others' positions, an evolution diplomats describe as a pragmatic adaptation to the reform push's persistent lack of traction rather than any diminishment of its underlying ambition.

Japanese officials interviewed for this newspaper's ongoing General Assembly coverage describe the reform push as having settled, after eight decades, into something closer to a standing institutional commitment than an active campaign expecting near-term results — a position several officials characterize candidly as maintaining Japan's claim and its diplomatic credibility on the issue rather than pursuing any realistic expectation of change within the current geopolitical environment.

Whether this week's Gulf escalation ultimately strengthens or simply repeats the familiar reform argument remains, in the assessment of veteran diplomats this newspaper consulted, largely dependent on factors well outside Japan's own control, including how the conflict itself resolves and whether it produces any broader appetite among the Council's current permanent members for the kind of structural change Tokyo has advocated for since the 1990s.

Gaza Cease-Fire Talks Continue as General Assembly Week Approaches

Wire Reports

Negotiations aimed at stabilizing the Gaza cease-fire continued this week, with mediators reporting incremental progress on humanitarian access even as disagreements over the truce's longer-term terms remain unresolved heading into General Assembly week, when the concentration of foreign ministers and heads of state in New York is expected to bring renewed diplomatic pressure on all parties.

The cease-fire, brokered under a framework Israel and Hamas signed in October 2025, has now held for nearly a year in the narrower sense that large-scale hostilities have not resumed, even as implementation of the agreement's later phases has proceeded considerably more slowly than its architects initially outlined, with a disarmament roadmap finalized late last month still awaiting full implementation from both sides.

Humanitarian conditions inside Gaza remain a central point of friction in the ongoing talks, with aid organizations operating in the territory continuing to report that humanitarian truck crossings run well below the volumes the original agreement specified, even as the flow has improved measurably from the war's final months, according to figures this newspaper has reviewed from organizations active in the territory.

Diplomats familiar with the current round of talks say humanitarian access, rather than the more politically fraught disarmament and governance questions, remains the area where mediators see the most realistic prospect for near-term, concrete progress, a assessment that has held consistently across several rounds of negotiations this newspaper has covered in recent weeks.

Mediators from Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the United States, who finalized the current disarmament roadmap late last month, are expected to use General Assembly week's concentration of relevant officials in one location to push for renewed momentum on implementation, according to people familiar with the mediation effort, though no specific breakthrough is anticipated before the session's formal conclusion.

Japanese officials, who have played a comparatively modest direct role in the mediation itself, have continued reiterating Tokyo's support for the broader framework and its own financial contributions to reconstruction planning, a position consistent with Japan's traditional preference for supporting Middle East diplomacy through humanitarian and reconstruction funding rather than direct mediation involvement.

This newspaper's own coverage of the Gaza cease-fire will continue alongside its coverage of Wednesday's separate but geographically proximate Gulf escalation, with both stories now converging on General Assembly week as a potential inflection point for the broader Middle East security picture heading into the session's final days.

Negotiations aimed at stabilizing the Gaza cease-fire continued this week.

JAPAN NEWS

Two Days Out, Okinawa Campaigns Make Final Appeals

Tamaki and Koja remain deadlocked as both camps focus final efforts on turnout rather than persuasion
By Aiko Tanaka | Senior Japan Correspondent, Tokyo Bureau

With Sunday's vote now two days away, incumbent Denny Tamaki and challenger Genta Koja spent Thursday making their closing arguments across Okinawa, each campaign increasingly focused on turning out supporters who have already made up their minds rather than persuading the roughly half of voters recent polling shows still undecided.

Tamaki, 66, held a series of appearances in Naha and Urasoe emphasizing his administration's handling of the twin crises — Kumamoto's earthquake-adjacent disaster planning and this month's national currency turbulence — that his campaign has increasingly cited as evidence of steady governance even as his signature base-relocation opposition has receded somewhat as a voting issue relative to economic concerns.

Koja, 42, campaigned through the day emphasizing his platform's economic-development focus, repeating his commitment to the planned return of US military land south of Kadena Air Base under the 2013 consolidation framework as a concrete, deliverable benefit he argues his opponent's more confrontational approach has left on the table for years without meaningful progress toward realizing it.

Both campaigns report early voting continuing to track modestly ahead of the 2022 cycle's equivalent point, a trend each side continues to claim as favorable to its own chances without providing internal polling to substantiate the claim publicly, a pattern that has held consistently throughout the campaign's final week.

National political figures from both the ruling coalition and opposition parties continued largely avoiding high-profile campaign appearances in the race's final days, a pattern local political observers attribute to a shared calculation that visible involvement from Tokyo could backfire in a prefecture with a long history of responding skeptically to perceived national interference in local political decisions.

Weather conditions are expected to be favorable for Sunday's vote, with this edition's own forecast page projecting warm, dry conditions across Okinawa through the weekend, removing what election administrators in past cycles have identified as one of the few genuinely unpredictable variables affecting turnout in a race this close.

Election observers from several international organizations are expected to be present for Sunday's count, a level of outside attention local officials attribute to the race's genuine competitiveness combined with its significance as a test of the Takaichi government's standing roughly eleven months into her tenure.

Both campaigns have devoted significant resources to get-out-the-vote operations targeting younger voters specifically, a demographic organizers on both sides describe as historically underrepresented at the polls relative to its share of the electorate and, in a race this close, plausibly decisive if turnout among voters under 35 shifts even modestly from recent cycles.

Sunday's result will be closely watched well beyond Okinawa's own borders, with political analysts across Japan describing the outcome as likely to shape how the ruling coalition calibrates its messaging in prefectures with their own longstanding local disputes ahead of next spring's unified local elections, regardless of which specific issue proves most decisive in Okinawa's own count.

Kumamoto's earthquake-adjacent disaster planning and this month's national currency turbulence.

Reshuffle Lineup Takes Shape as Takaichi Finalizes Choices

Katayama, Koizumi and Motegi all considered safe; health and agriculture portfolios remain the least settled
By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle, now expected within days rather than weeks, has entered its final planning stage with several senior portfolios considered effectively settled and a smaller number still subject to genuine internal debate, according to LDP officials familiar with the deliberations.

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama's retention is considered all but certain given her direct role managing the currency intervention story that has dominated this newspaper's coverage for much of the past two weeks, with party officials describing continuity in the ministry's most senior post as the clear preference heading into the Bank of Japan's consequential Sept. 17-18 policy meeting.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi are both considered likely to remain in their current posts as well, given the crowded regional security agenda — the Gulf conflict's escalation, North Korea's continued weapons development, the trilateral exercise with the United States and South Korea — that party officials say argues strongly for experienced continuity in both portfolios during an unusually turbulent stretch.

The health and agriculture portfolios remain, by contrast, genuinely unsettled, according to multiple officials familiar with the planning, with Health Minister Kenichiro Ueno's own noncommittal public posture on pending medical-pricing reform legislation read by some within the party as reflecting his own uncertainty about whether he will remain in position to see any reform through to completion.

Speculation has intensified around several younger LDP lawmakers as potential entrants to the Cabinet for the first time, part of what party officials describe as Takaichi's broader effort to signal generational renewal within a government now approaching its first full year in office, even as the currency and security crises dominating recent weeks have left comparatively little bandwidth for the kind of extended internal deliberation a reshuffle of this scale would ordinarily receive.

The timing of the reshuffle itself continues to be calibrated around the BOJ meeting and Okinawa's Sunday election, with party officials describing a preference for announcing changes only after both events have concluded, to avoid either appearing to preempt the central bank's independent decision-making or inserting national politics too visibly into a prefectural race already drawing outsized attention.

Opposition parties have offered muted commentary on the reshuffle speculation itself, with Yuichiro Tamaki's Democratic Party for the People notably more focused this week on pressing the government for currency-intervention transparency than on the Cabinet lineup question, a prioritization DPP officials describe as reflecting where the party believes it can extract the most substantive concessions from a government currently managing multiple simultaneous crises.

Whether the eventual reshuffle produces meaningful policy change or largely reshuffles personnel around an unchanged policy trajectory remains, political analysts say, the more consequential question than the specific names ultimately announced — a distinction this newspaper intends to examine closely once the actual lineup is confirmed.

Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's Cabinet reshuffle.

Katayama's Currency Role Grows as Reshuffle Nears

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Finance Minister Satsuki Katayama continued fielding questions this week about the mechanics of August's currency intervention, with opposition lawmakers pressing for greater transparency even as her own retention through the coming Cabinet reshuffle is considered increasingly secure given her direct familiarity with the operation's details heading into next week's Bank of Japan meeting.

Katayama's ministry pointed to this week's confirmed Nikkei decline and continued yen strength as evidence that market conditions remain genuinely fluid, arguing that continuity in the finance portfolio specifically serves Japan's interests at a moment when the currency, rate and now Gulf-conflict stories are all developing simultaneously rather than in the more sequential fashion markets have typically digested comparable news in calmer periods.

Katayama's own background as a career Ministry of Finance official before entering politics — she became Japan's first female finance minister when Takaichi appointed her last October — continues to distinguish her from many recent predecessors whose paths into the role ran through business, journalism or political staff work rather than the ministry's own institutional hierarchy.

Whether that technical fluency translates into durable public confidence in the government's broader economic management remains, political analysts say, a genuinely open question distinct from the more immediate matter of her Cabinet retention, particularly as the currency story now intersects with a Gulf conflict escalation whose economic implications Katayama's ministry has only begun to publicly address.

Katayama addressed reporters briefly Thursday on the Gulf escalation's implications for Japan's own fiscal planning, noting that the ministry is monitoring energy-cost pass-through effects closely but declining to speculate on whether the development might affect the timing or scale of the food consumption tax cut currently moving through the Diet.

Colleagues within the ministry describe Katayama's approach to the current multi-front crisis — currency, rates, and now Gulf-driven energy uncertainty — as methodical rather than reactive, a characterization several credit to her decades of institutional experience navigating comparable, if smaller-scale, crises during her earlier career within the ministry's own ranks.

Tamaki Presses for Currency Transparency Amid Gulf Escalation

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Yuichiro Tamaki, leader of the Democratic Party for the People, continued pressing the government this week for fuller disclosure of the currency intervention's mechanics, a push that has taken on additional urgency in the wake of Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation given how directly rising oil prices now interact with the same inflation dynamics driving the intervention debate.

Tamaki's technically grounded, cooperative-but-independent opposition approach, built substantially on his own background at the Ministry of Finance, continues to distinguish the DPP's currency-transparency push from more categorically oppositional criticism from other parties, a distinction party officials say has given the request added credibility even among some lawmakers within the ruling coalition itself.

Whether the transparency push ultimately produces a formal Diet committee inquiry, as several DPP lawmakers have suggested it might, remains genuinely uncertain, with Tamaki himself continuing to characterize the government's voluntary disclosure as the preferred outcome over a more adversarial escalation.

Tamaki's third-term mandate, secured in a decisive leadership vote earlier this month, gives him a renewed platform to press the currency question with the full institutional weight of his party behind him rather than as an initiative that risked being read as one faction's personal priority within a still-consolidating party organization.

The DPP's growth in recent electoral cycles, from a minor party to a genuine secondary force in Japanese opposition politics, has been built substantially on exactly this kind of technically literate policy critique, distinguishing the party from opposition rivals whose objections to government economic policy have more often taken the form of broader ideological opposition than specific, mechanism-level questions of the sort Tamaki continues to press.

Political analysts note that Tamaki's currency-transparency push carries a secondary function beyond its stated policy goal: reinforcing the DPP's core electoral brand ahead of the 2028 Upper House election, where the party will need to demonstrate it can translate its reputation for technical competence into a durable share of the vote beyond the protest-vote dynamics that boosted several opposition parties in recent cycles.

Defense Ministry Monitors Gulf Escalation's Regional Implications

By William | Senior Political Analyst

Japan's Defense Ministry said it is closely monitoring Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation for implications beyond the immediate energy-security questions this newspaper's business pages have examined, with officials noting the exchange's significance as the first direct state-to-state military contact of the conflict's seven-month duration.

Defense Minister Shinjiro Koizumi's ministry has continued advancing previously announced defense-spending increases and expanded industrial cooperation with Washington on shipbuilding and munitions production, initiatives officials describe as proceeding on a trajectory set well before this week's specific Gulf developments even as the broader security environment they reflect reinforces the case for continued investment.

Japan's own energy security planning, built around strategic petroleum reserves sized to weather sustained Middle East supply disruption, has not required activation despite the conflict's persistence, Defense and Economy, Trade and Industry ministry officials said this week, characterizing current reserve levels as adequate to the conflict's actual, as opposed to potential, effect on physical crude supply through the Strait of Hormuz.

The trilateral military exercise involving Japan, the United States and South Korea, which concluded earlier this week, provided what defense officials describe as timely, if coincidental, reinforcement of coordination mechanisms directly relevant to any scenario in which Gulf tensions require a broader allied security response, even though the exercise itself was planned and scheduled well before Wednesday's specific escalation occurred.

Defense Minister Koizumi has fielded direct questions from Diet lawmakers this week about whether the Gulf escalation should prompt any acceleration of Japan's own defense-spending trajectory beyond commitments already made in prior budget cycles, with the minister consistently declining to commit to any specific new measures while emphasizing that existing plans already account for a broadly deteriorating regional and global security environment.

Trade and Industry ministry officials said this week.

Health Minister Remains Noncommittal on Pricing Reform Timeline

By Michael Hayes | Deputy Editor, Politics & Policy

Health, Labour and Welfare Minister Kenichiro Ueno remained noncommittal this week on whether Chuikyo medical-pricing reform legislation will move forward this autumn, with his own position in the coming reshuffle considered among the least settled of any senior Cabinet post.

Pharmaceutical industry groups continue lobbying actively on the question, with multinational drugmakers generally favoring reforms that would speed reimbursement of novel therapies, while domestic generic manufacturers have urged caution about changes to pricing formulas governing a substantial share of prescriptions dispensed nationally.

Patient advocacy groups, particularly those representing patients with rare diseases, have grown more vocal in recent weeks, with several organizations specifically calling for faster review cycles that would let newly approved treatments reach patients without the extended delays that have periodically characterized the current pricing-negotiation process.

The Chuikyo system's basic structure has remained largely unchanged for decades even as the volume and complexity of novel therapies moving through Japan's regulatory approval process has grown substantially, a gap reform advocates argue increasingly disadvantages Japanese patients relative to peers in markets where newly approved treatments reach pharmacy shelves considerably faster.

Ueno's own noncommittal public posture reflects a genuinely difficult political calculation rather than simple indecision, according to people familiar with the ministry's internal deliberations: any reform ambitious enough to meaningfully address reimbursement-speed complaints from multinational drugmakers risks provoking resistance from domestic generic manufacturers and the broader coalition of stakeholders invested in the current system's cost-containment functions, which have helped keep Japan's overall health spending growth more moderate than several comparable advanced economies despite the country's rapidly aging population.

Pharmaceutical industry groups continue lobbying actively on the question.

BUSINESS

Nikkei Falls to 64,534 as Gulf Escalation Compounds Currency Pressure

Index down 0.93% Thursday, extending Wednesday's decline as traders weigh geopolitical shock against next week's BOJ decision
By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 fell a further 0.93% Thursday to close at 64,534, extending Wednesday's 0.19% decline to 65,142.78 as markets continued digesting Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation on top of the currency and rate story that has dominated this newspaper's business coverage for two weeks running. The two-day decline of roughly 1.1% marks the index's worst stretch in several weeks, even as trading desks describe the moves as orderly rather than panicked.

The yen held steady around 153.4 to 153.8 per dollar through Thursday's session, remaining near its strongest level in nearly seven months even as the Gulf escalation introduced a fresh source of uncertainty into a market already weighing next week's widely expected Bank of Japan rate increase. Traders described the currency's stability through Thursday's volatility as itself notable, given that geopolitical shocks have historically produced sharper yen moves in either direction depending on the specific safe-haven dynamics in play.

Brent crude eased somewhat Thursday from Wednesday's spike toward \$101 a barrel, a partial retracement several energy analysts attributed to the absence of immediate further escalation rather than any fundamental resolution of the underlying conflict, with prices remaining well above the levels that prevailed before Wednesday's exchange between Iran and US forces.

Bank of Japan Governor Kazuo Ueda faces an increasingly complex calculus heading into next week's meeting, with board member Kazuyuki Masu telling reporters this week that the central bank will continue tightening policy as underlying inflation approaches its 2% target — a signal markets read as reinforcing expectations for a quarter-point increase to 1.25% even as the Gulf escalation's inflationary pressure through higher oil prices complicates the timing question further.

Sector performance across Thursday's session reflected the competing crosscurrents clearly: energy-adjacent names gained on the higher crude outlook, while broader exporters continued lagging amid the currency's sustained strength, and technology shares gave back a portion of their recent AI-driven rally as risk appetite generally retreated in response to the geopolitical news.

Foreign investor positioning has become a subject of particular attention this week, with several overseas funds reportedly reassessing near-term Japan allocations in light of the compounding currency, rate and now geopolitical uncertainty, even as the same funds' longer-term theses around Japan's corporate governance reforms and semiconductor supply-chain exposure remain largely unchanged according to fund managers this newspaper consulted.

Trading volume on the Tokyo Stock Exchange's prime market remained elevated through Thursday's session, consistent with the pattern this newspaper has tracked for two weeks of unusually high activity whenever multiple market-moving stories develop simultaneously rather than in sequence.

Options market positioning continues to reflect genuine uncertainty about the path ahead, with implied volatility on Nikkei options climbing further Thursday to levels not seen since the most acute weeks of July's currency turmoil, a combination derivatives strategists describe as consistent with a market bracing for continued volatility through both next week's BOJ decision and whatever further developments emerge from the Gulf conflict in the meantime.

Tokyo's benchmark Nikkei 225 fell a further 0.93% Thursday to close at 64,534.

BOJ Meeting's Stakes Grow as Gulf Escalation Adds Inflation Pressure

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

The Bank of Japan's Sept. 17-18 policy meeting, now one week away, carries higher stakes than at any point since this newspaper began tracking the current rate-hike cycle, with Wednesday's Gulf escalation adding a fresh inflationary pressure through higher oil prices to a decision already shaped by the wage data, currency intervention and hawkish board-member commentary of recent weeks.

Board member Kazuyuki Masu's comments this week that the central bank will continue tightening as inflation approaches its 2% target were widely read as reinforcing the case for a quarter-point increase to 1.25%, which would mark the policy rate's highest level in roughly 31 years, following a previous increase in June.

Economists surveyed by this newspaper describe the meeting as now carrying a genuinely difficult balancing act: raising rates to address currency weakness and wage-driven inflation risk while the Gulf conflict simultaneously threatens to push imported energy costs higher through an entirely separate channel that a domestic rate increase does comparatively little to address directly.

BOJ watchers note that a hike this month would mark the central bank's most consequential single policy move since the initial steps away from negative rates began, given how directly it would interact with the currency's already-elevated trajectory, the carry-trade unwind still working through global markets, and now the added complication of Gulf-driven energy price volatility feeding into the same inflation calculus from a completely different direction.

Options market pricing has reflected the elevated stakes clearly this week, with implied volatility on yen options climbing to levels not seen since the most acute weeks of July's currency turmoil, a signal derivatives desks describe as consistent with a market genuinely uncertain how the Board will weigh the compounding wage, currency and now geopolitical inputs when the two-day meeting convenes next Thursday.

Some economists have begun openly debating whether the Gulf escalation could, in a scenario few considered plausible even a week ago, push the BOJ toward an even larger increase than the quarter-point move currently priced into markets, though most analysts this newspaper consulted continue to view a larger hike as unlikely given Governor Ueda's consistent preference for gradual, telegraphed policy moves over surprise action.

Fastest Wage Growth Since 1997 Still Shapes Rate-Hike Calculus

By Yuki Saito | Economics & Finance Reporter

This week's wage data, showing nominal pay growth at its fastest pace since January 1997, continues to anchor the Bank of Japan's rate-hike case even as attention has shifted somewhat toward the Gulf conflict's more immediate market effects, with economists describing the wage figures as removing one of the last credible arguments for the central bank to delay action at next week's meeting.

Corporate treasurers at major exporters said this week they continue reviewing hedging strategies in light of both the wage data and the currency's sustained strength, with several describing the current environment — now compounded by Gulf-driven oil price volatility — as requiring more active, multi-factor risk management than the relatively stable years preceding this summer's currency turmoil.

Small and medium-sized enterprises, which together employ the large majority of Japan's private-sector workforce, continue facing a considerably more difficult version of the wage-growth story than the national headline figures suggest, with many smaller employers already squeezed by years of rising input costs now facing the added prospect of higher energy costs flowing through from the Gulf conflict's latest escalation.

The Bank of Japan's own internal wage analysis, according to people familiar with the central bank's deliberations, places particular weight on this smaller-firm dynamic precisely because it bears directly on the durability question at the center of the coming rate decision: a wage increase concentrated among large, already well-capitalized firms is a less reliable signal of an economy-wide wage-price spiral than comparable growth spread more evenly across firm sizes and sectors.

Labor economists caution that the fastest-since-1997 headline figure reflects an aggregate across industries and firm sizes that likely conceals meaningful variation, with wage growth at large, unionized employers generally outpacing gains at smaller firms less able to absorb higher labor costs even before accounting for any additional energy-cost pressure the Gulf escalation might introduce.

The Bank of Japan's own internal wage analysis.

Exporters Navigate Currency and Now Energy-Cost Pressure Simultaneously

By Kenta Sakamoto | Data & Visualization Reporter

Sony Group and Toyota Motor continue adjusting guidance commentary in light of the yen's sustained strength, a challenge now compounded for energy-intensive manufacturing operations by the prospect of higher input costs stemming from Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation and its effect on oil prices.

Toyota's own six-month currency planning assumption of ¥150 to the dollar, adopted specifically to manage volatility, faces continued pressure given the currency's sustained trading below that level, while the company's manufacturing operations — both in Japan and globally — face a second, largely separate cost pressure from any sustained increase in energy prices tied to the Gulf conflict's trajectory.

Smaller and mid-sized Japanese exporters and manufacturers, lacking the scale to maintain sophisticated hedging programs for either currency or energy-cost risk, face a genuinely more acute version of this compounding pressure, according to trade finance specialists this newspaper consulted, with several describing a marked uptick in client inquiries about both currency and energy-cost hedging since Wednesday's escalation.

Sony's more diversified business mix — spanning entertainment, gaming and financial services alongside its traditional electronics operations — has historically provided somewhat greater insulation from currency swings than Toyota's more concentrated automotive export exposure, though analysts note that Sony's own semiconductor and imaging-sensor manufacturing operations retain meaningful exposure to both currency and energy-cost pressures given their production-intensive nature.

Toyota's exposure runs particularly deep given the scale of its global manufacturing footprint, where energy costs factor directly into production expenses at every facility regardless of the currency in which final vehicles are ultimately sold, a structural exposure that a strengthening yen alone does not offset and that Wednesday's Gulf escalation has now made measurably more acute.

Sony Group and Toyota Motor continue adjusting guidance commentary in light of the yen's sustained strength.

Markets at a Glance

Compiled by the Business Desk

NIKKEI 225: closed Thursday at 64,534, down 0.93%, extending Wednesday's 0.19% decline to 65,142.78. YEN: trading around 153.4-153.8 per dollar, strongest in nearly seven months. BRENT CRUDE: near \$101/bbl after Wednesday's Gulf escalation, easing slightly Thursday. BOJ RATE: 1.00%, with markets widely expecting a quarter-point rise to 1.25% at the Sept. 17-18 meeting.

REAL WAGES: fastest growth since January 1997.

UPCOMING: Okinawa gubernatorial election and Aki Basho sumo tournament both Sunday, Sept. 13; BOJ policy decision Sept. 17-18.

NIKKEI 225: closed Thursday at 64,534, down 0.93%, extending Wednesday's 0.19% decline to 65,142.78.

JAPAN-U.S. RELATIONS & SPORTS

Alliance Coordination Extends to Gulf Response, Officials Say

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

Japanese and American officials continued close coordination this week on the Gulf conflict's implications, extending a pattern of alliance cooperation this newspaper has tracked extensively in recent weeks across the currency intervention and investment framework tracks, according to people familiar with the discussions.

Trade Minister Ryosei Akazawa's ministry said Thursday that follow-up consultations on the \$550 billion investment framework are proceeding as scheduled despite the Gulf news, with officials characterizing the sessions as routine continuation of ongoing coordination rather than a response to any specific development this week.

Defense officials from both countries have continued advancing shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation this newspaper has covered extensively, with the Gulf conflict's persistence reinforcing, rather than altering, the underlying rationale both governments have cited for deepening defense-industrial integration.

Japanese officials describe the current pattern of alliance coordination — spanning currency intervention, investment flows, defense-industrial cooperation, and now Gulf conflict consultation — as evidence of the more continuously managed alliance relationship this newspaper's editorial page examined at length in a recent long-form essay, a structure officials on both sides continue to describe as more resilient than the more implicit, less actively managed relationship it has gradually replaced.

Washington's own bandwidth for managing this many simultaneous alliance tracks with Japan has itself become a subject of quiet discussion among Tokyo-based diplomats, with several noting that the current administration's attention, however genuinely engaged, must now be divided across the Gulf conflict, the currency coordination, and the ongoing investment framework consultations in ways that could eventually test the relationship's capacity for sustained, high-level engagement across every track simultaneously.

For now, officials on both sides describe the coordination as functioning smoothly, with no indication that the Gulf escalation has displaced or slowed any of the alliance's other active work streams, though this newspaper intends to monitor closely whether that capacity proves durable should the Gulf conflict's trajectory demand even more sustained high-level attention in the weeks ahead.

Japanese business groups with significant Gulf-region energy exposure have separately sought their own direct briefings from government officials this week, according to people familiar with the discussions, reflecting private-sector interest in the same alliance-coordination questions that have occupied government-to-government channels since Wednesday's escalation.

The upcoming General Assembly session in New York is expected to provide the next major venue for US-Japan alliance coordination on the Gulf question specifically, with officials from both governments describing sideline meetings on the conflict's trajectory as a near-certain component of whatever bilateral engagement occurs during the session's high-level week.

Japanese and American officials continued close coordination this week on the Gulf conflict's implications.

Bessent's Currency Confidence Faces Its First Geopolitical Test

By Rachel Kim | Japan-U.S. Coverage, Washington-Tokyo Liaison

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's confident public posture on the yen's trajectory, which this newspaper has covered extensively in recent editions, faces its first genuine test from a source outside the currency markets themselves: Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation, whose inflationary and risk-sentiment effects operate through channels largely independent of the intervention dynamics Bessent has spoken about with such evident confidence.

Currency strategists note that a sufficiently sharp risk-off move driven by geopolitical shock could, in principle, produce yen movements running counter to the currency's recent intervention-and-rate-driven strengthening trend, given the yen's traditional, if inconsistent, role as a safe-haven currency during periods of acute global uncertainty — a dynamic that adds a new variable to a currency story this newspaper's readers have followed closely for weeks.

Bessent has not issued new public comment specifically addressing the Gulf escalation's currency implications as of Thursday, though Treasury officials said the department continues monitoring developments closely alongside its ongoing coordination with Japanese counterparts on the broader currency stabilization effort.

The Treasury Secretary's characteristically confident public posture, built substantially on his own claimed insight into Bank of Japan decision-making, has not yet been tested by a shock originating entirely outside the currency and monetary-policy domain where that confidence was forged, and currency strategists this newspaper consulted describe Thursday's relatively muted yen response to the Gulf news as, if anything, a modest early vindication of Bessent's underlying thesis that the currency's intervention-and-rate-driven strengthening trend has developed genuine momentum independent of any single news catalyst.

Japanese officials, characteristically more circumspect than their American counterparts throughout the currency episode, have offered no public assessment of whether Bessent's confidence should extend to geopolitical shocks of this kind, continuing instead to focus public commentary narrowly on the currency and rate mechanics within their own direct area of responsibility.

Whether the yen's relative stability through Thursday's Gulf-driven volatility proves durable, or whether a sufficiently prolonged or severe escalation could eventually overwhelm the currency's current intervention-and-rate-driven strengthening trend, remains a question this newspaper intends to track closely alongside the conflict's broader trajectory in the days and weeks ahead.

Currency options markets have shown only modest repricing of yen volatility expectations specifically tied to the Gulf conflict, according to traders this newspaper consulted, a relatively muted reaction several attribute to the currency's dominant near-term narrative remaining firmly anchored in the BOJ rate decision rather than external geopolitical shocks, at least for now.

Bessent is expected to face renewed questions about the currency's resilience to geopolitical shocks when he next addresses reporters, with several financial journalists covering the Treasury Department indicating they intend to press specifically on whether his confident public posture extends beyond the currency-specific dynamics he has spoken about in such detail throughout the intervention episode.

US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's confident public posture on the yen's trajectory.

Rain Wipes Out Hanshin-Hiroshima as Yomiuri Keeps Pace at Tokyo Dome

Giants rally past Chunichi behind Dahlbeck's 24th home run; Koshien's cancellation is the 15th of the season

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Hanshin's home game against Hiroshima at Koshien Stadium was called off Thursday evening, rained out in an announcement that came just before first pitch and marked the fifteenth weather cancellation of the NPB season — a toll that has left the league's late-season schedule increasingly congested heading into October. Fans who had already arrived at the stadium reacted with visible frustration at the late timing of the call, according to reports from the scene, with the postponement pushing an already tight scheduling picture further into question for a club still fighting to hold its shrinking Central League lead.

With Hanshin idle, Yomiuri took full advantage at Tokyo Dome, rallying past Chunichi 5-3 behind a go-ahead two-run home run from import slugger Dahlbeck, his 24th of the season, which came an inning after fellow import Cabbage's double had set up the Giants' first go-ahead run off Chunichi starter Kanamaru. Eiki Tanaka picked up the win in relief, improving to 3-3 with two saves on the year, with closer Martinez notching his league-leading 38th save to close it out. Yoshida took the loss for Chunichi, falling to 1-4.

Thursday's game at Tokyo Dome opened with a moment of silence observed by both clubs, with a photograph from his playing days displayed on the video board — a tribute this newspaper understands was connected to the recent death of a figure closely associated with the Yomiuri franchise's history, though full details were not independently available at press time. The tribute added a somber note to an otherwise tightly contested game that drew 42,347 fans.

The result trims Hanshin's Central League cushion further in the standings, with the Tigers now needing to make up Thursday's postponed game at a later date even as Yomiuri continues playing at full pace. NPB's rules require postponed games to be rescheduled within the regular season calendar where possible, typically as part of a doubleheader or an otherwise open date, a scheduling puzzle the league office will need to solve for Hanshin with barely three weeks of the regular season remaining.

Elsewhere in the Central League, Yokohama DeNA routed Tokyo Yakult 8-1 at Yokohama Stadium, extending what has become one of the league's most productive offensive stretches over the past two weeks and further cementing the BayStars' position as the most realistic fourth Climax Series contender given the growing gap behind them in the standings.

In the Pacific League, Saitama Seibu defeated Orix 6-3 at Hotto Motto Field Kobe, while Fukuoka SoftBank narrowly held off Hokkaido Nippon-Ham 3-2 at Mizuho PayPay Dome behind a go-ahead solo home run from Tomoya Masaki, his 24th of the season and his first in 25 plate appearances, backing starter Matsumoto Sei. Chiba Lotte defeated Tohoku Rakuten 6-1 at ZOZO Marine Stadium in a game that did little to alter either club's position in the standings.

SoftBank's win keeps the Hawks on pace for one of the most dominant Pacific League regular seasons in recent memory, while Seibu's victory maintains its slim edge over Nippon-Ham for sole possession of second place, a margin now measured in barely a single game with the season's final weeks fast approaching.

Attendance across Thursday's five completed games remained strong despite the weather disruption elsewhere in the league, with Tokyo Dome's 42,347 standing out as one of the larger crowds of the week — consistent with the pattern this newspaper has tracked all season of attendance climbing in direct proportion to how tightly contested the standings remain heading into the stretch run.

With roughly three weeks left in the regular season, the compounding effect of weather postponements — fifteen and counting — has emerged as its own quiet storyline, forcing NPB's scheduling office to weigh doubleheaders, off-day makeups and, in the most extreme scenario, a compressed race to the season's Nov. 1 finish line against the league's stated preference for giving contending clubs adequate rest heading into the Climax Series.

NPB Scoreboard and Standings at a Glance

Compiled by the Sports Desk

THURSDAY RESULTS — Yomiuri 5, Chunichi 3 (Tokyo Dome); Yokohama DeNA 8, Yakult 1 (Yokohama); Hanshin vs. Hiroshima postponed, rain (Koshien); Chiba Lotte 6, Tohoku Rakuten 1 (ZOZO Marine); Saitama Seibu 6, Orix 3 (Hotto Motto Kobe); Fukuoka SoftBank 3, Hokkaido Nippon-Ham 2 (Mizuho PayPay Dome).

CENTRAL LEAGUE — Hanshin Tigers 69-53-1 (.566); Yomiuri Giants 69-55-2 (.556, 1.0 GB); Yokohama DeNA BayStars 59-62-3 (.488, 9.5 GB); Tokyo Yakult Swallows 53-69-2 (.434, 16.0 GB); Hiroshima Toyo Carp 50-67-4 (.427, 16.5 GB); Chunichi Dragons 53-73-2 (.421, 18.0 GB).

PACIFIC LEAGUE — Fukuoka SoftBank Hawks 77-45-3 (.631); Saitama Seibu Lions 72-52-3 (.581, 5.5 GB); Hokkaido Nippon-Ham Fighters 71-55-2 (.564, 7.5 GB); Chiba Lotte Marines 56-62-3 (.475, 18.5 GB); Orix Buffaloes 59-66-2 (.472, 19.0 GB); Tohoku Rakuten Golden Eagles 47-76-1 (.382, 30.0 GB).

UPCOMING — Aki Basho sumo tournament opens Sunday, Sept. 13, at Ryogoku Kokugikan. Okinawa votes for governor the same day. Hanshin's rained-out game against Hiroshima will be rescheduled.

UPCOMING — Aki Basho sumo tournament opens Sunday, Sept. 13, at Ryogoku Kokugikan.

TECHNOLOGY & SOCIETY

Rapidus Order Pipeline Grows as Government Support Nears ¥3 Trillion

By Ethan Cole | Technology and Science Editor

Rapidus Corp. continues discussions with more than 60 companies interested in designing chips for AI and robotics applications, chief executive Atsuyoshi Koike said this week, as cumulative government support for the venture approaches ¥3 trillion combined across direct subsidies and loan-guarantee mechanisms.

The company's production timeline has shown gradual signs of slipping even as funding commitments grow, with some recent guidance pointing to mass production beginning as late as March 2028 rather than the 2027 target cited earlier this year, a delay Koike attributed to the technical difficulty of the underlying 2-nanometer manufacturing challenge rather than any funding or construction-related shortfall.

Skeptics continue to question whether Rapidus can compress into a few years a manufacturing learning curve that took Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co. decades to climb, though customer interest has intensified alongside the broader AI infrastructure boom that has driven much of this year's rally in Japanese semiconductor-linked equities, a rally that has proven considerably more volatile this week amid the currency and Gulf-conflict news dominating other coverage.

The venture's Hokkaido fabrication facility remains on track for its next construction milestone despite the broader timeline's gradual slippage, with the company's most recent funding round having secured ¥267.6 billion from the government and 32 private companies including Sony Group, Toyota Motor and SoftBank, building on an initial ¥73 billion commitment from eight founding companies when Rapidus was established in 2022.

Prospective customers evaluating Rapidus, according to people familiar with the discussions, continue weighing the venture's technical promise against the practical uncertainty of committing design work to a manufacturing partner without a finished, qualified production line to point to — a dynamic common to first-of-its-kind foundry ventures but one that carries particular weight given how conservative the semiconductor design industry has historically been about switching manufacturing partners for its most advanced chip designs.

The government's cumulative financial exposure to the project, now approaching ¥3 trillion when both direct subsidies and various loan-guarantee mechanisms are combined, has drawn periodic scrutiny from fiscal conservatives within the ruling coalition, though the project has so far retained broad cross-party political support given its explicit framing as a matter of economic security rather than conventional industrial policy.

Rapidus executives have consistently argued that partnership with IBM on foundational chiplet technology, combined with the government's willingness to underwrite losses during the venture's early years, gives Japan a realistic path to closing its semiconductor manufacturing gap with Taiwan and South Korea faster than organic industry development alone could achieve, a claim that remains, by the nature of the challenge, unprovable until actual mass production begins.

Tokyo Chip Stocks Give Back Gains as Gulf News Rattles Risk Appetite

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

Technology shares on the Tokyo Stock Exchange gave back a portion of their multi-week rally Thursday as Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation prompted a broader retreat in risk appetite, with chip designers, memory makers and AI infrastructure suppliers among the session's more pronounced decliners even as the underlying AI investment thesis driving the rally's earlier gains remained largely intact according to analysts.

Fund managers who had cautioned for weeks about the rally's underlying narrowness — concentrated in a relatively small band of AI-infrastructure-linked names — pointed to Thursday's pullback as at least a partial vindication of that caution, even as several were quick to distinguish a geopolitically driven risk-off session from any fundamental deterioration in the sector's earnings outlook.

Trading volume across the sector remained elevated, consistent with the broader pattern this newspaper has tracked all week of unusually concentrated market-moving stories developing simultaneously rather than in the more sequential fashion markets have typically digested comparable news in calmer periods.

Foreign institutional investors, who had played an outsized role in the rally's earlier weeks according to Tokyo Stock Exchange flow data, showed the first signs of measurable profit-taking Thursday, though fund managers this newspaper consulted described the movement as consistent with routine risk management around a geopolitical shock rather than any wholesale reassessment of Japan's semiconductor supply-chain investment thesis.

Individual chip-adjacent names showed considerable divergence within the broader sector pullback, with materials and equipment suppliers generally holding up better than the highest-multiple AI-infrastructure names, a pattern several analysts read as evidence that Thursday's decline reflected valuation-sensitive profit-taking as much as any uniform reassessment of sector fundamentals.

Whether Thursday's pullback proves a temporary pause in an otherwise intact rally or the beginning of a more sustained reassessment will likely depend heavily on how the Gulf conflict develops over the coming days, according to strategists who note that Japan's technology sector has, at multiple points this year, demonstrated a capacity to resume its AI-driven rally quickly once whatever immediate catalyst prompted a given pullback fades from market attention.

Retail investor sentiment, tracked through brokerage account activity this newspaper reviewed this week, showed comparatively modest change through Thursday's session relative to the sharper institutional repositioning, a divergence several strategists attribute to domestic retail investors' generally longer holding-period orientation toward AI-linked names compared with the more tactically positioned foreign institutional flows.

Analysts expect the sector's next genuine test to come not from any single day's geopolitical headline but from the BOJ's rate decision next week, which several strategists describe as carrying more durable implications for AI-linked valuations than Wednesday's Gulf escalation given the sector's sensitivity to the broader cost-of-capital environment a rate increase would signal.

SoftBank Shares Swing as AI Bet Meets Broader Risk-Off Mood

By Maya Suzuki | Science & Innovation Desk

SoftBank Group shares remained among the most actively traded on the Nikkei 225 Thursday, with founder Masayoshi Son's aggressive AI infrastructure bet continuing to drive outsized swings even as the strengthening yen and now Wednesday's Gulf escalation add fresh layers of complexity to the conglomerate's already difficult-to-value sprawling portfolio.

Investors remain divided on how to weigh the conglomerate's exposure to this week's compounding pressures — currency, rates and now geopolitical risk — against the longer-term AI infrastructure thesis Son has continued articulating in increasingly expansive terms across recent public comments, with bulls and skeptics alike describing Thursday's session as a genuine test of how much of SoftBank's recent share strength reflects durable conviction versus momentum that a sufficiently sharp risk-off shift can quickly unwind.

SoftBank's sprawling portfolio structure, spanning direct chip-design investments, the Vision Fund's startup holdings, and its controlling stake in Arm, means the conglomerate's share price now functions as something close to a composite index of investor sentiment across multiple distinct risk factors simultaneously, a complexity that makes isolating the specific effect of any single week's news, including this week's Gulf escalation, genuinely difficult even for analysts who cover the company closely.

Son himself has not issued public comment specifically addressing the Gulf escalation's implications for SoftBank's own investment strategy, continuing instead to focus recent public remarks on the conglomerate's longer-term artificial general intelligence infrastructure thesis, a framing that has proven durable through numerous shorter-term market disruptions over the past several years.

Credit rating agencies have continued monitoring SoftBank's overall leverage picture closely given the scale of capital the conglomerate has committed across its various AI-related investments, though none has taken recent rating action specifically tied to this week's currency or geopolitical developments, treating them as inputs among many in an already complex credit profile rather than standalone triggers for reassessment.

Analysts covering the stock note that SoftBank's share price has, over the conglomerate's recent history, tended to exhibit higher volatility than most comparably sized Japanese companies regardless of the specific news catalyst in any given week, a pattern several attribute to the market's ongoing difficulty valuing a portfolio this diverse and this dependent on the ultimate success of still-unproven artificial intelligence investments.

SoftBank's next scheduled earnings update is expected to draw unusually close scrutiny given how many distinct pressures -- currency, rates, geopolitical risk and the underlying AI investment cycle itself -- have converged in the weeks leading up to it, according to analysts who describe the upcoming report as a genuine test of how clearly the company can communicate its exposure across each of these dimensions separately.

Kyoto Minpaku Restriction Advances Toward Formal Adoption

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Kyoto's plan to effectively prohibit new private lodging operations in residential areas advanced further this week, with city officials confirming the restriction remains on track for formal adoption in the coming weeks, following Tokyo's Shinjuku Ward in curbing short-term rental expansion amid sustained complaints over noise, waste disposal and rule-flouting operators.

Real estate agents specializing in Kyoto's historic districts continue reporting slowing inquiries for minpaku-configured properties in anticipation of the restriction, a trend city planning officials say is consistent with the policy's intended effect of redirecting investment capital toward longer-term residential use in the affected zones.

Neighborhood associations in Gion and other historic districts, whose sustained advocacy city officials credit with building the political consensus behind the restriction, continue monitoring the formal adoption process closely, with several group leaders describing the coming weeks as the culmination of years of accumulated frustration with under-regulated short-term rental growth.

Kyoto's approach differs in one notable respect from Shinjuku's earlier restriction: rather than a blanket ward-wide prohibition, city officials have designed the measure around specific residential zoning categories, preserving minpaku eligibility in commercial and mixed-use areas the city considers better positioned to absorb short-term visitor traffic without the same level of resident friction.

Some traditional Kyoto townhouse owners continue pushing back on the restriction, arguing that short-term rental income has been essential to maintaining historic properties that would otherwise be difficult to sustain through long-term residential leasing alone, a tension city officials say the zoning-based approach is specifically designed to address without eliminating minpaku's economic viability citywide.

Tourism industry groups have offered mixed reactions to the restriction's progress, with some expressing concern about the effect on the city's total accommodation capacity during peak travel seasons, and others welcoming what they describe as a necessary correction to years of unmanaged growth that had begun generating visible tension between tourism revenue and residential quality of life in the city's most historic districts.

City officials say the restriction's design draws directly on lessons from Shinjuku's own rollout, with Kyoto planners having specifically studied which enforcement mechanisms proved most effective at curbing the noise and trespassing complaints that dominated public hearings in both cities before finalizing the zoning-based approach now nearing adoption.

Real estate agents specializing in Kyoto's historic districts continue reporting slowing inquiries for minpaku-configured properties, a trend some describe as likely to redirect investment capital toward either traditional long-term rental conversion or, in a smaller number of cases, outright sale of properties whose owners had specifically purchased them for short-term rental income.

Suica Penguin Finalists Draw Strong Public Response

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

JR East's three finalists to replace the retiring Suica Penguin have drawn a notably strong public response in the week since their unveiling, with the railway operator reporting higher-than-expected engagement with its public feedback channels as commuters and character-goods collectors weigh in on the character's eventual successor.

The penguin, introduced alongside the Suica card's 2001 launch and designed to convey a card moving smoothly and independently through the transit system, prepares to "graduate" in March after more than two decades as one of Japan's most recognizable transit mascots, with JR East continuing to signal plans for commemorative programming in the character's final months of service.

JR East has not disclosed the specific criteria used to narrow the field to three finalists, though company officials said the selection process incorporated both internal design review and informal public sentiment gathered over recent months, a process the company describes as balancing genuine public input against the practical need to settle on a successor with enough lead time for full commercial rollout by the penguin's spring retirement.

Character mascots occupy an unusually significant role in Japanese corporate branding more broadly, with transit operators, local governments and businesses across virtually every sector maintaining dedicated mascot characters that often generate meaningful independent merchandise revenue well beyond their original promotional purpose, a context that has raised the stakes considerably for JR East's eventual successor selection.

The transition will be watched closely within the broader character-goods industry, marketing analysts say, as a test case for how successfully a genuinely beloved, long-serving mascot can be retired and replaced without alienating the loyal following the outgoing character built over more than twenty years of continuous service.

JR East's decision to solicit meaningful public feedback in selecting a successor, rather than simply unveiling a fully formed replacement character, reflects what marketing specialists describe as a broader recognition within the company of how genuinely attached commuters have become to the outgoing mascot over its two-decade run.

The eventual successor will inherit a merchandising and branding role that has made the Suica Penguin one of the most recognizable transit-system mascots in Japan, appearing on everything from station signage to a long-running line of character goods sold at kiosks throughout the network, a commercial legacy the new character will be expected to sustain from its very first day.

JR East has indicated the final selection will be announced with sufficient lead time before the penguin's March retirement to allow for a coordinated transition across signage, merchandise and digital branding, though the company has not specified an exact announcement date as of this week.

Osaka Metro QR Transition Timeline Confirmed for Fiscal 2031

By Emi Kondo | Society & Local News Reporter

Osaka Metro reaffirmed this week its plan to abolish magnetic paper tickets in favor of QR code-based fare systems around fiscal 2031, citing both declining magnetic-ticket usage and the rising cost of maintaining aging gate hardware built around the older technology as the two primary drivers behind the timeline.

The operator continues positioning the transition as particularly beneficial for international visitors, who often purchase magnetic paper tickets for short visits rather than acquiring a rechargeable IC card intended for longer-term use, with QR-based digital tickets purchasable in advance through smartphone apps before a visitor even arrives in Japan.

Osaka Metro's move follows similar transitions already completed or underway at several other regional Japanese rail operators, though the operator's scale makes this transition among the largest attempted domestically to date, a distinction officials say has required more extensive testing and phased rollout planning than smaller operators' comparable transitions required.

The operator said it will continue accepting cash fare payment at station windows throughout the transition, addressing a concern raised by some elderly riders' advocacy groups about the pace of Japan's broader shift toward cashless and card-based transit payment, a commitment officials describe as essential to maintaining accessibility even as the underlying fare technology modernizes.

QR code-based fare systems, already deployed on a trial basis at select Osaka Metro stations, offer the operator a lower-cost alternative to both magnetic tickets and IC-card infrastructure, since QR-based systems can in principle operate with comparatively simpler, cheaper gate technology than the dedicated card-reading hardware IC systems require.

The magnetic-ticket infrastructure Osaka Metro plans to retire represents technology largely unchanged in its basic mechanics for decades, and the aging gate hardware built around it has become an increasingly expensive maintenance burden as manufacturers reduce production of replacement parts for equipment few operators worldwide still use at meaningful scale.

Osaka Metro officials say the fiscal 2031 timeline was chosen specifically to allow sufficient lead time for public communication and gradual station-by-station hardware replacement, rather than a more disruptive rapid transition that could inconvenience the operator's substantial daily ridership.

Visitor-focused considerations have shaped the transition timeline considerably, given how heavily the operator's ridership skews toward international tourists during peak travel seasons, a demographic officials say the QR-based system is specifically intended to serve more efficiently than either magnetic tickets or IC cards currently do.

Osaka Metro reaffirmed this week its plan to abolish magnetic paper tickets in favor of QR code-based fare systems around fiscal 2031.

Universal Studios Japan Halloween Event Draws Strong Opening Crowds

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Universal Studios Japan's 2026 Halloween event, which opened to the public Wednesday, drew strong opening-day crowds according to park officials, who described early attendance as running ahead of last year's pace for the park's record zombie-performer season and its first horror attraction restricted to visitors aged 18 and over.

The park's decision to segment Halloween programming by age — family-friendly daytime attractions alongside the new, more explicitly intense evening offering — appears, based on this newspaper's own visit to the park's opening days, to be succeeding at its stated goal of satisfying visitor demand for a genuinely frightening experience without disrupting the broader family-accessible atmosphere the park maintains through daytime hours.

USJ's Halloween season, now running through early November, remains one of the park's most significant annual revenue drivers, drawing both domestic repeat visitors and a growing share of inbound tourists specifically timing trips around the seasonal programming, a pattern park officials expect to continue through the event's full run.

The park's zombie-performer expansion this year represents what officials describe as the largest single-year increase in the event's live-actor component in its history, requiring additional makeup and costume staff brought on specifically to support the larger performer roster across the season's roughly two-month run.

Competition among Japan's major theme parks for Halloween-season visitor share has intensified in recent years, with Tokyo Disney Resort, USJ and a growing number of smaller regional parks each expanding seasonal programming annually in what industry analysts describe as an increasingly important battleground distinct from the parks' core summer and New Year peak seasons.

USJ's decision to segment its offering by visitor age, rather than uniformly intensifying the entire park experience, is being watched closely by competitors as a potential template for growing event revenue without alienating the family visitors who remain the parks' core customer base, according to industry consultants this newspaper consulted this week.

Restaurant and retail partners within the park report their own seasonal revenue tracking ahead of last year's pace, consistent with the broader attendance trends park officials have described, with several Halloween-themed food and merchandise offerings selling out within the event's opening days.

Park officials say the event's continued expansion reflects a multi-year investment strategy in seasonal programming that has, over the past several years, transformed what was once a modest autumn addition into one of the park's three most significant annual revenue periods alongside summer and New Year.

Universal Studios Japan's 2026 Halloween event.

Rice Harvest Proceeds as Wholesale Prices Hold Recent Gains

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Japan's autumn rice harvest continues proceeding broadly on schedule this week, with wholesale prices holding their recent gradual decline from the peaks of the multi-year Reiwa rice crisis even as the government's food consumption tax cut continues moving through the Diet.

Agricultural cooperatives report harvest quality broadly consistent with recent-year averages across most growing regions, with only isolated pockets of concern in areas that experienced the most significant flooding during last week's severe rain event, damage officials say has not meaningfully altered the overall national harvest outlook.

The combination of falling rice prices, a strengthening yen easing other imported food costs, and this week's wage data showing the fastest growth since 1997 continues to produce what several economists describe as the most favorable household cost environment in several years, even as Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation introduces a fresh source of potential upward pressure on imported energy costs that could complicate the broader affordability picture going forward.

The Reiwa rice crisis that preceded this year's relief traced its roots to a combination of factors agricultural economists have debated extensively: a genuinely poor 2023 harvest, Japan's decades-old production-adjustment policies that have historically discouraged farmers from expanding rice acreage even amid rising demand, and a surge in inbound tourism that added meaningfully to domestic rice consumption at precisely the moment supply had tightened.

Rice farmers themselves have offered a notably mixed reaction to the continued price relief, with some welcoming the easing of a crisis that had drawn unwelcome political scrutiny to the industry, and others expressing concern that falling wholesale prices, however welcome for consumers, could erode the improved farm-gate income levels many producers only recently began enjoying after the crisis's earlier price spikes.

Government rice-policy officials have faced sustained political pressure throughout the crisis to reconsider the production-adjustment framework more fundamentally, though the government has so far favored targeted, temporary measures — including the consumption tax cut moving through the Diet — over the more politically fraught question of structural reform to the underlying production system.

Agricultural cooperatives say balancing consumer relief against farmer income stability will likely remain a central tension in rice policy discussions well beyond this particular harvest season, particularly if the Gulf conflict's energy-cost implications begin feeding through to fertilizer and transportation costs that directly affect farm-level economics.

This newspaper's food desk will continue tracking the harvest's progress through its remaining weeks, alongside the broader cost-of-living picture the rice price trajectory has come to symbolize for many Japanese households since the crisis began.

Hikone Castle's UNESCO Candidacy Draws Growing Visitor Interest

By Grace Park | Food & Restaurant Columnist

Hikone Castle in Shiga Prefecture continues drawing increased visitor interest in the weeks since its formal selection as Japan's candidate for UNESCO World Cultural Heritage nomination, with local tourism officials reporting a measurable uptick in inquiries even as the castle, one of only twelve surviving Japanese castles retaining an original wooden keep from the feudal era, faces a multi-year formal nomination process before any final designation.

Local officials describe the candidacy announcement alone as having generated meaningful visitor interest well ahead of any final UNESCO decision, a pattern consistent with how other Japanese heritage sites have seen tourism benefits accrue gradually throughout their own nomination processes rather than concentrated solely around a final designation announcement.

The castle's original wooden keep, one of only twelve such structures surviving nationwide from the feudal era, has drawn renewed academic attention alongside the tourism interest, with several architectural historians describing the nomination process as an opportunity to document and preserve construction techniques that have not been comprehensively cataloged in decades.

Shiga Prefecture officials say they are preparing infrastructure and visitor-management plans in anticipation of continued growth in tourist numbers through the multi-year nomination process, drawing on lessons from other Japanese heritage sites that experienced significant visitor increases well before their own final UNESCO designations were confirmed.

Local business owners in Hikone's castle district report steady growth in foot traffic since the candidacy announcement, with several describing the designation process itself, independent of its ultimate outcome, as having already delivered meaningful economic benefit to the surrounding community.

The formal nomination process now beginning is expected to take several years to conclude, with Shiga Prefecture officials describing sustained, patient advocacy through each successive procedural stage as essential to any Japanese heritage site's eventual UNESCO success.

Whether Hikone ultimately achieves the same designation status as Himeji Castle, Japan's only previously listed original castle structure, remains years away from resolution, though local officials express confidence in the strength of the castle's historical and architectural case.

This newspaper's culture desk will continue tracking the nomination's progress in future editions.

This newspaper's culture desk will continue tracking the nomination's progress in future editions.

Tokyo Condo Market Braces for BOJ Decision Amid Gulf Uncertainty

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Tokyo's condominium market, where average prices surpassed ¥140 million for the first time this year, faces a consequential test as next week's Bank of Japan rate decision approaches alongside the fresh uncertainty Wednesday's Gulf conflict escalation has introduced into the broader economic outlook.

Mortgage brokers report continued elevated inquiries from prospective buyers seeking to lock in current borrowing costs ahead of any further rate increase, a pattern that has historically produced a short-term surge in transaction activity followed by a period of adjustment once new rates take hold, though several brokers this week noted early signs of buyer hesitation tied specifically to the added geopolitical uncertainty rather than the anticipated rate move itself.

Developers continue describing the underlying supply constraint — land scarcity, elevated construction costs and persistent labor shortages in the construction trades — as the more durable driver of Tokyo's elevated prices, one that neither a single rate cycle nor a geopolitical shock originating thousands of miles away is likely to meaningfully reverse over any multi-year planning horizon relevant to major residential development.

This newspaper's real estate desk will provide full coverage of the BOJ decision's effect on the condominium market once next Thursday's rate announcement is confirmed.

Municipal Akiya Programs Show Modest Early Results

By Kenji Fukuda | Real Estate & Urban Development

Municipal programs designed to address Japan's growing stock of vacant akiya housing continue showing modest, incremental results, according to a review of several pilot programs this newspaper has tracked since reporting last week on projections that vacant dwellings nationwide could approach 6 million by 2043.

Officials in the municipalities furthest along with subsidized demolition and akiya-matching programs describe steady, if unspectacular, progress, cautioning that no single municipal-level intervention is likely to meaningfully alter the national trajectory absent broader structural changes to Japan's inheritance-registration system and the demographic pressures driving rural depopulation in the first place.

Property valuation in the most severely depopulated regions continues to grow more difficult, with appraisers reporting increasing numbers of properties whose market value, by conventional methods, comes out at or near zero once demolition and disposal costs are weighed against realistic resale prospects.

Some municipalities have begun experimenting with programs that actively pay property owners a modest sum to formally relinquish ownership, effectively treating vacant, valueless housing stock as a municipal liability to be actively managed down rather than a private asset left to market forces alone, though results remain limited in scale relative to the overall akiya stock.

Detective Conan Holds Box Office Lead as Autumn Slate Approaches

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Japan's domestic box office in 2026 remains led by 'Detective Conan: Fallen Angel of the Highway' at roughly ¥13.70 billion, with 'Chiikawa the Movie: The Secret of the Mermaid Island' close behind at approximately ¥12.23 billion, according to rankings current through early September, as the industry looks toward an autumn slate that exhibitors say could extend the year's strong performance into its final quarter.

Industry watchers continue to note that this year's box-office strength remains concentrated in a narrow band of established franchises rather than reflecting a broader recovery across the full range of theatrical releases, a pattern consistent with comparable dynamics in film markets worldwide.

International distribution rights for several of this year's top releases have become an increasingly significant revenue stream in their own right, with both 'Detective Conan' and 'Chiikawa' securing theatrical releases in multiple overseas markets, reflecting the growing global commercial viability of Japanese animation beyond its traditional streaming-driven international fanbase.

The 'Detective Conan' franchise's continued dominance reflects a now three-decade-long run for the long-running property, whose annual theatrical releases have become something close to an institutionalized spring tradition in Japanese cinema, consistently topping domestic box-office charts against new competition year after year.

Sumo's Tourism-Driven Boom Builds Ahead of Sunday's Opening

By Naomi Kato | Culture & Society Editor

Ticket demand for Sunday's Aki Basho opening continues building ahead of the tournament's start at Ryogoku Kokugikan, with Japan Sumo Association officials describing this weekend's opening as among the strongest in recent memory for a sport whose current popularity surge owes considerably more to inbound tourism than to any single dominant Japanese star.

The tourism-driven demand has produced measurable knock-on effects for Ryogoku, the Tokyo district surrounding the Kokugikan, where restaurant owners and souvenir shops catering to sumo visitors report business volumes well above pre-pandemic levels heading into what promises to be an unusually well-attended opening weekend.

Chanko-nabe restaurants, the hearty stew associated with sumo stables' traditional communal diet, have become an especially visible beneficiary of the tourism surge, with several Ryogoku establishments reporting that international visitors now account for a majority of their business during tournament periods.

The Japan Sumo Association's broader modernization efforts, including expanded digital ticketing and English-language broadcast commentary options, have proceeded alongside the tourism boom rather than preceding it, with officials describing the organization as adapting to demonstrated demand rather than attempting to engineer international interest through active marketing investment.

Aki Basho Opens Sunday as Two Yokozuna Headline Deep Field

By Oliver Brooks | Japan Sports Desk Editor

Sumo's autumn tournament opens Sunday at Tokyo's Ryogoku Kokugikan for a fifteen-day run through Sept. 27, with two yokozuna — Onosato and Hoshoryu, both of Mongolia — headlining a field several sumo journalists describe as unusually deep in realistic championship contenders this September.

The tournament's opening coincides with Okinawa's gubernatorial election the same day, giving Sunday an unusually full national news calendar even before accounting for whatever developments emerge from the Gulf conflict or currency markets over the weekend.

Attention in the sport's press corner continues to focus on Aonishiki, the Ukrainian-born wrestler whose rapid ascent through the ranks has drawn particular international attention and, Japan Sumo Association officials say, contributed meaningfully to the strong overseas ticket demand building ahead of Sunday's opening.

Onosato's ascent to yokozuna has itself become a significant storyline within Japanese sumo in recent years, with the wrestler's promotion following a run of dominant tournament performances that sumo journalists have compared favorably to some of the sport's more celebrated recent champions.

Hoshoryu, the other reigning yokozuna, brings his own notable lineage to September's tournament as the nephew of a previous yokozuna, a family connection Japanese sumo media continue to reference prominently in coverage of his career heading into Sunday's opening bout.

Ohtani Continues Hitting-Only Role as Dodgers Push Toward October

By Haruto Yamamoto | Sports Reporter

Shohei Ohtani continued in the Los Angeles Dodgers' lineup as a hitter this week, a week after confirming he is no longer working toward a pitching return in 2026, with the club's coaching staff continuing the deliberate, incremental build-up plan manager Dave Roberts has described as prioritizing Ohtani's availability for October over maximizing his regular-season workload in September.

The Dodgers enter the season's final stretch comfortably positioned atop the National League West, with the team's pitching rotation — built around Yoshinobu Yamamoto, Blake Snell, Tyler Glasnow and Tarik Skubal — continuing to prepare for a postseason run that does not depend on any contribution from Ohtani on the mound.

Ohtani's underlying 2026 numbers, compiled across a season increasingly defined by absence as much as production, remain formidable by any ordinary standard: a batting average near .280, 30 home runs and an OPS ranking among the league's top hitters despite the accumulated missed games from his various injuries.

Manager Dave Roberts has described the team's approach to Ohtani's continued build-up as deliberately conservative, prioritizing his full availability for October over maximizing his regular-season plate appearances in the season's final weeks, a plan both player and coaching staff have described as mutually agreed upon.

EDITORIAL & OPINION



TODAY'S CARTOON

"Twenty-five years. We still say their names. We still name what was done."

We Still Say Their Names. We Still Name What Was Done.

Today's cartoon draws a straight line between a memorial ritual and a drafting choice, and argues the second protects the first

By Samantha Ortiz | Editorial Page Editor

Today's cartoon, drawn by our own Taro Suzuki, places two acts of memory side by side and asks the reader to notice that they are, in fact, the same act. On the left, in the cartoon's main frame, firefighters stand at a granite wall bearing a number — 2,977 — and a date range spanning exactly twenty-five years, while a flag is raised against a skyline lit by the ghost outline of two towers rendered in spotlight rather than steel. On the right, an old man in a firefighter's coat holds open a book. One page, marked "Official History — Draft," shows a softer vocabulary struck through: tragedy, incident, extremism unspecified. The facing page, in plainer type, reads simply: al-Qaeda. Jihad against a free people. The cartoon's caption does not separate these two scenes into a memorial panel and a political one. It offers a single sentence for both: twenty-five years, we still say their names, we still name what was done. This newspaper wants to spend today's editorial explaining why we think that sentence is right, why the second half is not optional if the first half is to mean anything, and why a Japanese newspaper, writing from a country with its own fraught, ongoing argument about how to name its own history, is especially well positioned to make this case.

Start with the easier half: saying the names. Nobody seriously disputes that a memorial's central obligation is to the individual dead rather than to any abstraction they can be made to stand for. The National September 11 Memorial's twenty-fifth anniversary ceremony this morning will do what it has done every year since the reading of names began: call out, one by one, the 2,977 people killed in the attacks themselves, plus the six killed in the World Trade Center's earlier 1993 bombing, a ritual this year extended by a seventh moment of silence for those who have died since from illness tied to their exposure at Ground Zero. That extension matters on its own terms — it acknowledges, correctly, that the day's death toll has never actually stopped accumulating, that more than 400 New York firefighters have now died of World Trade Center-related illness, a figure that has surpassed the 343 killed in the towers' collapse itself. A memorial that adjusts its own ritual to keep pace with an expanding toll is a memorial taking the individual dead seriously as individuals, not as a fixed historical statistic frozen at a convenient anniversary number. This newspaper has no quarrel with any part of that half of today's cartoon. We doubt any serious person does.

The second half is where the argument actually lives, and where this newspaper thinks the cartoon's real work is being done. Naming what was done is not, on its surface, a memorial act at all — it is a historical and, inescapably, a political one, because it requires a drafter, an editor, a curriculum committee, a museum wall label, or a newspaper editorial page to make an actual choice about vocabulary, and every available vocabulary choice carries implications the softer alternatives are specifically designed to avoid. "Tragedy" is a word for events without agents — earthquakes, plane crashes attributable to mechanical failure, diseases. Applying it to September 11 requires either genuine confusion about who flew the planes or a more deliberate flattening of agency into circumstance, the rhetorical equivalent of describing a shooting as "gun violence occurred" rather than naming who pulled the trigger. "Incident" performs a comparable flattening through sheer bureaucratic blandness, the same word a transit authority might use for a signal failure. "Extremism unspecified" is, of the cartoon's three struck-through phrases, the most interesting, because it does not deny agency so much as launder it — extremism belongs to no particular tradition, answers to no particular reading of any particular text, and therefore implicates no particular community in any way that might require anyone to sit with an uncomfortable specific truth rather than a comfortable general one.

This newspaper wants to be precise about what we are, and are not, arguing here, because precision is exactly the virtue the cartoon is defending and exactly the virtue this kind of essay can lose if it is not careful. We are not arguing that every Muslim, or every adherent of any particular reading of Islamic tradition, bears responsibility for the attacks — that claim is false, was false in 2001, and remains false today, and this newspaper rejects it as firmly as we reject the euphemisms the cartoon depicts being struck through. Al-Qaeda's own stated justification for the attacks, which its leadership articulated at length in the years before and after 2001, invoked a specific, minoritarian, and — crucially — contested interpretation of religious obligation that the overwhelming majority of the world's Muslims, including the overwhelming majority of Islamic religious authorities who addressed the attacks directly, explicitly rejected as a distortion of the tradition it claimed to represent. Naming the attack accurately requires naming al-Qaeda's own stated ideology, in its own terms, precisely because that specificity is what distinguishes an accurate historical account from the kind of vague, undifferentiated blame that genuinely would implicate an entire religious tradition rather than a specific, identifiable, and — again — internally contested strand within it. The cartoon's own second page does not say "Islam." It says al-Qaeda, and jihad against a free people — the group's own name, and language drawn from its own stated justification, not an editorial generalization imposed from outside.

That distinction — between naming a specific group's specific stated ideology and indicting an entire tradition — is exactly the distinction the softer vocabulary in the cartoon's draft page is designed to make unnecessary, by avoiding specificity altogether in either direction. "Extremism unspecified" does not merely fail to indict Islam broadly, which would be a mistake in the opposite direction; it fails to name al-Qaeda specifically, which is simply an inaccurate account of who committed the attack and why. A reader encountering only the softened vocabulary would not know that a specific organization, with a specific leader, operating from specific safe havens, trained specific operatives to carry out a specific, elaborately planned operation justified in specific theological terms the group itself published at length. They would know only that something extreme happened, for reasons unspecified, to people who are named. That is not caution. It is a different kind of inaccuracy than false generalization, but an inaccuracy nonetheless — and this newspaper considers precision about who did what, and why, in their own stated terms, to be the single non-negotiable requirement of any account of this kind, however uncomfortable the specific answer turns out to be for various constituencies who would each, for different reasons, prefer a vaguer one.

We raise all of this as a Japanese newspaper, and we think that vantage point is worth making explicit rather than incidental, because Japan's own relationship to naming its twentieth-century history remains, twenty-five years after September 11 and eighty-one years after the events in question, genuinely and visibly unresolved in ways this newspaper's own news pages have covered extensively in recent weeks. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's address at last month's National Memorial Service for the War Dead omitted the word "reflection" — hansei, in the original Japanese — that her predecessor had used a year earlier, a choice Japanese press coverage treated, correctly in this newspaper's assessment, as a substantive signal rather than a stylistic one, precisely because the presence or absence of that specific word has functioned for years as shorthand for where a given prime minister stands on the broader question of how directly Japan's own wartime conduct should be named in its own commemorative language. The prime minister's own Nagasaki and Hiroshima addresses this August drew similar scrutiny for their studied ambiguity on Japan's three non-nuclear principles, language observers on multiple sides of the debate read as calibrated rather than accidental.

This newspaper does not intend, in an editorial devoted to September 11, to relitigate the full complexity of Japan's own historical reckoning, which involves genuine questions of proportion, context and comparative culpability that a cartoon about a different country's different atrocity cannot resolve by analogy alone. But we do think the structural pattern is instructive, and worth naming plainly: in both cases, the passage of time creates its own gravitational pull toward softer language, and in both cases, that pull operates independently of whether softer language happens to be more accurate. Time does not, on its own, make "tragedy" a more accurate word for September 11 than it was in 2001, any more than eighty-one years makes "the ravages of war" — Takaichi's own August phrase, notably passive, notably agentless — a more accurate description of a war Japan's own imperial government chose to wage than a franker accounting would be. What time does is make the softer language more comfortable to use, for domestic political constituencies in both countries who would each, again for different reasons, prefer their national narrative arranged around a vaguer, less specifically agented account of what actually happened and who specifically did it.

We think this pattern deserves a name of its own, distinct from the more familiar charge of "historical revisionism," which implies an active, deliberate campaign to rewrite an established record. What the cartoon depicts, and what this newspaper has watched unfold in miniature in Japan's own commemorative language this summer, is closer to a kind of historical erosion: not a deliberate falsification imposed all at once, but a gradual, almost bureaucratic softening, one struck-through word at a time, each individual substitution defensible on its own terms — "incident" is not technically false, merely imprecise; "the ravages of war" is not technically false, merely passive — until the cumulative effect, twenty-five or eighty-one years on, is an official record that a reader encountering it fresh, without independent knowledge of the underlying events, could not reconstruct an accurate account of who did what to whom, and why, from the official language alone. Erosion, unlike revision, does not require a villain. It requires only that accurate specificity be, in each individual instance, slightly less comfortable than vague generality, and that no single institution feel a strong enough individual obligation to resist the marginal substitution in front of them on any given anniversary.

This is, we think, precisely the mechanism the cartoon's old firefighter is resisting simply by holding the book open to the page that still says the specific thing rather than the vague one. He is not depicted making an argument. He is depicted performing an act of custodianship — noticing that a specific, accurate, uncomfortable sentence is being quietly replaced by a vaguer, more comfortable one, and, by the simple act of holding the earlier page open where it can still be read, refusing to let the substitution happen without at least one person registering that it is happening. This newspaper considers that a genuinely modest act, and a genuinely necessary one, precisely because the alternative to individual acts of custodianship of this kind is not a dramatic, contestable act of revision that invites pushback — it is a series of small, individually defensible substitutions that never quite rise to the level of a controversy anyone feels obligated to have.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

We Still Say Their Names. We Still Name What Was Done. — Continued from Page 9

What would it mean, concretely, for a newspaper — as opposed to a memorial museum, a school curriculum, or a government commemorative address, each of which faces its own distinct institutional pressures toward euphemism — to practice the kind of custodianship the cartoon depicts? We think it means, at minimum, three commitments this newspaper intends to hold itself to, today and in whatever anniversary coverage follows in years we will not all be present to write. First, naming organizations and ideologies by their own stated terms rather than substituting vaguer institutional language, even when the specific terms are less comfortable to print than the vague ones — al-Qaeda, not extremism unspecified; jihad against a free people, in the group's own stated framing, not tragedy. Second, resisting the temptation to let round-number anniversaries function as natural resting points where more careful specificity is no longer required — a twenty-fifth anniversary account owes readers the same precision a first anniversary account did, not a more relaxed version calibrated to how much collective attention the subject can still reliably command a quarter-century on. Third, and perhaps hardest to operationalize consistently, applying the same standard of specific, agented, uncomfortable naming to our own country's history that we are applying today to another country's atrocity — a standard this newspaper does not believe it has always met with full consistency in its own coverage of Japan's twentieth-century conduct, an admission we make deliberately rather than in passing, and one we commit, in this editorial, to holding ourselves to more consistently going forward, precisely because the alternative is exactly the kind of selective specificity — precise about other nations' atrocities, vague about one's own — that would make today's editorial an act of comfortable hypocrisy rather than genuine custodianship.

There is a final image in today's cartoon worth dwelling on separately: an eagle perched atop a cross fashioned from raw timber, positioned above two empty folding chairs, in the composition's upper-left corner, quiet and easy to miss beside the flag-raising and the granite wall commanding the frame's center. We read those empty chairs as the cartoon's most understated argument, and possibly its most important one: memory of this kind is not a completed project with a fixed cast of participants, but an ongoing one that requires new people to occupy the chairs the original witnesses will not be able to hold forever. Twenty-five years on, a meaningful share of today's readers were small children, or not yet born, when the towers fell, inheriting a ritual of memory — and, this newspaper would add, an obligation of specific, accurate naming — built by a generation for whom September 11 remains a lived memory rather than a historical date encountered secondhand.

Nowhere is that inheritance more directly at stake than in how the attacks are taught to students who have no personal memory of them at all, a population that by now includes the overwhelming majority of secondary and university students in both our countries. The National September 11 Memorial & Museum's own educator programming has spent recent years wrestling openly with exactly this challenge, developing what its staff describe as classroom-ready strategies for engaging with what the museum itself calls "difficult content" — language this newspaper does not read as euphemism so much as an honest acknowledgment that teaching accurate specificity to students with no living memory of the event requires deliberate pedagogical scaffolding that simply reading a textbook paragraph aloud cannot provide. A teacher explaining al-Qaeda's stated theological justification to a classroom of students born a decade or more after the attacks faces a genuinely harder task than a newspaper editorial page does: the students lack not only personal memory but the surrounding cultural context — the anthrax scares, the color-coded terror alerts, the two decades of wars that followed — that made the specific vocabulary feel urgent and necessary to the adults who lived through it firsthand. Under those conditions, the pull toward the textbook's safer, vaguer paragraph is not laziness or ideological capture so much as a genuinely difficult curricular problem honestly, if imperfectly, being worked through — which is exactly why the custodianship this newspaper is describing cannot be left to educators alone, and why institutions like this one, with no comparable pedagogical burden to manage, bear a correspondingly greater obligation to keep the specific, accurate version in continuous circulation for the curricula, eventually, to draw back on.

None of this is unique to September 11, which is precisely why this newspaper thinks the cartoon's argument travels beyond the specific anniversary prompting it today. Every atrocity substantial enough to require decades of continuous public memory faces the identical structural pressure once the last generation with direct experience of it begins to thin: the Holocaust, whose survivor population is now overwhelmingly gone and whose remembrance increasingly depends on institutions rather than individual testimony; the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, whose hibakusha survivors this newspaper's own recent coverage has noted are dwindling year by year, with their testimony now substantially mediated through museums, films and secondhand accounts rather than direct address; and, in a considerably smaller register but a real one nonetheless, the individual family griefs this newspaper's own reporters have encountered while covering twenty-five years of anniversaries, where children of the dead have themselves become parents explaining an event they experienced as children to children who did not experience it at all. In every one of these cases, the same choice recurs at every institutional level with a stake in how the memory is transmitted: hold the specific page open, or let the softer page take its place because no single decision to soften it, in isolation, seems to matter very much.

This newspaper will keep saying the names. We intend, with the same seriousness, to keep naming what was done — plainly, specifically, and in whichever country's history the naming happens to be uncomfortable, including, when the occasion calls for it as directly as this anniversary calls for it today, our own. Twenty-five years is long enough that the temptation to let the page turn quietly is real and, we suspect, only grows stronger from here. It is also, we would argue, exactly long enough to have tested whether the specific version can survive the passage of time intact. Today, at least, it has. That is not a small thing, and it did not happen by accident — it happened because enough people, in enough newsrooms, classrooms, museums and memorial halls, on both sides of the Pacific, kept doing the quiet, unglamorous, largely thankless work the old firefighter in today's cartoon is shown doing: holding the specific page open, refusing the easier, softer substitute each time it was offered, one anniversary at a time, for as long as it takes.

EDITORIAL & OPINION

The War That Never Quite Ended, Twenty-Five Years On

Wednesday's Gulf escalation is not a new war. It is the same one, in its latest chapter, and this newspaper thinks the anniversary demands we say so plainly

By Jonathan Mercer | Senior Editor, International Desk

This newspaper's front page today carries two stories that its editors debated, briefly, whether to run on the same day at all: the twenty-fifth anniversary of the September 11 attacks, and Wednesday's sharp escalation in the Gulf conflict this newspaper has covered for seven months, in which Iran fired ballistic missiles at a US base in Jordan and struck ten ships hours after Washington said it had destroyed five Iranian oil tankers. We decided quickly that running them together was not merely defensible but necessary, because we do not believe these are, in any meaningful sense, two separate stories. We think they are the same story, read at two different points along a single continuous timeline, and that treating the anniversary as a discrete historical commemoration, sealed off from this week's headlines, would itself be a kind of quiet dishonesty about how directly one set of decisions in the autumn of 2001 continues to shape the decisions being made in the Gulf this week.

The connective tissue is not abstract. The invasion of Afghanistan that began weeks after the September 11 attacks, explicitly framed as a response to al-Qaeda's safe haven there, initiated what became a two-decade American military commitment in the region that only formally concluded with the chaotic 2021 withdrawal. The 2003 invasion of Iraq, justified through a different and more contested chain of reasoning but unmistakably enabled by the post-9/11 political environment in which a sitting American president could credibly argue for preemptive military action against a state actor on the theory that the alternative was risking another attack of comparable scale, reordered the Middle East's balance of power in ways whose consequences are still working themselves out on battlefields the current generation of policymakers inherited rather than chose. Iran's own regional posture — its support for proxy forces across Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen, its consistent characterization of American military presence in the Gulf as fundamentally illegitimate — took much of its current shape in direct response to the American invasion of a neighboring state whose own government, whatever its considerable sins, had no operational connection to the September 11 attacks at all.

We want to be careful here, because tracing this chain of causation is not the same as arguing that the chain determined Wednesday's specific strikes, or that Iran's current leadership bears no independent responsibility for choices it alone made in firing missiles at a base hosting American forces. Nations are not simply passive vessels carried along by historical momentum; Tehran's government has made its own calculated decisions at every point along this twenty-five-year timeline, including, this newspaper has argued in our news coverage this week, the decision to strike a base in Jordan specifically, a choice analysts read as deliberately calibrated rather than reflexive. What we are arguing is narrower and, we think, considerably harder to dispute: that the specific menu of options available to every actor in this week's Gulf confrontation — the American military infrastructure in the region that gave Iran a target, the accumulated grievances that gave Tehran a reason, the alliance structures that shape how Washington's partners including Japan respond — was substantially built, deliberately and at great cost, in the direct aftermath of September 11, and that a quarter-century later, that architecture is still the one everyone involved is operating within.

This matters for how Japan, and this newspaper's own readers, should understand the country's own stake in a conflict fought thousands of miles from Japanese shores. We have covered extensively in recent editions how directly the Gulf conflict bears on Japan through the narrower channel of energy prices and crude oil supply through the Strait of Hormuz — a real and immediate economic exposure that requires no historical argument to justify sustained attention. But Japan's stake in the underlying architecture we are describing runs deeper than the current price of Brent crude, because Japan's own security posture, as this newspaper's front page explores today, was itself substantially reshaped by the same 2001 moment that produced the American military presence in the Gulf now serving as both flashpoint and target. The Self-Defense Forces' first sustained experience operating in direct logistical support of active American combat operations came through the Indian Ocean refueling mission Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi authorized within weeks of the September 11 attacks — a mission whose legal and political precedent, our reporting today argues, still shapes how far Japan's current government believes its forces can be stretched in support of allied operations a quarter-century later.

Put simply: the same crisis that gave the United States its current military footprint in the Gulf also gave Japan its first meaningful legal pathway toward the kind of alliance-support role Tokyo continues to expand today, through the shipbuilding and munitions-production cooperation this newspaper has covered extensively in recent weeks. These are not two separate legacies of September 11 that happen to be intersecting by coincidence this particular week. They are the same legacy, viewed from two different capitals, and Wednesday's Gulf escalation is the moment both legacies became simultaneously, unavoidably visible on the same day this newspaper devotes its front page to the anniversary that produced them both.

There is a temptation, twenty-five years on, to treat the post-9/11 wars as a closed chapter — Afghanistan concluded, Iraq's American combat mission formally ended over a decade ago, the acute phase of the global War on Terror superseded in Washington's own strategic priorities by great-power competition with China and, more recently, the currency and trade stories this newspaper's business pages have tracked extensively. We understand the appeal of this framing, and we do not think it is simply wrong — the specific military campaigns launched in direct response to September 11 have, in the narrowest sense, concluded. But Wednesday's escalation is a direct, forceful argument against the broader version of this framing, the one that treats the underlying strategic architecture September 11 produced as similarly concluded. Iran's ballistic missiles did not strike a base built last year. They struck a base that exists, in its current form and mission, substantially because of decisions made in the specific weeks this newspaper's front page commemorates today.

This newspaper is aware that this argument can be, and has been, deployed toward political conclusions we do not endorse and are not making here. Some who trace this chain of causation do so to argue that the September 11 attacks themselves were somehow deserved, or that American and allied responses were uniquely culpable for everything that followed, in a way that erases al-Qaeda's own agency and responsibility for the attacks that began this entire sequence — an argument this newspaper's companion editorial today addresses directly, and firmly rejects, in its insistence on naming al-Qaeda's specific, stated ideology rather than diffusing blame into vague structural forces. We are not making that argument. Al-Qaeda chose to fly airliners into occupied buildings, killing 2,977 people who had no part in any American foreign policy decision whatsoever, and no chain of subsequent causation reduces that specific, chosen atrocity's specific, chosen perpetrators' responsibility for it by one degree. What we are arguing is a different and, we think, more defensible claim: that the world built in response to that atrocity — including its considerable successes, such as the alliance structures that have kept direct conflict between major powers at bay for a generation, and its considerable costs, including the ongoing instability now visible in this week's Gulf headlines — remains the world we are all still living in, whether or not we find that fact comfortable to state plainly on an anniversary optimized, by its nature, for more contained forms of commemoration.

What would it mean to take this continuity seriously rather than treating the anniversary and the Gulf headlines as separate news categories, as most publications covering both stories today have chosen to do? We think it means, at minimum, resisting the natural editorial instinct to file the anniversary under history and the Gulf conflict under current events, as though a quarter-century were sufficient distance to convert one into the settled property of the past while the other remains genuinely, urgently unresolved. It means asking, when covering the Gulf conflict's next escalation, whichever form it takes, not only what immediate tactical or diplomatic considerations produced it, but which decisions made in the specific autumn we commemorate today made that immediate consideration possible in the first place. And it means being honest, in our own front-page decision this morning, that a photograph of Lower Manhattan's skyline before the towers fell and a headline about missiles striking an American base in Jordan are not, whatever the wire services' own categorization systems suggest, stories belonging to different sections of the newspaper.

Historians of American foreign policy have, for at least the past decade, debated whether the post-9/11 conflicts constitute what several scholars have termed a "forever war" -- a military commitment whose scope, duration and eventual resolution resist the conventional frameworks through which earlier conflicts were understood and, eventually, concluded. We think Wednesday's escalation offers a useful, if uncomfortable, test of that framework's continued relevance. A conventional war reaches a resolution recognizable as such: a surrender, an armistice, a negotiated settlement that both sides can point to as the moment hostilities formally ceased. The conflicts that trace their origin to September 11 have produced nothing resembling this kind of clean resolution at any point across twenty-five years, only a series of formal troop withdrawals, strategic pivots and, this week, escalations that draw on the same underlying architecture even as the specific combatants and battlefields have shifted repeatedly across the intervening decades.

This absence of a recognizable endpoint is not, we would argue, an accident of poor strategic planning so much as a structural feature of the conflict's original nature. September 11 was not a state's declaration of war against another state, the kind of conflict international law and diplomatic tradition alike are built to eventually resolve through negotiation between recognized governments. It was a non-state actor's attack against a state, followed by that state's military response against both the non-state actor directly and, in Iraq's case, a state government whose connection to the original attack remains, twenty-five years later, a matter of genuine historical dispute rather than settled fact. A conflict structured this way does not have a natural resolution mechanism built into it the way a war between two sovereign governments does, which may help explain why, a quarter-century on, the architecture it produced continues generating new flashpoints -- Wednesday's Gulf escalation the latest, but almost certainly not the last -- rather than converging toward the kind of formal conclusion earlier generations of conflict eventually reached.

Japan's own experience with this open-ended quality deserves particular attention from a newspaper covering Japan specifically, because the Self-Defense Forces' gradual, incremental expansion into alliance-support roles that our front-page coverage traces to the 2001 refueling mission has itself never reached anything resembling a defined endpoint. Each individual expansion -- the original Indian Ocean mission, the 2015 collective self-defense legislation, the current shipbuilding and munitions cooperation -- has been justified as a response to a specific, bounded circumstance, yet the cumulative trajectory across twenty-five years has been consistently, if gradually, expansive rather than settling into any stable, final equilibrium the way Japan's postwar security posture arguably had before 2001. Whether that trajectory eventually produces the kind of formal constitutional revision Prime Minister Takaichi has long favored personally, or continues indefinitely through the same incremental, crisis-driven mechanism that has characterized it since Koizumi's original decision, remains, our reporting suggests, one of the genuinely open questions in Japanese security policy -- and one that Wednesday's Gulf escalation, by reinforcing the broader regional security anxiety that has driven each prior expansion, makes marginally more likely to resolve toward continued expansion than toward any return to the more restrictive posture that preceded 2001.

We raise this not to argue that Japan's security evolution has been mistaken -- this newspaper has covered, with considerable nuance we do not intend to abandon here, the genuine security challenges from North Korea and China that have driven much of Japan's defense posture independent of anything happening in the Gulf. We raise it to note that the same open-ended, resolution-resistant quality that characterizes the broader post-9/11 conflict architecture also characterizes Japan's own gradual security transformation within it, and that Wednesday's escalation, whatever its ultimate trajectory, is unlikely to be the moment either the broader conflict or Japan's own evolving role within its alliance structure finally reaches the kind of settled conclusion a conventional war eventually provides.

There is a version of this argument that risks slipping into a kind of fatalism this newspaper wants explicitly to reject: the idea that because the post-9/11 architecture has proven this durable and this resistant to clean resolution, individual decisions made within it -- including, this week, decisions in Washington and Tehran about how to respond to each other's latest strikes -- somehow matter less than the broader structural forces we have spent this essay describing. We do not believe this. Structures constrain and shape the range of choices genuinely available to individual decision-makers at any given moment; they do not determine those choices in any way that relieves the people actually making them of full responsibility for which specific option, among the available range, they ultimately select. Iran's leadership chose Wednesday's specific targets from among a range of possible responses, just as American commanders chose the specific tanker strikes that preceded it, and both sets of choices will be judged, by history and by this newspaper's own ongoing coverage, on their own terms rather than excused as the inevitable output of a twenty-five-year-old architecture neither government fully controls.

What the structural argument does usefully clarify, we think, is why de-escalation has proven so difficult to achieve at any point across the conflict's seven-month duration, Wednesday's exchange included. A conflict fought entirely within a bounded, conventional framework -- two states, a defined territorial dispute, a recognizable path to negotiated settlement -- offers off-ramps that a conflict embedded within the sprawling, multi-decade, multi-actor architecture we have described simply does not offer in the same accessible form. Mediators seeking to de-escalate Wednesday's specific exchange must contend not only with the immediate grievances both sides cite, but with the accumulated weight of two decades of prior escalations, proxy conflicts and unresolved strategic grievances that make any single de-escalatory gesture harder to trust, and harder to sustain, than it would be within a more conventional, more bounded conflict structure -- a diplomatic burden this week's mediators inherited rather than created, and one no single round of talks is likely to fully resolve.

This newspaper does not know how Wednesday's escalation resolves, whether it proves containable within the conflict's existing seven-month equilibrium or marks the opening of a more dangerous phase our own news pages are only beginning to grapple with today. We do know, with considerably more confidence, that whatever comes next will be shaped by an architecture of alliances, grievances, military postures and strategic assumptions that a group of nineteen men set irrevocably in motion twenty-five years ago today, in a way that makes today's anniversary considerably less like a closed historical commemoration and considerably more like the opening chapter of a story this newspaper, and every other publication covering both the anniversary and the Gulf conflict today, is still, whether we fully acknowledge it or not, in the middle of writing.

This newspaper's own coverage across the coming weeks will continue trying to hold both halves of this argument simultaneously: reporting the Gulf conflict's next developments, whatever they turn out to be, with the same immediate, day-by-day attention we have given every prior escalation across its seven-month duration, while never losing sight of the longer architecture within which each individual development takes its shape. We think readers are owed both registers of attention simultaneously -- the close, present-tense daily reporting that treats each escalation as the specific, consequential event it genuinely is, and the longer historical framing that refuses to let any single week's headlines be understood in isolation from the quarter-century of accumulated decisions that produced the conditions making them possible in the first place. Today's anniversary, and Wednesday's escalation arriving in the same news cycle, make holding both registers simultaneously considerably easier than it will be once this particular week's coincidence of dates has passed and the two stories drift back into their more conventional separate categories, filed under history and current events respectively, in a way this newspaper has argued throughout this essay obscures more than it clarifies about how directly one continues to shape the other.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

The War That Never Quite Ended, Twenty-Five Years On — Continued from Page 11

Twenty-five years is a long time by the measure of a single newspaper's daily coverage cycle. It is a considerably shorter time by the measure of the strategic architecture a single catastrophic morning can set in motion, and shorter still by the measure of the generational security relationships — Japan's own alliance evolution chief among them, in this newspaper's own coverage today — that a crisis of that scale can permanently redirect. We commemorate today because the specific, individual dead of September 11 deserve commemoration on their own terms, named and remembered as the people they were rather than as data points in any larger strategic narrative, a distinction our companion editorial insists on directly. But we would be failing our readers if we let that necessary, individual commemoration obscure the larger, unfinished story this week's Gulf headlines make impossible to ignore: that the war which began twenty-five years ago today has never, in the fullest sense, actually ended. It has simply continued, one escalation at a time, into this particular Thursday, a day most of the world will remember, if it remembers this particular week at all, for an anniversary rather than for the war that anniversary is still, a quarter-century later, quietly writing -- a war this newspaper intends to keep covering as exactly that, rather than as a series of entirely disconnected headlines each somehow arriving from nowhere, unmoored from everything that came before.

EDITORIAL & OPINION

What Twenty-Five Years of Security Actually Bought

America rebuilt itself around preventing a second September 11. Japan did not. This newspaper asks what that difference reveals about the trade-off both approaches represent

By Daisuke Ito | Investigations & Longform

In the twenty-five years since September 11, the United States built an entirely new tier of government, the Department of Homeland Security, employing roughly a quarter-million people across more than twenty component agencies, at a cumulative cost that independent estimates place well into the trillions of dollars once related spending across defense, intelligence and law enforcement is included. It created the Transportation Security Administration, transforming air travel into the routinized removal of shoes and confiscation of liquids that has become, for a generation of travelers, simply what flying is. It built a surveillance architecture, revealed in fragments over the ensuing decades, whose scope startled even many of the lawmakers who had voted to authorize its legal foundations. Japan, confronting the same attack against its closest ally, and having lost 24 of its own citizens in the towers that morning, did none of these things in anything resembling comparable scale. This newspaper's front page today traces how September 11 reshaped what Japan's Self-Defense Forces are permitted to do abroad; today's companion essay asks a different question: what, if anything, does the comparative modesty of Japan's domestic security response, set against America's vast reconstruction of its own government around preventing a repeat, reveal about whether the American approach actually represents the wiser trade-off.

We want to state plainly what this essay is not arguing. We are not arguing that homeland security spending was wasted, that the specific attacks prevented in the years since — and credible open-source estimates suggest a genuine, if inherently uncertain, number of disrupted plots — do not represent real lives saved, or that the officials who built this architecture acted in anything other than good faith response to a genuinely catastrophic intelligence and security failure. September 11 succeeded, in significant part, because of specific, identifiable gaps in American aviation security, interagency information-sharing and border screening that a reasonable government has every obligation to close once identified, and closing them plainly required new institutions, new authorities and new spending that did not previously exist.

What we are asking is a narrower, comparative question: whether the specific scale and form America's response ultimately took was calibrated to the actual, ongoing threat, or whether it reflects something closer to what behavioral economists call an availability cascade — a self-reinforcing cycle in which a vivid, catastrophic event produces public and political demand for visible protective measures that persists and expands well beyond what the underlying, continuously reassessed threat level would independently justify, because no official wants to be the one who scaled back a protective measure shortly before the next attack, however statistically unlikely, makes headlines.

Japan's own experience offers a genuine, if imperfect, natural comparison. Tokyo faced its own catastrophic terrorist attack seven years before September 11 — the 1995 Aum Shinrikyo sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system, which killed thirteen people and injured thousands, using a domestically produced chemical weapon deployed by a homegrown cult rather than a foreign terrorist organization. Japan's response to that attack was significant within its own domestic security and legal context — new anti-cult legislation, enhanced chemical-weapons detection capability, reformed emergency-response protocols for the Tokyo Metro specifically — but it did not produce anything resembling the sweeping, permanent reorganization of the Japanese state that September 11 produced in the United States six years later, even though both attacks killed civilians in a nation's own capital using unconventional means designed to maximize both casualties and psychological terror.

Part of this difference is straightforwardly explicable by scale: September 11 killed roughly 230 times as many people as the Tokyo subway attack, struck the symbolic heart of American financial and military power rather than a subway system, and was carried out by a foreign organization with stated ambitions toward further, larger attacks, features that reasonably justify some difference in response scale between the two events. But this newspaper does not believe scale alone fully explains the difference, given that America's homeland security buildup has, by most independent assessments, continued expanding in scope and cost across a quarter-century in which no attack of remotely comparable scale to September 11 has recurred on American soil — a track record that could as easily be read as evidence the threat has been successfully contained at a lower ongoing cost than current spending levels reflect, as it could be read as vindication of the spending's continued necessity.

The surveillance dimension of this comparison raises civil-liberties questions this newspaper believes deserve more direct treatment than security-spending comparisons alone provide. The expansion of American domestic surveillance authority in the years following September 11 — bulk metadata collection programs, expanded national security letter authority, warrantless surveillance provisions that survived multiple legal challenges before eventual congressional reform — proceeded through a series of individually defensible steps that, examined cumulatively a quarter-century later, produced a surveillance apparatus whose scope surprised even many lawmakers who had voted for its individual component authorizations, according to congressional testimony and investigative reporting this newspaper has reviewed across the intervening decades. Japan's own surveillance-law evolution over the same period has been considerably more incremental and, by most comparative assessments, considerably more constrained, reflecting both Japan's own postwar constitutional privacy protections and a domestic political culture that has, on this specific question, proven more resistant to the kind of rapid, crisis-driven authority expansion the American system permitted.

Security economists who study exactly this question — how to calibrate ongoing protective spending against a threat that, by definition, becomes harder to assess precisely because successful prevention makes the counterfactual invisible — describe a structural problem this newspaper considers genuinely difficult to resolve through ordinary democratic accountability mechanisms. A policymaker who successfully argues for reduced security spending, and is subsequently proven right by the absence of any attack, receives essentially no public credit for the correct call, since an absence of catastrophe generates no headlines. A policymaker who argues for reduced spending and is subsequently proven wrong by an attack that additional spending might plausibly have prevented faces career-ending, potentially historically damning consequences. This asymmetry creates a systematic bias toward continued, and often expanding, security spending that has little to do with the actual, continuously updated threat assessment and everything to do with the wildly asymmetric political consequences of guessing wrong in either direction.

Japan's comparatively modest domestic security buildup after both the Aum Shinrikyo attack and September 11 offers, we think, a useful natural experiment in whether this asymmetric political incentive structure is truly inescapable, or whether a different political culture can resist it. Japanese security policy in the years since both attacks has certainly evolved — enhanced counterterrorism cooperation with allies, improved intelligence-sharing mechanisms, the gradual expansion of Self-Defense Forces' permitted activities this newspaper's front page traces to the same 2001 moment — but it has evolved without producing anything resembling the scale of permanent, visible domestic security infrastructure, the TSA-style security theater at every point of mass transit, or the surveillance capability expansion that has characterized the American response. Whether Japan has simply been fortunate not to face a second catastrophic attack that would test whether its comparatively restrained approach can survive genuine domestic political pressure to respond as expansively as the United States did, or whether Japan's political culture and institutional structure genuinely offer more resistance to the availability-cascade dynamic we have described, remains, this newspaper believes, a genuinely open and understudied question.

There is a cost side of this ledger that deserves equal attention to the security benefits, and one this newspaper thinks American commentary on the homeland security buildup has, twenty-five years on, still not fully reckoned with in proportion to its scale. The TSA's screening apparatus alone processes hundreds of millions of passengers annually, at an aggregate cost in both direct spending and passenger time that dwarfs, by orders of magnitude, the resources any specific, identified terrorist plot targeting aviation has required to execute in the years since September 11. Surveillance authorities expanded in the attacks' aftermath have been used, court records and investigative journalism have both documented over the ensuing decades, for purposes considerably broader than the counterterrorism justification originally offered for their creation, a mission creep this newspaper considers a predictable, if still concerning, consequence of building surveillance infrastructure this expansive in response to any single catastrophic event, regardless of how well-justified the initial authorization seemed at the time.

A closer look at aviation security specifically illustrates the comparative question with unusual clarity, since both countries responded to the same underlying vulnerability — weapons or explosives smuggled aboard commercial aircraft — that September 11 exposed so catastrophically. American airports adopted the TSA's now-familiar full-body scanning, extensive liquid restrictions, and a screening workforce numbering in the tens of thousands, funded through a combination of federal appropriations and a dedicated passenger security fee levied on every ticket sold. Japanese airports, by contrast, maintain rigorous but comparatively less invasive screening protocols, staffed substantially by private security contractors operating under narrower government mandates than their American federal counterparts, with passenger throughput times that frequent international travelers this newspaper consulted consistently describe as faster than comparable American airports without, by any available metric, producing a correspondingly higher rate of security incidents at Japanese airports specifically.

This comparison is not, we want to be clear, a claim that Japanese airport security is simply better or that American airports are needlessly burdensome — aviation security specialists note genuine differences in threat profile, passenger volume, and the specific intelligence each country's aviation security apparatus has had to respond to over the ensuing decades, differences that complicate any simple apples-to-apples comparison of screening rigor. But the throughput difference is real, measurable, and sustained across twenty-five years, and it suggests that the specific form American aviation security took — highly visible, uniformly applied, resource-intensive at every checkpoint regardless of individual passenger risk profile — reflects a policy choice among several plausible alternatives rather than the only defensible response to the threat September 11 revealed.

Israel's own aviation security model, frequently cited by security specialists as a comparison point distinct from both the American and Japanese approaches, relies more heavily on behavioral profiling and pre-screening intelligence than on the uniform, exhaustive physical screening of every passenger that has come to define the American TSA experience — a model its advocates argue achieves comparable or superior security outcomes with less aggregate passenger burden, though critics raise legitimate concerns about the profiling methodology's potential for discriminatory application at the kind of scale American aviation's passenger volume would require. That at least three advanced democracies facing genuine, serious terrorism threats have arrived at three meaningfully different aviation security models over the same quarter-century — rather than converging on a single, empirically validated best practice — itself suggests the underlying question of how much visible security apparatus a given threat level actually justifies remains considerably more contested, and considerably less settled by hard evidence alone, than any single country's confident domestic consensus might suggest to its own citizens.

The Aum Shinrikyo comparison deserves one further layer of examination this newspaper considers instructive: Japan's response to that 1995 attack, precisely because it involved a domestic actor rather than a foreign terrorist organization, offers a useful test of whether Japan's comparatively restrained security posture reflects a general political and institutional preference for restraint, or simply a narrower judgment that foreign-originated terrorism specifically did not, in Japanese officials' assessment, warrant the kind of sweeping response an attack originating from international terrorism might have produced. The evidence, on balance, points toward the former explanation: Japan's response to Aum Shinrikyo, a homegrown cult with no international terrorist network behind it, was similarly measured relative to the attack's severity as Japan's later response to September 11 was relative to that attack's severity, suggesting a more general institutional and political disposition toward proportionate, incremental response rather than a threat-specific judgment about foreign versus domestic terrorism specifically.

Whatever the explanation, the comparative pattern holds across both of Japan's major encounters with catastrophic terrorism in the past three decades, and this newspaper believes that consistency strengthens rather than weakens the case for taking the comparison seriously as evidence about genuinely different, viable approaches to the same underlying policy problem — rather than dismissing Japan's restraint as merely a product of not having suffered an attack severe enough, on Japanese soil specifically, to trigger the kind of response September 11 triggered in the United States.

None of this leads this newspaper to a confident, simple conclusion about which country — America's expansive, permanent security-state response, or Japan's more restrained, incremental one — ultimately struck the better balance between genuine protection and proportionate cost, because the honest answer requires weighing prevented harms that are, by their nature, difficult to observe directly against costs that, while more visible, remain genuinely difficult to compare against a counterfactual in which the spending never occurred at all. What we do believe, with somewhat more confidence, is that twenty-five years provides sufficient distance to ask the question seriously, in a way that doing so in year one or year five of the post-9/11 security buildup would not have permitted, when the raw emotional proximity to the attacks themselves made any suggestion of reduced vigilance feel, to many Americans, close to a betrayal of the dead rather than a legitimate policy question deserving genuine debate.

The economic opportunity-cost dimension of this comparison deserves separate mention, distinct from the direct spending figures themselves. Every hour an American traveler spends in a TSA screening line, every dollar a small business spends complying with post-9/11 regulatory requirements that trace their origin to homeland security legislation, and every delayed shipment attributable to enhanced port and border security screening represents economic activity foregone in the name of security — a real cost that rarely appears in direct budget accounting but that economists who study regulatory burden broadly estimate as substantial when aggregated across a national economy over a quarter-century. Japan's comparatively lighter-touch approach has not been costless in its own right — this newspaper does not dispute that some genuine security value likely exists in the more extensive American apparatus that Japan's approach forgoes — but the economic opportunity-cost side of the ledger deserves inclusion in any honest accounting of which approach ultimately represents better value for the security it purchases.

Congressional oversight of the homeland security apparatus, several American policy scholars this newspaper consulted noted, has itself evolved unevenly across the twenty-five years since the department's creation, with budget growth in several component agencies persisting through multiple administrations of both parties despite periodic bipartisan calls for consolidation or reduction, a pattern several scholars attribute directly to the asymmetric political-incentive structure described earlier in this essay: no individual member of Congress wants to be the one whose vote for reduced funding precedes a successful attack, regardless of how tenuous the actual causal connection between funding levels and any specific prevented or unprevented plot might prove to be under rigorous after-the-fact analysis.

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EDITORIAL & OPINION

What Twenty-Five Years of Security Actually Bought — Continued from Page 13

We think today's anniversary, arriving alongside this week's Gulf conflict escalation that our companion editorial argues represents a direct continuation of the same strategic architecture September 11 produced, offers exactly the right occasion to ask this harder question plainly: not whether September 11 justified a serious security response, which this newspaper has never disputed, but whether the specific, sprawling, still-expanding form that response ultimately took represents the proportionate answer to the actual threat, or whether a quarter-century of accumulated institutional momentum, asymmetric political incentives and availability-cascade dynamics has produced a security architecture considerably larger than the continuously reassessed threat, on its own terms, would independently justify — a question Japan's own considerably more restrained response suggests, at minimum, was not the only reasonable answer available to a close ally that suffered the same attack, mourned many of the same dead, and chose, for reasons this newspaper believes deserve more serious comparative study than they have so far received, a genuinely different path.

This newspaper's own position, offered with appropriate humility about a question we have spent this essay arguing resists confident resolution, leans toward believing the truth lies somewhere between the two national approaches rather than fully vindicating either: America's response likely purchased genuine security value that Japan's more restrained approach forwent, particularly given the specific, credible, ongoing threat al-Qaeda and its successor organizations continued to pose against American targets specifically in the years immediately following 2001. But we also believe, on the evidence a quarter-century now allows us to weigh soberly, that the American response's scale and permanence exceeded what continuously updated threat assessment alone would have independently justified by at least the second decade of the buildup, if not considerably earlier, and that Japan's comparatively restrained approach -- whatever its origins in political circumstance rather than deliberate philosophical choice -- offers genuine evidence that a serious ally facing the same grief and the same alliance obligations could choose a materially different, and by several available metrics no less secure, path.

This newspaper does not have a confident final answer to offer today, twenty-five years on, and we are suspicious of anyone who claims to have one with more certainty than the genuinely difficult counterfactual reasoning this question requires actually permits. What we do have, after a full quarter-century of watching both national approaches play out in real time rather than merely theorizing about them in the abstract, is a genuine, substantive comparison we believe deserves to be taken seriously rather than dismissed as an unfair matching of two countries facing fundamentally incomparable circumstances — one close ally that rebuilt vast, permanent portions of its own government specifically around preventing a second catastrophic attack, and another that mourned twenty-four of its own citizens in those same collapsing towers and chose, whether by deliberate philosophical restraint or simply the accumulated weight of different domestic political circumstance, not to follow anything resembling the same expansive path — and we think that comparison, honestly examined on the quarter-century anniversary that finally makes examining it without the raw emotional immediacy of the attacks themselves genuinely possible, deserves more sustained, serious attention from policymakers in both countries than a single day's anniversary coverage, however extensive this newspaper has tried to make it today, can ultimately provide on its own.



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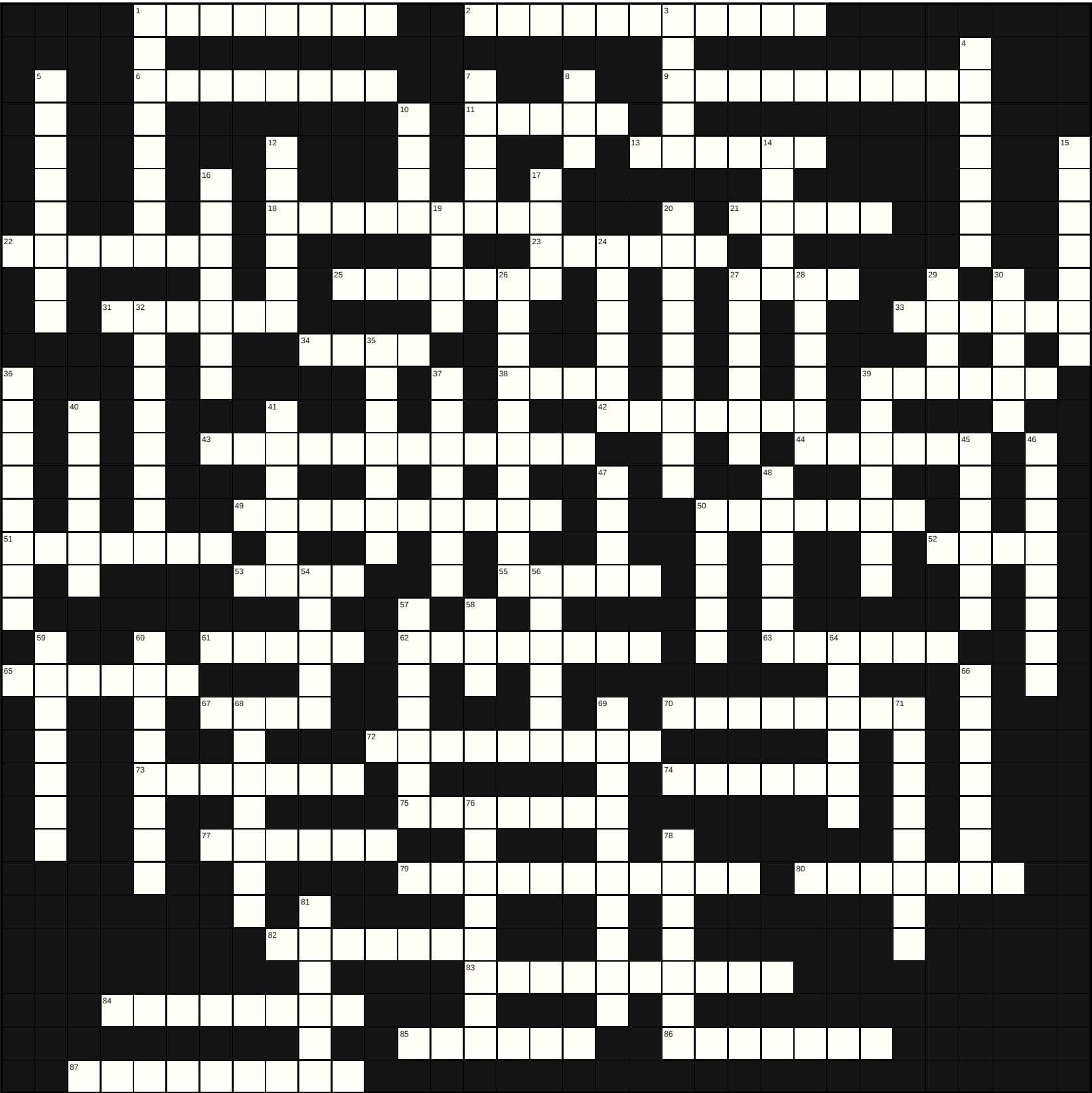
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Corrections are published promptly and prominently once an error is confirmed, in the Classifieds & Notices section. Readers may direct correction requests to the Copy Desk at the address below.

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

Today's Professional Puzzle — Constructed by James O'Neill — 91 Words



Solution will appear in tomorrow's edition. Puzzle difficulty: Professional / Sunday-level.

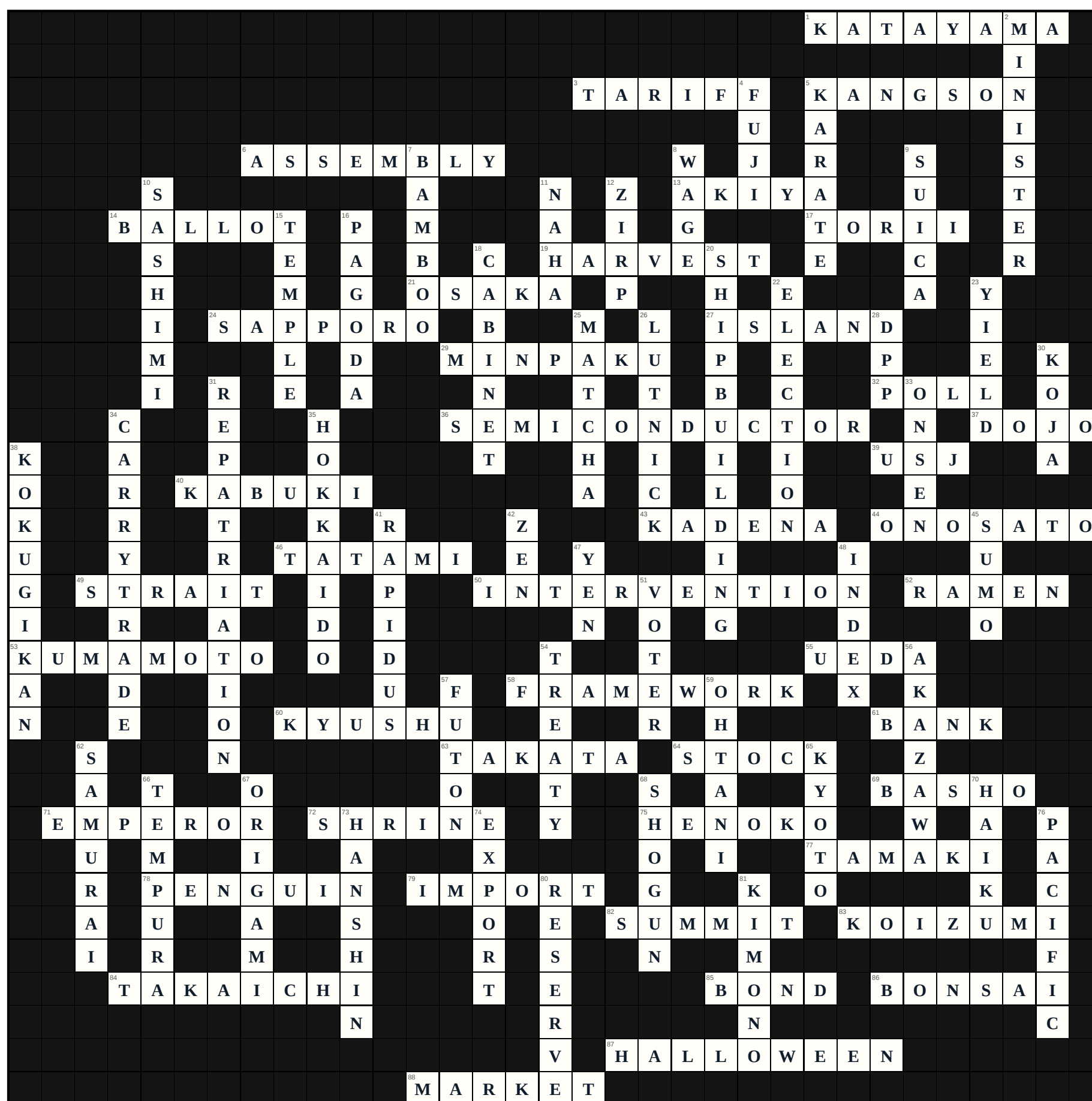
ACROSS

- US government bond, sold to fund yen defense (8)
- Pennsylvania town where Flight 93 crashed (11)
- Prefecture recovering from quake and rain (8)
- Site of the former World Trade Center (10)
- Japanese hot spring (5)
- ____ 93, downed by its own passengers (6)
- What the 343 firefighters made (9)
- Return on a bond, near a multi-decade high (5)
- Sliced raw fish dish (7)
- Toxic dust that sickened first responders (6)
- Prefecture voting for governor Sunday (7)
- Ancient Japanese wrestling (4)
- Classical Japanese drama form (6)
- Okinawa's incumbent governor (6)
- Symbol raised at Ground Zero in 2001 (4)
- Term applied to many first responders (4)
- Tokyo's benchmark stock index (6)
- ____ in Light, the twin beams over Manhattan (7)
- New York ____, performing today (12)
- Twin ____, struck at 8:46 and 9:03 a.m. (6)
- What allied nations offered the US in 2001 (10)
- Japan's ceremonial head of state (7)
- What the new seventh silence honors (7)
- Japan's national legislature (4)
- Genta ____, Okinawa's LDP-backed challenger (4)
- What families read aloud each anniversary (5)
- Grand sumo tournament, opening Sunday (5)
- Democratic vote, as in Okinawa, this Sunday (8)
- Goods sent abroad, squeezed by the yen (6)
- Miniature potted tree (6)
- Government debt instrument (4)
- Five-sided building struck on 9/11 (8)
- First ____, honored in today's coverage (9)
- Giants who beat Chunichi 5-3 Thursday (7)
- Landform surrounded by water, like Japan (6)
- Battered, deep-fried dish (7)
- Powdered green tea (6)
- Recurring commemoration, in its 25th year (11)
- Incoming conductor of that orchestra (7)
- Chip venture nearing a 3 trillion yen pledge (7)
- Years marked by today's anniversary (10)
- Island hosting Rapidus's fab (8)
- Striking martial art (6)
- Body of ministers Takaichi will soon reshuffle (7)
- Month of the 2001 attacks (9)

DOWN

- Japan's prime minister (8)
- Candlelight gathering held outside the US Embassy (5)
- Where Flight 93 passengers stormed (7)
- Father Mychal Judge's FDNY role (8)
- Gate marking a Shinto shrine (5)
- Currency near seven-month highs (3)
- Seventeen-syllable poem (5)
- Tigers whose Koshien game rained out (7)
- Japanese PM who responded within a day in 2001 (7)
- BOJ governor weighing a rate hike (4)
- Fire department that lost 343 members that day (4)
- City bombed in 1945, subject of August speeches (9)
- Voting slip (6)
- City where the Pentagon is located (10)
- Historic military ruler of Japan (6)
- Where stocks are traded (6)
- Institution like the BOJ (4)
- Noodle soup dish (5)
- US-Japan security partnership, tested since 2001 (8)
- Group that carried out the 2001 attacks (7)
- Site where names are read each anniversary (8)
- Feudal Japanese warrior (7)
- City where the towers once stood (7)
- What remained after the towers fell (6)
- Traditional Japanese robe (6)
- Sacred Shinto site (6)
- Hawks who beat Nippon-Ham 3-2 Thursday (8)
- What the BOJ may raise next week (4)
- Apple product line, now including a Duo (6)
- Bird atop the cross in today's cartoon (5)
- Word invoked in al-Qaeda's own justification (5)
- Season now visibly arriving in Kanto (6)
- US Treasury Secretary (7)
- Meditative Buddhist school (3)
- Stadium where rain forced a cancellation (7)
- Finance minister managing currency policy (8)
- Tiered ceremonial tower (6)
- Moment of ____, observed seven times today (7)
- Art of paper folding (7)
- What carry-trade investors are doing with capital (10)
- Second Japanese city bombed in 1945 (8)
- Cabinet-level official (8)
- Ocean bordering Japan's east coast (7)
- Item held at remembrance vigils (6)

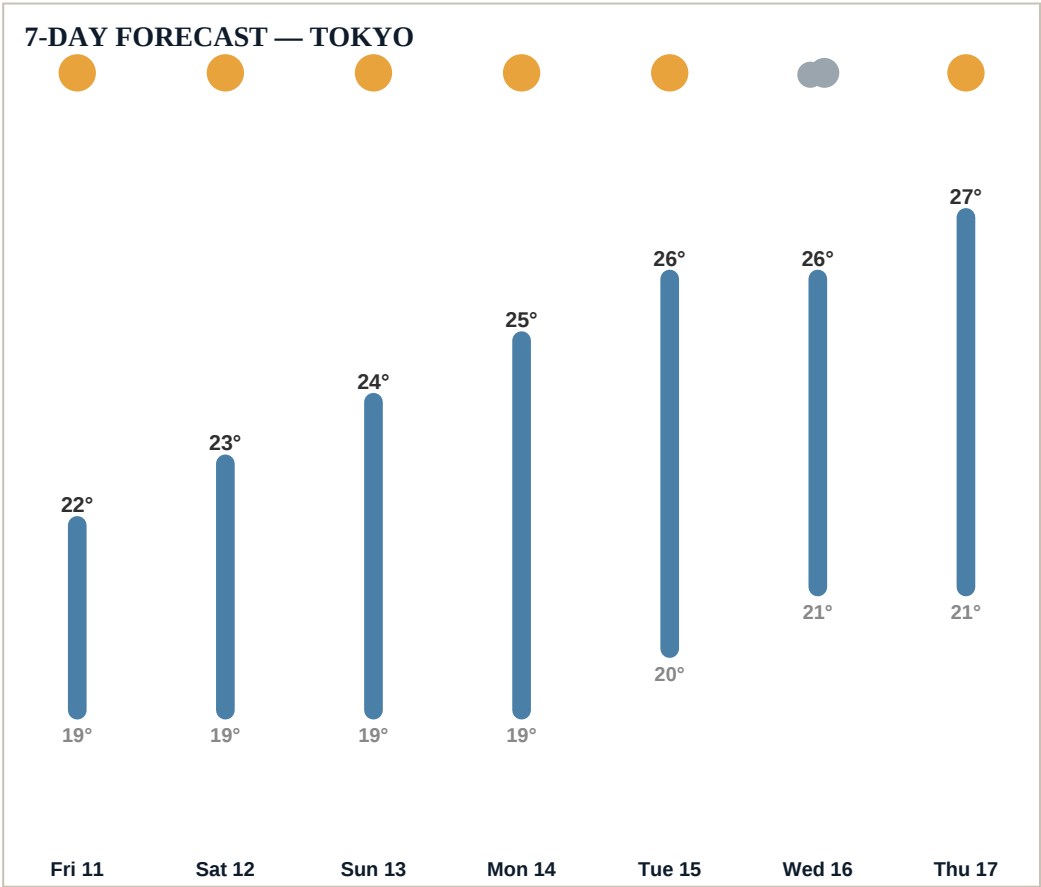
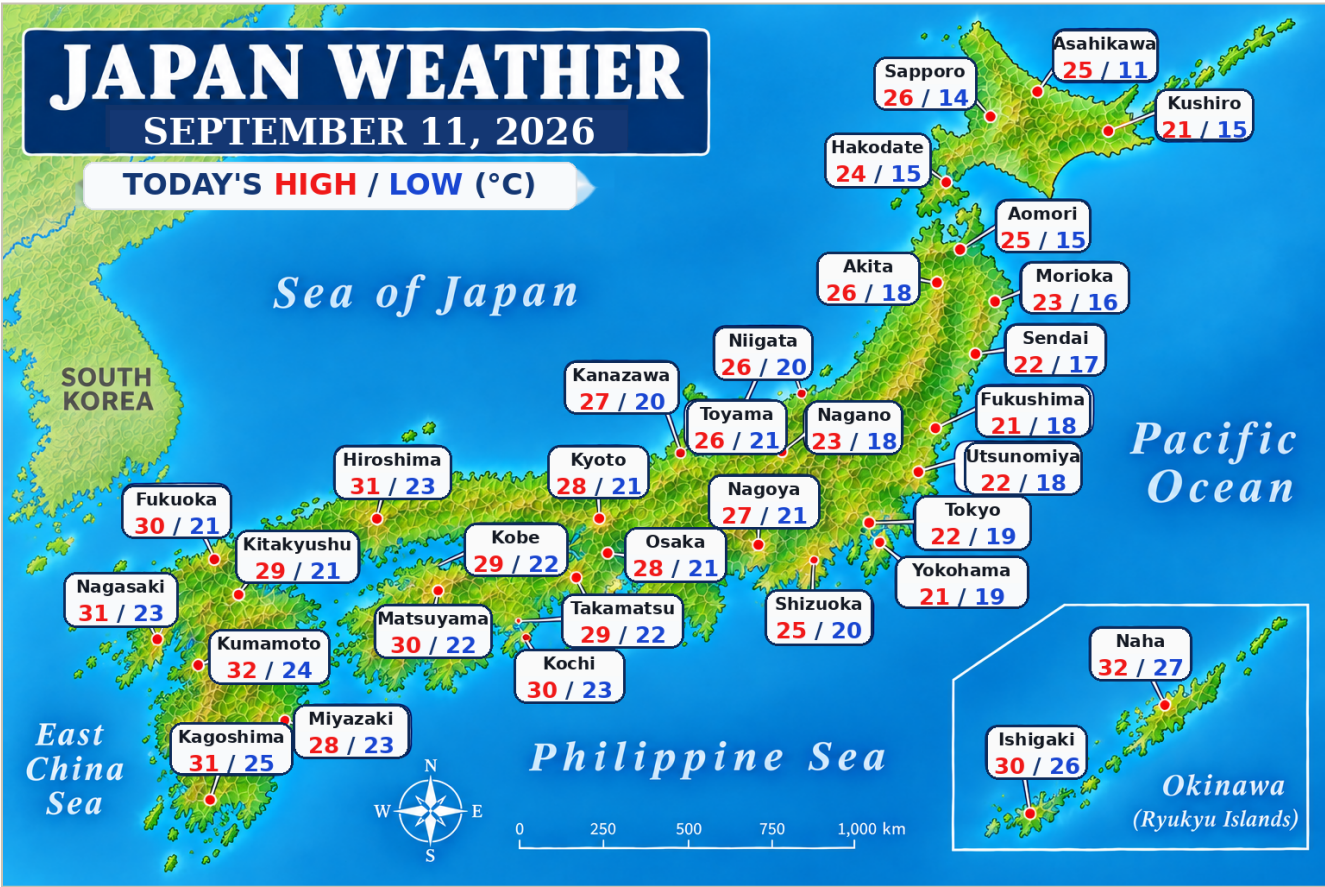
Yesterday's Puzzle, Solved — Thursday, September 10, 2026 — 89 Words



WEATHER & ENVIRONMENT

22°C

Tokyo — Mild and clear, the season's first hint of autumn



TOKYO METROPOLITAN AREA — Friday, September 11, 2026

Morning: Mild and clear, 19°C, as a cooler air mass settles over the Kanto region overnight into this morning. Light winds. Sunrise 5:19 a.m.

Afternoon: Warm and comfortable, high near 22°C, a noticeably milder reading than earlier this week as the season's first genuine hint of autumn reaches the capital.

Evening: Clear and mild, cooling toward 20°C by 9 p.m. Sunset 5:56 p.m. Comfortable conditions for evening commutes and for the twenty-fifth anniversary commemorations taking place around the city today.

Overnight: Clear, low near 19°C.

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Today's national weather map shows a pronounced north-south temperature gradient, with Kanto and Tohoku both settling into distinctly cooler, early-autumn conditions — Tokyo's high of 22°C and Sendai's 22°C mark some of the mildest daytime readings the capital region has seen since early summer — even as Kyushu and Okinawa remain firmly in late-summer territory, with Kumamoto reaching 32°C and Naha 32°C. The contrast reflects a seasonal transition now visibly underway across the northern half of the country while the south continues running several degrees warmer.

UV INDEX & AIR QUALITY

UV Index: 6 (High) in Tokyo, lower than the "Very High" readings common earlier this week as the sun angle continues its seasonal decline. Air Quality Index: Good nationwide. Pollen: Negligible.

TODAY'S HIGH / LOW BY REGION (°C)

Hokkaido — Sapporo 26/14, Asahikawa 25/11, Kushiro 21/15, Hakodate 24/15: Asahikawa's overnight low of 11°C the coolest reading in the country, a clear signal of the season turning first in Japan's north.

Tohoku — Aomori 25/15, Morioka 23/16, Akita 26/18, Sendai 22/17, Fukushima 21/18: consistently mild across the region, with Fukushima and Sendai both running several degrees cooler than the Kanto readings just to their south.

Chubu & Hokuriku — Niigata 26/20, Toyama 26/21, Kanazawa 27/20, Nagano 23/18, Nagoya 27/21: Nagoya the region's warmest reading, continuing its late-summer pattern even as neighboring prefectures trend cooler.

Kanto — Utsunomiya 22/18, Tokyo 22/19, Yokohama 21/19, Shizuoka 25/20: the most pronounced cooling of any region today, with Tokyo's 22°C high a full seven degrees below Wednesday's reading.

Kansai — Kyoto 28/21, Kobe 29/22, Osaka 28/21: holding onto late-summer warmth, a sharp contrast with Kanto just to the northeast.

Shikoku — Takamatsu 29/22, Tokushima 29/22, Kochi 30/23, Matsuyama 30/22: consistently warm across the island.

Chugoku & Kyushu — Hiroshima 31/23, Kitakyushu 29/21, Fukuoka 30/21, Nagasaki 31/23, Kumamoto 32/24, Miyazaki 28/23, Kagoshima 31/25: Kumamoto the warmest reading on the main islands, with recovery work in the earthquake- and rain-affected areas continuing under clear, hot skies.

Okinawa — Naha 32/27, Ishigaki 30/26: the warmest readings nationally, as is typical for the Ryukyu Islands in mid-September, with conditions remaining calm and dry ahead of Sunday's gubernatorial election.

SEVEN-DAY EXTENDED FORECAST FOR TOKYO

Saturday, Sept. 12: High 23°C, low 19°C. Mostly sunny and mild, continuing today's cooler pattern.

Sunday, Sept. 13: High 24°C, low 19°C. Mostly sunny. Comfortable conditions expected for both the Aki Basho's opening day in Tokyo and Okinawa's gubernatorial election, though Okinawa itself will remain considerably warmer.

Monday, Sept. 14: High 25°C, low 19°C. Mostly sunny, with temperatures beginning a gradual climb back toward seasonal norms.

Tuesday, Sept. 15: High 26°C, low 20°C. Mostly sunny and mild.

Wednesday, Sept. 16: High 26°C, low 21°C. Partly cloudy.

Thursday, Sept. 17: High 27°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. The Bank of Japan's two-day policy meeting begins today in Tokyo.

Friday, Sept. 18: High 27°C, low 21°C. Mostly sunny. The BOJ's policy decision is expected today.

EXTENDED OUTLOOK (September 12-18)

Today's cooler air mass is expected to linger through the weekend before temperatures gradually climb back toward more typical mid-September norms by the middle of next week. Forecasters continue monitoring the western Pacific for further tropical development given this year's above-average typhoon season, though no system currently poses a near-term threat to Japan. The extended outlook remains favorable for both this weekend's Aki Basho opening and Okinawa's election, with no significant weather disruption currently anticipated for either event.

ALMANAC

Today's sunrise: 5:19 a.m. Today's sunset: 5:56 p.m. Day length: 12 hours, 37 minutes, continuing to shorten by roughly two minutes daily as the autumnal equinox approaches later this month. Moon phase: Waning crescent. Tokyo Bay tide times: high tide 8:52 a.m. and 9:24 p.m.; low tide 2:55 p.m. Barometric pressure: 1018 hPa and steady.

CLASSIFIEDS & NOTICES

CLASSIFIEDS, LEGAL NOTICES & ANNOUNCEMENTS

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

TANAKA & ASSOCIATES: Corporate tax advisory for foreign-affiliated firms operating in Japan. inquiries@tanaka-tax.jp

OTEMACHI TRANSLATION BUREAU: Certified legal and financial document translation, Japanese-English-Mandarin. orders@otemachitranslation.jp

MERIDIAN RELOCATION SERVICES: Full-service relocation support for incoming executives and families. info@meridianrelo.jp

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MARUNOUCHI INTERNATIONAL LAW PARTNERS: Cross-border commercial contracts and regulatory compliance. info@marunouchilaw.jp

OTEMACHI CURRENCY RISK ADVISORY: Hedging strategy consultations for exporters navigating currency and energy-cost volatility. hedging@otemachifx.jp

LEGAL & PUBLIC NOTICES

NOTICE OF SHAREHOLDER MEETING: A publicly listed manufacturing firm headquartered in Osaka has announced its annual general meeting will be held in late September.

This section is provided for informational purposes. The Japan Morning Post recommends consulting a licensed attorney or notary for matters requiring legal advice.

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ADDITIONAL PROPERTY LISTINGS

AZABU: Renovated 3-bedroom townhouse, 142 sq m, private garden. Reference AZ-2026-07.

DAIKANYAMA: Boutique 1-bedroom near station, 52 sq m. Reference DK-119.

YOKOHAMA MINATO MIRAI: Waterfront 2LDK with bay views, 88 sq m. Reference YMM-330.

SETAGAYA: Family house, 4LDK, 168 sq m, near international school. Reference STG-812.

PUBLIC NOTICES

TRANSPORT ADVISORY: Ferry services to Okinawa's outer islands remain on normal schedules ahead of Sunday's election.

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: The Japan Morning Post welcomes reader corrections. Please direct inquiries to corrections@japanmorningpost.com.