

U.S.-Japan Commission on the Future of the Alliance

January 13, 2014
Washington, DC

The Asia Pacific region is the center of dynamism in the international system, and events there are defining the security and prosperity of the world. Increased economic interdependence and a budding institutional architecture create a solid foundation for a vibrant and stable future, but the region also faces an array of challenges that could destabilize the security environment. For over six decades the U.S.-Japan alliance has been the cornerstone of security and stability in the Asia Pacific, and it should continue to play an important role in shaping the regional order.

The U.S. and Japanese governments are taking important steps to strengthen the alliance and ensure that it remains a lynchpin in maintaining regional stability and prosperity. In 2013 the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) established a bilateral commission of distinguished policymakers and scholars to develop a strategic vision for the alliance. The commission met for the second time on January 13 in Washington after an inaugural meeting last June in Tokyo and will continue over the next two years to discuss a range of issues animating the bilateral relationship.

At this second meeting the commission examined several issues including the rise of China and the role of the alliance in maintaining stability in the Asia Pacific, as well as overcoming complexities in relationships among nations in the region. Commissioners discussed China's recent moves, including declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and the recent announcement of extended fisheries zones in the South China Sea in the context of Beijing's overall capabilities and intentions, and agreed on the importance of ensuring a sustained commitment to shared principles such as freedom of navigation in the East and South China Seas. They also reviewed the security strategies of Japan and the United States. The Japanese side explained the process and significance of revising the interpretation of the right of collective self-defense, and the American side agreed this would be an important step to ensure the effectiveness of the U.S.-Japan alliance. It will be important to complete this work in advance of the review of U.S.-Japan defense guidelines.

Against this background, enhanced U.S.-Japan-ROK security cooperation will be indispensable, and it is urgent that steps be taken to make that possible.

The participants unanimously agreed on the economic and strategic importance of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) to U.S. engagement in Asia and the success of the Japanese economy. The discussion also included an examination of energy security issues and the need for comprehensive energy strategies that include nuclear and natural gas. Commissioners agreed that increased U.S. natural gas exports to Japan are in both countries' national interests.

The commission may periodically invite scholars to conduct research that will inform these discussions and may choose to publish occasional papers over the course of this project. The commission agreed to produce an interim report for presentation later this year.

Commission members are as follows:

Richard Armitage, President, Armitage International L.C.; CSIS Trustee

Aaron Friedberg, Professor of Politics and International Affairs, Princeton University

Michael Green, Senior Vice President for Asia and Japan Chair, CSIS and Associate Professor, Georgetown University

Jiro Hanyu, Chairman, Sasakawa Peace Foundation

John Hamre, President, CEO and Pritzker Chair, CSIS

Ryozo Kato, former Ambassador of Japan to the United States

Joseph Nye Jr., University Distinguished Service Professor, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; CSIS Trustee

Yukio Okamoto, President, Okamoto Associates

Ryouichi Oriki, Former Chief of Staff, Joint Staff

Masashi Nishihara, President, Research Institute for Peace and Security

Koji Tanami, Former Administrative Vice Minister, Ministry of Finance and former President, Japan Bank for International Cooperation