

U.S.-Japan Symposium
150 Years of Amity & 50 Years of Alliance
June 18-19, 2010, Washington, D.C.

Looking Back on 150 Years of U.S.-Japan Relations

Preliminary Thoughts

On the Occasion of the Symposium

150 Years of Amity & 50 Years of Alliance:

Adopting an Enhanced Agenda for the U.S.-Japan Partnership

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When a nation is confronted with a new set of challenges and problems and wishes effectively to deal with them, it is usually prudent and wise to look back at history and seek wisdom from the past. At the moment, the democratic administration of Japan under Prime Minister Hatoyama continues to struggle with the Futenma relocation issue. Many fear that this stalemate may potentially result in uncertainties about the future of Japan's alliance with the United States. It is therefore doubly important that we look back at the 150 plus years of U.S.-Japan relations to obtain insights from our common experiences.

It so happens that exactly 150 years ago the Shogun government of Japan sent its first official mission to the United States. Their task was to deliver to Washington a ratified copy of the Treaty of Amity and Commerce. The Shogun's emissaries crossed the Pacific Ocean on board the USS *Powhatan* and the JS *Kanrin-maru*. Since then, millions of people have crossed the wide ocean both ways and hundreds of events have taken place across the seas. Although the history of the bilateral relations thus started can be interpreted in many different ways, one can perhaps draw some general lessons from the voyages of the two ships.

First, it was to the United States that Japan chose to send its first overseas mission in over 200 years. This was perhaps because Commodore Perry and Consul General Harris were more successful than representatives of other countries in making Japan decide to open its doors. Nevertheless, Japan and the U.S. were destined from the beginning to build and maintain a long and important relationship.

Furthermore, the mission sailed to the east, not to the west. It could have opted to sail to the United States via the Indian and Atlantic Oceans. It did not do so and their first destination was San Francisco. The two nations realized that the vast Pacific Ocean that had once separated them now enabled them to be closely linked together. This

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foretold the eventual partnership between the two Pacific nations.

In this connection, the crossing of the Pacific by the *Kanrin-maru* was the first joint U.S.-Japan navy-to-navy operation: Japanese and American sailors worked together on board. Although the two navies eventually confronted each other as enemies, the *Kanrin-maru's* voyage presented a model for the close navy-to-navy relationships between the USN and the JMSDF today.

In short, Japan and the U.S. realized, or at least sensed, from the very beginning that despite their many differences, a close cooperative working relationship between them could exist and prosper; that the two maritime nations on both sides of the Pacific would have a lot to share with, and benefit from, each other; and that a robust bilateral relationship would be essential for their respective security and prosperity, as well as the welfare of other nations and peoples. This basic tenet of the bilateral relationship has never changed over the past 150 years.

We should keep this in mind in propounding upon current issues and problems regarding the alliance.