

21st Century Japan Politics and Society Initiative

Event Recap: January 12 and 19, 2021 21JPSI/Brookings Special Two-part Collaborative Webinar Series “U.S.-Japan Relations: Policy Challenges for the Biden Administration”

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

On the eve of the inauguration of the Biden-Harris Administration, 21JPSI and the Brookings Institution Center for East Asia Policy Studies <<https://www.brookings.edu/center/center-for-east-asia-policy-studies/>> joined forces to convene eight leading experts from North America and Japan to discuss pressing foreign policy challenges for the U.S. and Japan under the new administration. The first panel focused on issues related to national security and domestic politics and was moderated by 21JPSI Director Adam P. Liff <<https://adampliff.com/>> . The second panel focused on trade and other transnational challenges and was moderated by CEAP Director Mireya Solis <<https://www.brookings.edu/experts/mireya-solis/>> . Both events were open to the global public, and attracted a combined total of over 400 attendees.

Full-length recordings of both panels are available at the following links, and concise summaries of speakers' prepared remarks appear below.

- **Panel 1: U.S.-Japan Relations: National Security and Politics** (Watch the recording on YouTube <<https://youtu.be/9YMbgh2houY>>) – January 12, 2021
- **Panel 2: U.S.-Japan Relations: Trade, COVID-19, Climate, and Infrastructure/Connectivity** (Watch the recording on YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3pm7eNJffc0>>) – January 19, 2021

(January 12, 2021) Panel 1: National Security and Politics

Challenges from China

Andrew Erickson <<https://usnwc.edu/Faculty-and-Departments/Directory/Andrew-Erickson>> (U.S. Naval War College, Professor of Strategy)

As the Biden Administration enters office, the United States, Japan, and the Indo-Pacific face difficult challenges, particularly from the People's Republic of China (PRC). The region is a very worrisome neighborhood for Japan, with direct implications for vital American interests. Beijing is attempting to carve out a zone of exceptionalism within which international rules and institutions—long taken for

granted in Tokyo, Washington, and around the world—are subordinated to PRC policy preferences <<https://warontherocks.com/2019/10/make-china-great-again-xis-truly-grand-strategy/>> . The risk is greatest in what PRC strategists term the Near Seas—the Yellow, East, and South China Seas—home to all China’s disputed island and maritime claims. Here, Beijing continues to pursue coercive envelopment <<https://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA05/20200630/110841/HHRG-116-FA05-Wstate-EricksonA-20200630.pdf>> of claimed territories, together with the subjugation of less powerful neighbors. Of these three seas, the East China Sea contains the highest-stakes, most-intense risks: concerning both Taiwan and Senkaku Islands.

Major trends in the force structure China is developing and deploying to these ends pose particular challenges to Japan, the region, and the United States. China’s armed forces increasingly enjoy dominance in numbers and sufficiency in quality. Each of China’s three major armed services has its own sea force <<https://ipdefenseforum.com/2019/01/maritime-numbers-game/>> . The People’s Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), China Coast Guard (CCG), and People’s Armed Forces Maritime Militia (PAFMM) all answer to a military chain of command under paramount leader Xi Jinping himself. Each of China’s sea forces is the world’s largest in numbers of ships—by a significant margin <<https://www.19fortyfive.com/2020/12/advantage-at-sea-u-s-maritime-strategy-focuses-on-china/>> . Regionally, the operations of these sea forces, as well as military flights, are significant and growing in worrisome ways.

As the U.S. seeks to confront the challenges posed by China, Japan is a uniquely important ally. Washington and Tokyo enjoy a comprehensive partnership built on a bedrock of shared values and highly compatible systems. When it comes to regional basing for U.S. forces, Japan with its archipelago of more than 6,000 islands is simply irreplaceable. The enduring nature of geography <<https://nationalinterest.org/feature/why-islands-still-matter-asia-15121>> has positioned it astride both Asia-Pacific “island chains <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/china-quarterly/article/abs/barriers-springboards-and-benchmarks-china-conceptualizes-the-pacific-island-chains/B46A212145EB9D920616650669C697F0>> ,” which strategists have repeatedly prioritized in great power competition <<https://www.defensenews.com/global/asia-pacific/2016/02/01/powers-jockey-for-pacific-island-chain-influence/>> over the past century. Upon that unparalleled foundation, Japan is enhancing its already formidable role in upholding power projection and regional access for U.S. forces as a comprehensive partner with growing capabilities and interoperability. Japan has unique opportunities to alter military dynamics in the Alliance’s favor through deployment of land-based conventional mobile missiles <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-08-29/good-riddance-inf-treaty>> , both indigenously and in partnership with U.S. forces <https://www.foreignaffairsj.co.jp/articles/201910_ericson/> .

Going forward, the Biden Administration must prioritize the U.S.-Japan Alliance by leading from the front, firmly opposing and countering pernicious PRC behavior, and accepting friction and risk <<https://news.yahoo.com/competitive-coexistence-american-concept-managing-102700857.html>> .

President Biden should expeditiously appoint an Ambassador befitting the Alliance. This should be a senior professional with the President's ear experienced in security and crisis management. Keeping Taiwan free, democratic, and part of an open Indo-Pacific is critical for the U.S.-Japan Alliance. The Biden Administration must recognize how vital Taiwan is to both American and Japanese interests in terms of values, politics, security, and such apex technologies as semiconductors and proceed accordingly.

Challenges in Emerging Domains: Space, Cyberspace, and Digital infrastructure

Yuka Koshino <<https://www.iiss.org/people/asia-pacific/yuka-koshino>> (International Institute for Strategic Studies, Research Fellow for Japanese Security and Defence Policy)

There are three major challenges for US-Japan relations in the Biden administration as it concerns new and emerging domains.

The first challenge in new and emerging domains stems from China's, Russia's, and North Korea's increasing development and use of asymmetric capabilities in new domains to undermine the more traditional deterrence created by the US-Japan alliance. The development of kinetic and non-kinetic anti-satellite weapons systems has transformed space into a warfighting domain that could disrupt US and Japanese military operations, which rely heavily on space-based communications and precision timing satellites. These other countries are also investing heavily in offensive cyberweapon capabilities, which could penetrate both government and civil networks--thus causing security and economic damage to society.

The second challenge is the rapid growth of China's digital footprint in the region through its Digital Silk Road project—i.e., the digital dimension of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) designed to promote Chinese network infrastructure, e-commerce services, and smart cities across the region. A major focus is the 5G mobile network. The 5G network, which will see massive data flows, will serve as the backbone of the digital economy, transforming industries by connecting smartphones, cars, factories, and Internet of Things (IoT) devices. There are only a few 5G vendors in the global market, and Chinese firms dominate it—despite security concerns in the USA, Japan, and many other democratic countries. Specifically, these governments are concerned that the spread of technologies from untrusted vendors may undermine the rules-based free, open, and inclusive digital economy in the region.

The third challenge in these new and emerging domains is the lack of governance. There is no “arms control” agreement in the space or cyber domains, or even an agreed-to set of rules and norms on how emerging technologies – big data, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, etc.— should be used. Moreover, the rapid spread of Chinese digital technologies is allowing the country to promote its model of digital governance with authoritarian and protectionist leanings. There is a growing need for a coordinated response from the US, Japan, and like-minded partners to prevent the spread of such a model, which could undermine liberal and democratic values.