

US-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program

26th Diet Delegation to the United States & Political Leadership Study Visit Program

April 30-May 3, 2013

A bipartisan JCIE delegation of three up-and-coming Diet members and four of Japan's most promising younger policy experts visited Washington DC on April 30-May 3, meeting with more than three dozen foreign policy experts, political analysts, and government officials. During their visit, they were the featured speakers at the Tadashi Yamamoto Memorial Seminar at the Council on Foreign Relations and were welcomed to Washington at a reception in the US Capitol Building that drew 150 key figures in American politics and US-Japan relations.

Participants

Hon. Yasushi Adachi, Member, House of Representatives (Japan Restoration Party)

Hon. Seiji Kihara, Member, House of Representatives (Liberal Democratic Party/LDP)

Hon. Takao Ochi, Member, House of Representatives (LDP)

Dr. Yuichi Hosoya, Professor, Keio University

Dr. Satoru Mori, Professor, Hosei University

Dr. Ryo Sahashi, Associate Professor, Kanagawa University; Research Fellow, JCIE

Dr. Harukata Takenaka, Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies

The group's discussions were wide-ranging, but four topics came up repeatedly:

Dysfunctional domestic politics: Most of the delegation members have been involved in a major JCIE study that examines the phenomenon of weak political leadership and domestic political instability in Japan. In a series of roundtables, US scholars and former Congressional members remarked that American politics have also become deeply dysfunctional, in large part due to the spread of corrosive partisanship and a steady erosion of the powers of political parties and Congressional leaders. While the roots of these challenges facing Japanese and US politics differ considerably, one common factor has been the changing nature of media coverage, which has helped to fuel further political instability in both countries.



Participants pose at the US Capitol Building with JCIE board members and friends

Disputes over war history: The experts and officials that the group spoke with felt that US-Japan relations are strong, but concerns about the Abe administration's stance on Japan's war history came up in every meeting. There was a strong sense from Washington DC experts across the political spectrum that Japan should refrain from any moves



Ambassador Sasae welcomes the delegation, with former Transportation Secretary Norman Mineta and Professor Gerald Curtis in background



Former Congressman Bill Frenzel looks on as former House Budget Chairman Jim Jones describes recent changes in US politics



Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld talks with JCIE/USA's Jim Gannon at a welcome reception at the US Capitol



Discussing the US pivot to Asia with CSIS's Matthew Goodman and Michael Green



Delegation members debate China-Japan-US relations at the Brookings Institution



Participants speak with Robert Primus, Chief of Staff to Congressman Michael Capuano

that roll back the apologies for its wartime aggression or further inflame tensions with its Asian neighbors. The delegation members remarked that Prime Minister Abe has some advisors urging him to take a nationalistic tack while others are arguing for more pragmatic approaches, but he is unlikely to wade any deeper into the debate over history issues this year, primarily to avoid taking the focus off of his economic agenda.

Territorial issues: To some degree, the debate over “history issues” has become intertwined with the narrative surrounding the territorial disputes that neighboring countries have with Japan. Delegation members noted that Japan only aims to maintain the status quo on territorial issues in its relations with China and Korea, arguing that the Japanese government has sought to avoid actions that might be perceived as aggressive regarding the Senkaku/Diaoyu and Takeshima/Dokdo Islands. Their American counterparts were sympathetic to the argument that China and Korea bear considerable responsibility for recent tensions on these issues, but they remain deeply concerned that a maritime accident, particularly in the vicinity of the Senkakus, could lead to an uncontrolled escalation of tensions and draw the United States into a conflict with China.

One expert summed up the general consensus by explaining that Japan improves its position by being seen as the party in these disputes that is going the extra mile to be calm and conciliatory. Of course, he noted, the more debate there is over war history, the more that Japan’s stance on these territorial issues is undermined in the eyes of Americans and the rest of the international community. One area where the delegation members felt progress can be made is in the territorial dispute with Russia over the so-called “Northern Territories” or Kuril Islands. There have been positive signs from both Japan and Russia on this recently, and they felt that a successful resolution of this dispute is feasible over the next several years, which in turn might help improve the dynamics involving other territorial issues.

TPP and trade: The delegation and their US counterparts were markedly positive about the prospects for the successful ratification of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) agreement. The Japanese side felt that, while rallying domestic political support for TPP will be the first major test of Prime Minister Abe’s power, his government is focused on its long-term strategic implications and will succeed in pushing the final agreement through the Diet. Several of the Diet members noted that the key factor will be the scope and contents of the agricultural support package that the Abe administration will need to announce as compensation for farming communities that will suffer under TPP. As one expert noted, special interest lobbies that traditionally back the LDP, notably including the agricultural lobby and the Japan Medical Association, have lost power in recent years, which will enable the Abe administration to resist their entreaties this time. American experts also felt that TPP has a strong chance of



Secretary Norman Mineta, an alumnus of JCIE's parliamentary exchange, speaks with former US Ambassador to Japan Tom Schieffer

being successfully negotiated and ratified, although many thought that the October deadline for negotiations will need to be extended. One added that, since they are losing the argument on the merits the trade deal, American opponents to TPP may be tempted to highlight the controversy over Japan’s war history to rally opposition to the overall deal, and this approach will gain more traction the longer that history issues stay in the spotlight.

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This program was made possible by the generosity of the MRA House, the Shibusawa Eiichi Foundation, the Smith Richardson Foundation, and the many donors to the Tadashi Yamamoto Memorial Fund.