

**US-Japan Relations in an Era of New Challenges
Roundtable following up on the New Shimoda Conference**

April 7, 2011

Co-sponsored by
US-Japan Council &
Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE)

More than 30 American and Japanese foreign policy experts, US-Japan specialists, and political leaders—including 7 US Congressional members—came together in Washington DC on April 7, six weeks after the New Shimoda Conference was held in Tokyo, to explore how to follow up on that meeting's discussions. The New Shimoda Conference had been convened by JCIE amidst concerns that the US-Japan relationship had been adrift, and it ended with a call for both countries to take action to strengthen their partnership in order to better shape the future of Asia and to respond to a proliferation of global challenges. However, just three weeks after the conference closed, Japan was thrust to the center of discussions on global challenges when it was hit by one of history's strongest earthquakes, a massive tsunami, and the resultant nuclear crisis—adding up to the worst natural disaster to ever strike an advanced industrial country.

In their remarks, Senator Daniel Inouye (who arranged for the group to meet in grand surroundings in the US Capitol) and the other Congressional members relayed their sorrow at the loss of life in Japan and pledged that Americans stand in solidarity with the Japanese people in these tragic times. Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki, in turn, expressed the gratitude of his country for all that the United States had done, ranging from the rescue operations of the US military to the overwhelming show of grassroots support around the nation for Japan.

Kent Calder set the stage for the discussion, noting that the disaster reaffirms the importance of the US-Japan alliance and adding that this tragedy now provides an opportunity to further strengthen bilateral relations. He also gave an overview of the key priorities for bilateral relations that were identified at the New Shimoda Conference in February. In fact, the importance of many of these areas—closer cooperation on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance, sustaining and expanding human networks, and deepening dialogues on specialized areas—was driven home by the disaster. For example, efforts to expand US-Japan alliance cooperation and interoperability, especially joint military exercises to train for disasters elsewhere in the region, proved vital by enabling swift and coordinated US support for the Japanese response. Meanwhile, the human networks built between Americans and Japanese supported US civil society contributions to the disaster response, especially on the part of American humanitarian assistance groups and the philanthropic sector.

Much of the discussion focused on the impact of the disaster on Japanese society and US-Japan relations. Several participants remarked that perceptions of Japan's Self Defense Forces are changing as a result of their highly visible contributions to the relief effort, and others noted how the close coordination with US military forces—many from controversial bases in Okinawa—has led to a higher regard for the US military among the Japanese public. More fundamental questions were also raised about how Japanese politics may evolve after the disaster, and many agreed that the crisis had at least given the prime minister a temporary lease on life.

A number of points were raised about what both countries should be doing to ensure that a stronger US-Japan partnership emerges in the aftermath of the disaster and in light of the longer term challenges that have been facing the region:

- Participants spoke about the danger that Japan might withdraw from international engagement after the disaster, scaling back on its international contributions and settling for a more modest regional and global role. For example, some raised concerns about proposed cuts in Japan's ODA budget in order to divert funds to domestic recovery, noting the irony of this at a time when the international community's response to the crisis has shown just how important international assistance and engagement is, even for rich countries. The participants **urged Japanese leaders to work to ensure that Japan does not turn inward and encouraged American leaders to do whatever they can to support these efforts.**
- There was consensus that any effort to strengthen US-Japan relations must involve the **expansion of dialogue on specialized areas, particularly about what both countries can do together to help ameliorate global challenges.** There are fertile areas for deeper cooperation, including the fields of energy, global health, technology policy, and nuclear issues (not just proliferation, but also nuclear safety and the disposal of fuel).
- The case for **deeper US-Japan cooperation on disaster relief and humanitarian assistance** has grown even stronger after "3/11," especially in light of how the Asia Pacific region is becoming more vulnerable to disasters as a result of urbanization, climate change, and other trends.
 - Participants argued that the United States and other countries would benefit from studies of Japan's disaster preparedness and its communities' impressive resiliency.
 - In order to strengthen regional coordination, one participant proposed the establishment of an Asia Pacific effort to maintain an inventory of military and civilian resources that can be quickly mobilized to respond to future disasters.
 - Other participants highlighted the vital roles of domestic and overseas NGOs and argued that there is a need for greater efforts and resources to encourage US-Japan civil society collaboration.
- Many participants stressed the **continuing importance of US-Japan efforts to strengthen economic cooperation**, whether through a freestanding US-Japan free trade agreement or in the context of the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Concerns were raised that the disaster may make it more difficult to gain domestic support in Japan for initiatives such as the TPP, especially from the hard-hit agricultural sector, and they urged Japanese and US leaders to push back against these pressures.
- Another overriding theme was that **efforts to strengthen US-Japan exchanges and expand human networks are even more pressing now.**
 - Citing the long-term financial challenges facing the sector, participants urged redoubled efforts to support existing exchange programs, even if attention to them may temporarily decline due to the disaster.
 - Particular emphasis was placed on strengthening US-Japan parliamentary exchange.
 - Support was also voiced for the creation of a US-Japan task force or wisewomens/wisemens group to focus greater political attention on bilateral relations.

Participants

Kent Calder, *Director, Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies, School of Advanced International Studies*

Raelyn Campbell, *Senior Program Officer, Asia-Pacific Region, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation*

Patrick Cronin, *Senior Advisor & Senior Director of the Asia Program, Center for a New American Security*

Susan Davis, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Diana DeGette, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Abe Denmark, *Fellow, Center for a New American Security*

Gordon Flake, *Executive Director, Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation*

Ellen Frost, *Visiting Fellow, Peterson Institute for International Economics*

Ichiro Fujisaki, *Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the United States of America*

James Gannon, *Executive Director, JCIE/USA*

Carl Green, *Senior Advisor, Hitachi Corporation*

Morton Halperin, *Senior Advisor, Open Society Institute*

Irene Hirano Inouye, *President, US-Japan Council*

Mazie Hirono, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Susan Hubbard, *Senior Associate, JCIE/USA*

Daniel Inouye, *Member, US Senate; Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee*

Hideko Katsumata, *Managing Director and Executive Secretary, JCIE*

Peter Kelley, *President, National Association of Japan America Societies*

Dan Kliman, *Visiting Fellow, Center for a New American Security*

Christopher LaFleur, *Vice Chairman, J.P. Morgan Securities Japan; former US Ambassador to Malaysia*

Charles Lake, *Chairman, Aflac Japan*

Mark Manyin, *Analyst in Asian Affairs, Congressional Research Service*

Jim McDermott, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Masashi Nishihara, *President, Research Institute for Peace and Security*

Thomas Petri, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Amy Searight, *Senior Policy Advisor, Asia Bureau, US Agency for International Development*

Yuka Uchida, *Former Political Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs*

Greg Walden, *Member, US House of Representatives*

Barbara Wanner, *Director, Senior Project Coordinator, US Asia Pacific Council/East-West Center*

Taizo Yakushiji, *Research Counselor, Institute for International Policy Studies; Visiting Professor, National Graduate Institute for Policy Studies; Professor Emeritus, Keio University*

Tadashi Yamamoto, *President, JCIE*

Nobuaki Yasunaga, *Manager, US-Japan Research Institute*