Japan-U.S. Relations

BACKGROUND

Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Japan were severed in the war that followed Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor.1 After its devastating defeat in World War II, Japan adopted a U.S.-drafted peace constitution in 1946, but the rise of Communism caused U.S. policymakers to reconsider their plan for Japan’s occupation. The Chinese Communist Party’s victory in 1949 and North Korea’s invasion of the South in 1950 became a large motivation for the U.S. to pursue policy toward strengthening the Japanese state in political and economic terms to aid Washington’s containment policy.

The 1960 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the U.S and Japan became the foundation of the bilateral relationship, which highlights shared values of “democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law,” including an emphasis on fostering closer economic cooperation for economic stability and mutual well-being.2 Even after the end of the Cold War, the two countries deepened security cooperation throughout the next quarter century, in addition to broadening collaboration in economics, technology, and diplomacy. Japan has increasingly identified itself with the support of liberal democratic systems in Asia. It led to a particularly close relationship between Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and U.S. President George W. Bush, with Japan sending Self-Defense Forces to Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Indian Ocean in support of the U.S. war on global terrorism.3

Over the past decades, growing economic ties between the two have further developed relations, with strengthening free trade and establishing global economic standards. In 2017, Japan was the fifth-largest U.S. trading partner for goods and services exports and fourth largest for imports. However, the alliance faces major strains and risks as trade tensions have arisen recently. In addition to imposing tariffs on imports of steel and aluminum products from Japan, the Trump administration is undertaking an investigation on motor vehicles which could pose a serious threat to the Japanese economy.4 Furthermore, the U.S. has withdrawn from a multilateral Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) promoted by Japan as a counterweight to China, abandoned the Paris Agreement backed by Tokyo and is pursuing talks with North Korea notwithstanding Japan’s warnings about past mistakes.5

LET’S THINK ABOUT IT

1 U.S. Department of State, U.S. Relations With Japan
2 James L. Schoff, Uncommon Alliance for the Common Good: The United States and Japan After the Cold War
3 John Friberg, The ABCs of the U.S.-Japan Relationship: Alliance, Business, and Culture
4 Emma Chanlett-Avery, U.S.-Japan Relations
5 Linda Sieg, “Trump giving Japan’s Abe a hard time on trade despite close ties”
Your SWAC leader will prompt you with questions concerning this idea: Does President Trump’s transactional “American First” orientation, protectionist policies, and questioning the value of forward U.S. military presence pose a serious risk to the alliance between the U.S. and Japan? What will be the advantages or disadvantages of embracing protectionist policies for the U.S.?

Express your thoughts and contribute to discussion!

(room to write your thoughts)

This lesson plan is meant as an aid for the Faculty Sponsor, President, or Vice-President to lead their respective SWAC chapter in discussion of this late November focus: Japan-US Relations.

Kahoot! INTRODUCTORY QUIZ

Kahoot! is an online Quiz platform. This small five-question quiz is to test students’ prior knowledge of Japan-U.S. relations and introduce them to the discussion to come. The quiz does not require the proctor to have a Kahoot account in order to start. Students will use an electronic device in order to answer. The link is below; click START NOW and select Classic mode. After the Game PIN is generated, students will be able to join the session by accessing kahoot.it on their computer or mobile device. Begin the quiz once all students have joined! This activity shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes.

LINK: https://play.kahoot.it/#/k/a0b8b231-a910-48bf-93cd-fafdc648d3be

LESSON HANDOUT

Now is when the handouts should be passed out to students. This handout will cover the analysis of the Sino-Japanese relations as it relates to the security interests of the U.S.-Japan Alliance. It is recommended that the handout be read aloud as a group instead of individually. Take some time after the document has been read to cover the material with students and make sure that its been generally understood. Ask questions to students; get

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6 Rechard L. Armitage and Joseph S. Nye, More Important than Ever: Renewing the U.S. Alliance for the 21st Century

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them to summarize what they’ve read and make sure that the students are engaged. The reading shouldn’t take more than 20 minutes.

VIDEO RESOURCES

We have two video resources below that will go over in more detail the current event portion of the handout and expand upon it. Following each link we’ve included a description of the video and possible questions that you can ask students to see what they’ve taken away from watching the clips. Each video clip is between 5 and 12 minutes; coupled with questions this segment should take no more than 25 minutes.

• **JAPAN IS REBUILDING ITS MILITARY FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WWII**
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-qxsYkhN20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-qxsYkhN20)

Japan adopted the U.S.-drafted constitution which banned any offensive military capabilities. However, Japan is now rebuilding its military for the first time since WWII in response to China’s increasing expansionism, and with tensions on the rise in the Pacific. Give your opinions on whether this change can be seen as the purpose of going to war or the purpose of protecting national security.

• **WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF THE AMERICAN-JAPANESE ALLIANCE?**
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27snNWDq4ZU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27snNWDq4ZU)

There is risk of an unintended incident between Chinese and Japanese forces operating in the East China Sea due to the frequency of operations involving Chinese and Japanese assets and the lack of consensus on lines of demarcation around the islands. The U.S. and Japan are planning to combine their armed forces in response to Chinese threats. Do you think the dispute in the East China Sea may carry greater risk of drawing the U.S. into conflict with China?

**DISCUSSION**

• The Trump administration has openly questioned the value of deployed U.S. forces in Asia, and some analysts wonder whether Trump’s actions will force Japan to edge toward China. Do you think U.S. policies will affect the relationship between Japan and China?

• Some analysts think that the U.S.-led alliance system was created to protect the U.S. from rising competitors after WWII. Do you agree that Japan was never an equal ally?

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(This shouldn’t take more than 10 minutes – total estimated meeting time: no more than 1 hour.)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


• Shi Jiangtao, “China-Japan ties at ‘historic turning point’ after Shinzo Abe’s visit, but can the goodwill hold?” (October 29, 2018), Retrieved November 07, 2018, From South China Morning Post: https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/2170469/china-japan-ties-historic-turning-point-after-shinzo-abes-visit

• U.S. Department of State, U.S. Relations With Japan, (July 17, 2018), Retrieved November 06, 2018, From U.S. Department of State: https://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/4142.htm