

[New Shimoda Conference](#)  
Revitalizing Japan-US Strategic Partnership for a Changing World

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Keynote Address  
Honorable Jim Webb, *Member, U.S. Senate*

Thank you very much, Ichiro [*Fujisaki*]. The other Ichiro. He does not wear 51 [*like Ichiro Suzuki*], but he is just as valuable to Japan and the United States. Ambassador Fujisaki is a great representative of Japan in the United States. He mentioned that he travels all around the United States to express his opinions about American-Japanese relationships. He did indeed come to my family home in the Appalachian Mountains, which is a very rural area—mostly tobacco farmers and coal miners. I told Ichiro when he and his wife Yoriko visited Alley Hollow, which is a mountain area where my family came from, that he was the highest-ranking foreign diplomat ever to visit Alley Hollow. In fact, he was the only foreign diplomat who ever visited Alley Hollow.



Let me express my appreciation to Tadashi Yamamoto for having put this conference together. I am very pleased to be able to spend time with you today.

It is remarkable when you think that 80 percent of Americans like the Japanese; that is a very good signal for the future of our relationship and a good starting point for what I have to say to you today.

I was very grateful for the invitation when the Ambassador called me on behalf of Mr. Yamamoto and asked if I would participate in this conference. He indicated to me how important this was from the viewpoint of the Japanese government in terms of trying to get people together to reinvigorate the notion of the relationship between our two countries. This has been a great opportunity for me today to listen to the frankly expressed viewpoints of people from across the spectrum of ideas.

I come here as a friend of Japan, who strongly believes that the future stability of the Asia Pacific region depends on this alliance because of the balance this bilateral relationship brings. This relationship affects other countries through the moral authority that comes from the shared views of openness, society, and vigorous economic interaction, as well as the stability in security terms that it brings to the region.

I have had the privilege of being involved with Japan for now 42 years, since I first came to Okinawa during the Vietnam War as a Marine. One comment I think is appropriate given the recommendation of Mr. Kono earlier that more people in the United States of Japanese descent should become involved in these issues. As you could hear from the opening comments of Representative DeGette, echoed by Representative Davis, there is a

wellspring of support for this relationship from the millions of American veterans who have had the opportunity to come to this country, to interact with its people, and to understand the stability of this society and the positive ways that the Japanese people treat themselves. I have often said that in terms of domestic society Japan is the fairest society that I have come across. I was here after I left the Marine Corps, working for the governor of Guam. Ironically, I did a paper in the mid-1970s as a military planner on the basing system in the Pacific, which was the basis for the first book that I wrote. I visited Japan looking at the training areas at the bases in Okinawa. I wrote this paper in 1974, and a good bit of what I wrote is actually happening at the moment.

I had the interesting experience almost exactly a year ago of coming to Tokyo and Okinawa, looking at the recommendations of the military, visiting with the Okinawan leaders, and then returning to Guam, Tinian, and Saipan--where I had spent a good bit of time in the 1970s--and examining the very difficult mechanical process of having to put this relocation into place.

I have visited this country many times as a novelist and as a journalist. I was told in 1983 that I was the first American journalist ever allowed inside Japan's prison system. I spent a month visiting prisons, meeting with people from the Ministry of Justice and also interviewing people in the United States about how the Japanese prison system works. Bottom line: fair, hard, well-administered. I took that experience back with me. One of the key issues that I have been involved with in the United States Senate has been reforming the American criminal justice system, and I have often commented about the way the Japanese criminal justice system works.

I was here as Secretary of the Navy. Earlier I believe Mr. Hitoshi Tanaka mentioned the COCOM Toshiba incident. We were the principal negotiators when I was Secretary of the Navy on examining the implications of that incident. I was here in 1998 when Korea fired its first long-range missile. It was very interesting to see the reaction in this country when that happened. I was here on a journalistic assignment in 2002 when it was revealed that North Korea possessed nuclear weapons.

The Ambassador mentioned my Senate campaign in 2006. In the final debate that I had with my opponent, we were each allowed one question to ask the other person. I asked my opponent what he thought we should do about the Senkaku Islands. It was a fair question—he was on the Foreign Relations Committee. It was very interesting to watch the media section behind the crowd with all the journalists checking Google, putting in “Senkaku....where is Senkaku?”

The reason I took some time to lay all that out is that I have had the good fortune over the years of observing the evolution of the relationship between our two countries. The question really is, “What has this journey been since World War II, and how do we proceed together?”

I would begin with the premise that Northeast Asia is the only place in the world where the interests of Russia, China, and Japan directly intersect. We tend to forget when we

look at history that these balances can be very volatile when one of those three countries assumes that it has more power and becomes more daring than the other two. The great benefit of the United States–Japan relationship is that, since World War II, we have added a fourth component to this intersection, and that is the United States being vigorously involved in this part of this world and doing so in an alliance with Japan. This has not been perfect. At that time there was a lot of turbulence in the region, but the United States’ relationship with Japan has brought about the kind of stability that has allowed this region to prosper.

When I was here in 1969, the United States was fighting a war with Vietnam—a war that cost us 58,000 dead—in which the Soviet Union was playing a very heavy hand. We had recently lost nearly 40,000 dead in the Korean War, mostly fighting the Chinese. Japan in 1969 was rebuilding physically, emotionally, and economically, and the Soviet Union was expansionist, as we saw later in Vietnam. China was consolidating its power internally and externally and making a good bit of noise about the situation in Taiwan. From the United States’ perspective, China was behind what we called the “bamboo curtain;” we did not have a great deal of information about what was going on.

By the 1980s, when I was in the Pentagon, we had seen instability in the region because of the fall of Vietnam that was creating a lot of questions about whether the United States was committed to remaining in the region. We tend to forget--and we have not mentioned it a great deal in the discussions today--that by the 1980s, the Soviet Union had made a major push in East Asia. The principal focus of the United States during the Cold War was an expansionist Soviet Union. In this part of the world, the Soviet Union had 600 naval combatants. It had gained warm water ports in the Pacific for the first time in history at Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam. When I was Secretary of the Navy, on any given day there were over 25 Soviet combatants at Cam Ranh Bay.

China at that point became a major beneficiary of a shift in the United States’ strategy as a counterpoint to what we were perceiving as an expansionist Soviet Union. This caused the United States some difficulties, which we are still working to overcome. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States had become overexposed and unprepared for the way that China would begin expanding. This has had a dramatic effect on our economy, and on an incremental basis it has affected regional stability. This is another reason why it is so important that any adjustment to military bases or any questions about the relationship between the United States and Japan be handled very carefully so as not to create the wrong impressions in terms of regional stability.

After 9/11 the United States basically lost its focus on East Asia. We became obsessed with Iraq and Afghanistan. I can say from my time in the Senate that it is even true today. You can only handle so many issues in one day. When Americans were talking foreign policy, they were talking about Iraq and Afghanistan. When they were talking about Asia, generally they were talking about the evolving relationship with China.

The past few years have seen a healthy readjustment to that tendency, both from the perspective of the United States and also from the perspective of countries in the region. I

have spent a great deal of time in the Senate reinforcing in East Asia, Southeast Asia, and Northeast Asia the intention of the United States to remain involved in this part of the world, not simply in terms of security but in terms of our economy, our cultural ties, and the vital importance of the United States remaining part of the formula in East and Southeast Asia in order to provide stability so that these economies can grow.

It has been almost one year to the day since I was last visiting Tokyo and Okinawa. There have been a series of issues over the past year that have provided a clarity in terms of what our challenges are and why we need to remain together in terms of our alliance: the *Cheonan* incident which happened in March of last year, other incidents that have increased the tensions in the Koreas, the surprisingly violent protests in Thailand—surprising for me as someone who has been in and out of Thailand for more than 30 years—and the absence of clear reassurances from the Chinese government when they have been asked to join us in providing a steady hand in incidents that involve Korea, Iran, and even Burma, where I have spent time over a number of years. So it is extremely important for Japan and the United States to work to maintain a strategic stability in this region and also for us to take advantage of the willingness of South Korea to join in this effort.

It is important for us to work with the ASEAN countries, particularly to grow our relations with Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and—something that I have been working on for a good bit of time—to resolve the situation in Burma in a way that would keep that country from falling ever further under Chinese economic and military dominance.

We have a wide range of sovereignty issues that the United States and Japan can work together to resolve. We hear the comment many times that sovereignty issues should only be dealt with on a bilateral basis. The reality is that there are a lot of sovereignty issues that are incapable of being dealt with on a bilateral basis when one country has far more power than another country that is protesting the sovereignty issues. This is particularly true, although not exclusively true, with China in the South China Sea and East China Sea. The Senkakus were a wake-up call for a lot of people, the Spratly Islands are claimed by five nations, and the Paracels are claimed by China and Vietnam.

Here is something that I think the United States and Japan need to think about in terms of how we can work collectively together with respect to sovereignty issues: the Mekong River Delta. This does not get enough attention, but approximately 70 million people in the Lower Mekong right now have been put at risk environmentally and in terms of a whole range of economic and way-of-life issues by a series of dams that have been put on the Mekong River beginning in China and going down into Southeast Asia. China is the only country in that region and one of the few countries in the world that does not recognize downstream water rights in situations like this where rivers cross international boundaries. I have made a recommendation in the United States Senate that lending institutions such as the Asian Development Bank put in environmental requirements before they fund any more of these hydroelectric dams on the Mekong River. It is a very serious situation in the Lower Mekong.

The bottom line looking to the future is that history shows us what happens when this region loses its stability. This is one of the most volatile regions in the world, and history also reminds us, particularly since the end of World War II, that if the United States and Japan stand together, this region is going to remain the economic flagship of the world.

Strategic security for me is kind of like birth control: the more precautions you take, the less chance of an incident. You can apply that to this region, which is one of the reasons we must remain close together.