

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

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Opening Remarks

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It is a real joy and privilege to open the New Shimoda Conference with the presence of many of my friends and colleagues from the United States and Japan. I express my sincere gratitude to you all, particularly to our American friends, for having made a special effort to join us at this conference. I should hasten to convey my deep thanks to a special friend, Seiji Maehara, the distinguished Minister of Foreign Affairs for having helped me with this conference and particularly for hosting a lavish dinner meeting at his official residence tonight. More than anything else, including the promise of fine sake and Japanese cuisine, my colleagues and I are most grateful to Foreign Minister Maehara for his strong agreement with us about the importance of holding this bilateral dialogue and including leaders from diverse fields, particularly from the US Congress and the Japanese Diet.



Aside from the fact that Shimoda is the location where Admiral Perry landed to open our relationship, many associate the name of Shimoda with the Shimoda Conference. This has been remembered as the first of the non-governmental bilateral policy dialogues on the US-Japan relationship, and also for the impressive participation of political leaders. That meeting took place in the fall of 1967. There had been, by then, a growing recognition that the important and yet complex relationship between our two growing countries could not be managed by the governments alone. We were amazed at the sight of the powerful American politicians who joined us for the meeting. Mike Mansfield, the Senate Majority Leader came as a keynote speaker, and we had six other prominent politicians: John Brademas, Ed Muskie, Don Rumsfeld, Jeff Cohelan, Jim O'Hara, and Wendell Wyatt. (They were mixed in with prominent intellectual and business leaders such as Bob Scalapino, Frank Gibney, Herman Kahn and Herb Passin.)

Efforts to broaden the nongovernmental policy dialogue were not easy then, and political leadership was very much needed. The constraints against such dialogues were many and they were visible in the first Shimoda Conference. There was strong ideological opposition to such a meeting on US-Japan relations, mainly coming from the left. The gateway to the Shimoda Tokyu Hotel, the conference site, was packed by leftist demonstrators who yelled at me, calling me "the running dog of the American imperialists!" Representatives of the demonstrators were allowed to submit their protest note to a representative of the organizers, and that representative was none other than future Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. The Central Committee of the Japan Socialist Party banned their Diet Members from attending the first meeting. The right wing,

represented by the infamous Mr. Bin Akao, balanced this when he made a spectacle by throwing his cane across the hotel lobby. In short, it took years before we started establishing the kind of dialogue between us that could solidify our alliance relationship.

In his memorable keynote speech, Mike Mansfield emphasized the critical roles played by politicians in the advanced democratic nations, not just in terms of domestic affairs but also in the diplomatic relationship. He went on to stress the importance of deepening and broadening action-oriented parliamentary exchanges. It certainly was not easy to start political dialogue with United States and to involve all the different political parties in Japan, but we followed the strong appeal by Mike Mansfield, and began the [US-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program](#) in 1968. I am very proud to say that some 140 US politicians have come to Japan on this program, which grew out of the Shimoda Conference series, while nearly the same number of Diet members have visited the United States. Unfortunately, both the Shimoda Conference and US-Japan parliamentary exchange have become less dynamic in recent years.

I also hope you would not mind my explaining a small number “40” on the program. My organization, JCIE, is indeed celebrating its 40th anniversary, and we are making this conference a centerpiece of a series of commemorative events. It was 40 years ago that I, along with some of my colleagues left my former boss, Mr. Tokusaburo Kosaka, to establish JCIE. In 1962, after I returned from the grassroots of Wisconsin, home of the Green Bay Packers, he brought me on to take on the work of the Shimoda Conference, parliamentary exchange, and other related activities mainly to enhance the US-Japan relationship. I am deeply and personally indebted to him for this, but after he entered politics, I felt that I had to become independent and create a full-fledged civil society organization in order to be effective in pursuing the ambitious goal of contributing to Japan’s relations with the rest of the world. To make a long story short, I decided to jump from the cliff, as it were, and leave Mr. Kosaka to build an independent institution, which was very much a rarity in Japan. I am deeply indebted to many friends in the United States and Japan who helped me go through this process and who supported my conviction that nongovernmental participation is necessary to strengthen relations between our nations.

I felt that I should relate this history on this occasion, partly to express my deepest gratitude, but also to start to explain why I believe that dialogues like this are so important and why it is especially critical at this time to think more seriously about how we should revitalize the US-Japan relationship. This relationship is not just about bilateral issues anymore; rather it is about what type of Asia and what type of world we wish to see. We are at an important point in our relations with one another, and we have been witnessing dramatic change, both at the global level as well as in the regional order here in East Asia. The changes we see around us make me even more conscious of the fact that, to paraphrase Mike Mansfield, “the US-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship bar none” for Japan. If we are to deal effectively with the challenges before us—some regional in scope, such as how to peacefully accommodate the rise of China, and some that are more cross-border in nature, such as environmental degradation or the spread of communicable disease—we need deeper US-Japan collaboration that involves diverse sectors of society. But revitalizing this relationship, which some describe as drifting, requires us to identify precisely what our two countries should be doing together and to think concretely about what our priorities need to be. I hope that today’s Shimoda Conference can contribute to the process of doing this.

The fact that everybody here has gathered together today to jointly explore how to revitalize US-Japan relations shows the deep conviction we all have to forging a stronger and more meaningful role for US-Japan partnership in Asia and around the world. I count my blessing for what I and my colleagues have been able to do in the past 40 years, and wish to make this conference at this time as an occasion to renew our commitment to continue the exciting and fulfilling task of encouraging both of our countries to jointly be more effective in contributing to a more stable and peaceful world.