

# Post-War U.S.-Japan Reconciliation: Healing as a National Security Strategy

Jonathan Berkshire Miller  
Senior Visiting Fellow, JIIA

*On November 30, 2017, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), co-hosted a day-long symposium with the Carnegie Endowment of International Peace (CEIP), entitled “Post-War U.S.-Japan Reconciliation: Healing as a National Security Strategy”. The following is a brief synopsis of the event.*

The relatively swift transformation of the U.S.-Japan relationship after World War II—from brutal enemies with racial animus to close allies is a remarkable product of history, yet mutual efforts by many players in support of this historical reconciliation process are rarely considered in the foreign policy arena. Moreover, the valuable contribution that these efforts make to each country’s long-term national security is generally unappreciated, even as the lack of such progress among many countries in East Asia is bemoaned and seen to be a serious geopolitical risk factor. Last year marked the 70th year since Japan enacted its post-War constitution and it is important to reflect upon bilateral reconciliation efforts, what they have accomplished, what helped or hindered these efforts, and what work remains. During discussions in Washington, D.C. a group of experts and scholars focused on the US-Japan relationship gathered at the offices of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, D.C. with an aim to consider these issues from a contemporary foreign policy and national security perspective as well as from a historical one, in order to examine them in a global context to think through what—if any—lessons might apply to broader geopolitical relations in Asia today.

The conference began with senior representatives from JIIA and CEIP stressing the importance of looking at US-Japan reconciliation from the perspective of how it serves as the foundation for national strategy and modern diplomacy for both countries. Historical tension is often so pervasive in the region that it becomes an organizing principle, of sorts, for nations politics and foreign policy. This has been evident time and again in Northeast with tensions between Japan and its neighbors, China and South Korea. As participants noted, the U.S.-Japan situation is unique, as U.S. and Japan shared an incredibly intense, but relatively brief period of conflict around World War II, and yet managed steadily to overcome the animosities related to that legacy and creating a strong security alliance and economic relationship. History is something that one cannot undo but is something that is one of the crucial determinants of where Japan is today.

## **Morning Address: Congresswoman Niki Tsongas (D) – MA**

Congresswoman Tsongas made a morning address to start the conference and noted that Japan is one of the United States’ greatest friends and most critical allies. She then recanted some of her own personal experience with Japan when she lived there with her family in the 1960s, when her

father was an air force pilot. Tsongas spent her time emphasizing the close economic and security ties of the alliance and noted that from a state-level, Japan is Massachusetts's fifth largest trading partner, with companies operating in a diverse array of fields, such as pharmaceuticals, medical devices, manufacturing and electronics, that are Japanese-owned, supporting jobs and innovative new products in a wide range of areas. Tsongas also highlighted the key security challenges in the region, a fact which has been underscored by the provocative actions of North Korea as of late, and of China's destabilizing activities in the maritime domain (East and South China Seas). According to the Congresswoman, it is important for Tokyo and Washington to have dialogue and communication at every level to further the long-term relationship.

### **Panel 1 Discussion: US-Japan Historical Reconciliation:**

#### **Dr. Jennifer Lind, Dartmouth College**

Dr. Lind opened up the panel with a thoughtful discussion of the key milestones in US-Japan reconciliation, such as President Obama's recent visit to Hiroshima and Shinzo Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor. Lind stressed that those visits, and the remarks made by both leaders, showed empathy for the suffering on the other side and a strong commitment to friendship. But, while important, Lind also emphasized that such visits don't cause reconciliation – rather they are the result of it. According to Lind, reconciliation – which was true in the case between Washington and Tokyo – comes first from a strategic need that pushes countries together. It is only in this case - and under those conditions - that leaders have incentives to accept what are often massive domestic political costs of pursuing reconciliation toward a formerly hated adversary.

Lind went on to discuss the vast gulf in remembrance on both sides, which is common after conflict where each side sees the other as the aggressor who is at fault, toward whom no sympathy, no concessions are owed. Each side sees itself as acting in self-defense. This gives rise to opposing narratives in which each side frames itself as a victim. As Lind noted, often “entrepreneurial politicians” use such fears in order to seize or consolidate power. With regard to the US-Japan alliance, Lind stressed that the relationship grew out of shared strategic need during the Cold War, aimed at Soviet containment but continues today amidst shared interests in a geopolitically volatile East Asian environment. Lind pointed to a number of key examples over the years that were the result of this reconciliation such as Obama's visit to Hiroshima and Abe's visit to the USS Arizona Memorial in Pearl Harbor.

Lind concluded with discussion on Japan's relations with South Korea, noting “cautious pessimism” while stressing that South Korea continues to hedge between China and the US – preventing real space for reconciliation at the state level. Lind noted that the 2015 comfort women agreement, despite the current uncertainty of the deal, was a good start and showed tremendous compromise on both sides.

#### **Dr. Toshihiro Nakayama, Keio University**

Dr. Nakayama began his talk by noting that the basic conditions of the U.S.-Japan relationship and then went on to discuss the historical background to this relationship before World War II, such as the links during the Meiji restoration period. Nakayama noted that this part of history should not be forgotten when looking at US-Japan reconciliation. At the same time, Nakayama noted the strains within Japan in the post-war period where some groups attached themselves to pacifism after the war and were cautious on the alliance with Washington; others say the US-Japan alliance as a hurdle to Japan's sovereignty and ability to be a “normal” nation. Of course, this is a point that is less contentious nowadays and Nakayama noted all the historical markers and relationships that have lifted and sustained the alliance, such as the growth during the Reagan-Nakasone years or the George W. Bush and Junichiro Koizumi years. Nakayama stressed that these efforts made

space for the later reconciliation efforts such as Obama's visit to Hiroshima and Abe's visit to Pearl Harbor.

Nakayama concluded with discussion on the US-Japan relationship in its current state. He noted that, while many in Japan were concerned when President Donald Trump was elected in the US last year, Tokyo was able to move forward because the US remains the best choice for Japan as an ally and friend. This alliance will lead both sides to address a constantly evolving security environment in East Asia.

### **Dr. Michael Auslin, Stanford University**

Dr. Auslin closed the session by posing the question on whether US-Japan efforts since 1945 is more a sign of cooperation, due to shared interests, rather than true reconciliation. When exploring this further, he looked at the question of "what is reconciliation?" and put forth three types of reconciliation: temporal, geographical and societal. Auslin noted that the first one suggests that time has "healed wounds" over the seven decades following World War II. The second category, focused on geography, premises that reconciliation has been helped due to the geographic distance between Japan and the US providing a geopolitical buffer of sorts. The final category, looking at societal reconciliation, is the most important and difficult for Auslin.

Auslin noted that societal reconciliation can be sub-categorized in three realms: state, groups and individuals. In this vein, he noted while states can reconcile without incredible difficulty – this question is much more challenging for groups and individuals. Auslin used examples of some US prisoners of war and their lingering bitterness and inability to reconcile. He concluded that reconciliation is a far more fraught process, beyond the state level, and is probably much more fragile than what we might think.

### **Luncheon Keynote Discussion:**

#### **Keynote: Ambassador Michael Armacost, Stanford University**

Ambassador Armacost opened the lunch keynote speech by noting that US-Japan reconciliation is an issue that is personal for him, as he was alive before World War II. He noted that reconciliation is a challenging and constant process but was necessary to heal the ghosts of the War. Washington and Tokyo needed to acknowledge the past and yet seek to overcome it, transform their status from arch-enemies into strategic partners. Armacost then discussed the immediate post-war history and the relatively benign occupation and how that contributed to reconciliation. Afterwards, Armacost noted that the emergence of the Cold War prompted the transformation of the US occupation of Japan into an alliance. This alliance proved not only durable but it always provided incentive on the American side to cultivate a cooperative relationship with the Japanese.

Armacost stressed that, in light of Cold War realities, it was hardly surprising that political reconciliation moved forward. It was probably easier for Americans and was taken on with greater comfort level and more readily than it was for the Japanese. For Japan, reconciliation offered practical benefits and an evident geopolitical logic. Armacost concluded with discussion of current day situation and noted that he thought Prime Minister Abe's statement history, made on the 70th anniversary of the conclusion of World War II, came "pretty close" to coming to terms with Japan's actions during the conflict. Armacost also mentioned that there should be less a focus on apologies – for which Japan has made on several occasions – and more on education related to the war in Japan. Armacost finished up by noting the strong links for the US and Japan and called it a "global alliance".

During the Q&A session, Armacost noted that the Japan-South Korea agreement in 2015 seemed to be a reasonable one but it is unfortunate that it has not been implemented as expected.

**Discussant: Dr. Gerald Curtis, Columbia University**

Dr. Curtis, as a discussant for Ambassador Armacost, noted the uniqueness of the US-Japan relationship and its strength through reconciliation. For Curtis, reconciliation is not about forgetting or forgiving, but about overcoming hatred and enmity and nurturing feelings of trust and friendship. Curtis stressed that this is what happened in the U.S.-Japan relationship after the war. How did this happen? To answer this, Curtis noted a number of factors including: a relatively benign occupation, the US government decision to retain the institution of the Emperor, and the combination of US magnanimity in victory and Japanese humility in defeat.

Curtis also noted that the American military presence in Japan over decades resulted in many soldiers and their families living in Japan and then coming back to the States with positive stories to tell. Their experiences there was another important element in growing the US-Japan relationship and alliance. He then went on to discuss other powerful elements such as intellectual exchange programs like the Fulbright Commission and International House of Japan and the role the army and navy Japanese language programs played in producing a postwar coterie of Japan specialists who were committed to a strong US-Japan relationship. This helped foster reconciliation and, according to Curtis, showed that reconciliation was not simply about joint strategic interests facing common threats, but also deep personal and social connections. He noted that the JET program today is playing an important role in producing Japan specialists that is comparable to the role played by the wartime military language program, and that it is doing so in the context of peace rather than war.

During the Q&A session, Curtis noted, although he believes it was inappropriate for Korean President Moon to invite a former comfort woman and serve “Dokdo shrimp” at the dinner he hosted for President Trump, the Japanese government had nothing to gain from protesting his action. President Moon was playing to a domestic Korean audience which would not be influenced by the Japanese protest. All it accomplished was to draw more international attention to the comfort women issue. Continuing to protest the erection of comfort women statues in cities and towns in the United States will only damage Japan’s reputation. It would be far better for Japanese to continue to express sympathy for these women and not do things that only publicize the issue and inflame public opinion.

**Panel 2 Discussion: US-Japan Historical Reconciliation in a Global Context:**

**Dr. Thomas Berger, Boston University**

Dr. Berger opened the second panel by asking the question: when does history become a problem? According to Berger, it tends to become a problem when you have a combination of two factors: a collective set of memories and calculations of interest. With this background, Berger spoke at length on the Japan-Korea relationship and noted it is unnatural in strategic terms for Tokyo and Seoul to be at loggerheads. Part of the reason for the tension, according to Berger, is the way in which the memory of relations with Japan has been politicized by South Korea over the course of the last 70 years since the end of the colonial occupation. To illustrate this, Berger pointed to the Rhee years and his powerful movement to try to define a Korean identity and create a sense of there being one Korea based on two principles: anti-communism and anti-Japanese. Sometimes interests have trumped this political entrepreneurship in the Japan-Korea relationship, but the struggle and emotions are social facts on the peninsula.

Berger noted that, when you have a combination of interests and of calculations, you can wind up with history becoming periodically a problem – as in the Japan-Korea case. Berger then shifted to the US-Japan relationship as the anomaly case where there was great pain during the war, but strong reconciliation efforts in the seven decades following. Much of this was due to shared interests and the Cold War, as previous panelists noted. As Berger stressed, history was

not able to interfere in their strategic relationship in the way that history has interfered with the Japanese-Korean relationship. Closing on the ties between the US and Japan, Berger noted that the relationship is stabilized by the perception that there are common interests and network of human ties that never give up on this process.

During the Q&A sessions, on the questions about the implications of political system to the reconciliation process, Berger noted, in a democratic country, while it may be more difficult for leaders to create a consensus, it is more meaningful because it has greater legitimacy and it can lead to greater societal change. He also pointed out that, in the reconciliation process, education is one of the important tools. According to him, it can either promote or hinder reconciliation, depending upon the type of narratives that you are perpetuating through the educational system.

### **Dr. Rohan Mukherjee, Yale NUS**

Dr. Mukherjee focused his remarks on to issues in the context of historical reconciliation. First, he compared U.S.-Japan reconciliation with the reconciliation that took place between the United Kingdom and India since the end of the Second World War. And second, Mukherjee assessed the implications of U.S.-Japan reconciliation for Asian security more broadly. On the issue of the UK-India comparison, Mukherjee stressed the differences in the two cases but also noted important similarities. As Mukherjee noted, there is similarity in the manner in which each of these relationships periodically becomes contentious in the domestic politics of the countries involved. So, according to Mukherjee, in Japan, there is of course resistance in certain quarters against the U.S. alliance, particularly against the status of forces agreements and the impact of the U.S. military presence.

The second theme of Mukherjee's remarks focused on the implications of the U.S.-Japan reconciliation on Asian security, and the most important question being: does reconciliation between the U.S. and Japan come at the cost of reconciliation perhaps for Japan with other countries. In this light, Mukherjee talked about historical ties between Japan and India both during and after the war. He also noted that the U.S.-Japan reconciliation has been beneficial for regional security but also noted that some argue that U.S. alliances in East Asia, including that with Japan, were structured as a hub and spoke system and so there was no complex multilateral form of cooperation that could effectively tie the U.S. down and create a community of interests that might eventually have evolved in a group identity in the way that the E.U. did.

### **Keiko Iizuka, Yomiuri Shimbun**

Ms. Iizuka opened her talk by noting the series of key events that have hallmarked US-Japan reconciliation, such as the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, and more recently President Obama's visit to Hiroshima and Prime Minister Abe's visit to the U.S.S Arizona Memorial, Pearl Harbor. She insisted that these reciprocal visits clearly affected the public sentiment on both sides of the U.S. and Japan. But, Iizuka then noted that the situation on reconciliation however is far different with regard to Japan and its neighbors in East Asia. Iizuka spoke for some time on the difficulty of historical reconciliation efforts with Okinawa and noted that the tensions over US bases, and also that between Tokyo and Naha, remains a big concern.

Iizuka noted that the citizen's personal sentiments could both contribute and damage countries' diplomatic relations including reconciliation on history. On the East Asian security relationship and specifically ties between Japan and South Korea, she talked on how historical issues have inhibited the two sides to move forward on practical security cooperation amidst tensions on the Korean peninsula.