Senator Jim Webb
The US-Japan Alliance After 3/11
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Thank you very much, Lincoln Bloomfield, for that introduction, and I would like to say that it's a great pleasure to be here with you tonight and I would like to express my appreciation to the organizations that have put on this conference, this very important conference, dealing with the future of the relationship between our two countries.

I would like to begin by saying what a great pleasure it's been for me over my entire adult life to have had an association with Japan, with the Japanese people, first beginning 42 years ago as an United States Marine in Okinawa and then in Vietnam during the Vietnam War. Having returned many, many times to Japan as a military planner, as a novelist, as a journalist on several occasions, as a government official, as a guest of your government, and most especially, over the past four and a half years, as a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee as the Chairman of the East Asia Subcommittee.

This is a relationship that is so vital to both of our countries and has gone, in most cases, smoothly, that we tend to, I think, take advantage of or to ignore how well or how important it really is.

In the United States, we have a saying. Most of you know it: The squeaky wheel gets the oil. Meaning that in such a competitive, multi-cultural society as ours, you have to speak up in order to be heard. And in Japan, as most of you know, they have a saying that the loose nail gets the hammer, meaning obviously that if you speak too loudly or draw too much attention to yourself, you're going to going to pay the price.

But when it comes to this relationship between our two countries, in the United States, I think we need to get a little squeakier and I think in Japan, I hope we can see people ready to get smacked a little bit by the hammer.

This is a very important time in history for both of our countries and for the careful relationship that we have developed over the past 60 years and not incidentally for the future of the entire East Asia region.

In the United States, this means that those of us who understand and support the reality need to speak ever more loudly. We need to work in order to have our voices heard despite the many other distractions that have recently permeated our foreign policy discussions from Iraq, Afghanistan, and recently Libya, to the challenge and seduction of dealing with an evermore assertive and evermore economically powerful China.

In Japan, this means that those who support understand the importance of this relationship should be willing to accept the possibility of being criticized by some who believe that the future is somehow different from the past, that Japan would benefit by distancing itself from its close alliance with the United States, due to the undeniable economic growth of other countries in the East Asian region.

So let me summarize a few of the fundamental principles that are familiar to many people in this room that emphasize the importance of our relationship. First, due to its strategic and commercial importance and the population levels that the historic turbulence that can visit East Asia: it's undeniable its global security cannot exist without stability in East Asia.

Second, and I say this as a student of history, as a frequent visitor to East and Southeast Asia, including having just completed a visit to Thailand, Singapore, Indonesia, and Vietnam. The geographical and historic realities of Northeast Asia remind us everyday that there cannot be stability anywhere in East Asia, including Southeast Asia, unless there's a strategic balance in Northeast Asia. Let us for a moment understand how important and unique the strategic balance actually is. Northeast Asia is the only place in the world where the direct interests of Russia, Japan, and China intersect. And they intersect historically and quite often with the Korean Peninsula in the center. Over and over again throughout history, we've seen the turbulence that has come to this region when one or the other of these three great powers has become more dominant or has attempted to unnaturally expand its influence. And against this historical backdrop since WWII, the strong presence of the United States in this region has become more than a military deterrent rather it has emerged as the most important factor in the overall stability of the region. The security partnership between Japan and the United States, has formed the very basis of the ability of the United States to become something of an honest broker and thus as a guarantor of the kind of stability that has allowed other countries such as South Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, even Vietnam, and most of the countries of ASEAN, to grow economically and to evolve in terms of more liberal governmental policies.

This need for balance in Northeast Asia was true during the expansionist period of the Soviet Union. By the mid-1980s when I was serving in the Pentagon as Assistant Secretary of Defense and then Secretary of the Navy, the Soviets had 3,700 ground troops in East Asia. They had 85 backfire bombers, 2,400 combat aircraft. They had a pacific fleet that had boasted some 600 ships including 2 aircraft carriers, 41% of their heavy surface ships in their entire navy, 40% of their nuclear submarines. They had accomplished the historic Russian dream of having a warm water port in the Pacific. When I was Secretary of the Navy, on any given day, on Cameron Bay(?), Vietnam there were 2 dozen Soviet Union combatant ship plus fighter bomber, long range reconnaissance aircraft.

This truth, this need for strategic balance in Northeast Asia has remained true since the region adapts to the increased influence and activities of China that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. Looking back, from an American perspective, as we dealt with the expansion of the desires of the Soviet Union, there was an acceptable, if untested logic that the Chinese political system could be permanently liberalized through the mechanism of free trade. Sensible Americans believed that contact with the outside world, creation of a vibrant middle class, an exposure to creature comforts and possibly individual freedoms, all would combine to bring major changes in the way that China and

its unelected leaders approached international relations. This logic underwent some rather surprising mutations along the way. As the power relationships in East Asia began to alter, when the Soviet Union fell apart, and at the same time, within a few years, the United States Navy's fore structure was cut in half, creating the impression of a partial American withdrawal from East Asia. The Chinese began steadily to increase their military activities and their claims of sovereignty over distant territories. China engaged in a massive modernization program fueled largely by purchases at that time of Soviet weaponry and bolstered by the acquisition of American technology. It shifted its aviation doctrine from defensive to offensive operations, including the ability for long range strikes throughout Southeast Asia. It has continuously rattled its sabers over the issue of Taiwan. It has laid physical claim to the disputed Paracel and Spratly island groups, thus potentially straddling not only one of the vital sea lanes in the world, but an area that is thought to be rich in mineral resources. Overtime, even as recently as last year, China has made repeated naval excursions into Japanese territorial waters, a cause for long term concern, as everyone in this room knows and understands, as China still claims Senkaku Islands and has never formerly accepted the legitimacy of Okinawa's 1972 aversion to Japan.

And in the United States, the national distractions of Iraq and Afghanistan, following the 9/11 attacks, as well as the seduction of increased trading opportunities with China led many citizens and leaders to downplay the importance of maintaining a strategic balance and ultimately the stability itself of the East Asian region. This was also true at some level in Japan where many well-intentioned leaders believed that history was providing Japan and other countries in East Asia with a fresh opportunity to retreat what was being called an Asia-centric policy that diminished the importance of Japan's close relationship with the United States.

Only 18 months ago, when I visited Tokyo, Okinawa and Guam, the importance of our relationship was openly being called into question. Both with respect to Japan's dealing with China and with respect to the issue of the future American military forces in Japan. Now clearly on both of these issues, our two countries can benefit from adapting previously policies to the realities of present day activities, but no one, Japan, the United States or elsewhere, should mistake these kinds of short-term adjustments for the abandonment of the long term benefits that derive from the close friendship and the security alliance between our two countries, which serve as the lynchpin of security in the entire East Asia region.

In the last 18 months, since that visit, there has been an incident in the Senkaku Islands, which Japan legally administers under the edicts of international law. There has been a spirited, emotional discussion regarding base realignments and the validity of the continued American military presence in Japan. I have participated in that discussion. There have been military provocations on the part of the Chinese off the coast of the Philippines just this past March, twice in the exclusive economic zone of Vietnam, May and June. I was the sponsor of the Senate resolution, which Senator Inoyue by the way was one of the two principal co-sponsors, that deplored China's use of military force in

these incidents and also in Senkaku military activity, calling for peaceful, multi-lateral approaches to resolves these issues of sovereignty.

To my knowledge, this is the first time the United States Senate has ever gone on record as deploring a Chinese use of military force in South China Sea and other areas with respect to sovereignty issues and the Senate did so unanimously. This is an indicator now that I think of the renewed concern and acknowledged importance of the United States remaining as the strategic balancing factor for stability in this region.

Our two countries have learned some valuable lessons, both of our countries I think in the last 18 months. Hopefully this time period has encouraged leaders in Japan and in the United States to understand how valuable our alliance has been and will remain and how important it is for both of our countries as well as the region itself to continue to work together and to rely on one another. So what is it that we should continue to do together? Here are a few thoughts.

First, we need to maintain our vital security alliance including the restructuring of the United States' bases on Japan in a way that continues to reassure countries in the region that the United States will remain as the balancing force for security in this volatile part of the world.

I first began working on this issue in the 1970s when I was a military planner working on an analysis of all the facilities in the Pacific and examining how we might restructure our military basing system in Okinawa and Guam. I've worked on it continuously since I've been in the Senate and I believe with the support now with Senator Levin who is the chairman of the Armed Services Committee and Senator McCain who is the ranking Republican, we will see an approach that can guarantee the continued presence of the United States in a way that diminishes the impact on the Okinawan people and does not diminish our ability to respond to military threats in this region.

Second, we can work together to strengthen the economic, cultural, and security relationship between both of our countries and the Republic of Korea. As a student of history again I would say I know full well the challenges of cementing this three way alliance, but the realities of the present and of the future should be clear to all three countries that it is in our collective interests to do so. And on a personal level, as a member of the United States Senate on this committee, I would say it's been very gratifying for me to see the representatives from Japan and from Korea, both among your diplomatic core and also from overseas visits, so willing to work together in order to strengthen our security relationship among our three countries.

We should work to maintain the health and visibility of our common political systems, which despite recent frustrations in both countries should still serve as examples to the region and to the rest of the world. Both of our countries are yearning for political and economic stability. Both of our countries are sometimes frustrated by the visible nature of our political systems which allow those who wish us ill to make light of our debates. But our openness, in my view, will in the end prove to be our strength. We will work these

issues out. In many areas, such as the increasing interdependence of our economic systems, we will demonstrate the ability of like-minded systems to create harmony and stability rather than discord and unrest. We must remain committed to maintaining freedom of navigation in the vital sea lanes to which such a large percentage of the world's commerce now flows. This comment does not need elaboration. Any country that doubts the commitment of the United States to this basic principle does not understand our history, of the sacrifices our military people have made for over 200 years.

And on this point, we must agree openly and seriously to work together in order to find peaceful, multi-lateral solutions to these issues of national sovereignty, especially in areas like Senkaku Islands and the South China Sea where the basics of international law are now being irresponsibly challenged. The very rule of law is a question here. Japan and the United States should stand together to ensure that the rule of law is respected rather than the open threats, back room deals that have always marked the journey of those who wish to respond in irresponsible behavior. Serious issues are at stake, including the rights of nations to properly explore, develop, and market natural resources within internationally recognized boundaries. And as with so many other issues in this vital region, the motivations of our two countries should be nothing more than the principles of fairness, and the importance of stability, based on the rule of law. We should work as we have so assiduously done over the course of my entire lifetime, to expand our trade and to increase our cultural ties. Send us your business, share your ideas, your best ideas, and not incidentally, send your students to study alongside our young and to develop relationships that will carry over into the next generation and the next.

I have always respected the fundamentals of Japanese society, which focus on fairness, human dignity and personal honor. Both of our countries are at their best when we proceed from these basic principles, and in that respect, we are natural allies. We are also long time friends with loyalties that have been tested, sometimes in the crucibles of war. Our partnerships are synergetic, promising to strengthen both of our countries without detracting from the history or the fundamentals of either one.

So in summary, growing our relationships in this way will be good for Japan. It will be good for the United States, and it could prove essential to the long term stability of the Asian region. I have been committed to working this goal for more than 40 years. I will continue to do so, it will be my honor to do so with you, for the benefit of Japan and the United States. Thank you very much. It has been a pleasure to be here with you.