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Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA

Charting a Shared Course

U.S.-Japan Security in 2021 and Beyond

Abstract

On Tuesday, January 26, 2021, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) welcomed Rear Admiral James Kelly, USN (Ret.), Former Commander, U.S. Naval Forces Japan, and Dr. Takako Hikotani, the Gerald L. Curtis Associate Professor of Modern Japanese Politics and Foreign Policy at Columbia University, for a discussion of the future of the U.S.-Japan security alliance. RADM Kelly reviewed the current state of the U.S.-Japan security relationship and analyzed how the alliance needs to grow to meet present and future challenges in the Indo-Pacific region. Similarly, Dr. Hikotani gave commentary on RADM Kelly's remarks, providing a Japanese perspective on where the U.S.-Japan relationship has room to grow.

This talk was presented through Sasakawa USA's Policy Briefing Series and held virtually via Zoom. Attendees included distinguished guests from the Washington D.C. policy community, academic think tanks, and former and current members of the military and government. Dr. Satoshiro Akimoto, Chairman and President of Sasakawa USA, moderated the panel and facilitated the Q&A.

Remarks by RADM (Ret.) James Kelly

Rear Admiral Kelly's views are his own and he does not speak for the USN or any other part of the U.S. government.

The event began with RADM James Kelly highlighting the importance of the U.S.-Japan alliance. He stated that the core of alliance relations is people-to-people exchange, and he hoped to demonstrate that through his discussion. On that note, he began his presentation by showing the audience a photo of the USS George Washington, a U.S. Navy nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, entering Yokosuka Harbor on September 26, 2008. RADM Kelly stated that the arrival of the carrier signaled the hard work that thousands of people, both American and Japanese, had done to prepare for the arrival of such a ship. The arrival also demonstrated the cultural change that had taken place in Japan. The USS George Washington, as RADM Kelly highlighted, was at first not welcomed by the local Japanese community due to it being powered by nuclear energy. However, through demonstrating the safety and game-changing technology of the U.S. Navy, the Japanese people in Kanagawa Prefecture came to understand the importance of the alliance and welcomed the USS George Washington to its new home in Yokosuka Harbor.

Next, RADM Kelly walked the audience through U.S. force posture in Japan, starting from the North and ending in the South. The first and most northern base is the U.S. Naval Air Facility in Misawa, Aomori Prefecture. RADM Kelly identified that the importance of this base is primarily its location, but it also serves as a joint, bilateral, and commercial co-use facility. Additionally, from Misawa, joint forces deploy Lockheed P-3 Orion and Boeing P-8 Poseidon aircraft for anti-submarine warfare in the Sea of Japan, responding to any alliance concerns from either North Korea or Russia. The next base identified was Yokosuka Naval Base, in Yokosuka, Kanagawa Prefecture. RADM Kelly stated that this base is the most important U.S. naval base in the entire world. He added that the location of the base, alongside its Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) counterpart in Uruga, enables great communication between the two forces. From Misawa, RADM Kelly briefly turned to the U.S. Naval Air Facility in Atsugi, Kanagawa Prefecture, where HSL-51 anti-submarine helicopters fly out to join U.S. Naval forces in the Sea of Japan. Next, RADM Kelly highlighted the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni, Yamaguchi Prefecture. The reconstruction of this base began in 1971 and was completed in 2020. RADM Kelly stated that this long process represents the U.S.-Japan alliance's capability to work together, as one force, to get jobs done. From Iwakuni, RADM Kelly addressed the U.S. Fleet

Capabilities Naval Base in Sasebo, Nagasaki Prefecture. He stated that this base is the most strategic U.S. base globally. The U.S. Navy deploys its newest capabilities and technology to this base to support both Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) in response to ongoing issues in the East and South China Seas. Lastly, RADM Kelly concluded his presentation on the U.S. force posture in Japan by highlighting U.S. Fleet Activities in Okinawa. He noted that U.S. bases in Okinawa are highly strategic and are the key to the entire alliance. They serve as the location for the U.S. Marine Corps to exercise their amphibious ships, among other important purposes.

Following RADM Kelly's presentation of U.S. force posture in Japan, he turned to address current and ongoing matters related to the U.S.-Japan alliance. First, he discussed the matter of new administrations in both Tokyo and Washington. With power exchanging hands, RADM Kelly stated that the new Biden administration must put a focus on the alliance. He added that he hopes the U.S. will soon announce the U.S. ambassador to Japan, as it's the most important signal of commitment to both Japan and other countries in the region. Secondly, RADM Kelly discussed the future of U.S. force posture in Japan. He stressed that capabilities and cooperation in the alliance must be increased where possible and gave the new construction of a U.S. base at Mageshima as an example. Next, RADM Kelly stated that Japan's decision to put AEGIS missile-defense systems out to sea is a great choice. However, he stressed that Japan needs to take a hard look at how to get more people involved in the force to man these new capabilities. Following this point, RADM Kelly discussed the threat of China. He highlighted that the U.S. and Japanese forces need to work together to address PRC-related issues in the East and South China Sea. RADM Kelly then discussed the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, an informal strategic grouping of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia that is also known as the "Quad." While tremendous improvements in cooperation amongst Quad members have taken place, he noted that India needs to be more incorporated into current security dynamics in the region. Switching gears from China, RADM Kelly addressed North Korea and Russia. He stated that the United States and Japan must keep an eye on both countries. North Korea's nuclear program necessitates a continued focus on AEGIS and missile defense, and the alliance must boost coordination on combatting Russian cyber-attacks. Concluding his presentation, RADM Kelly addressed forward basing. RADM Kelly believes that the focus on forward basing must be kept and that he has great confidence in Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, the Department of Defense, and most importantly, President Biden, to do so.

Commentary by Dr. Takako Hikotani

Following RADM Kelly's presentation, Dr. Hikotani offered three comments and three related questions. The first comment was on military-to-military relations and their impact on diplomatic relations between the United States and Japan. She stated that military-to-military relations, especially at the Navy level, have historically been strong, and this close relationship has four aspects that impact civil-military relations. The first aspect is shared learning that has affected how the alliance understands world views, division of the world order, and the rule of law. The second aspect is legitimacy, in that alliance relations have given access to a region where, without such relations, the United States may have been more skeptical of Japan's influence. The third aspect is linkage, referring to Japan's shift to more joint forces, following the U.S.'s joint force capabilities. The last aspect is leverage, as military-to-military relations can serve as leverage vis-à-vis civil or political levels within each country. Dr. Hikotani concluded her first comment by asking RADM Kelly to speak on what issues need to be addressed at the political level of alliance relations going forward.

Next, Dr. Hikotani focused on base issues within the U.S.-Japan alliance. She commented that while U.S. bases in Japan are a great source of stability, they are also a source of controversy. Although RADM Kelly's experience with the USS George Washington in Iwakuni is hopeful, Dr. Hikotani highlighted that her recent academic research contrasts RADM Kelly's experience. Dr. Hikotani's survey asked Japanese people living around bases in Okinawa and other parts of Japan their opinion of U.S. forces. While the good news is that the Japanese public opinion is relatively favorable, Dr. Hikotani noted that this one indicator does not equate to acceptance of the bases, nor does it equate to a welcoming attitude. Dr. Hikotani added that another twist in her research is that Japanese people are actually more receptive to Japanese Self-Defense Forces having the same capabilities in bases as opposed to U.S. forces. On this note, Dr. Hikotani asked RADM Kelly to discuss what can be done to make bases more palliative and constructive to the Japanese community and what can be done to advance the political discussion concerning the controversial Okinawa bases.

The final comment and question by Dr. Hikotani centered on the multilateral aspect of the U.S.-Japan alliance, especially expanding partners in the region. The Biden administration, as Dr. Hikotani identified, has already placed a strong emphasis on the alliance, but there are even greater potential opportunities to work with partners outside of the U.S.-Japan alliance in the region. This is bolstered by more countries outside of the Indo-Pacific being interested in the area and taking action, such as the United Kingdom and Germany's planned deployment of their navies to the region. With this changing situation, Dr.

Hikotani asked RADM Kelly to discuss what he thinks will be the future of the shared course of the U.S.-Japan alliance, especially accounting for the inclusion of other countries in a Quad-like arrangement. Dr. Hikotani concluded her commentary by stating that the ROK may also play a major role as Japan-ROK relations are stable but concerning due to possible changes in U.S. interests.

Response by RADM James Kelly

To Dr. Hikotani's first comment and question, RADM Kelly stated that politicians often say that overcoming an issue is too difficult, but he believes this outlook is wrong. He stated it is never too hard to accomplish goals if people want the goals to be realized. RADM Kelly referred to the Iwakuni base as a prime example. He stated that there was opposition and pushback for the base; however, the construction of it was to the benefit of both the United States and Japan and, therefore, it was completed. For controversial issues such as Okinawa bases, RADM Kelly stated that the alliance must overcome these issues as the strategic interests are too important to either nation. With the threat of China driving a wedge in the U.S.-Japan alliance, RADM Kelly concluded that the U.S.-Japan alliance has the political will to move forward and chart a shared course and that it must continue to take every chance to show the successful cooperation of the alliance.

Next, RADM Kelly addressed base issues. He agreed that bases were controversial; however, to overcome tension in the U.S.-Japan alliance, it is pertinent that communities be brought together. U.S. forces that visit Japan are often traveling overseas for the first time. With great cultural differences, RADM Kelly noted the lack of interest in leaving the comfort of U.S. bases in U.S. forces, and because of this mindset, it is vital that U.S. leadership push their people to go outside of the base and engage in the communities in Japan. Outside of the benefits of people-to-people communication, RADM Kelly also addressed the economic and strategic benefits of U.S. bases in Japan. First, U.S. bases bring significant, positive economic impact to local communities in Japan through base contracts with local businesses. Secondly, RADM Kelly stated that while Japan's central government recognizes the strategic needs of both the United States and Japan in Okinawa, the people and local government in Okinawa do not. RADM Kelly stressed that Okinawa must recognize this and continue to work and support the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Dr. Hikotani's final comment and question on multilateral levels of the U.S.-Japan alliance was also addressed by RADM Kelly. He stated that the U.S.-

Japan alliance is always working to become more collaborative and cooperative. While there is sometimes tension in Japan-ROK relations, RADM Kelly stated that the United States serves as a bridge between these two countries. Navies of all three countries often work together concerning missile defense, but RADM Kelly recommended that the United States work more to engage Japan in trilateral relations with the ROK. Addressing not only the ROK but speaking more broadly, RADM Kelly also stated that countries with shared values in the region must come together to respond to China's actions in the East and South China Seas. If China sees a united front, RADM Kelly believes they will back off from interests adverse to both the U.S.-Japan alliance and other partners in the region. Concluding, he stated that the United States, Japan, and countries with similar values must cooperate and support one another.

Moderated Q&A with Attendees

The Q&A opened with a question from Lieutenant General Wallace "Chip" Gregson, United States Marine Corps (USMC) (Ret.), who served as the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Asian and Pacific Security Affairs from May 2009 to April 2011. LtGen Gregson asked why U.S.-Japan forces still have separate bases, noting that the Iwakuni base among others is a great example of how shared bases work better than separate ones. In response, RADM Kelly agreed that shared bases are the way to go. He also noted that Iwakuni is currently led by the U.S. Marine Corps, but the United States has much to gain by implementing joint command structures in all bases. Dr. Hikotani then added that from her research, she found that a lesser impact on local communities surrounding bases and shared use of bases are possible solutions to concerns from the Japanese community. However, Dr. Hikotani reminded the audience that transparency with local communities is critical to planning shared bases.

Next, LtGen Gregson asked another question. He first stated that the current era is one of rapid technological development that can provide great advantages. On that topic, he asked how can the United States and Japan chart a shared course to quickly adapt to rapidly developing technology in a way that is both effective and affordable. In response, RADM Kelly stated that the United States and Japan must take advantage of the shared technological capabilities and bring them together. The current U.S.-Japan security apparatus is comfortable to each party, as highlighted by RADM Kelly, so he sees no reason why either force cannot be in the other's network. He added that the United States and Japan must share space technology such as satellites with an emphasis on linking them together and cooperating. RADM Kelly concluded his response by stating that

sharing technologies and the cost of them to work together is what an alliance is all about.

Next, Dr. Akimoto asked both speakers to discuss the impact of U.S.-India relations on U.S.-Japan relations in the Indo-Pacific. RADM Kelly responded first by stating that for the U.S.-India relationship to affect the U.S.-Japan alliance, it must start at the top. He recommended that the Indian Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) communicate with the U.S. CNO to grow overall relations. The United States and India should then branch out to the respective counterparts in Australia and Japan, and eventually, the directive will move to fleet commanders. Overall, RADM Kelly highlighted that the Quad relationship must be in sync and continue to build personal relations between each member from the top down. Dr. Hikotani also commented that for a top-down approach to be successful, Japan needs to consider the importance of PM Shinzo Abe's relationship with India, and that relationship needs to be continued in the Suga administration. Dr. Hikotani concluded by stating that although the speed of progress in building relations among Quad members will vary, it is important that this process is accommodative for each country's interests.

The Q&A concluded with another question from Dr. Akimoto. He stated that there is new political leadership in both Tokyo and Washington. With new leadership comes a new set of policymakers, and Tokyo has been paying special attention to the new appointments of the Biden administration. Therefore, Dr. Akimoto asked RADM Kelly if he could comment on the confirmation of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin. In response, RADM Kelly stated that although he does not personally know Secretary Austin, he knows him by reputation. RADM Kelly commented that Secretary Austin is a great leader and knows command every at every level. Civil leadership of the military, as identified by RADM Kelly, is the key to success and getting things done, and he has confidence that Secretary Austin can transition to this type of leadership.

Sasakawa USA is grateful to RADM Kelly, Dr. Hikotani, the Q&A participants, and attendees for the thoughtful discussion on the future of U.S.-Japan relations.

The views expressed herein are entirely the work of Sasakawa USA and do not represent the official positions of any of the speakers.

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