Abstract

On Tuesday, June 28, 2022, Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA (Sasakawa USA) hosted the virtual policy briefing, “Key Takeaways from President Biden’s Trip to Japan.” In this event, Ms. Katherine Monahan, Director of the Office of Japanese Affairs, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, at the U.S. Department of State (DOS), shared her analysis of President Biden’s meeting with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the newly launched economic frameworks, the QUAD Summit meeting, and recommendations for bolstering U.S.-Japan relations. Her remarks were followed by a lively Q&A session touching upon various challenges and opportunities for the U.S. and Japan.

This discussion was presented by Sasakawa USA’s Policy Briefing Series and was held virtually via Zoom. Attendees included distinguished guests from the Washington, D.C. policy community along with members of academia, think tanks, and media, as well as current and retired members of the U.S. military and Japanese Self-Defense Forces. Dr. Satohiro Akimoto, Chairman and President of Sasakawa USA, provided introductory remarks, facilitated this event, and moderated the Q&A discussion.
President Biden’s Meeting with Prime Minister Kishida in Tokyo

Ms. Monahan began by outlining current U.S.-Japan relations which have been the cornerstone for security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region for over six decades. Ms. Monahan stated President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida reaffirmed their close partnership at their meeting in Tokyo on May 23, 2022. President Biden is no stranger to Japan as he visited the country in 2011 to assess the bilateral disaster recovery plan known as Operation Tomodachi. During this visit, their Prime Minister Kishida invited President Biden to a tea ceremony during which the close personal connection between the two leaders was apparent. Ms. Monahan described President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida as having a strong rapport and coming together like “magnets” at multilateral meetings, which cameras subsequently captured when the two of them walked side-by-side at the G7 and NATO conferences.

In addition to personal ties, the two leaders at the Tokyo meeting affirmed that bilateral relations are much stronger, much deeper, and more important than ever, recapitulating their message from their previous virtual meeting in January 2022. They further affirmed peace, security, and prosperity of the Indo-Pacific region are crucial and the rules-based world order in the region is an indivisible component that destruction of such would have devastating impact around the world. Ms. Monahan then explained the Biden administration envisions the following goals in the U.S.-Japan relationship and to ensure peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond:

(1) Modernizing the Security Alliance through collaboration and investment in defense capabilities.

(2) Partnering on global issues which includes partnering on a response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

(3) Strengthening people-to-people ties through study abroad in the United States, the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Program, Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program,
and several other programs run by organizations like Sasakawa USA and the United States-Japan Foundation.

(4) Defending and strengthening the rules-based economic order for global prosperity and security through the new economic 2+2 Meetings and Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) to counter economic coercion and malign influence. Details provided in the next section.

During the meeting, President Biden welcomed the Kishida cabinet’s commitment to bolstering Japan’s defense capabilities by substantially increasing its defense budget. The leaders further discussed deepening their economic, science, and technology ties. Ms. Monahan elaborated that science and technology cooperation entails protecting key technologies, cooperating on space programs, conducting cancer research, overcoming the COVID-19 crisis, preventing future pandemics, countering climate change, and collaborating on nuclear energy. The outcomes of the Tokyo meeting are summarized in the joint statement,1 the U.S.-Japan Competitiveness and Resilience (CoRe) Partnership factsheet2 and the U.S.-Japan Climate Partnership Fact Sheet.3

New Economic Frameworks: EPCC and IPEF

On January 21, 2022, President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida established the U.S. – Japan Economic Policy Consultative Committee, “EPCC” (pronounced “epic”) or the “Economic 2+2,” to strengthen the economic rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and the world. On May 6, DOS and the Department of Commerce held the first vice-ministerial level EPCC meeting, for which Ms. Monahan was the master of ceremony. At this meeting, the two countries discussed closer cooperation on digital economy, supply chain resiliency, export controls, countering economic coercion and other key challenges of our time. With the meeting on May 23, President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida announced the first ministerial-level EPCC scheduled in July

---


Details of the meeting are not public, but Ms. Monahan reassured that the two leaders are determined the U.S. and Japan will play active roles in addressing salient global challenges.

Ms. Monahan then moved on to explaining the official launch of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) on May 24 in Tokyo. Having 14 member states from the Indo-Pacific region, which covers 40% of global GDP, indicates the far-reaching ambition of IPEF and high expectations for renewed economic leadership by the U.S. Furthermore, IPEF, together with EPCC, creates a unique framework designed to tackle 21st century problems ranging from setting rules for digital economy; ensuring secure and resilient supply chains; supporting major investment in clean energy and transition to clean energy; and raising standards for transparency, fair taxation, and anti-corruption.

Ms. Monahan analyzed EPCC and IPEF are fruitful results of U.S.-Japan ties over the years which opened greater opportunities for both countries to realize their shared Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision.

**The Quad Leader’s Tokyo Summit 2022**

President Biden, Prime Minister Kishida, Indian Prime Minister Modi, and new Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese convened the Quad Summit in Tokyo on May 24. This meeting assessed the progress of Quad initiatives such as the COVID-19 vaccine assistance, economic recovery, impact of climate change, prevision of humanitarian assistance, maritime security, securing emerging technology, counterterrorism, infrastructure coordination, and countering foreign disinformation. The four leaders reconfirmed their commitment to FOIP which is inclusive and resilient. Quad leaders further underscored the Quad’s main purpose to bring tangible goods and benefits to the region by maintaining democracy and the FOIP as their core values, strengthening their capabilities, staying committed to peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific, being unconstrained by coercion, supporting rule of law, acknowledging freedom of navigation and overflight, seeking peaceful resolution of disputes, standing up for territorial integrity, and recognizing the ASEAN’s centrality as the main pillar to regional engagement.
Ms. Monahan pointed out that Japan’s international role has strengthened recently now that the world sees Japan not only as a regional partner, but more as a global leader standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the U.S., Europe, and other partners. For instance, as soon as Russia invaded Ukraine, Japan quickly showed its solidarity with the Ukrainian people defending and standing for their national sovereignty by imposing sanctions against Russia and welcoming Ukrainian exiles to Japan. Japan’s continuous condemnation of Russia since day one of the invasion is a clear indication that Japan is stepping up to become a global leader advocating for democratic values shared among various nations beyond the Indo-Pacific region. Ms. Monahan provided more examples of Japan’s leadership in the international community including Prime Minister Kishida’s visit to Europe for the NATO and G7 conferences and calling out atrocities committed by Russian troops in Bucha, Ukraine. With Prime Minister Kishida’s bold action, not only have Japanese people became aware of changing global dynamics, but also have alerted other nations that the invasion of Ukraine was no longer a regional conflict in Europe but a global issue threatening the world order.

Priorities for the U.S. Moving Forward

As a JET alumna, Ms. Monahan restated the importance of grass-root efforts in building healthy and lasting people-to-people connections between the U.S. and Japan which have fostered and sustained the bilateral relation. She then provided data on the accomplishments of these people-to-people ties:

- Over 29,000 alumni of U.S. government supported exchange programs
- Over 30,000 Americans participated in Japanese government supported JET exchange programs to Japan
- Over 6,500 Japanese students have come to the U.S. under Fulbright programs since 1952
- There are 37 U.S.-based Japan-America societies sustained by business ties between the two counties
- The U.S. and Japan share more sister-cities with each other than any other countries.
It is clear that this two-way student mobility should be a priority for the two nations. Despite travelling setbacks caused by the pandemic, sustaining people-to-people exchanges, engaging in next generation leaders of these two countries, and instilling support and interest in U.S.-Japan relations are vital components of our future relations. Moreover, Ms. Monahan stressed that one cannot take current bilateral relations for granted. Certainly, the U.S.-Japan relationship is at an all-time high, but one cannot dismiss continuous efforts needed to maintain this healthy bond. One of the challenges in sustaining such ties is continuous efforts by our adversaries seeking to identify our weak spot such as economic ties and conduct malign activities which would divert our strong bonds.

Q&A Session

An engaging Q&A with the audience followed Ms. Monahan’s remarks. Questions covered a wide range of topics including opportunities for business sectors, the new U.S. ambassador to Japan, U.S.-Japan-R.O.K. relations, Japan-Russia relations, U.S. Forces in Okinawa, more details on IPEF, and engagement with Southeast Asian countries. A brief summary of Ms. Monahan’s responses is below:

- Ms. Monahan encouraged greater involvement by business sectors sharing R&D and leading technologies, setting and aligning rules and standards, and establishing resilient supply chains. Key sectors would include car batteries, climate change, energy, semiconductors, and minerals used for semiconductors which could all play a significant role. Additionally, countries such as the Netherlands, Taiwan, and ROK could also join and contribute to bolstering the U.S. and Japan’s critical supply chains.

- Ms. Monahan shared her enthusiasm for Ambassador Rahm Emanuel bringing a breath of fresh air with his focus on exploring deeper economic partnership. This new partnership will include digital economic ties between the U.S. and Japan to strengthen rules-based economic order.
• Ms. Monahan stated that it will be important for Japan and ROK should resolve disputes and improve their bilateral relations amongst themselves. Despite historical issues, the two parties have engaged in talks at all levels as Prime Minister Kishida reached out to newly elected ROK President Suk Yeol Yoon and held constructive vice-ministerial meetings. All three countries have not forgotten the importance of the trilateral U.S.-Japan-ROK relationship in countering threats imposed by Russia, China, and North Korea.

• Ms. Monahan again noted Prime Minister Kishida’s actions against Russia are a clear indication that Japan aligns with the U.S. and the world in condemning Russia’s invasion. Japan’s quick action further evidenced Japan’s strong international leadership. While Russia currently has the upper-hand on energy exports to Japan, it will be important for Prime Minister Kishida to establish a mid- to long-term energy strategy to withstand Russia’s coercion.

• On her recent visit to Okinawa, Ms. Monahan gained a positive impression of both Japanese Self Defence Forces (SDF) and the U.S. Forces stationed in Okinawa. The U.S. Forces’ economic engagement with local communities, such as patronizing local businesses or providing land within the base to produce sugar cane, have helped reduce the friction in some areas. Ms. Monahan acknowledged the distrust of the U.S. Forces among Okinawans stems from their devastating memories of WWII in which the U.S. must show humility and work on changing the mindset of Okinawans to see U.S. bases for their benefit instead of being a burden. Additionally, an increase in Chinese forces’ presence near Okinawa has encouraged Okinawans and the Japanese Coast Guard to further seek more collaboration with the U.S. forces. Thus, Ms. Monahan assured the U.S. will slowly but surely complete the relocation of the U.S. base in Futenma to Camp Schwab.

• Ms. Monahan described IPEF as still in the development stage but making good progress. The framework, and the bilateral EPCC, strive to align rules and standards among likeminded countries to strengthen a free and open world order.
The U.S. and Japan will continue to engage economically with Southeast Asian countries and respect the centrality of the ASEAN. The ASEAN Summit has shown that member states would like to see the U.S. and Japan engage more internationally with investments on infrastructure development from ports to roads. The U.S. recently announced a Southeast Asia dialogue with Japan on how to respond to the ASEAN’s request, to bolster ASEAN centrality, and to better coordinate in supporting the ASEAN upon their request.

Sasakawa USA is grateful to Ms. Monahan for sharing her analysis of President Biden’s visit to Japan in May 2022 and how this will impact the bilateral relations between the U.S. and Japan. Sasakawa USA also thanks the Q&A participants and attendees for joining us in this engaging discussion.

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

For more information about Sasakawa USA’s Policy Briefing Series, click here.