

April 22, 2014

**Mr. Abe Goes to Washington**

Jeffrey W. Hornung

Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu's recent speech to a joint session of Congress received an unusual amount of attention because of the rift it exposed between the president and congressional leaders. On April 29, Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe will travel to Washington also to deliver a speech to a joint session of Congress. His speech is guaranteed to garner attention as well, though not because of any rift between the White House and Congress. Rather, people are curious about what, if anything, Abe will say about Japan's past.

Prime Minister Abe's speech will be historic. Although former premiers Hayato Ikeda and Nobusuke Kishi, Abe's grandfather, both spoke to the House of Representatives, Mr. Abe will speak to both chambers. In any other circumstance, this fact alone would be important. However, Abe's speech has taken on extra significance because 2015 marks the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II hostilities.

Even though he will issue a statement to commemorate the occasion later this year, which is expected to include a reflection on Japan's wartime past and offer an apology in the same vein as previous official apologies, a strong narrative around Abe's speech is that he needs to address and/or further apologize for Japan's wartime deeds. The president of the American Defenders of Bataan and Corregidor Memorial Society has said that Abe should only be able to speak if they are assured he will acknowledge Japan's defeat. The Washington, D.C.-based Korean American Civic Empowerment and the Washington Coalition for Comfort Women Issues have even delivered letters to House Speaker John Boehner's office expressing their opposition. They also ran an ad in the *Hill*, pressing Abe to apologize. Even Seoul has entered the fray. Last month, media in South Korea reported that Seoul's Foreign Ministry called on Abe to include an expression of "sincere repentance" for Japan's actions in the war.

These groups are concerned about Prime Minister Abe because he has a reputation, particularly in China and South Korea, as a right-wing apologist for Imperial Japan. In the past, he made comments that called into question his views on, for example, the validity or nature of "comfort women," the definition of "aggression" in relation to Japan's wartime acts, and the validity of the Tokyo Tribunal's verdict that found 14 wartime leaders guilty of war crimes. At the same time, he has upheld the landmark 1993 apology to "comfort women" and the 1995 Murayama Statement that apologizes for the suffering Japan caused during the war. The problem for Abe is not that previous administrations, including his own, have not apologized—or upheld past apologies—for Imperial Japan's actions; rather, it is that leaders, like Abe himself, send mixed messages. Apologies are often undercut by acts or comments by members of the government or ruling party that are seen as historical revisionism. What has been lacking is acknowledgment and acceptance of historical responsibility in a clear and unequivocal manner by all members of the government.

Yet, Prime Minister Abe's speech to Congress is not the right venue for this. He was invited to speak before Congress because of Japan's role as an economic power and trusted ally today, particularly at a time when the countries are revising their defenses guidelines and negotiating the Trans-Pacific Partnership. For too long, Japan has struggled with being an economic giant but a political pygmy in international affairs. Abe represents a new Japan. And yet, he cannot ignore the past. He cannot speak from the same podium where Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war without explicitly acknowledging the horrors Imperial Japan visited upon the United States and offering his condolences for the vast number of Americans whose lives were lost or who suffered as survivors of Imperial Japan's actions. He needs to incorporate history into his remarks, but not make it a centerpiece. Keep it simple and explicit.

Instead, it behooves Prime Minister Abe to focus on the present and future. The Asia-Pacific region is a very complicated place where the United States is in dire need of willing and capable partners with which to cooperate. This is particularly important given the Obama administration's "rebalancing" to the region. Whether it be dealing with a rapidly rising—and

increasingly assertive—China, a resurgent Russia, an unpredictable North Korea, or the long list of nontraditional security concerns that plague the region, the Asia Pacific is home to some of the United States’ most pressing security concerns. Abe remains a stalwart U.S. ally, increasingly willing and quite able to meet regional challenges independently or in tandem with the United States.

Therefore, it is Abe’s task to make very clear all the areas where Japan is actively engaged in “peaceful contributions to peace” and how, through its actions, Japan is supporting objectives shared by the United States. It is questionable how much members of Congress know about Japan’s substantial Official Development Assistance program, capacity-building efforts to regional coast guards, strong advocacy of rule of law (particularly the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea), antipiracy efforts, and major role in leading international assistance to Afghanistan. All of these actions are nonmilitary in scope, demonstrating in deed Japan’s postwar commitment to peace. Importantly, they assist the United States’ engagement strategy, leading to greater economic development, better governance, and a safer region.

At the same time, Prime Minister Abe needs to go beyond what Japan is doing now. He needs to lay out his vision of Japan’s role in contributing to regional peace. Since coming into office, Abe has actively revised security policies that increased Japan’s defense budget and relaxed rules on Japan’s ability to export arms and engage in military activities heretofore prohibited. At the same time, he is actively cultivating new security ties with countries around the world—particularly Australia and India—while further strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance. Whether it is providing humanitarian assistance/disaster relief to regional countries, providing used patrol boats to countries challenged by China, negotiating the sale of advanced weaponry to U.S. partners and allies, or simply becoming a more capable ally, the United States needs to hear why these changes are important to the region, for future U.S. engagement in the region and for U.S. forward presence in Japan. Abe’s Japan represents a proactive, dependable ally to which the United States will need to turn increasingly to meet tomorrow’s regional challenges. It is Abe’s job to demonstrate why the United States cannot effectively deal with the Asia-Pacific region without Japan.

Prime Minister Abe’s measure of success will be his ability to demonstrate why the words of the late Senator Mike Mansfield still ring true: “the U.S.-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.” Abe has an historic opportunity no other Japanese leader has had. The alliance remains strong because it has been forward looking and capable of adapting to meet new challenges. Although acknowledgment is necessary, Abe should not dwell on what happened 70 years ago; rather, he should focus on what Japan does today and where it will go tomorrow side-by-side with its U.S. ally.

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