



Abe's Speech Spotlights an "Alliance of Hope" to Uphold the U.S.-led International Order

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Experts' Views on Prime Minister Abe Shinzo's Address

Prime Minister Abe Shinzo delivered an address from the stage at a joint meeting of the U.S. Congress on April 29, 2015 as the Prime Minister of Japan, the first such address in 54 years. He was the fourth Prime Minister to deliver such an address following Prime Minister Ikeda Hayato 54 years ago, Prime Minister Kishi Nobusuke, the grandfather of Prime Minister Abe, 58 years ago and other predecessors on this occasion. It was, in fact, the first time for a Japanese Prime Minister to deliver an address in front of all the members of the Senate and the House of Representatives at a joint meeting of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Partly due to the fact that this year is the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, before Prime Minister Abe's address, most attention was only focused on his wording in terms of historical perception, for example, whether or not an apology for comfort women would be included in the address.

Even so, Prime Minister Abe repeatedly presented messages that depicted his strong determination for the future, such as "Reforms for a stronger Japan," "Pride in developing international peace together with the United States following World War II and determination to maintain peace," "Realization of the kind of world where finally women are free from human rights abuses," "Proactive contributions to peace" and "A sturdy U.S.-Japan alliance."

In the end, what was the message that Prime Minister Abe wanted to deliver that could not be read simply from the superficial meaning of the words in his address? How did the U.S. government, Congressmen, media and the public take the address? How should Japan behave in the future?

Yesterday's Enemy is Today's *Tomodachi*—Put in the simplest terms, this was the message that Prime Minister Abe Shinzo sent to the American people in his speech at the joint session of the U.S. Congress.

Japan and the United States fought a cruel war, resulting in a lot of sacrifices for both sides. Prime Minister Abe expressed a "deep repentance" over the war and prayed for peace for the spirits of the American people who lost their lives.

Then, he staged a "historical miracle" with a handshake between former Lt. Gen. Lawrence Snowden, who was engaged in the Battle of Ioto (Iwo Jima), and Shindo Yoshitaka, a Diet member and grandson of Kuribayashi Tadamichi, the General of the Ioto Defending Force. It was at this moment that a particularly massive standing ovation occurred.



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An apology is not necessary for the reconciliation between Japan and the United States. All that matters is sharing the tragic history with each other in dignity. The Abe speech that embodied the reconciliation between Japan and the U.S. was received very favorably by the members of the U.S. Congress. Senator McCain, a leading figure of the Republican Party, highly evaluated the speech, applauding it as “a historic recognition of two peoples reconciling their shared history.” House of Representatives Speaker Boehner also praised the speech, stating that it was “a proud and pivotal moment” in the history of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Prime Minister Abe also touched upon the country’s “deep remorse” over World War II. Upholding the position of previous prime ministers, the prime minister said that the country will not avert its eyes from the fact that it brought suffering to the peoples of Asian countries. This means that he will also endorse the “Murayama statement.” With that in mind, as he highlighted in the speech at the Bandung Conference in the previous week, the prime minister swore that the country would spare no effort in working for the peace, progress and prosperity of Asia, going forward.

Eliminating unrest caused by the visit to the Yasukuni Shrine

The U.S. Government had expressed a “disappointment” over Prime Minister Abe’s visit to the Yasukuni Shrine at the end of 2013. Vice President Biden, who took the lead in releasing the statement, said “What I liked most was that he extended his empathy to all his Asian neighbors.” Most of the U.S.-based experts on the Japan-U.S. relationship, who had been upset by the Yasukuni visit for some time, also praised the speech.

The Abe speech was not intended just to spotlight the reconciliation between Japan and the United States or to reflect on the past. The main message was, if anything, that Japan and the United States have been working with each other to protect freedom and democracy in the postwar world was the main theme.

Today, seventy years since the end of the war, the U.S.-led international system faces a great challenge in terms of both economy and security. The challenge comes from China, which advocates the establishment of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and its new security concept. To rise to the challenge and maintain a free, fair and open regional order, both Japan and the United States need to implement difficult reforms domestically.

Against the backdrop of these situations, Prime Minister Abe positioned the U.S.–Japan alliance as an “alliance of hope.” Japan challenged the international order in the past. After the war, however, it has maintained order with the United States. Let’s further develop it and continue to spread hope throughout the world!—The fact that a prime minister who represents Japan made such an appeal in person to the members of the Congress that represents the United States is limitless in meaning.



Japan and the United States must contribute to the peace and prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region by improving the economic order of the region through the TPP and create synergetic effects through the U.S. Asia rebalancing policy and Japan's proactive contribution to peace.

Meanwhile, irrelevant criticism that Prime Minister Abe did not apologize to China or Korea is spreading in both countries, as well as parts of the United States and Japan, without understanding the real message of his speech. In the first place, it is thoughtless to request that a prime minister of Japan apologize to a third-party country in a speech to be delivered to the U.S. Congress. Besides, Prime Minister Abe has repeatedly expressed his intention to continue the positions of both the Murayama and Kono statements.

The danger of playing with history with intolerant nationalism

A fundamental reason for the issue of historical awareness being repeatedly brought up is that there are forces in China and Korea, as well as parts of Japan, who use history politically with intolerant nationalism. We must humble ourselves before history. Hopefully, Prime Minister Abe will include the danger of playing with history as a warning to all, including Japanese people, in his statement scheduled to be issued for the 70th anniversary of the end of the war.

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