

The Japan-America Society of Washington DC Japan in 2019: A Look at the Year Ahead

Japan in 2019 was the sixth occurrence of the Japan-America Society of Washington DC's "Japan in the Year" symposium, an all-day program which brings together top experts on Japan from think tanks, academia, the government, the press, and the business and nonprofit sectors to look at Japan's domestic and international prospects for the coming year.

This year the event was held on Tuesday, January 22nd at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The Carnegie Endowment co-sponsors the event alongside JASWDC and provides logistical support. Additional support comes from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation and National Association of Japan-America Societies. The event featured two sole speakers and two discussion panels, with the morning focused on domestic concerns and the afternoon centered around international affairs.

Mr. James L. Schoff (Senior Fellow, Carnegie Endowment and JASWDC trustee) gave the opening remarks, thanking the many people from the organizations which had contributed to the event. He also noted that 2019 would be the end of the Heisei Era, a motif which would appear in several speeches by guests. The morning keynote speaker was intended to be Mr. Marc E. Knapper (Acting Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Japan and Korea, US Department of State), but unfortunately due to the government shutdown which coincided with the symposium, he was unable to deliver his speech. In his place, Dr. Sheila A. Smith (Senior Fellow for Japan Studies, Council on Foreign Relations) gave an address where she reflected on that which had happened in 2018, such as the US-North Korea summit and the various trade initiatives Japan had participated in during that year. She also predicted that although both Prime Minister Abe and President Trump would both be very busy with domestic affairs this year, the alliance between the United States and Japan will continue to find common ground and relevance on the issue of China.

Following the first keynote speech, the first panel of the day focused on domestic issues within Japan. It was moderated by Mr. James L. Schoff, and featured as panelists Mr. Hiroki Takeuchi (Associate Professor of Political Science, Southern Methodist University), Mr. Mikio Sugeno (Washington, DC Bureau Chief, NIKKEI), and Ms. Yuki Tatsumi (Co-Director of East Asia Program, Stimson Center). Mr. Takeuchi started off by remarking that although standard political science usually dictates that people are elected for a long term because they are initially popular, Prime Minister Abe has only become popular *because* he has served for a long time. Mr. Sugeno expressed his belief that Japan in 2019 will be "dependent, eventful, and bumpy," with several examples of what he meant by each criterion. In particular, he noted that there is an expected slowdown in the global economy, which could stand to hurt export-dependent Japanese companies. Ms. Tatsumi finished by noting that Prime Minister Abe had been very accomplished in the field of international relations and trade, but that he would need to deliver on a number of difficult domestic issues soon and it is unclear whether he has the political capital remaining to do so.

Ms. Abigail Friedman (CEO of the Wisteria Group and Treasurer, Japan-America Society of Washington DC) delivered a few remarks after lunch before introducing the second keynote

speaker, Mr. Mashiro Kawai (Director General, Economic Research Institute for Northeast Asia). In his speech, Mr. Kawai focused on Japan's economic relations and foreign trade. He explained to the audience the nature and status of Japan's recent free trade agreements such as the TPP-11, RCEP, and the bilateral agreement pending between them and the United States. A significant theme in his speech was the importance of China, and how the United States, the European Union, and Japan, among others, need to work together in order to combat China, convince them to conduct economic reforms, and ultimately open up to free trade.

The second and final panel was moderated by Mr. Matthew P. Goodman (William E. Simon Chair in Political Economy/Senior adviser for Asian Economics, CSIS and Chairman of JASWDC) and focused on Japan's foreign affairs. The panelists were Mr. Toshihiro Nakayama (Professor of American Politics and Foreign Policy, Keio University), Ms. Shihoko Goto (Senior Northeast Asia Associate, Wilson Center), and Mr. Eric G. Altbach (Senior Vice President, Albright Stonebridge Group). Mr. Nakayama began with commending Prime Minister Abe on his achievements and his political stability. He noted that the attitude of Japan towards the US-Japan Alliance is approaching a "shouganai" mentality; Japan has no ally that can replace the United States, but American diplomatic retrenchment is in turn making the Japanese less enthusiastic about the alliance. Ms. Goto discussed Japan's position in the ongoing trade war between the United States and China, and its two-pronged approach towards weathering the conflict. She also stated that data and privacy will be the most important resource and create power struggles in the future, and that this is an area in which Japan can take the helm among the nations of the world. Mr. Altbach expressed feelings of doubt with regard to Japan's future relationship with the United States, referencing the ongoing retreat from the world diplomatic stage which the United States has been following. He mentioned that Prime Minister Abe has a challenge in negotiating his Trade Agreement in Goods with the United States, but expressed hope that the RCEP trade agreement which includes India and China could provide a wedge for trade development in those countries.

All speakers were engaged in question-and-answer sessions following their statements, in which many active participants asked about specific details of things the speakers had mentioned. Many previous guests of the symposium were in attendance as well. Thanks to the National Association of Japan-America Societies and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, as well as the many speakers who gave their views and the sponsors which supported the event, JASWDC will continue its mission to promote understanding and sustain friendship between the peoples of Japan and the United States through events such as Japan in 2019. Following the event, JASWDC received positive reviews, feedback, and thanks for the symposium. With approximately 200 participants attending and the symposium televised by C-SPAN, Japan in the Year continues to be a popular event for those in Washington, DC, the United States, Japan, and around the world.