

Speech on U.S.-Japan Relations

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U.S.-Japan relations began when the fleet of seven black ships of Commodore Perry appeared in Tokyo Bay on February 13, 1854. Although the voyage of Commodore Perry was not intended to be a provocative one, it did raise much concern with the government of Japan. As we know, at that moment in history, the Japanese had enveloped their islands with a silk curtain. However, the appearance of Perry's fleet of seven black gun ships sent a message to the Japanese, that they could no longer isolate themselves. Thus began the Japanese effort to learn about the Western World. There was a sudden interest in government and industrial circles in the development of ships, railroads, and commodities unknown in Japan at that moment: modern western weapons of war, improved means of communication, et cetera. Since then, the relationship has opened new chapters, but it appears that with most of these chapters, military force was an element. After the Russo-Japanese War, our nation, the United States, was very much involved in bringing about the Portsmouth Treaty that ended the Russo-Japanese War. This war was one that raised the eyebrows of the U.S. and the Western world. It demonstrated that Japan was no longer an isolated, insular kingdom with exotic music and gracious dancers. It was a nation of threatening military might.

Our next chapter was World War I, in which the Japanese military involvement was not a major one, but it did prevent the Germans from wreaking much havoc in the Pacific.

As a result, the Japanese were presented with precious islands that became the sites of major battles a few decades later—for example, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, the Mariana Islands, and the Carolines. Using these islands as bases on the outer perimeter of the Empire, they were immediately able to disrupt Allied lines of communications, and stage attack U.S. positions in the Pacific such as Midway, Pearl Harbor, and the Aleutians. Up until this moment, our relationship with Japan was for the most part as allies. We began our trade relations, exchanges of scientific knowledge, and visitation of high officials.

But in World War II, the Japanese became our most hated enemy in the history of the United States. In this war, 1,140,429 members of the Japanese military were killed, and civilian casualties are estimated to have ranged from 700,000 to 10,000,000. In the Pacific War, 51,983 members of the U.S. military were killed. Pearl Harbor became part of the history of the United States. There are some who still carry on their lives with scars of this war.

Early in his tenure in Japan, Ambassador Mike Mansfield began using a phrase that would forever be associated with him and his extraordinary term of service, which spanned from 1977 to 1988—under Presidents Carter and Reagan. His statement was a simple one, as one would expect from a man not known for long speeches: “The U.S.-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship in the world, bar none.”

Today, Japan is our most important trading partner outside of North America. However, there is a grave trade imbalance. For example, this year, it is

anticipated that more Toyota cars will be purchased in the United States than General Motor cars. Japan is also an important ally militarily and diplomatically. We just agreed upon a defense treaty that calls for the continuation of American presence on Japanese soil. It also calls for stationing 7000 marines in Guam, and the cost of the transportation and housing of these troops will be covered by the Japanese. It is no secret that our most important ally in the area of missile defense is the Japanese. However, it would be most unwise to assume that this positive and happy relationship will continue indefinitely. If we make an effort to do so, it could happen. There are signs of diplomatic and economic irritants that could develop into major concerns.

For example, there is the matter involving House Resolution 121, a measure that calls for the formal apology of the Government of Japan for the atrocities committed by the Imperial Armed Forces against those known to the world as “comfort women,” during its colonial and wartime occupation of Asian and the Pacific Islands from the 1930s through the duration of World War II. The mention of the two words “comfort women” always conjures up horrible pictures of slave girls. For those who suffered these atrocities, I suppose that all the apologies in the world could never erase this nightmare.

But, in the world of diplomacy, there must be a moment of closure, and in this matter, my research leads me to conclude that the leaders of Japan have on several occasions expressed their regrets.

I have seen official apology statements beginning with the 1994 statement of then Prime Minister Murayama, and every succeeding Prime Minister of Japan, including that of the current Prime Minister, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. I also note that the Parliament of Japan, on two separate occasions, adopted separate Resolutions – one in 1995 and the other in 2005 – expressing regret and apology. Finally, monetary redress has been provided by the people of Japan as further demonstration of their remorse.

In the arena in which government apologies are called for, it should be noted that many Native Americans for decades have been suggesting that the time has come for an apology to come for U.S. treatment of the Indian tribes.

The Congress of the United States passed an apology for Native Hawaiians on the American take over in 1898. To this day, there is a small number of citizens who seek independence and restoration of the monarchy.

In 1988, the Congress and the President issued an apology for our government's actions on the internment of 120,000 Japanese Americans in concentration camps beginning in February 1942. We have had one and there have been no further apologies from succeeding Presidents.

There is now a movement to seek an official apology for slavery.

Apologies are fine. They might serve to ease tension. What is more important than the apology is the action that follows it.

Then there is the matter of our trade imbalance. It has become a source of much debate in Washington.

There is another problem not widely debated but of interest to some – Native Alaskans and Eskimos and their limited use of whales for subsistence. This has been a major source of pain for our Eskimos because they find that they are repeatedly used as leverage for international negotiations, and in this area of negotiations, for those who are knowledgeable, the major adversaries are the Japanese and the Americans.

I cite just these few examples to demonstrate that the journey that is ahead of us is not traveled on a smooth, paved highway. There are many irritating potholes along the way. So my simple message to you is that if you want to maintain a positive relationship, Americans must work at it. The Japanese must work at it.

It is not a relationship that is based on family ties and cultural relations. Ethnically, we differ; culturally, we differ; in religion, we differ; and in physical appearance, we differ. Our friendship and alliance is not a natural occurrence. We must constantly work on it.