

The World in 2025 and the Japan-US Alliance

Japan-US Kanazawa Conference Concept Paper

In the earliest days of the Japan-US alliance, with negotiations on the reversion of Okinawa still underway, a group of young researchers from Japan and the US gathered in Kyoto to discuss a broad range of issues pertinent to the future of the Japan-US alliance, focusing especially on the status of Okinawa and nuclear strategy. The deliberations at this Kyoto Conference laid the foundations for maintaining, strengthening and developing the alliance as the participants went on in later years to become alliance managers themselves. Sixty years thence, with the strategic environment surrounding Japan and the US on the verge of major changes, a new Kyoto Conference – the Kanazawa Conference – is very much needed.

The Japan-US alliance has contributed to the postwar peace and security of the Asia-Pacific region for six decades, not only functioning as a stabilizer to maintain the international order but also proving essential to Japan in maintaining its own national interests. From Japan's perspective, it goes without saying that the alliance's functions are essential for sustaining the stability and prosperity of this region.

During the twenty-old years since the end of the Cold War and the ten years since the terrorist attacks of 9-11, however, we have seen a notable relative decline in European and American power and the rise of China and other Asian countries. Complicating the situation further is the Arab Spring, which is redrawing the world map in the Middle East and Africa. With the global system now on the edge of a momentous transformation, the conventional norms and values that have been in place since Westphalia are being called into question. Given this context, another look at the significance and roles of the Japan-US alliance is required.

Since the 9-11 terrorist attacks, the US and its allies have committed themselves to a war on terror, endeavoring to secure their own safety and engaging in nation-building activities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Have these efforts in fact brought peace and stability to that region and to the world? Will the continuation of this war on terror, one factor underlying the growing budget deficits in Europe and the US, only hasten the rise of China militarily and economically?

The Arab Spring sweeping the Middle East and Africa has at a stroke altered the political landscape in the authoritarian countries of the region, and a completely new order is emerging in the Middle East. The possibility that this phenomenon might even spread to the authoritarian countries of China and North Korea cannot be ruled out. Should an “Arab Spring” come to the authoritarian nations of Asia, what impact would this have on their neighbors and on the global system?

Unconventional threats such as earthquakes, tsunamis, global warming, climate change, droughts, floods, pandemics, and cyber-attacks significantly transcend national borders. How should we address unconventional threats to such global commons as the seas, space and cyberspace? The demographic issues that populous countries such as China and India will face in the next few decades will have direct ties to energy issues. What should we do to tackle issues such as these that are expected to evolve from unconventional to conventional threats?

The Japan-US Kanazawa Conference will undertake discussions with 2025 as a reference point, bearing in mind the aforementioned issues. Granting that changes in the circumstances of Japan, the US, China and the Korean peninsula in 2025 could bring about abrupt changes to East Asia’s strategic environment, the whole concept of the Japan-US alliance itself must also be discussed. More specifically, we will ponder the regional circumstances of China, Taiwan, and the Korean peninsula in 2025 and approaches to conventional security, and discuss how Japan and the US (plus α) can cooperate in 2025 with respect to the global commons and unconventional security. It is only natural to anticipate that global circumstances will change by 2025 and, as this could be accompanied by changes to norms and values, we welcome out-of-the-box thinking at this conference.

Young researchers from Japan and the US who may well become the managers of the Japan-US alliance in 2025 will be invited to the Japan-US Kanazawa Conference for uninhibited discussions. If the San Francisco Conference serves as a venue for Japan-US alliance managers to come together to confer on and resolve immediate issues, then the Kanazawa Conference could well be considered a conference preparing for the future by giving prospective alliance managers the opportunity to talk over potential Japan-US issues and to get to know each other better.