

Summary of Round Table Discussion

The US-Japan Institute's round table discussion was held at Hilton Embassy Row in Washington D.C. on September 23rd from 9:00 AM to 12:00 PM, coinciding with a meeting of U.S. President Barak Obama and Japan's Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama in New York.

Professor Katsuichi Uchida of Waseda University declared the opening of the event, explaining the purposes of the discussion: first, sharing and exchanging views among scholars in Japan and the United States on Japan's new government and its implication on the US-Japan relationship; and second, discussing the future plan of the institute.

Waseda University President Katsuhiko Shirai gave opening remarks and expressed his expectation for the institute to create a new horizon for the US-Japan relationship by facilitating academic and realistic policy analysis and proposals on important issues shared by the two countries.

Professor Akihiko Tanaka from the University of Tokyo was responsible for moderating the discussion, and raised topics for discussion such as the significance of the victory of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in the last general election, assessment of Hatoyama's cabinet appointment, the fortune of the DPJ government, the DPJ's foreign policy orientation, and possible friction and cooperation between the United States and Japan.

Three speakers were asked to begin the discussion. Professor Aiji Tanaka of Waseda University analyzed the last general election results with empirical data, and concluded that both Junichiro Koizumi of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Yukio Hatoyama of the DPJ won the elections in 2005 and 2009, respectively, by getting support from independent voters. He also held that the LDP leader Taro Aso did not intend to save the economy but to secure his political survival, which led to his inconsistent attitudes and finally the LDP's loss in the election.

Professor Mike M. Mochizuki of George Washington University talked about Japanese foreign policy and its implications on East Asia, focusing on history issues related to Japan's prewar responsibility. He mentioned the possibility that the DPJ has a better chance to establish good relations with East Asian countries by taking measures more sensitive to the views of Japan's neighbors.

Dr. Sheila A. Smith from the Council on Foreign Relations pointed out several issues that may occur in the transition to an inexperienced DPJ government. She was especially concerned about the US-Japan alliance with respect to North Korea, relocation of the U.S. base in Okinawa, and nuclear deterrence, and believed that the Hatoyama government's proposal for drastic change in policy would require compromise, reaction, and learning for both sides.

Arguments by these three scholars induced a lively debate among the round table participants over such issues as:

- how the DPJ government can stimulate economic growth,
- how likely the DPJ government is to participate in coordinated international efforts to balance the world economy,
- how the Heisei municipal mergers affected voting behavior,
- how regime type can affect the way neighboring East Asian countries react to the apology issue,
- to what extent the DPJ policy will be socialist,
- what role the United States can play in the relationship between Japan and other Asian countries
- in what way the DPJ policies can be beneficial for Japanese companies,
- how the DPJ and the LDP can get the support of younger voters,
- how Japanese apologies to China and Korea are linked to security issues,
- how the United States and Japan reconcile more fully on such issues as the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan,
- how the relationship between central and local governments will change under the DPJ government,
- whether Japanese voters really want social welfare-oriented policy,
- how the DPJ government will tackle structural reforms, while it advocates seemingly socialist-oriented policies,
- to what extent the DPJ's foreign policy was important for voters,
- how American and Japanese governments, backed by labor unions, can satisfy and produce good employment opportunities for workers.

Moving on to the second part, the round table participants discussed the future plan of the institute. Topics included: what research questions should be examined, how to organize research groups, how to get external funding, and how to collaborate with other think tanks and companies.

As a research agenda, historical comparative study of the United States and Japan was proposed with an example of comparison between the Boston-New York and Tokyo-Osaka areas.

For the institute's organizational framework, the foundation of an advisory board consisting of experienced scholars and professionals was suggested to select issues fitted to funders' interests and needs. Also, several participants emphasized that the institute must collaborate with businesses to overcome weak points in academic research.

In the discussion on the role of the institute, the institute was expected to overcome language barriers so that American scholars can benefit from interesting works by Japanese scholars, and co-authorship between scholars in the United States and Japan is encouraged. Other expectations were that the institute should help scholars prepare applications for international grants, and also contribute to the multi-culturalization of Japanese universities.

A participant warned that there might be temptation for the institute to reach only "Japan hands," but the institute should have a more global perspective by collaborating with non-Japan specialists, and appealing to an audience without a background in Japanese.

The round table discussion ended with closing remarks by Waseda University President Shirai, in which he thanked all participants in the discussion for their help and cooperation to make the event successful.

This summary report was prepared by Dr. Takeshi Iida of Waseda University for the USJI. No quotations are allowed without permissions from the speakers and the USJI. The views expressed by the speakers are not of their affiliated organizations.