

Policy Recommendations:

The Deepening of US-Japan Cooperation on 'Non-Military' Aspects



JFIR

The Japan Forum on International Relations

Preface

This policy recommendation report is the outcome of the activities of the study group “The Deepening of US-Japan Cooperation on ‘Non-Military’ Aspects,” which the Japan Forum on International Relations (JFIR) has conducted over a two-year period since FY2024.

Security cooperation between Japan and the United States has traditionally been centered on the Japan-U.S. Alliance, focusing primarily on so-called “hard” security measures related to defense capabilities. However, as China has emerged in recent years as a major economic, scientific, and technological power, it has increasingly employed geopolitical and geoeconomic instruments, backed by its formidable economic and technological capabilities, particularly toward countries of the Global South. Against this backdrop, the importance of strengthening security in non-military domains, often referred to as “soft” security, including economic security and climate security, has become increasingly prominent.

Based on this understanding of the issues, JFIR established a study group composed of the project leader and members listed below. The study group focused on the fields of climate change, trade, human rights, immigration, and media and communications, and re-examined concrete methods and frameworks through which Japan and the United States can jointly address these issues. This report presents the findings and outcomes of the study group’s two years of activities.

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WATANABE Mayu

President, The Japan Forum on International Relations

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Introduction

The inauguration of the second Trump administration has once again brought into sharp relief the structural transformation of the postwar international order. Reasserting “America First” as its guiding principle, the Trump administration has prioritized short-term national interests and transactional approaches over alliances and multilateral cooperation. Its negative stance toward international climate frameworks, including the Paris Agreement, its reductions in humanitarian and development assistance, and its reinforcement of protectionism through high-tariff policies have significantly shaken the very foundations of the international order that the United States has long supported.

These changes do not merely represent a shift in the direction of U.S. foreign policy. Rather, they indicate that the era in which the United States led the international order after the Cold War, backed by its overwhelming military power, economic strength, and soft power, has reached a turning point. In the international community, competition among states is rapidly expanding beyond the military domain into non-military fields such as the economy, technology, information, human mobility, energy, institutions, and values. Supply chains, technological standards, social media spaces, people-to-people exchanges, and energy supply networks are no longer merely economic or social infrastructure. They have become strategic foundations that shape state influence and the international order.

This transformation also calls for a reconsideration of the nature of the Japan-U.S. Alliance. The alliance has traditionally developed with military deterrence at its core. In recent years, however, the security domain itself has become increasingly affected by political polarization and changes of administration within the United States, creating greater medium- to long-term uncertainty. At the same time, non-military domains, including rules-based trade, climate change, human mobility, academic exchange, freedom of speech, media and communications, humanitarian assistance, and global governance, are not issues that recede in importance simply because of a temporary change in government. On the contrary, they are a set of challenges whose importance continues to grow in the international community.

Against this backdrop, the study group “The Deepening of US-Japan Cooperation on ‘Non-Military’ Aspects” examines the future of U.S.-Japan cooperation in non-military domains. The term “non-military” as used here does not simply refer to fields other than the military. Rather, it refers to a broad range of areas that directly affect the formation and maintenance of the international order, including economic networks, human connectivity, energy, the information space, institutional design, and values and norms. In recent years in particular, non-military means, such as economic coercion, competition for technological dominance, information manipulation, and the political use of human mobility, have increasingly become major instruments of interstate competition. In other words, non-military domains are no longer peripheral to security. They are at the very core of it.

China, in particular, has been strengthening its geopolitical and geoeconomic engagement with countries of the Global South, backed by its economic and technological capabilities. At the same time, the United States is seeing a significant decline in the soft power and international trust it has

traditionally enjoyed, through high-tariff policies, unilateralism, and reductions in humanitarian assistance. Meanwhile, even among democratic countries, the foundations of democracy itself are being shaken by social divisions, the spread of conspiracy theories, and the disorder of the information space in the age of social media.

Yet these circumstances do not diminish the importance of U.S.-Japan cooperation in non-military areas. On the contrary, precisely because the security environment is becoming more unstable and uncertainty surrounding the international order is increasing, there is a growing need to strategically strengthen U.S.-Japan cooperation in non-military domains. The international order can no longer be sustained by military power alone. It must be supported in a multilayered manner across multiple domains, including economic networks, people-to-people exchange, the information space, energy cooperation, and institution-building.

From this perspective, this policy recommendation report examines the future of U.S.-Japan cooperation in non-military domains from multiple angles: (1) cognition, the information space, and soft power; (2) human mobility and human connectivity; (3) economic security and supply chains; (4) energy security and decarbonization; (5) social structure, demographic change, and the foundations of the alliance; (6) the stability of the Japan-U.S. Alliance in an age of polarization; and (7) global challenges and Japan's international role.

This report also places importance on deliberately making visible the differences between Japan and the United States in their perceptions of issues and priorities regarding non-military domains. In areas such as trade, climate change, immigration, the information space, and policy toward China, differences exist in the perspectives and areas of emphasis among researchers and practitioners on both sides. Moreover, the information environment in the age of social media and domestic political polarization have, in some respects, further widened these gaps in perception.

This study group does not regard such differences simply as “conflicts” that should be resolved. Rather, it views them as part of the reality currently facing the Japan-U.S. Alliance. On that basis, the study group held discussions that incorporated differing positions and problem awareness. We believe that placing multiple perspectives side by side is itself a step toward building the foundation for sustainable U.S.-Japan cooperation in non-military domains.

(MAESHIMA Kazuhiro, Distinguished Research Fellow, JFIR / Professor, Sophia University; ITO Wakako, Director of Research, JFIR)

Chapter 1 Reconstructing the Cognitive-Information Space and Soft Power

Issue 1. Growing Distrust of the United States in the Global South

Distrust of the United States has been rising across the international community, particularly in the Global South. This trend intensified following Israel's military actions in Gaza, supported by substantial U.S. assistance, and has further accelerated with the Iran war that began in late February 2026 after a preemptive strike by the United States and Israel. Anti-American sentiment is especially strong in Southeast Asia, where many countries have large Muslim populations.

U.S. actions are widely perceived as inconsistent with its stated commitment to the rule of law. While criticizing China's behavior in the South China Sea and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the United States has continued to use force in regions such as the Middle East, often with limited regard for international law. This perceived inconsistency has deepened skepticism in the Global South.

The Iran war has also reinforced the view that U.S. foreign policy lacks predictability. Despite earlier emphasis on non-interventionism and a strategic focus on Latin America, the Trump administration shifted rapidly toward military intervention in Iran. This has raised concerns about unclear strategic priorities and red lines.

As the conflict continues and civilian casualties increase, solidarity among Global South countries is likely to strengthen, along with religious solidarity in Muslim-majority regions. These dynamics may further intensify anti-American sentiment and encourage some countries to strengthen ties with China. Moreover, the case of Iran may lead non-nuclear states to conclude that nuclear deterrence offers protection from external attack, potentially encouraging nuclear proliferation.

If left unaddressed, these trends risk deepening divisions between the United States and the Global South, destabilizing the international order and complicating cooperation on global challenges such as climate change, energy, and food security.

Issue 2. The United States at a Disadvantage in Soft Power Competition with China

Since the start of the Trump administration, U.S. foreign policy has contributed to growing international isolation. Actions such as delays in support for Ukraine, the imposition of tariffs on allies, withdrawal from international institutions, and coercive rhetoric toward partners have weakened trust.

China has responded by strengthening its ties with Europe and presenting itself as a cooperative partner. Public opinion data indicate a sharp decline in global perceptions of the United States

alongside improving views of China. In several key U.S. allies, China is increasingly seen as a more reliable partner, particularly in economic and technological domains¹.

These perceptions are beginning to shape policy. Countries such as Canada and the United Kingdom have expanded economic cooperation with China, and European leaders have also strengthened ties following high-level engagements. This suggests a gradual shift in the global balance of influence.

(Seiko Mimaki, Professor, Doshisha University)

Recommendation 1 Realize Broader-Based University and Research Exchange with the United States

To counter the shift toward China, it is important to recognize that declining trust in the United States stems largely from its own policy choices. A change in approach could therefore help restore U.S. soft power. Among various strategies, revitalizing academic and research exchange is particularly important.

The United States has long attracted global talent not only because of its research funding but also because of its academic freedom. Despite China's increasing investment in research and development, many scholars continue to prefer the United States for its open intellectual environment. Policies that constrain universities risk weakening this advantage.

Joseph S. Nye emphasized that culture, values, and higher education institutions are key sources of national power. He warned that coercive policies and reduced international engagement could erode U.S. soft power over time².

Japan, as a key ally, should promote broader academic exchange with the United States. At the same time, it is necessary to recognize domestic divisions within the United States. Criticism of universities has gained support among some segments of society, reflecting concerns about ideological imbalance and limited accessibility.

To address these dynamics, academic exchange should extend beyond elite institutions and include a wider range of universities, including those associated with conservative intellectual traditions. Expanding engagement across ideological and institutional boundaries will be essential for sustaining long-term cooperation and supporting the recovery of U.S. soft power.

¹"Exclusive: China's Global Favorability Rising, Views of the U.S. Turn Negative," Axios (June 2, 2025), <https://www.axios.com/2025/06/02/china-us-global-opinions>; "Top US allies are turning toward China instead. Blame Trump," Politico (March 15, 2026), <https://www.politico.com/news/2026/03/15/trump-china-europe-closer-ties-00823457>.

²Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "The End of the Long American Century — Trump and the Source of U.S. Power," Foreign Affairs (July/August 2025), <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/end-long-american-century-trump-keohane-nye>.

Recommendation 2 To Prevent the Spread of Conspiracy Theories — Now Is the Time to Reinforce “Freedom of the Media”

Regrettably, the United States today can be said to provide a “perfect breeding ground” for conspiracy theories. There are three reasons for this.

First, political polarization has reached an unprecedented level. This is evident from the trajectory of approval ratings for the second Trump administration over the past year. While President Trump’s overall approval rating has remained low, hovering between 30 and 40 percent, he continues to command nearly 90 percent support among Republican voters, whereas support among Democratic voters does not even reach 10 percent. According to a Gallup survey conducted in August 2025, President Trump’s overall approval rating stood at 40 percent, with 56 percent disapproval. However, the partisan gap was stark: approval among Republican supporters reached 93 percent, while support among Democratic supporters was just 1 percent, a difference of 92 percentage points. Although Gallup has conducted continuous presidential polling for over 80 years since the Truman administration, this marked the lowest level of support ever recorded from opposition party supporters, as well as the largest partisan gap on record.

The second factor underpinning the spread of conspiracy theories is that, alongside deepening social divisions, conservative and liberal forces remain closely balanced. The outcome of the 2024 United States presidential election may not have been fully conveyed with precision in Japan, but the popular vote margin was only 1.48 percentage points, making it the closest election of the century. In the congressional elections held the same year, the Republican Party secured majorities in both chambers, but by extremely narrow margins. In the United States House of Representatives, Republicans held 220 seats to the Democrats’ 215, a difference of just five seats. In the United States Senate, the split was 53 seats for Republicans to 47 for Democrats (including unified parliamentary groups), a margin of six seats. Particularly in the House, such a slim majority has been exceeded only once in the past.

The deadliest war in United States history was the Civil War between the North and the South. Although scientific public opinion polling did not exist at the time, electoral outcomes suggest that today’s ideological polarization and the close balance between opposing camps are even more pronounced. In the 1860 United States presidential election, the Democratic Party split into Northern and Southern factions, each fielding its own candidate. In the popular vote, however, the Republican candidate Abraham Lincoln received 39.7 percent, maintaining a lead over the two Democratic candidates (North: Stephen A. Douglas at 21.5 percent; South: John C. Breckinridge at 14.4 percent) by 3.5 percentage points. At the outset of the 37th United States Congress in 1861, the Republican Party held majorities in both chambers. In the United States House of Representatives, the gap with the Democrats exceeded 60 seats, while in the United States Senate, the margin stood at seven seats.

In other words, it is precisely in the present-day United States that “unprecedented polarization and a closely balanced political landscape” are occurring simultaneously, to a greater extent than even during the country’s most devastating war.

In a society where divisions are deepening amid such parity, neither liberals nor conservatives command overwhelming support. As a result, both sides are more inclined to believe that their own views are unquestionably correct. Rather than accepting outcomes they find unpersuasive, they are more likely to assume that “the other side is orchestrating something,” thereby giving rise to conspiracy theories.

A prime example of this mechanism is the “election fraud” conspiracy theory surrounding the 2020 United States presidential election. Unable to accept the election outcome, claims by the Trump campaign that “mail-in ballots were stolen” spread widely among Republican supporters. Convinced that “our leader could not have lost,” between 70 and 80 percent of Republican voters continued, over an extended period, to believe that the election had been fraudulent, according to various surveys. By contrast, among Democratic supporters, the share who believed that “fraud had occurred” remained at a statistically negligible level.

The third factor underlying the spread of conspiracy theories is the explosive growth of social media. While political information now disseminates instantly and widely, social media platforms exhibit tendencies toward “selective exposure” and “filter bubbles,” whereby users preferentially consume and share information aligned with their existing views. Conservatives are inundated with conservative-leaning content, while liberals are exposed primarily to information tailored to liberal audiences. Amid this information overload, content circulates predominantly within groups that share similar political values, reinforcing homogeneity and creating increasingly insular “echo chambers.”

How, then, can the spread of conspiracy theories be prevented? Unfortunately, there is no simple or definitive solution. The coexistence of “unprecedented polarization and political parity” is, in part, a contingent outcome in the course of political history. That said, there remains room for improvement in how information is disseminated.

In the United States, the media environment is already shifting away from a simple dichotomy of “legacy media” (referred to in Japan as “old media”) versus the internet, toward a hybrid ecosystem in which content from television and newspapers is widely disseminated through social media platforms. In such a context, improving the quality of information produced by television, newspapers, and radio would directly contribute to countering conspiracy theories.

Of greater concern, however, is that the Trump administration has begun tightening its stance toward the press. The handling of issues such as strikes on Iran is a typical example. Not only President Donald Trump, but also Brendan Carr, Chair of the Federal Communications Commission responsible for regulatory oversight, has repeatedly voiced criticism of media coverage. Moreover, there have been suggestions that even the revocation of broadcasting licenses could be considered.

It begins to resemble an authoritarian regime (dictatorship). In such systems, media information is subject to thorough top-down control. The ruling elite monopolizes information, and the media effectively becomes an extension of state power. Reporting is standardized and uniform, conveying only a narrow slice of society. Audiences have little ability to choose among sources and are left with

no option but to interpret a limited set of information, often expansively. Inevitably, this fosters a more passive public and further accelerates the spread of conspiracy theories.

In Japan, compared to the United States, social polarization has not advanced to the same extent, nor is the political landscape characterized by such close parity. Nevertheless, there has been a growing perception that social divisions have been deepening since around the time of last year's House of Councillors election in Japan. One of the underlying factors contributing to this trend is social media, whose use during election periods was deregulated approximately a decade ago.

At the same time, Japan's media organizations have long exhibited a tendency toward self-restraint, often refraining from openly challenging the government. As a result, overt regulatory pressure on the media is less visible; however, it is difficult to regard this as an appropriate balance between media and politics.

To prevent the spread of conspiracy theories, the thorough protection of "freedom of the media" is now required not only in the United States but also in Japan.

*(Kazuhiro Maeshima, Distinguished Research Fellow, Japan Forum on International Relations /
Professor, Sophia University)*

Chapter 2 Strategizing Human Mobility and Human Connectivity

Human mobility is becoming a strategic factor that directly affects interstate relations and the international order, rather than merely a matter of economic activity or social exchange. The movement of highly skilled professionals, researchers, international students, tourists, and workers supports supply chains and the foundations of innovation. At the same time, there are growing cases in which such mobility is used by states as a means of economic coercion and political influence.

In the United States in particular, domestic political polarization over immigration policy has intensified in recent years, creating uncertainty even for legal and strategically important forms of human mobility among allies. China's use of travel restrictions and the adjustment of outbound tourist flows also demonstrate that human mobility itself can become an instrument of geoeconomic competition.

Under these circumstances, Japan and the United States need to reposition human mobility not merely as an issue of domestic policy, but as a foundation that supports the resilience among allied nations and economic security.

(Prepared by JFIR Research Team)

Recommendation 3 Reduce Uncertainty in the Movement of People Between Allied Nations

In recent years, the discourse surrounding immigration policy in the United States has become increasingly polarized, driven by concerns regarding border control and undocumented immigrants. The present political polarization surrounding immigration policy is exerting considerable influence on the policies that regulate the legal movement of people, including engineers and corporate transferees. Consequently, immigration policy has become intricately intertwined with domestic political divisions, engendering systemic uncertainty for allied nations.

This is having a direct impact on U.S.-Japan relations. Companies from Asian allies, including Japanese firms, are deeply integrated into U.S.-based supply chains, particularly in advanced manufacturing and technology sectors. The expansion of operations within the United States necessitates not only capital investment but also the deployment of specialized professionals, such as engineers. Nevertheless, it remains challenging to assert that the U.S. visa system offers an institutional framework that sufficiently supports the deployment of such specialized personnel.

A prime example of this is the 2025 federal raid targeting subcontractors of South Korea's Hyundai Motor Company. While this enforcement action was formally aimed at illegal employment, it drew attention to the fact that even companies from U.S. allies lack the institutional support necessary to facilitate the personnel deployments essential for sustaining investment in the United States. While the U.S. does have visa categories such as the L visa (intracompany transfer), these appear insufficient to address the staffing needs required for globally integrated economic activities. Furthermore, the

political polarization surrounding immigration policy and the resulting rigidity in policy implementation are contributing to the overall tightening of immigration policies and creating uncertainty for the corporate strategies of allied nations.

Given these points, one policy option would be to separate the discussion on the movement of professionals among allied nations from the broader debate on immigration policy and emphasize its economic rationale. The personnel deployment—and, by extension, the movement and relocation of personnel to the United States—associated with investments by companies from allied nations is a matter of strategic economic cooperation. It is important to recognize that treating this as a matter of “immigration policy” creates bottlenecks in supply chains and increases uncertainty regarding investment in the United States.

(Saori Tezuka, Associate Professor, Nanzan University)

Recommendation 4 Reevaluate the Strategic Significance of People’s Mobility and Promote a Framework Based on Reciprocity

From a security perspective, it is imperative to acknowledge that the movement of people can be weaponized. International mobility across sectors such as tourism, education, research, and labor is utilized as a strategic tool for states to exert economic and political influence.

China’s call for its citizens to refrain from traveling abroad clearly illustrates this trend. In November 2025, when Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi made remarks regarding a contingency in Taiwan, Chinese authorities reportedly reacted strongly and urged their citizens to refrain from traveling to Japan. Although these measures are classified as recommendations, given the scale of Chinese overseas travel, they function as unofficial economic sanctions designed to exert pressure on the affected economic region.

A similar pattern was evident in the 2017 dispute between China and South Korea over the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system. In response to South Korea’s decision, China imposed restrictions on group tours, resulting in a sharp decline in Chinese tourists and causing significant economic losses to South Korea’s tourism and retail sectors. The impact was not only immediate but also prolonged, illustrating how dependence on the flow of people from a specific country creates structural vulnerabilities.

Based on these examples, we might consider that countries that have become economically dependent on the flow of tourists, international students, and workers from specific nations have the risk of being exposed to coercive pressure. A further consideration is that this dynamic extends far beyond tourism to encompass ecosystems such as higher education and research, where international students and researchers play a vital role. To avoid such risks, “diversification” and “reciprocity” are essential. First, diversification is essential to mitigate vulnerabilities in international human mobility. It would be desirable to avoid over-reliance on flows of people from any single country, particularly those that have exploited human mobility for economic or political gain. Diversifying source countries enhances resilience and reduces sudden risks. Second, a framework based on reciprocity regarding

human mobility might be considered. The degree of openness to cross-border human mobility could be calibrated based on the level of mutual access and trust between nations. One policy option would be to discuss systems that can minimize potential risks associated with inflows from nations that use cross-border human mobility as strategic tool to exert economic and political gain while establishing preferential human mobility agreements with allies and partners.

(Saori Tezuka, Associate Professor, Nanzan University)

Chapter 3 Redesigning Economic Security and Supply Chains

Economic security has become a central issue in U.S.-Japan cooperation today. Trade, investment, technology, critical minerals, semiconductors, pharmaceuticals, and energy are no longer purely matters of economic activity. They have become strategic foundations that shape a state's bargaining power, crisis response capacity, and even its influence within the international order.

In recent years, as supply chains have become more complex and interdependence has deepened, interstate competition has shifted from mere market competition to competition over networks themselves. Economic interdependence has increasingly come to function not only as a stabilizing force but also as a source of interstate leverage, as seen in economic coercion, export controls, restrictions on critical mineral supplies, and concerns over technology leakage. In addition, other kinds of disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East have further demonstrated the vulnerability of economic ties.

Under these circumstances, what matters is not simple decoupling or self-sufficiency. Rather, a state's strategic advantage depends on what kinds of economic networks it builds, with which countries and regions, and what position it occupies within those networks. For Japan and the United States in particular, it is essential to advance supply chain resilience, diversification, and institutional cooperation through coordination with each other and with other like-minded countries.

(Prepared by JFIR Research Team)

Recommendation 5 Strategic Management of Trade Networks

The nature of economic interdependence, which constitutes one source of bargaining power among states, has changed significantly due to economic globalization. Merchandise trade now accounts for more than 40 percent of global GDP, and when services trade is included the figure approaches 60 percent. As a result, countries are increasingly exposed to indirect impacts transmitted through third countries. In addition, the expansion of global supply chains has created situations in which a disruption in the supply of low-cost components in a distant country can halt domestic final-goods production. In such cases, the damage depends not on the price of the component itself but on the value of the final product, making the impact far greater than might be expected.

Avoiding these risks by moving toward economic self-sufficiency is not a realistic option. Even a country with a large domestic market, such as the United States, would fall behind China in terms of economic efficiency if it turned away from trade while China continued to expand it. We therefore need to move beyond a simple understanding of economic interdependence as a bilateral relationship and instead view it as a network that includes third countries, to be managed strategically in ways that preserve our position. In today's international economy, a country's bargaining power arises not only from bilateral dependence, but also from its position within the wider trade network.

To reduce economic dependence, prevent technology leakage, and address security concerns, some form of decoupling or de-risking from China has become increasingly difficult to avoid. Even if Japan and the United States did not pursue such policies, China would likely continue to diversify and localize production in ways that serve its own interests. However, these policies reduce not only a country's dependence on its partner but also the partner's dependence on that country. Because the United States has long occupied a central position in global trade, restrictions on trade tend to reduce other countries' dependence on the U.S. even more than U.S. dependence on them, thereby asymmetrically weakening U.S. bargaining power.

To address this problem, it is important to strengthen economic ties with third countries and strategically reconfigure the overall trade network. Expanding economic cooperation with friendly countries can help maintain the market size of the allied economic bloc while increasing third countries' dependence on the United States. Although bilateral decoupling between the United States and China inevitably reduces leverage in their dyad, this loss can be offset by strengthening influence over third countries and mobilizing them in policies against China, thereby maintaining influence at the level of the broader network.

To achieve this, it is not enough simply to remove trade barriers with friendly countries through formal agreements; actual trade and investment flows must also increase. Clear policy signaling is essential in this regard. Subsidies, trade insurance, and related policy tools can serve not only to encourage private-sector trade and investment in strategically important countries, but also to send credible signals to private firms, particularly in industries where large-scale foreign direct investment plays a major role.

(Kazutoshi Suzuki, Professor, Sophia University)

Recommendation 6 Strengthen the Institutionalization of Collective Response Frameworks in Economic Security

In recent years, economic coercion and sanctions that exploit cross-border dependence in goods and capital have become increasingly common. In response, concern over economic security has risen rapidly across many countries. Economic security includes both offensive measures, which impose costs on adversarial states, and defensive measures, which strengthen the resilience of one's own economy. In today's international economy, where supply chains are deeply intertwined, multilateral cooperation is indispensable for both. Japan, the United States, and other like-minded countries should therefore accelerate the institutionalization of collective response frameworks for economic security.

In offensive policies such as economic sanctions and export controls, cooperation from third countries is essential to closing loopholes. Without such cooperation, sanctions can easily be circumvented. On the defensive side, strengthening resilience also requires closer economic ties with trusted third countries in order to diversify economic dependence. If adversarial states succeed in drawing third countries into their orbit through coercion or economic inducements, the balance of network power

will shift in their favor and will ultimately be turned against us. Given the competitive nature of this environment, immediate action is required.

Small and medium-sized countries located between the United States and China are particularly vulnerable to economic coercion by major powers, as they tend to be more dependent on trade. The growing number of recent cases of Chinese economic coercion may create demand for a credible framework that can help offset these risks. By explicitly establishing institutions for collective responses to economic coercion, like-minded countries can demonstrate a strong commitment that does not depend on partisan changes in leading governments. This would make it easier for vulnerable smaller states to resist pressure from adversarial powers, thereby expanding the network of like-minded countries and, in turn, strengthening it.

In addition, if such frameworks are given a research cooperation function, they could facilitate joint policy analysis based on statistical data available to customs and financial authorities in participating countries, as well as country-risk information used in trade insurance systems. This would help like-minded countries develop more sophisticated policy responses by making use of the broader participation of advanced economies.

(Kazutoshi Suzuki, Professor, Sophia University)

Recommendation 7 Initiate a U.S.-Japan “Golden Supply Chain Project”

The United States and Japan have both experienced significant economic and societal disruptions in recent years due to insufficient preparedness for global supply chain shocks. The COVID-19 pandemic made clear how vulnerable critical industries are to health crises and natural disasters, revealing gaps in the availability of essential goods ranging from medical supplies to industrial components. At the same time, rising geopolitical tensions have underscored the national security risks associated with concentrated supply chains. China’s willingness to restrict exports of rare earth minerals—targeting Japan in 2010 and the United States in 2025—highlighted the strategic leverage that can be exerted through control of key materials. Most recently, Beijing has threatened to cease exporting critical minerals to twenty Japanese companies, demonstrating that the alliance must act more forcefully to deter Chinese economic coercion.

These developments have made supply chain resilience not only an economic priority for Washington and Tokyo but a strategic imperative. To address this shared challenge, the United States and Japan should jointly establish a new bilateral or multilateral resilience initiative focused on identifying and mitigating critical vulnerabilities. As an initial step, the two governments could develop a coordinated assessment of high-risk sectors in which both countries remain heavily dependent on unstable or concentrated supply chains. Priority areas should include rare earth magnets essential for defense and clean energy technologies; pharmaceutical ingredients, where global production remains highly centralized; semiconductors, which constitute the backbone of advanced manufacturing and military systems; and energy supplies, which underpin industrial activity and national security.

Building on this assessment, the two countries should collaborate closely—and selectively—with international partners to strengthen supply chain resilience across each domain. Australia, Canada, and Indonesia represent natural partners for diversifying supplies of critical minerals. India and European partners could contribute to establishing alternative production pathways for pharmaceutical ingredients, reducing reliance on single-country sources. Taiwan, South Korea, and the Netherlands are essential counterparts in securing semiconductor value chains, from fabrication to lithography equipment.

Each of these sectors will require a unique coalition of like-minded partners, but all efforts could be anchored by U.S.–Japan leadership. To launch this agenda, Washington and Tokyo should announce a new joint resilience initiative and establish a formal bilateral working group dedicated to assessing risks, coordinating policy responses, and mobilizing partners. By acting together, the United States and Japan can enhance their own security and economic stability while contributing to a more resilient and reliable global supply chain system.

(Zack Cooper, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute)

Recommendation 8 Cooperate to Bolster Resilience Across the Entire Critical Minerals Supply Chain

To address their vulnerabilities to disruptions in critical mineral supplies, Japan and the United States must cooperate to enhance resilience across the entire supply chain end-to-end, from mining and separation to derivative products such as batteries, magnets, and catalysts. Bilateral coordination is already underway with the October 2025 U.S.-Japan Framework for Securing the Supply of Critical Minerals and Rare Earths through Mining and Processing and the March 2026 U.S.-Japan Action Plan for Critical Minerals Supply Chain Resilience. However, effectively bolstering supply chain resilience is a long-term endeavor, so sustained U.S.-Japan cooperation is necessary to build upon these early steps to jointly assess vulnerabilities, identify solutions, and finance projects through grants, guarantees, loans, equity, and offtake arrangements. Cooperation with the private sector is also essential.

In addition to deepening bilateral cooperation on critical minerals supply chains, the U.S. and Japan must also work together to build broader international coalitions to address this issue. The two countries are part of the new Forum on Resource Geostategic Engagement (FORGE) announced in February 2026 as a successor to the Minerals Security Partnership. By aligning their interests and working together within these minilateral groupings, the U.S. and Japan can leverage their respective resources and find more effective ways to diversify supply chains and enhance resilience. Given its relatively long experience trying to diversify its own rare earths supply chain since the early 2010s, Japan has valuable insights to share with the U.S. and other countries about best practices and challenges.

(Kristi Govella, Associate Professor, University of Oxford / Senior Adviser and Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies)

Chapter 4 Integrated Strategy for Energy Security and Decarbonization

Energy is a strategic domain where security, the economy, the environment, and technology intersect, and its importance in U.S.-Japan cooperation has grown in recent years. A stable and affordable energy supply is a foundation for industrial activity and citizens' daily lives. At the same time, dependence on fossil fuels and the concentration of supply in specific regions create vulnerabilities to geopolitical crises and market fluctuations. The recent escalation of tensions in the Middle East and the surge in energy prices caused by the Iran war have once again highlighted the limits of traditional energy security.

On the other hand, cooperation between Japan and the United States that places "climate action" itself at the forefront has become increasingly difficult, partly due to political polarization within the United States. However, from the perspectives of containing energy prices, stabilizing supply, and strengthening supply chains, cooperation on renewable energy, next-generation nuclear power, LNG, storage batteries, and critical minerals has strategic importance that goes beyond climate action alone.

Under these circumstances, what matters is not to view energy security and decarbonization as opposing goals, but to reframe them as an integrated strategic agenda. U.S.-Japan cooperation can become practical and sustainable only by linking supply stability, price containment, emissions reduction, technological cooperation, and economic security.

(Prepared by JFIR Research Team)

Recommendation 9 Position Energy Decarbonization as a Measure for "Energy Security" and Promote Japan-U.S. Cooperation

In the United States, political polarization has intensified, and climate change and energy decarbonization have become contentious issues rooted in conflicting political values. Given President Trump's skepticism toward climate change, his administration has been pushing for expanded domestic fossil fuel development and the halt of large-scale offshore wind power projects, making it difficult under current circumstances to advance Japan-U.S. cooperation under the explicit banner of "climate change action." Furthermore, pursuing cooperation that reflects a specific policy stance in areas where positions differ sharply between administrations is not desirable from the perspective of sustainable Japan-U.S. cooperation.

On the other hand, since the military strikes against Iran launched by the United States and Israel on February 28, 2026, the Strait of Hormuz has been effectively blockaded, giving rise to what IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol has described as "the greatest energy crisis in history," driven by shortages of oil and natural gas. Even if passage through the Strait of Hormuz resumes, it will take considerable time for distribution to recover to previous levels. Moreover, there are assessments that repairing Qatar's LNG export facilities — among the largest in the world and among those that sustained damage — could take up to five years, raising concerns that the disruption may be prolonged.

The IEA defines energy security as "the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price." The current turmoil in energy markets is having a serious impact on energy security worldwide, including in Japan and the United States. For Japan, which depends on the Middle East for approximately 95 percent of its crude oil imports, its traditional energy security policies — centered on defending sea lanes and maintaining friendly relations with oil-producing countries — are insufficient to address a crisis of this nature.

In the United States, even before the start of military operations against Iran, rising electricity prices alongside power shortages caused by aging infrastructure and the rapid proliferation of data centers had already become serious challenges. At the same time, the adoption of renewable energy has been on the rise. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), 17 of the 22 states where wind and solar power accounted for an above-average share of electricity generation recorded below-average electricity rates in June 2025. It is also noteworthy that 13 of the states actively embracing renewable energy are Republican-leaning states where Trump won the 2024 presidential election — a fact that illustrates how renewable energy is gaining acceptance across the political spectrum.

In Japan, rising energy prices have been compounding the problem of raw material shortages for petrochemical products such as naphtha, placing strain on manufacturing supply chains. From an energy security perspective, there is an urgent need to pursue the goal of securing affordable energy by reducing dependence on fossil fuels and expanding the use of renewable energy sources that require no transportation. At the same time, it is desirable to advance practical Japan-U.S. cooperation that incorporates energy decarbonization as a long-term policy goal, with a realistic eye toward the time horizons involved in policy implementation.

(Michiyo Obi, Professor, Nanzan University)

Recommendation 10 Japan Should Pursue Cooperation with the United States, with Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction as Its Primary Goal, While Upholding Multilateralism

Despite more than three decades of climate action undertaken under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), global warming continues unabated. In 2024, the global average temperature rise exceeded 1.5°C for the first time, reaching 1.55°C. The UNFCCC has 198 member states, and the Paris Agreement — adopted at the Convention's Conference of the Parties — has 195 signatories, forming an international framework in which nearly every nation participates. Nevertheless, the current Trump administration in its second term has announced its withdrawal from both the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. Meanwhile, the EU, which has been actively pursuing climate action, has developed the "EU Taxonomy" to define environmentally sustainable economic activities, and is spearheading the establishment of international rules applicable to businesses.

For Japan to exercise international leadership in this environment, what matters is the extent to which it has actually reduced greenhouse gas emissions and advanced energy decarbonization in practice. Japan's track record on emissions reductions has been insufficient, however, and its reluctance to

phase out coal-fired power plants has further limited its influence in the international arena. Underlying this situation is the observation that the Japanese government has long treated decarbonization not as a policy goal in its own right, but as a means of promoting industrial development and technological innovation. Japan's energy decarbonization (net-zero) plan relies in no small part on technologies that have yet to reach commercialization, including CCS (carbon capture and storage), CCUS (carbon capture, utilization and storage), hydrogen, ammonia, and perovskite solar cells. Furthermore, among the investment and financing commitments to the United States announced through March 2026 are large-scale gas-fired power generation projects in Ohio and crude oil export infrastructure projects in Texas; decarbonizing gas-fired power plants will require the deployment of clean hydrogen — which produces no carbon dioxide at the point of generation — as well as CCUS.

In the renewable energy sector, meanwhile, costs have fallen dramatically on a global scale, particularly for solar and onshore wind power generation and battery storage. Compared to fossil fuels, solar power has become approximately 40 percent cheaper and onshore wind more than 50 percent cheaper, while the cost of battery energy storage systems (BESS) has declined by more than 90 percent since 2010. Against this backdrop, renewable energy generation surpassed coal-fired generation for the first time on record in the first half of 2025. This signifies that the growth in renewable energy has outpaced the growth in electricity demand — a threshold commonly referred to as "Critical Velocity" — meaning that the surplus of renewable energy beyond demand growth can now substitute for fossil fuel-based electricity generation.

While advanced technology development is indispensable to achieving decarbonization, the fact that global warming shows no sign of slowing demands that Japan explicitly prioritize decarbonization as a core policy objective, actively deploy proven energy efficiency and decarbonization technologies, and steadily build up near-term emissions reductions. With regard to relations with the United States, it is not realistic to pursue cooperation with the current administration — which prioritizes fossil fuel development — under an explicit decarbonization agenda. However, given that renewable energy deployment is expanding within the United States as well, bilateral cooperation in areas that contribute to decarbonization, including energy efficiency technologies, is entirely feasible. As a party to both the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement, it is important for Japan to demonstrate, through its investment projects in the United States, a clear commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

(Michiyo Obi, Professor, Nanzan University)

Recommendation 11 Undertake a U.S.-Japan “Golden Energy Project”

If Japan wishes to remain a preferred U.S. partner under the Trump administration, it will need to demonstrate its value through concrete, near-term economic benefits. Energy is the most promising domain for such cooperation. Japan is heavily reliant on imported energy—87 percent of its supply in 2023—while the United States has become the world’s largest producer of oil and gas. This creates a natural opportunity for mutually beneficial arrangements that diversify Japan’s supply chains while strengthening U.S. energy exports.

Japan's energy landscape underscores the urgency of greater resilience. As of 2024, Japan relied on oil for 37 percent of its energy supply, followed by coal, natural gas, nuclear power, and renewables. Most oil imports originate in the Middle East, traveling through vulnerable chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait and South China Sea. Disruptions caused by regional instability, reduced U.S. presence, or broader geopolitical crises could cut off vital supplies. Tokyo is acutely aware of these risks, having been forced to reconfigure its energy portfolio after the 2011 Fukushima disaster and the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Two avenues offer promise. First, deepening cooperation on U.S. liquefied natural gas exports could secure stable supplies for Japan while delivering immediate economic wins for the United States. Second, enhanced bilateral collaboration on advanced nuclear technologies, especially small modular reactors, could provide Japan with reliable, disaster-resilient energy sources and create new commercial opportunities for both nations. Some progress has already been made in bilateral cooperation in both areas, but a major initiative is needed to capture President Trump's imagination and attention.

Together, LNG expansion and joint leadership in next-generation nuclear power can strengthen economic interdependence, bolster energy security, and provide the practical economic benefits the Trump administration values. In a period of shifting U.S. priorities, these initiatives can help anchor the U.S.–Japan alliance and ensure it remains robust amid a rapidly evolving strategic landscape.

(Zack Cooper, Senior Fellow, American Enterprise Institute)

Recommendation 12 Launch New Initiatives to Address Energy Security Threats

The U.S. and Japan should leverage their complementarity as a major energy exporter and a major energy importer to strengthen their mutual energy security. The Iran conflict has given new urgency to alleviating the risks posed by dependence on energy from the Middle East and the Strait of Hormuz. While Japan is 94 percent dependent on the Middle East—and 93 percent dependent on the Strait of Hormuz—for oil imports, the U.S. is the world's largest exporter of oil and liquified natural gas (LNG), offering Japan the benefit of transit route diversification.

The U.S. and Japan should pursue multiple forms of energy cooperation and engage the private sector, which has the potential to benefit both countries. For example, Prime Minister Takaichi proposed a joint project to stockpile U.S. crude oil in Japan at her meeting with President Donald Trump in March 2026, and it has been suggested that Japan could invest to increase Alaskan crude oil production. In addition, joint projects related to LNG and nuclear energy have already been selected as part of Japan's framework to invest \$550 billion in the U.S. under the 2025 U.S.-Japan trade deal. Other forms of clean energy cooperation were actively pursued during the Biden administration and offer additional avenues to bolster energy cooperation. By pursuing multiple types of energy cooperation, the U.S. and Japan can strengthen their energy security across multiple dimensions while also creating opportunities for their companies.

These initiatives should also be expanded to include additional countries where possible. For example, Japan's Partnership on Wide Energy and Resources Resilience (POWER) Asia framework announced in April 2026 recognizes and responds to the vulnerability of Southeast Asian countries to energy disruptions. This initiative attempts to leverage Japanese organizations such as the Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and Nippon Export and Investment Insurance (NEXI) to help these countries bolster their energy security. Additional support and engagement from the U.S. to leverage its own strengths would provide an important complement to POWER Asia and likely result in additional commercial opportunities for U.S. companies that are well-positioned to meet the growing energy needs of Southeast Asia.

(Kristi Govella, Associate Professor, University of Oxford / Senior Adviser and Japan Chair, Center for Strategic and International Studies)

Chapter 5 Social Structure, Demographics, and the Sustainability of the Alliance

Japan is at the forefront of the global trend in population aging, placing it on the frontlines of dealing with the associated challenges: a declining workforce, escalating healthcare costs, and mounting pension obligations. The United States is following in Japan's footsteps, and while it is still some distance behind, strains on labor markets, healthcare financing, and retirement security are already beginning to build. For both countries, these demographic shifts will also carry political consequences. As populations grow older, politicians are likely to face increasing incentives to cater to the policy priorities and preferences of older cohorts at the expense of the young. In both countries, younger citizens increasingly express a sense of exclusion from government shaped by and for older citizens. Population aging is thus likely to have widespread consequences not only for economic vitality and fiscal sustainability, but also for the democratic resilience that underpins the long-term foundation of the alliance. Yet while aspects of this shared challenge have received attention in academic and policy circles, aging and its consequences have not yet been elevated to the formal bilateral agenda. This represents a missed opportunity given how much the two countries can learn from one another.

(Charles McClean, Assistant Professor, Yale University)

Recommendation 13 Establish a Bilateral Working Group on Aging Societies

Despite the shared nature of these challenges, both the United States and Japan have tended to treat population aging as primarily a domestic issue, one managed largely within domestic-facing bureaucracies rather than bilateral coordination. Establishing a bilateral working group on aging societies would elevate aging to the alliance agenda and create a formal channel for policy exchange.

This working group should be housed under an appropriate existing bilateral coordination mechanism and should bring agencies not typically part of alliance discussions (such as those tackling health, welfare, labor, and local government affairs) into the bilateral infrastructure. Its mandate should be broad to reflect the wide set of challenges that accompany aging: from healthcare sustainability and workforce adaptation to pension reform, age-friendly community design, and youth political participation.

As a first step, the working group should produce a joint policy assessment of how population aging is affecting the economy, healthcare systems, labor markets, and democratic participation in both countries, to be completed within its first year. This assessment should then serve as the basis for continued exchange. Japan has been confronting these pressures for decades, including through healthcare delivery reform, efforts to ensure the pension system remains sustainable, community-based integrated care, and age-friendly urban design. The United States has a different set of experiences it can draw on, including technological innovation in service delivery, telemedicine, and approaches to integrating immigrant populations into local communities. Neither country has solved

these challenges on its own, but regular bilateral exchange could help both governments identify practical reforms in healthcare, workforce adaptation, and democratic participation across generations.

(Charles McClean, Assistant Professor, Yale University)

Recommendation 14 Deepen City-to-City Partnerships from Cultural Exchange to Policy Collaboration

Local governments are where many of the pressures of population aging are felt most directly. Municipalities must keep services running even as their populations shrink, provide care for older residents, and find ways to keep younger, working-age residents from leaving. Japan has been dealing with these problems for longer, and some local governments have experimented with responses that may be useful elsewhere, from compact city planning and community-based elder care to new ways of involving young people in decision-making processes. These experiences could offer models for American communities that are beginning to face similar pressures. U.S. cities and towns, meanwhile, may have lessons to offer their Japanese counterparts on immigration, diversity, and the use of technology in local service delivery.

The United States and Japan already share over 440 sister city relationships, more than any other country pair. Most of these partnerships, however, have focused primarily on student exchange, cultural visits, and ceremonial ties. That work is of course valuable in its own right, but the agenda for these relationships can be expanded to include practical policy exchange.

Both governments, working through existing sister city organizations, should pilot a “Policy Partnership” track. The initial focus should be demographic change, though the model could be expanded to other issues affecting local governments in both countries. The track could support municipal staff exchanges focused on specific policy problems, joint pilot projects on topics such as age-friendly community design or youth civic engagement, and expanded use of existing bilateral grant programs to fund local policy collaboration.

Many of the most difficult challenges facing both countries are being managed first by local governments. Strengthening the subnational layer of the alliance would help to build more durable ties between communities in the two countries while also generating practical lessons for national policymakers in Tokyo and Washington. A Policy Partnership track would create a new channel for local governments to contribute to the alliance in areas that directly shape citizens’ daily lives.

(Charles McClean, Assistant Professor, Yale University)

Chapter 6 The U.S.-Japan Alliance in an Era of Polarization — Securing Its Strategic Stability

The alliance between the United States and Japan remains a cornerstone of security and economic stability in the Indo-Pacific. As the geopolitical landscape grows increasingly complex, however, both nations face the challenge of managing this critical partnership in a climate of extreme U.S. polarization. Shifts in public sentiment, trade disputes, and debates over burden-sharing have introduced friction into the relationship. To secure the future of the alliance, both the United States and Japanese governments must look beyond partisan rhetoric and implement data-driven policies that reflect the shared interests binding the two nations together.

(Paul Sracic, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute)

Recommendation 15 Recommendations for the U.S. Government — Leverage the Strong, Quiet Bipartisan Consensus on Japan

For the United States, managing the alliance requires projecting stability to an anxious ally while accurately interpreting domestic public opinion. The arguments of Vanderbilt University Philosophy professors Scott Aikin and Robert Talisse give us hope that this stability does in fact exist. The authors highlight a critical distinction between “political polarization”—a natural divergence of policy preferences between political parties—and “belief polarization,” where echo chambers push citizens toward ideological extremes. Why is this important? In the U.S., survey response rates have plummeted from 70 percent in the 1980s to less than 10 percent today. Poll respondents are increasingly likely to be a self-selecting minority of highly engaged ideological extremists. Non-response bias can thus create an illusion that the American public is hopelessly fractured on, for example foreign policy, potentially leading policymakers to adopt extreme postures that alienate allies.

U.S. officials must recognize that, despite deep belief polarization among the most politically engaged, there is a robust, quiet bipartisan consensus regarding Japan. According to a 2026 Gallup poll, 85 percent of Americans hold a favorable view of Japan, making it one of the highest-rated allied nations. Furthermore, a late 2024 Chicago Council on Global Affairs survey found that 74 percent of Americans, including identical majorities of Democrats, Republicans, and Independents, believe the U.S.-Japan security relationship strengthens American national security. If we assume that pollsters are relying on respondents more likely to hold extreme beliefs, then this consensus is even more notable.

To capitalize on this consensus, the U.S. government should adopt the following policies:

1. Institutionalize Bilateral Commitments

To reassure Tokyo that the alliance is immune to electoral volatility, the U.S. executive branch and Congress should work to transition key bilateral agreements from executive actions to binding legislative frameworks. This will signal enduring structural stability to Japanese policymakers, insulating the relationship from shifting political winds.

2. Promote Data-Driven Public Diplomacy

U.S. leaders must actively communicate the bipartisan nature of American support directly to the Japanese public. Public diplomacy efforts should focus on the data, emphasizing that the American electorate overwhelmingly views Japan as a crucial partner. By highlighting the gap between highly publicized partisan debates and the actual statistical consensus on the Indo-Pacific, Washington can help mitigate Japanese anxieties regarding U.S. reliability.

3. Separate Trade from Security

While the emerging concept of economic security links supply chains and national security concerns, the U.S. must avoid rhetorically linking defense commitments to economic trade disputes. The strategic value of the U.S.-Japan security umbrella is broadly recognized by the American public; leveraging it for short-term economic gains undermines long-term deterrence and fuels distrust in Tokyo.

(Paul Sracic, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute)

Recommendation 16 Recommendations for the Japanese Government — Strengthen Japan’s Position and Devise Policies to Stabilize the Alliance

For Japan, the primary challenge is to not overreact to a perceived crisis of confidence in American reliability. Recent public opinion polls in Japan paint a stark picture of public anxiety. A 2025 Asahi Shimbun survey revealed that 77 percent of Japanese respondents doubted Washington would defend Japan in a military crisis. Similarly, a 2025 Yomiuri Shimbun poll found that only 22 percent of respondents expressed trust in the United States.

Japanese policymakers must be careful not to misinterpret U.S. domestic political polarization as a complete abandonment of foreign policy commitments. Highly engaged U.S. partisans may dominate the domestic news cycle, but neither political nor belief polarization has undermined support for the alliance among a large majority of the U.S. public. Japan must base its policies on long-term strategic realities and an accurate view of the data, rather than short-term public anxiety.

To strengthen its position and stabilize the alliance, the Japanese government should consider the following recommendations:

1. Broaden Diplomatic Engagement

To hedge against polarization within the U.S. executive branch, Japan must decentralize its diplomatic outreach. Tokyo should significantly expand engagement with U.S. state governors, local legislatures, and private sector leaders. By fostering deep economic and cultural ties at the sub-national level—such as foreign direct investment in key U.S. manufacturing states—Japan can build a resilient network of American stakeholders who will advocate for the alliance regardless of the political climate in Washington.

2. Pursue Complementary Autonomy

The Japanese public is increasingly prioritizing self-defense capabilities. The government should continue its historic increases in defense spending, framing this not as a distancing from the U.S., but

as the development of a more balanced partnership. By shouldering a larger share of the regional security burden, Japan can neutralize U.S. domestic criticisms regarding burden-sharing while simultaneously satisfying the Japanese public's desire for greater strategic autonomy.

3. Invest in Joint Policy-Oriented Polling

There is a severe lack of nuanced polling regarding foreign policy in both nations. The Japanese government should fund independent, comparative research to accurately gauge public sentiment on specific issues like regional security and economic integration. Addressing non-response bias and understanding exactly where U.S. and Japanese public attitudes diverge will allow Tokyo to craft more effective, targeted diplomatic strategies rather than operating on assumptions generated by polarized media ecosystems.

The U.S.-Japan relationship is securely anchored in shared strategic interests, mutual economic benefits, and shared democratic values. By recognizing the distortions of belief polarization, relying on verifiable public opinion data, and institutionalizing cooperation at multiple levels of government, Washington and Tokyo can ensure the alliance not only survives the current era of political division but emerges more resilient and adaptable for the future.

(Paul Sracic, Nonresident Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute)

Chapter 7 Global Challenges and Japan's International Role

We are currently experiencing great geopolitical uncertainty, and Japan's role as an international leader is critical. Since it adopted its "Peace Constitution" in 1946, just a year after the creation of the United Nations, it has charted an alternative model of economic development and international diplomacy. Always in close cooperation with the United States, Japan has cultivated multilateral networks to support the spread of peace and prosperity across the planet.

In this current moment, as the world faces wars in Europe and the Middle East, the chaos of another oil crisis, and climate crises wreaking havoc on vulnerable communities, Japan has served as a beacon of hope and can provide the quiet, collaborative, steady leadership that the world needs. As Mireya Solís carefully documented in her 2023 book, *Japan's Quiet Leadership*, Japan has developed its current international leadership role slowly over many decades.

No person or country is perfect, and Japan struggles with many of the same challenges facing countries across the globe—an aging population, urban-rural income gaps, nationalist sentiments stoking political polarization, disengaged youth, sexism, persistent environmental injustices, and growing public debt. And yet, citizens in the country continue to enjoy exceptionally long and healthy lifespans, safe cities, and beautiful countrysides. Japanese companies both large and small are innovative and successful, generating economic, social, and environmental benefits enjoyed by millions. Unlike many of its allies in Europe and North America, who are currently focused on war, Japan is in an excellent position to lead a global effort to promote peace and prosperity.

(Mary Alice Haddad, Professor, Wesleyan University)

Recommendation 17 Continue to Support and Enhance the U.S.-Japan Alliance

For more than half a century the U.S.-Japan alliance has served as the foundation of binational cooperation between the two countries and an important anchor for peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific. In spite of rising security tensions and an extraordinarily diverse set of political and economic regimes, the Asia-Pacific region has been able to prosper thanks in large part to its relatively stable international security. According to World Bank data, regional GDP has risen more than threefold in this century alone, from \$8 trillion in 2000 to \$32 trillion in 2024,¹ with per capita PPP rising from \$8,000 in 2000 to more than \$24,000 in 2024.² The United States has also benefitted, with its own

¹World Bank Data, East Asia & the Pacific GDP,
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD?locations=Z4>.

²World Bank Data, East Asia & the Pacific PPP,
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.KD?end=2025&locations=Z4&start=2000&view=chart>.

GDP rising from \$10 trillion in 2000 to \$29 trillion today,³ its per capita PPP rising from \$36,000 in 2000 to \$86,000 in 2024.⁴

These broad economic numbers only hint at how much the U.S.–Japan Alliance has contributed to shared peace and prosperity. From grassroots exchange of students to high-level scientific and policy collaborations, U.S.-Japanese cooperation has generated benefits for their own citizens and for the world. To take just one example, in 2025 the Tokyo Metropolitan Government and New York City signed a Memorandum of Understanding to co-develop advanced sustainable urban infrastructure and share their findings with others. Some of the early innovations and findings to emerge from this collaboration were shared during the Global City Network for Sustainability (G-NETS) Leaders’ Summit held in Tokyo in April 2026. Bringing together leaders of more than fifty cities, the innovations co-developed by New York and Tokyo have the potential to improve the lives of hundreds of millions of people located all over the planet.

(Mary Alice Haddad, Professor, Wesleyan University)

Recommendation 18 Enhance Japan’s Role as Convener of International Efforts to Develop Coordinated, Collaborative Solutions to Common Global Problems

Japan has steadily built its capacity and reputation for international cooperation. Often this has been through United Nations related frameworks (e.g., the UN Peacebuilding Commission, Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, Kyoto Protocol, etc.). Japan can enhance its role in convening and organizing international efforts to develop collaborative solutions to global problems.

The Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) serves as an example of how Japan has exhibited global leadership by convening and coordinating the development of collaborative solutions to global problems. In the most recent conference, held in Yokohama in August 2025, sessions focused on investment more than aid, urban dynamism rather than decline, climate resilience, higher education partnerships and other areas where mutually beneficial learning and cooperation are occurring.⁵

At a moment when the international geopolitical system is experiencing seismic shifts and unprecedented uncertainty, Japan offers a model of global leadership that is collaborative and cooperative. With a focus on sustaining the U.S.-Japan Alliance and enhancing its role as global convener of collaborative innovation, Japan can expand its role as a global leader contributing to the construction of a peaceful, prosperous world for everyone.

³World Bank Data, United States GDP,
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=US>.

⁴World Bank Data, United States per capita PPP,
<https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.PP.CD?locations=US>.

⁵World Bank Group, TICAD 9 session summaries and links,
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/events/2025/08/20/ticad9>.

(Mary Alice Haddad, Professor, Wesleyan University)

