

Ambassador Yamada, Reps. Kim & Bera See U.S.-Japan Alliance as Key to Peace

WASHINGTON, DC — With tensions rising in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region playing an increasingly important role in global trade and security, The Ripon Society and Franklin Center for Global Policy Exchange hosted a breakfast discussion yesterday morning focused on the alliance between the United States and Japan and why this alliance will be so critical in the years ahead.

The discussion featured three leaders who are actively working to shape and strengthen the relationship between the two countries. The leaders included: Shigeo Yamada, who serves as Japan’s Ambassador to the United States; U.S. Rep. Young Kim (R-CA-40), who Chairs the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Indo-Pacific; and, U.S. Rep. Ami Bera (D-CA-6), who serves as the Subcommittee’s Ranking Member.

Ambassador Yamada, who assumed his post this past December and is a longtime veteran of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opened the discussion by talking about Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s visit to Washington this past April and his historic address before a Joint Session of Congress.

“That visit clearly demonstrated the Japan-U.S. relationship is stronger than ever,” Yamada stated. “Our partnership has become a global partnership based on a strong sense of trust between our two leaders, but more importantly between our two peoples. The main message of the Prime Minister’s address to the Joint Meeting of the Congress was that U.S. leadership in the world is very much indispensable in ensuring peace and stability in the international community. But the United States doesn’t have to hold the burden alone. Japan will stand with the United States shoulder-to-shoulder to meet various challenges we face together in the international community.”

Yamada – whose very first posting as a diplomat was as a Second Secretary in Washington in 1989 and has also had postings in London and Beijing over the course of his career – then proceeded to articulate both the ways in which and the areas where Japan is contributing to global military and economic security.

“In the Pacific,” the Ambassador noted, “Japan is doubling our defense spending. Beyond our region, Japan is the strongest non-NATO supporter for the Ukrainian people’s effort to defend themselves. And one more important thing — during the Prime Minister’s visit was the first-ever trilateral meeting between Japan, the U.S., and the Philippines. As the Pacific region faces various challenges, countries in the region are working together and deepening strategic cooperation among themselves through multilateral frameworks. There has been a Japan, U.S., and Korea trilateral, a Japan, U.S., and Australia trilateral, and the core cooperation between Japan, U.S., Australia, and India. The fact that Japan and the United States are involved in most of these multilateral frameworks in the Pacific is a clear testament to the central role our alliance plays in regional peace and stability.”

“This very strong government-to-government relationship between our two countries is supported by a strong economic partnership between our countries. Japan has been the largest foreign investor in the United States for the past five years. Japanese companies are operating



Ambassador Yamada, Rep. Young Kim, and Rep. Ami Bera

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with about one million American workers, and Japanese companies are contributing to local communities and working very closely with local governments, thereby fostering the very important sense of trust between our two peoples.”

“We are indispensable partners, not only in matters of security, but in matters of the economy and the cross section of those two — meaning economic security. And I think we need to further strengthen our cooperation in economic security matters to ensure our competitiveness into the future.”

Kim agreed, and opened her remarks by discussing her role as Chair of the Indo-Pacific Subcommittee and the importance of Indo-Pacific trade to the people she represents back home.

“I represent an area which is very close to the St. Pedro Port Complex,” she said, referring to the seaport which is located 25 miles south of Los Angeles and is recognized as the busiest in the Western Hemisphere. “We handle about 30 to 40 percent of the imports coming from the Indo-Pacific region. California alone handles about 40 percent of the exports going to the Indo-Pacific. So it is

a critical region.

“The Indo-Pacific is not only the largest, but it’s also a very high-priority theater for the United States. We see a lot of challenges in the South China Sea. We see Xi Jinping becoming more brazen and bold. He’s inching closer and closer to achieving his ambition regarding Taiwan.”

Kim noted that she visited the Indo-Pacific region last year as part of a bipartisan delegation that was led by House Foreign Affairs Chairman Michael McCaul (R-TX-10) and also included her colleague from California, Congressman Bera. During the visit, she said, they flew over the South China Sea, where they saw ships from the Chinese Coast Guard harassing ships from the Coast Guard of the Philippines. The delegation also met with Prime Minister Kishida, where they discussed the importance of the U.S.-Japan relationship and the challenges facing both countries in the coming years.

“They’re really building up their military presence around the region,” Kim said of the Chinese. “So we’ve got a lot of work to do. The stability of the Korean Peninsula is also threatened, and that’s where we need this relationship that we have built.”

Bera echoed his colleague from California, and opened his remarks by talking about the decision by the United States to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017 and the impact he believes it had on Indo-Pacific trade and security in the ensuing years.

“I actually think if we had gotten TPP across the finish line, it would’ve changed the economic framework in the region,” he stated. “I think that was more than just about economics. It was about strategy, and about bringing countries together. I think it would’ve forced China to rethink the direction was going, that’s not going to happen right now.

“So in that context, the Ambassador talked about the important frameworks that are taking place with Japan and the United States in the center – between the U.S., Japan, and Korea; the U.S., Japan, and the Philippines; the Quad Coalition; and, the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India. I would include AUKUS in there, as well. It is no small thing that U.S. Navy vessels will be doing some repair and maintenance work in Japan. Those types of deals are not very easy to reach. But it starts to bring us together as nations in the region.”

“We have to stand together. The goal is not to be aggressive — it’s to maintain the status quo. But you have to do it through strength. And I think that’s the backbone of the U.S.-Japan partnership — economically, but also geopolitically and strategically.”

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