



## NPI Special Seminar on October 16, 2023 Keynote Address by NPI Chairman Aso Taro “The U.S. Presidential Election and Economic Security Policy” (summary)

Aso Taro

Chairman  
Nakasone Peace Institute

It is not necessary to reiterate that the United States is Japan’s only ally. The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed on September 8, 1951 by my grandfather Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru. On the same day, the San Francisco Peace Treaty was concluded, which marked Japan’s return to the international community. The following year, on April 28, 1952, the Treaty officially came into force. It was revised in 1960 and remains in effect to this day. Indeed, the alliance has continued for more than 70 years.

In his book “The Origins of Alliances,” Harvard University Professor Stephen M. Walt presents the “balance of threat theory,” which states that the alliance behavior of states is determined by the threat that they perceive from other states. From this perspective, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was originally formed through discussions between Japan and the U.S. to counter the threat of the expansion of communism after World War II. Some argue that the significance of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty has declined after the end of the Cold War, but such an argument is incorrect.

I remember that many people used to say that there would no longer be war in Europe, but the reality is that Ukraine is currently being invaded by Russia. There is also China, which, backed by its rapid economic growth, is transforming its economic power into military power and demonstrating its hegemonic ambitions. In addition, North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons and launch missiles. We face the threat of these authoritarian states, and Japan is bordered by all three countries.

It is also true that these authoritarian states pose not only a purely military threat; they also weaponize their economic activities, posing a threat that Geneva Conventions and other international wartime laws did not envision.

In light of these international circumstances, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is clearly effective. The threats we face have not diminished, and the Treaty is extremely effective in responding to threats in other forms. With the recognition of the Japan-U.S. alliance as a foundation, it is becoming increasingly important for Japan and the United States to enhance coordination and cooperation in a broad sense to respond to these challenges effectively.

I believe the Treaty is of critical significance for both countries and in fact for the international community as a whole. We have had to make significant changes in our security policy in the region surrounding Japan to cope with an environment different from that of 60 or 70 years ago. For this

reason, in December 2022 it was decided to double defense spending to 2% of GDP. In the recent defense white paper, the possession of counterattack capability was included. In spite of this major change, there have not been any disturbances or demonstrations around the Prime Minister's Office. We believe that this policy has been understood by many citizens.

Furthermore, we are witnessing the reality that our policy of a "completely free market economy" raises security concerns, and we must take our economic security policy seriously. In May 2022, the Economic Security Promotion Act was enacted.

These efforts must have contributed to the recognition that Japan is dependable in the eyes of the U.S. Furthermore, Japan has, for example, the capability to maintain U.S. naval vessels, which is well understood, positively evaluated, and appreciated by experts, including technical officers. Firm recognition of these somewhat lesser-known facts in both countries is, in my opinion, important for further strengthening the Japan-U.S. relationship.

I am aware that there are sometimes arguments that simply refer to these efforts as Japan's subservience to the U.S., but I believe that this is a complete misunderstanding. I would like to point out that showing in concrete terms that Japan is a reliable partner will strengthen the Japan-U.S. relationship, which will lead to the national interest of Japan and, in turn, benefit the international community.

If you understand that Japan-U.S. coordination and cooperation is a two-way street, then naturally there must be a great deal of interest in Japan on the part of the U.S. leadership. The Japanese press follows the trends in the U.S. presidential election because it is believed that the impact on Japan could vary depending on who becomes the U.S. President.

However, no matter who becomes the president of the United States, the relationship between Japan and the United States that has been built to this point is unlikely to fundamentally change. I believe that the Japan-U.S. relationship, firmly established over a long history, is robust.

Remember, 80 years ago, Japan and the United States were at war. The older generation may remember this. Younger people may ask, "Was Japan at war with America?" We must clearly remember this fact despite which we have built the present relationship. In that sense, the Japan-U.S. relationship has been firmly established over a long history, and we consider it to be extremely solid.

In view of the current international situation, Japan-U.S. coordination and cooperation is becoming increasingly important, and we continue to believe that the fundamentals of Japan-U.S. relations should remain solidly in place. Of course, depending on who will be the leader of the United States, there will be changes in specific policies. It is only natural that there will be issues for Japan to consider accordingly.

In particular, with regard to economic security, discussion will focus on China. The direction of U.S. policy toward China will be of great interest to Japan. I believe that both Democrats and Republicans are wary of China, and I am aware that it has been pointed out that U.S. policy toward China is unlikely to be a campaign issue in the presidential election.

On the other hand, however, a bipartisan delegation led by Democratic Party Majority Leader

Chuck Schumer met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on October 9, 2023, and President Biden is reportedly seeking a U.S.-China summit meeting at the APEC summit in November 2023. The U.S. policy toward China has been the subject of much interest.

There seems to be divergence in discussions regarding support for Ukraine. The so-called “stopgap bill” that was finally passed by the U.S. Congress on September 30, 2023 did not include a budget for supporting Ukraine due to political wrangling within the U.S.

Beyond the discussion of support for Ukraine, there is the current major issue of how the U.S. should deal with the authoritarian states of Russia, China, and North Korea and we are compelled to pay great attention to this issue.

In addition, we must not forget the fact that in the Middle East, a new conflict is brewing between Hamas and Israel in Palestine. We should not forget the fact that the situation is approaching a point at which war may or may not break out imminently in the coming days.

With these points in mind, we look forward to a frank and informative discussion during today’s seminar on “The U.S. Presidential Election and Economic Security Policy.”