

“U.S.–Japan Relations”

Event Summary

On December 14, 2010, the Center on Japanese Economy and Business (CJEB) at Columbia Business School co-organized a special evening lecture with the Japan Society. The Honorable John Roos, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States to Japan, spoke on the current challenges facing Japan and the strategic importance of the U.S.–Japan alliance. His Excellency Ichiro Fujisaki, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Japan to the United States, made brief introductory comments. Professor Hugh Patrick, Director of the Center on Japanese Economy and Business at Columbia Business School, introduced Ambassador Roos and presided over the event.

Ambassador Roos first said that, while Japan has largely been a success story for the last 65 years, the nation is now undergoing difficult times, both economically and politically. Looking ahead, Roos declared that “Japan is as important to the United States as it has ever been,” asserting that the U.S.–Japan partnership is comprised of three essential pillars: security, economic relations, and global partnership. Under all these pillars exist vital exchanges in education, culture, science, and business.

Within the security pillar, Roos explained that the U.S.–Japan alliance remains the cornerstone of the U.S. strategic position in Asia. The alliance has become ever more important in light of increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula, territorial disputes over the Senkaku Islands, and diplomatic strains with Russia. Roos noted that the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty has become particularly salient given North Korea’s unprovoked attacks on South Korea, announcement of a uranium enrichment facility, and an unpredictable succession process. The United States, Japan, and South Korea must show solidarity, enhance coordination, and consolidate their approach to North Korea-related issues. China’s rising influence and non-transparent military program is another example Roos cited as new complexities facing the world.

Next describing the economic pillar, Roos acknowledged that while Japan is a primary trade partner of the United States, foreign direct investment (FDI) from the United States to Japan is still too low and more opportunities for U.S. businesses in Japan need to be created. Roos explained that the United States also welcomes Japan’s interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), a multilateral free trade agreement. While the TPP will require Japan to address its tariff and non-tariff barriers, Roos believes open trade is the best option for both economies. Additionally, Roos stressed the importance of fostering innovation and ingenuity in

the younger generation to bring about job creation in the long-run. He would like to see Japan place more emphasis on entrepreneurship, including that of women. This includes having a global outlook, creating products with worldwide sales potential, and embracing a culture of “second chances.”

Regarding the pillar of global partnership, Roos urged the United States and Japan to take joint leadership on fundamental issues such as energy security and climate change. He explained that U.S. entrepreneurship can connect with Japanese innovation to tackle low carbon and smart grid technologies. Roos also drew from his August 6 visit to Hiroshima and noted that the United States would rely on Japan’s leadership to advance the non-nuclear agenda with regard to North Korea and Iran.

Lastly, Roos expressed his concern regarding the people-to-people elements underlying the pillars. He acknowledged that the number of Japanese studying abroad in the United States has decreased 15 percent since last year, to approximately 25,000 students, while those from China have grown 30 percent in the last year, with approximately 128,000 students in the United States. However, Roos is not worried about the media-promoted tension between the two nations (e.g. U.S. beef imports, the privatization of Japan Post, Japan’s ratification of the Hague Convention on International Parental Child Abduction, and realigning bases in Futenma) as dialogue is required in any relationship, and the lines of communication remain open.

This event was held at Japan Society as a Corporate Program and was co-organized by Japan Society and the Center on Japanese Economy and Business at Columbia Business School.

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