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Whole of Government

Message Discipline on Asia-Pacific Goals

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Before any presidential trip overseas there is always a certain amount of messaging by the administration. The scope and intensity of the messaging are dialed up or down to set the proper stage for the President to engage with his counterparts politically and diplomatically. In preparation for the President's trip to Asia next month, the messaging by the administration has been dialed up and harmonized across agencies in such a way as to achieve the following:

1. Reassure Japanese and South Korean allies of their significance to U.S. policy
2. Lay the groundwork for getting the Japan-ROK relationship back on track
3. Quell the negativity surrounding Japan-ROK and Japan-U.S. relations

On March 4 Danny Russel, Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, [testified](#) before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Asia and the Pacific, on Opportunities and Challenges in the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-ROK Alliances. His comments were designed to reassure our allies and quell tensions in the Japan-ROK relationship that have been enflamed by Prime Minister Abe's December visit to the Yasukuni Shrine to honor Japan's war dead, including war criminals. Assistant Secretary Russel reassured Japan and the ROK of their strategic significance to the success of the administration's rebalance policy, calling the U.S.-Japan alliance the "cornerstone of peace and prosperity in the Asia-Pacific" and the U.S.-ROK alliance the "linchpin of stability and security in Northeast Asia."

He also expressed concern over the current tension between Japan and the ROK, calling it "a problem that requires sincere efforts by both parties to address." It would seem that the Administration's efforts have met some success with the March [trilateral meeting](#) between Presidents Obama, Park, and Abe on the sidelines of the Nuclear Security Summit in The Hague, Netherlands—marking the first official high-level meeting between Park and Abe. The agenda was light and focused on the North Korean threat, allowing the three leaders to coalesce around a shared security concern and pose for the cameras.

Relations between Washington and Tokyo have been strained by Prime Minister Abe's visit to the Yasukuni Shrine, but, despite this, the administration attributes progress in the U.S.-Japan relationship over the past year to several actions taken by the Abe administration. Earlier this month senior Pentagon and State Department officials spoke at separate events in Washington and used identical talking points to praise Japan's actions to advance peace and security:

- Efforts to revise the Japan-U.S. defense guidelines by the end of 2014,
- Passage of a "secrets protection act" that gives the U.S. confidence to share intelligence with Japan,
- Okinawa's landfill permit approval to build the Futenma Replacement Facility, which is critical for U.S. troop realignment,
- Easing of arms export restrictions to boost Japan's security capacity, which would alleviate some of

the security burden the U.S. bears, and
- Development of a National Security Council and the publication of National Defense Guidelines, both of which the U.S. views as critical to transparency and harmonization with a similar U.S. system.

The Obama administration is eager to use the upcoming trip to Japan and Asia to capitalize on the positive trends set forth in 2013 by the Abe administration, and highlighting Japan's accomplishments helps to address existing U.S.-Japan tensions to set the stage for successful meetings. Continuing to harmonize messages across U.S. Government actors and maintain message discipline will be critical success factors for implementing an effective Asia-Pacific rebalance.

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