

# [***The Crucial U.S.-Japan Relationship Is on Display in Washington Right Now | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BS6-WN11-JBR6-9002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is making a historic official visit to Washington, D.C., this week, yet most Americans aren't even aware or paying attention.

**Body**

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is making a historic official visit to Washington, D.C., this week, yet most Americans aren't even aware or paying attention. Unsurprisingly, they are more focused on their own concerns and the upcoming presidential election.

But, with the current state of world affairs, U.S.-Japan relations should be in the spotlight this spring not just because of the cherry blossoms that have been ubiquitous in our nation's capital since being gifted more than 100 years ago by Japan. The two countries need each other more than ever before, and it is high time that our alliance go beyond just the president and the prime minister.

This is the first official visit by a Japanese leader since Prime Minister Shinzo Abe delivered his [*"Alliance of Hope"*](https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/statement/201504/uscongress.html) address to a joint session of [*Congress*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/congress?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) in 2015 and only the second time in history a Japanese prime minister has addressed the American people in this way. As [*Shigeo Yamada*](https://youtu.be/dkIHaCie9S4), Japan's new ambassador to the United States, said recently, "The international situation has changed dramatically" since 2015, including wars in Ukraine and Gaza, instability in the Middle East, and an increasingly severe security situation in East Asia.

The "U.S.-Japan relationship has evolved to meet those challenges together as global partners based on trust." And there is no lack of trust. As the ambassador noted, "Based on the recent poll conducted by the Foreign Ministry, about 90 percent of U.S. opinion leaders said that Japan is reliable." Japan also consistently polls the highest favorability rating with Americans of any country, largely because ties go so far beyond the political.

It's not just about business investment and the importance of connecting the the policy community. It's about *Kizuna,* or bridge-building at the grassroots level through people-to-people connections.

What's most interesting to me about Kishida's visit to Washington is the fact that it's happening at all. It showcases how much the world needs an allied U.S.-Japan like never before. Things are very different in 2024. We have a president and a prime minister who are both politically weakened because of domestic ***politics*** and historically low approval ratings trying to manage the "free and open" world order that seems to be at an inflection point. In a global context, the U.S.-Japan alliance is unusually strong as indicated by the close to 70 deliverables being announced this week. These include space exploration, technology development, and investment opportunities.

Unlike the last time Japan had a global moment, in the 1980s, this isn't seen as a threat to America, but rather as a natural and welcome development. The success of Japan in anime at the [*Oscars*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/oscars?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships), in cuisine, architecture, and Shohei Ohtani (of the Los Angeles Dodgers) is clear. It looks like Japan has reached a new zenith.

How can we capitalize on the interest and affection for Japan that Americans have? How can we take that energy and excitement for Japan and translate it into the U.S.-Japan relationship? How can we take the light that is Japan and bring it into the shadows of a divided America? These are the questions I ponder at Japan Society.

After almost 80 years of U.S.-Japanese relations post-World War II, Japan is poised to lead in its own unique way. Still, taking Japan's global moment for granted would be a grave mistake and a missed opportunity for Americans.

In his remarks at the opening of the Japan Society's landmarked headquarters building in 1971, Chairman John D. Rockefeller III stated that "the communication of understanding between peoples is the creative art which underlies statecraft, commerce, and world peace."

When Prime Minister Abe spoke on the 70th anniversary of World War II before Congress of his family's connection th, he was speaking for an entire generation, among them my two grandfathers who fought against Imperial Japan so that my parents—who have served faithfully as Southern Baptist missionaries in Hokkaido—could do their work.

As their grandson, I would like to remind us all just how far we have come. It is now our turn to go beyond our individual leaders to the bring our societies together. There is great promise for the future, whether on the sports fields, art galleries, board rooms, chef's tables, or virtual worlds—from anime to gaming. Let's not take this moment for granted.

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[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2376538/leaders-stand-together.jpg)

**Graphic**

Leaders Stand Together

Celal Gunes/Anadolu via Getty Images

President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio attend the official arrival ceremony at the White House in Washington, D.C., on April 10.

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