

opinion

What Abe should tell Congress

Yukihisa Fujita

SPECIAL TO THE JAPAN TIMES

I would like to thank U.S. House Speaker John Boehner for giving Prime Minister Shinzo Abe the opportunity to address a joint session of Congress on April 29. Regarding the content of Abe's address, there are some important issues that he should broach.

First, I'd like the prime minister to dispel suspicions the world harbors toward him as a result of his visit to Yasukuni Shrine, and his revisionist attitude and actions toward history.

For the last two years, the Western media has been very critical of Abe on this issue. Such criticism was also expressed by various foreign leaders.

Former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said, "Having a strategy that enables to keep your country moving on the right track but without unnecessarily inciting reaction [from other states] is in Japan's best interest."

Catherine Ashton, vice president and high representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, stated, "This action [Abe's Yasukuni visit] is not constructive to lowering tensions with Japan's neighbors, especially with China and Republic of Korea."

Even U.S. President Barack Obama said, "I've said directly to the prime minister: that it would be a profound mistake to continue to see escalation around this [Senkaku Islands] issue rather than dialogue and confidence building measures between Japan and China."

The U.S. Congress' invitation appears to be meant to signal Abe in advance that he should put the right tone on his planned statement on the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, which some observers are concerned may be based on his historical views. His speech before the U.S. Congress is therefore an excellent opportunity for him to erase such lingering suspicions.

Second, the speech can serve as an opportunity to restore trust in Japan among Asian countries. When Abe's grandfather, Prime Minister Nobusuke Kishi, visited the U.S. in 1957, his hosts welcomed him unusually warmly by giving him a chance to meet with President Dwight Eisenhower three times, to speak before both the Senate and the House of Representatives, and to play golf with the president.

This welcoming attitude reflected the U.S.' appreciation of Kishi's travels to Southeast Asian countries prior to his

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U.S. visit, in which he apologized for Japan's wartime actions and thus achieved reconciliation with them. Kishi's strategy was to strengthen Japan's negotiation position with the U.S. as an equal partner, and to avoid the image of Japan being isolated in Asia.

Just as Kishi was able to win considerable praise from the U.S. by having gained the trust of those Southeast Asian countries, what Abe needs to do now is improve Japan's chilly relationships with China and South Korea.

What the U.S. side might expect from Japan is not necessarily defense cooperation aimed at China through the

strengthening of Japan's military prowess, because the U.S. abhors being entangled in Japan's conflict with its neighboring countries. It would be Japan's best national interest to have Abe engage in straight talk with the U.S. about security issues from a position in which Japan has already begun to improve ties with its neighbors.

Third, the views that the prime minister will express before the U.S. Congress should reflect the will of the Japanese people rather than his private thoughts. Even the Emperor did not visit Yasukuni Shrine. The prime minister's revisionist historical perspective is different from the views of past prime ministers, most of whom came — like Abe — from the Liberal Democratic Party.

Abe's views don't reflect the will of the Japanese majority, either. Most Japanese regret the nation's past deeds and are dedicated to carrying on the postwar legacy of peace.

This sentiment was best represented by the Emperor's recent visit to Palau's Peleliu Island, which followed his previous visits to Okinawa and Saipan, where he prayed for the repose of the souls of the war dead: Japanese, Americans, and all other nationals alike.

I have a proposal. I would like the prime minister to announce to Congress a plan to invite to Japan all of POW survivors who were captured by Japanese forces during World War II. Such an act would symbolize the final reconciliation between the U.S. and Japan 70 years after the war.

These are some of my thoughts. I sincerely hope that the prime minister's address to the U.S. Congress will contribute to solidify mutual trust between the Japanese people, Western countries and our Asian neighbors.

Yukihisa Fujita, a former senior vice minister of finance, is a Democratic Party of Japan member of the House of Councillors (Upper House).