

Japan's New Politics and the U.S.-Japan Alliance



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Japan's new politics challenge some basic assumptions about U.S.-Japan alliance management. From the election of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) in 2009 to the return of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in 2012, this new era of alternating parties in power has revealed the growing importance of Japan's domestic politics in shaping alliance cooperation. The fluidity in electoral outcomes in recent parliamentary elections reveals the extent of Japanese voter frustration with the government. A divided Diet challenged the Japanese government's ability to implement policy. Policy reform is in high demand in Tokyo, and the U.S.-Japan alliance is not immune to the popular call for greater accountability as past choices are increasingly subjected to policy review.

Beyond partisan differences over how to manage the alliance, Japan's new politics have deeper implications for the U.S.-Japan alliance. CFR Senior Fellow Sheila A. Smith identifies three challenges that will confront U.S. policymakers as they seek to work with Japanese governments in the years ahead. First, electoral change will continue to create hurdles for predictable alliance management. Second, the challenges of alliance management should not be attributed solely to one party, but rather to the more complex domestic sensitivities to the complicated geostrategic shifts underway in the Asia-Pacific region. Finally, the United States and Japan must address the complex normative challenge to the alliance as national identity debates across Asia challenge the postwar order and recast domestic politics in Japan.

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Sheila A. Smith, an expert on Japanese politics and foreign policy, is senior fellow for Japan studies at the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR). She is the author of *Intimate Rivals: Japanese Domestic Politics and a Rising China* (Columbia University Press, 2015) and *Japan's New Politics and the U.S.-Japan Alliance* (Council on Foreign Relations, June 2014). Her current research focuses on how geostrategic change in Asia is shaping Japan's strategic choices. In the fall of 2014, Smith began a new project on Northeast Asian Nationalisms and Alliance Management.

Smith is a regular contributor to the CFR blog *Asia Unbound*, and frequent contributor to major media outlets in the United States and Asia. She joined CFR from the East-West Center in 2007, where she directed a multinational research team in a cross-national study of the domestic politics of the U.S. military presence in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. She was a visiting scholar at Keio University in 2007-08, where she researched Japan's foreign policy towards China, supported by the Abe Fellowship. Smith has been a visiting researcher at two leading Japanese foreign and security policy think tanks, the Japan Institute of International Affairs and the Research Institute for Peace and Security, and at the University of Tokyo and the University of the Ryukyus.

Smith is vice chair of the U.S. advisors to the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Exchange (CULCON), a bi-national advisory panel of government officials and private sector members. She teaches as an adjunct professor at the Asian Studies Department of Georgetown University and serves on the board of its *Journal of Asian Affairs*. She earned her MA and PhD degrees from the department of political science at Columbia University.

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