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I'm going to provide a few words of introduction for readers of The Asia-Pacific Journal on the subject of a piece I wrote for *The New Republic*'s website, The Plank, as background to President Obama's visit to Japan.

The invitation came about through John Judis. I've known John now for close on twenty years; not only is he a good friend, but he has been my most trustworthy guide (personally and in his writings) through the labyrinth of American politics. John is one of those rare American writers who extends his gaze beyond that stretch of land that lies from sea to shining sea when he grapples with the deep currents in American politics. I first got to know him when I was doing the research for my first book, *The Weight of the Yen*. As a student of the rise of American conservatism and the corruption and decline of the old internationalist American foreign policy elite, John seemed taken with my thesis that it was financing from Japan that had made that re-alignment of American politics known as the Reagan Revolution possible.

So when at John's urging the editors of the New Republic's website got in touch with me over the weekend, I was happy to put weekend plans to the side and set out my thoughts on the president's visit. There was much of course that I had to leave out -- I had initially gone on at some length on the way in which the political energies that had fueled the Japanese left had been diverted into the "salaryman" culture and how the Japanese right had consoled itself with dreams of some future re-militarization of the country and a restoration of the mystical nationalism of the war years. I had thought of noting how in hard political terms the attempts by former Prime Ministers Abe and Aso to make some of these dreams concrete had revealed how little traction they have with the wider public. I had sketched out some words to the effect that even conservative circles in Japan had been privately appalled at Washington's failure to recognize back in the 1950s that the People's Republic of China was a *fait accompli*. I had initially planned to write more about the way the institutions that had provided for economic security in Japan had been slowly undermined over the past two decades, and how China was now beating Japan at its own game -- that it was China that was now stepping up exports in the teeth of a worldwide downturn and pushing Japan aside as the premiere financier of the U.S. external deficit with all that implies about political leverage over Washington. And I thought I should go into more detail about Okinawa, even though I lack the grasp of the issue displayed by people like Gavan McCormack.

But when you are writing for the contemporary reader who flits from website to website to brief him or herself on the issues of the moment, you have to pare back to the essence of your argument (something that is hard for me to do). To its credit, *The New Republic* took what I sent them pretty much intact, their editorial suggestions they did helping to tighten the piece without weakening its thrust. And the most important points I wanted to make came through, I hope, loud and clear: that the kind of relationship Japan and the U.S. have had is over. That relationship was rooted in postwar arrangements that have been destroyed -- and this is the significance of the DPJ victory. That victory gives Obama a window in which to construct a genuine alliance that would be of great help to both sides. It would be the greatest mistake to slam shut the window shut of opportunity opened by electoral changes in both the US and Japan because of the Pentagon's narrow, parochial concerns with its logistics.

Like many Americans who voted for him, I have been disappointed that Obama has failed to capitalize on the windows of opportunity that his electoral mandate and the financial crisis seemed to provide him. The conditions that precipitated the crisis are still very much there; there has been no real reform or recognition of the need to bridle Wall Street. We are still spilling blood and treasure in military adventures that should never have been started in the first place. The assaults on the rule of law and civil liberties that occurred under the George W. Bush administration -- assaults that strike at the very essence of the American experiment -- have not been redressed. I understand that Obama is cautious by nature and that of course can be a great virtue. John indeed argues in a piece posted the same day mine was that which he calls the "anti-statism" of the American mind makes much of what Obama is trying to do harder than perhaps some of us realize. Point taken, but at the risk of belaboring the image, windows of opportunity do not stay open forever.

Here is one window -- forging a good, working relationship with the DPJ leaders. It is a tantalizing opportunity -- I hope that Obama understands it and seizes it.

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