

**PRIME MINISTER ABE'S YASUKUNI
SHRINE VISIT: MOTIVATIONS
AND CONSEQUENCES**

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Executive Summary

1. Although Prime Minister Abe Shinzo went to the Yasukuni Shrine (the symbol of Japanese militarism to the Chinese and Koreans) on 26 December 2013, the effect of his visit on US-Japan relations could still be felt today.
2. In March 2014, US Ambassador to Japan Caroline Kennedy reiterated that Abe's shrine visit, which aggravated Tokyo's strained ties with Beijing and Seoul, was not constructive for the region.
3. US criticism of Abe's shrine visit was the first public chastisement of its Japanese ally on this controversial issue. Hitherto, Washington's public criticism of Tokyo had been confined to trade disputes.
4. The Japanese media anticipated that Abe will make a personal explanation to US President Barack Obama at their Tokyo summit in April 2014.
5. Apparently, the US was flabbergasted with Abe's Yasukuni visit because it would rile South Korea, another US ally, and dent American hopes that their Japanese and Korean allies can broaden their security cooperation in the wake of a rising China.
6. Adding to US annoyance were the sarcastic remarks made by Eto Seiichi (special adviser to Prime Minister Abe) that he was more disappointed with the US for its "disappointment" with Abe's shrine visit.
7. Representative Ed Royce (a California Republican who chairs the House Committee on Foreign Affairs) during a meeting of bipartisan groups of American and Japanese lawmakers at a February 2014 meeting in Tokyo remarked that Abe's visit to Yasukuni would only benefit China.
8. There is speculation, rightly or wrongly, that despite Abe's rhetoric of wanting good relations with China based on mutual benefits, he actually welcomes tension between Beijing and Tokyo for his political ends. According to this view, goading

and baiting a fierce emotional response from the Chinese to his Yasukuni Shrine visit may well garner greater domestic support for his agenda to remake Japan into a “normal” state.

9. Abe ensured that good allied relations will weather the temporary US annoyance of Abe going to Yasukuni by reinterpreting the pacifist Japanese constitution to permit “collective security” to assist the US military in a more reciprocal way, participating in the US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiations, and supporting the revision of the US-Japan Defense Guidelines.