For years, United States foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region has been wavering between focusing on the containment or engagement of China and the strengthening of relations and interdependence in Japan. Throughout the Cold War, a Chinese friendship was extremely important to the US as the geopolitics quickly changed from anti-Communism to anti-Soviets with Nixon’s visit to China. With this historic change in Cold-War dynamics came continuous inconsistencies in US policies and values concerning China and the region as a whole. Democratic values were compromised, such as the tradition of containing Communist countries and defending human rights across the world, allies like Taiwan were practically abandoned, and economic and military aid was given to a Communist country with a history of mistrust and threatening behavior throughout the region. Japan, although having a history of militarism, was destroyed and given a new chance after World War II, which they embraced with vigor and gave the US the opportunity to create an economic superpower with little potential of military threat, similar democratic values, and a mutual perspective on security and stability in the region.

During the Cold War, the US decision to place a relationship with China first in the Asia-Pacific region was based on necessity and the need for global security. Friendly relationships must be based on a common interest; in this case, dissolving the threat of the Soviet Union was a priority for US national interests at the time and establishing relations with China was a beneficial decision. But with the end of the Cold War, the differences between the US and China and the lack of a common interest between the two have placed the Chinese as a lower priority to US national interest, less essential to US power and concerns and more unpredictable and unreliable as an ally. The US can no
longer conceal inconsistencies in foreign policies, ignoring of human rights violations, and secret diplomacy with the need to ensure US national security and the containing of the Soviet Union. The Tiananmen Square incident and recent episodes have demonstrated the inaccuracy of our assumption that human rights conditions are improving in China, while the slow economic progress, although worthy of investment, have failed to become essential to US business. Our policy on the Pacific Rim should not be one of conceding to possible future threats but one of cooperating with present political and economic allies such as Japan.

In contrast to China, Japan has grown into an economic superpower solely with the aid and support of the United States. Our democratic values are instilled in the Japanese society, and our history is not one of mistrust but of mutual sharing. In a world where interdependence is growing and economic power is a basis of global position, the US and Japan have the potential to become economic superpowers while encouraging democracy, stability, and human rights. With such close military, political, and economic ties with this regional ally, the US can maintain its influence in Asia. While China continues to view the US as a threat and guides its foreign policy against total alliance with the US, Japan is secure in its military relationship with the Americans and recognizes the importance of a US friendship. Therefore, it is almost certain that focusing on building Japan both militarily and economically as a regional superpower will not ultimately backfire on the US, a possible consequence of aiding and supporting China of which the future is uncertain. Although Japan and the US hold differing capitalistic views, the mutual sharing of technology and ideas is beneficial to both
countries, whereas China has yet to realize much technological advancement or a true capitalistic system.

In conclusion, focusing on a Japan-first policy in the Asia-Pacific region will ultimately prove more beneficial for the US by focusing on the economic advantages, reducing the future threat of an unfriendly superpower, and encouraging stability and democratic security in the region. The US should allow Japan the capabilities to become an area of strength in the region by continuing to help Japan rearm and become more militarily self-sufficient as their economy continues to grow. In this way, the US will have a powerful and trustworthy ally to maintain stability in the region. We should push to further open their markets to provide for mutual sharing of technology and capitalist ideas and a balance of trade between the two countries. Meanwhile, the United States must continue its diplomatic relations with China. We cannot place them first, however, and continue to concede to their “show us that you care” policy because we are now not in the position of needing them as much as they need us. The Chinese are an emerging power, however, and continuing relations with them is essential to the stability of the region and the world. The US must strive to ensure this security, and the most efficient and certain policy to achieve this goal is to maintain our influence in the region through strengthening our allies.