

Monday, January 23, 2012

Venue: Ishikawa Prefectural Museum of Art Hall

Organizers: Ishikawa Prefecture; Japan Institute of  
International Affairs

### Citizens' Forum on Japan-US Exchange

Keynote Speaker: KATO Ryoza, former Ambassador to the US

“The Prospects for Japan-US Relations”

I am likely regarded as a classical advocate for a Japan-US alliance. Of my 43 years with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 were spent overseas, and for 15 and a half of those I was posted to the US. The vast majority of my assignments within the Ministry itself were also connected with Japan-US relations. However, I am not an “America expert,” nor do I think America is a country on which one can easily become an expert. Today’s Citizens’ Forum is focused on those who will be responsible for Japan-US relations in future, but I will be speaking as a representative of the past.

To begin with, I had no lofty motives for joining the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I wanted to go abroad and, if possible, I wanted to see a Major League game in the US...that was all. I completed overseas training at an American university from 1965 to 1967, and then served at the Japanese embassy in Washington, DC from 1967 to 1969. Looking back, I recall how everything seemed to glitter when I saw the US for the first time. One US dollar was the equivalent of 360 yen at the time, so I led a rather harsh life in the US. Over this entire four-year period I only saw two Japanese cars and, of course, I never caught a single glimpse of sushi, karaoke, anime and the like. The year 1968, during which I was at the embassy, saw the presidential election between Nixon and Humphrey, the assassinations of Reverend King in April and Robert Kennedy in June, and demonstrations in Washington, DC that summer. It was an age of dramatic change in which, even as war weariness was settling in, Nixon won the presidential election on a slogan of “law and order.” As for Japan-US relations, the negotiations on the reversion of Okinawa were making headway.

During my next tour of duty in the US, from 1987 to 1990, Japanese cars suddenly seemed to be everywhere; this was a time of economic frictions between Japan and the US. The

Japan-US security arrangements were going smoothly but, triggered by the FSX issue, economic issues became entangled with issues of security and defense. One key reason that Japan did not insist throughout the FSX negotiations on domestic manufacture but was instead accepted joint development and joint production was that Japan did not have the requisite engine or systems integration technology; this also served as a lesson that technology once lost could not be recovered immediately. On the eve of the end of the Cold War, numerous members of Eastern Europe's "elite" who would later become leaders in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and elsewhere were in Washington, DC. I was able to meet with many of them thanks to a certain professor among them who had fled in exile to the US in the 1950s. My impression was that the US was broad-minded and that Washington was a treasure-house of information. I then returned home to Japan on the eve of the Gulf War.

My next long-term assignment in the US stretched from October 2001 to 2008 as I was appointed Ambassador to the US immediately after 9/11. My first impression was that US government and military leaders are extremely busy. The president begins his hectic schedule with a meeting at 7:00 am and goes on to have a full day of NSC briefings and numerous other meetings and public events but, though this pattern continues 365 days a year, he still did not miss out on visits to troops at veterans' hospitals and military bases. With the president's first meeting coming at 7 in the morning, deputy secretaries and agency heads have to start work from 3 or 4 am. On the eve of the start of the war with Iraq, Japan cautioned the US government, which insisted that it did not need UN approval, to utilize the "authority" of the UN. In these very trying times, baseball proved to be my salvation at work. Many high-ranking US officials are baseball fans, and this had the effect of massaging away the stiffness in our shoulders before dialogues began. For instance, President Bush could name several Japanese players: Oh, Nomo, Ichiro and Matsui.

I am now over 70 years old, and I am profoundly struck by the fact that Japan has made it to the big time. When Prime Minister Kishi attended the state funeral for President Eisenhower in 1968, he was given a seat more than halfway back, but Prime Minister Nakasone was seated in the very first row for President Reagan's state funeral in 2006. Economies are becoming increasingly borderless and imbalances are arising in the globalization of governance. Economic globalization has been making headway, but the rule of law and democracy are important foundations for social stability and growth. In a society in which the rule of law has been established, the enthusiasm of people striving for technological development will change, I think, at least over the long term. Certainly for a

short period leadership may be exerted by autocratic states. Stronger than a system under which producers of technology never know just when someone will steal from them the fruits of their labor, however, is one under which talented persons devote themselves to developing technology in countries that have established the rule of law under democracy. One positive aspect of democracy is the change of administrations in accordance with the popular will. There was a time when dictators governed using an ideology akin to Marxism-Leninism but the economy ultimately managed to continue expanding. However, there is no guarantee on just how long this economic growth will last. Leaders with political legitimacy deriving from the popular will must simply resign when the public withdraws its support, but leaders in authoritarian countries cannot be compelled by the popular will to resign, the result being killings and revolution. This, too, could be termed a point in favor of democracy. Sharing democratic values naturally has a big part in strengthening Japan-US relations.

At the same time, there is no reason whatsoever that relations between Japan and China need to be hostile; indeed, the two countries should pursue a smooth and sensible relationship. The same thing holds for ties with South Korea. Relations with China and South Korea are particularly important for Japanese diplomacy because these relations involve neighbors. Poor relations between India and Pakistan, for instance, have imposed a negative legacy on the international community. Although the US is an extra-regional player, Japan's relations with the US are fundamentally important in mending ties between Japan and its neighbors.

Japan needs to exercise some creativity when the US and Japan engage in strategic dialogue. Japan can, and in fact must be regarded by the US' as someone that not simply makes requests but also comes up with ideas beneficial to its American partner. One successful example of this can be found in the SS20 negotiations during the Nakasone administration. More recently, the cuts to US military spending under the Obama administration can also be seen as presenting Japan with an opportunity for dialogue with the US. The US has made a shift that prioritizes deployments in the Asia-Pacific, a sound move from the perspective of Asian security. However, it is by no means clear how this would change if something were to occur between Iran and the US. Depending on the actions it takes, Japan could very well increase its say in diplomacy, international relations and economics in the Asia-Pacific. Much as the left-handed pitcher Hyuma Hoshi featured in the famous "Star of the Giants" manga published from 1960 wore a "training cast," Japan's foreign policy and defense, too, have for quite some time been wearing "training casts."

How do we change when the world around us changes? It is pointless simply to say “things have changed; let’s respond,” “let’s mold our ties with the US in this way,” “let’s become a permanent member of the UN Security Council,” and “let’s adopt this approach with China,” or to wonder what we should do about North Korea without taking off our “training casts.” It is about time for Japan to start cutting them away. The US is a superpower, of course, and no country on Earth is truly its equal, so the essence of this approach would be to engage in exchanges of views in which the US and Japan can nod their heads in agreement on attitudes and views regarding global and regional affairs. TPP will likely serve as an important framework providing opportunities for Japan and the US to get to know each other far better. Intense negotiations should be pursued to that end, but little purpose would be served by overly debating matters before the negotiation.