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Venue: Tokai University Club (35F, Kasumigaseki Bldg.)

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“Forecasting Japan-US Relations over the Next 10 Years”

I have come here in my personal capacity, and I would like to make it clear from the start that the opinions expressed in this talk are entirely my own.

It is my understanding that the Japan Institute of International Affairs was founded in 1959 and that it has thus far sponsored lectures by a host of impressive guests. The continued efforts of an organization such as this over so many years make sound, influential, impressive and sustained contributions to society beyond the ability of any single individual. Something similar could be said of Japan-US relations and our alliance.

The continued existence of a given system or organization implies that it has maintained a balance between change and continuity. Japan's companies and political structures demonstrate that a delicate balance between embracing change and carrying on tradition is given particular emphasis in Japan.

In applying this idea of a balance between change and continuity to Japan-US relations, there is a tendency to view the Japan-US alliance from the perspective of security. The Japan-US alliance serves as a “shield,” allowing Japan to enjoy economic prosperity, peace and other benefits from the alliance. The US,

too, gains from the Japan-US alliance in being able to contain security risks in East Asia. While there is no doubt that viewing the Japan-US alliance thus from the security perspective is the core of the problem, its roots lie even deeper.

Japan and the US completely share something fertile and fundamental: a commitment to democracy and the rule of law. Having such fundamental values in common does indeed constitute a foundation for joint action by Japan and the US, and it has made it possible to build a solid relationship of trust that could even be termed exceptional. Some observers stress change, such as those emphasizing the rise of China. There are two models for alliances: one resembles a date, in which a temporary infatuation draws the two parties closer together and prompts them to begin dating, while the other is more like a marriage in that the parties share deeper values. The Japan-US alliance follows the latter model and features a close and sustained relationship between parties proclaiming the same fundamental values. There are no other alliances so rooted in shared values and built on such firm trust. My hope in the past and the future of the Japan-US alliance rests on this fact.

As made clear by the recent changes of government in both Japan and the US, democracy encourages change and reform. When new leadership comes about through change, the existing balance and harmony must of necessity collapse. New issues arise, and efforts are made to adapt to the changes. There is already an established pattern of bilateral relations between Japan and the US. Changes in the two countries' governments give rise to issues in the Japan-US relationship, and a new and different relationship pattern must be created.

It is essential that Japan-US relations remain deep and fundamental in nature, that these relations be developed still further, and that both countries exercise patience to this end. Japan and the US must consider directions in which they can proceed together, looking to the future while giving due consideration to the fundamental aspects of the Japan-US relationship. Let me stress the significance of pursuing future goals while leveraging past achievements. We are the heirs to the accomplishments of our ancestors, and we have a sacred obligation to develop them further. At the same time, this obligation offers us many opportunities.