Some Thoughts on U.S. Japanese Relations for the 1990s

Former United Sates Ambassador to Japan, Mike Mansfield is often quoted as saying that the most important bilateral relationship that the United States has is its relationship with Japan, "bar none." I agree with this, but, at the same time, go further and opine that the Japan-U.S. bilateral relationship is more important than any other, not only to the two countries directly involved, but to the world at large. How Japan and the U.S. conduct their relations, how they settle their differences, especially in the trade area, and how they work together for the benefit of other nations will be major determinants on the shape and nature of the new international community, following upon the end of communism and the demise of the Soviet Union.

With such significance attached to Japan-U.S. ties, it is imperative that the leaders of both countries spend time on improving and strengthening these ties. The president and the prime minister should establish a close personal working relationship as soon as possible and have their foreign policy establishments understand just how critically important each considers the relations between the two countries to be. At the same time as this is done very specific steps can be taken to elevate the relationship a notch higher than has been the case in the past.

One way to accomplish this is to appoint a special advisor to

the President and the Secretary of State whose job it will be to see that concrete action is taken to implement and to further develop the Tokyo Declaration issued on January 9, 1992 by then President Bush and Prime Minister Miyazawa. This declaration dealt with the matter of a U.S.-Japan Global Partnership. The words in the preamble of the declaration give a vision of the future to the peoples of both countries, "Japan and the United States recognize the benefits to their societies of the close cooperation they have enjoyed in the postwar period and are committed to building on this foundation to create an even closer partnership. Both acknowledge that a closer relationship must be constructed on enhanced mutual understanding and shared interests. As the two largest market-oriented economies and democracies in the world, Japan and the United States accept a special responsibility for shaping the new era. The two governments therefore resolve to join in a Global Partnership based on these enduring values to help build a just, peaceful, and prosperous world and to meet the challenges of the twenty-first century."

It is certainly not too much to expect that the governments of both Japan and the United States will allocate substantial human and material resources to achieve the results promised in the Tokyo Declaration. This means using their respective bureaucracies to the fullest possible extent, with outside expertise, especially from the academic and business communities, asked to participate where and when appropriate. Actions taken by past administrations can be a useful guide in this regard for both Japan and the United

States.

Most recently the Japanese side has been proposing the revival of a kind of high-level coordinating group that operated during the Kennedy Administration. A private Japanese group headed by former Japanese Ambassador to the United States, Yoshio Okawara, recommended the re-establishment of such a coordinating body which would provide the means for closer bilateral cooperation. During his February trip to Washington Foreign Minister Watanabe brought up this recommendation on a number of occasions with American officials. In my view, such a group would serve to complement and buttress the activities of a special adviser within the United States government to coordinate the American implementation of the Tokyo Declaration.

The setting-up of so-called Wise Men's groups has, in the past, been one way used by the United States and Japan to highlight the importance attached to the special ties between the two countries. The best such use of this mechanism took place in the first Reagan Administration. After some months a report was issued by the "Wise Men" recommending certain steps to improve the bilateral relationship. The members of the group were prominent Americans and Japanese from the business world, from academia and former government officials and their report was presented to the Prime Minister and to the President. While this kind of intellectual exercise is useful to a certain degree, it does not necessarily lead to the implementation of policies nor to the resolution of differences in special problem areas. Some, in fact,

argue that to engage in study projects of this kind simply tends to put off active programs until the given study project is completed and, in the meantime, the very real problems that exist fester like open sores and become more serious. However, it can be countered that to involve important and influential representatives of various segments of Japanese and American society in the scrutinization of a relationship as critical as the U.S.-Japan one is good in and of itself. The result is to make more people in positions of influence throughout the two countries focus on the significance of the bilateral relationship and what it means to the world's future.

During the Nakasone Administration, Japan produced the Maekawa Report which was a result of a study by a blue-ribbon panel on ways by which Japan could become a more open trading partner with the United States and other countries and, at the same time could sustain a level of high prosperity and affluence among the developed nations. This was a major undertaking and was welcomed enthusiastically by Washington and other world capitals and by business leaders everywhere. It put an end to the myth that Japan was determined to remain relatively closed to foreign traders and that the Japanese government and business leaders were convinced that the Japanese standard of living would go down or at the very least not rise if Japan did not continue protectionist policies toward imports from abroad. After the recommendations contained in the Maekawa Report were made public, the atmosphere of confrontation in trade circles in Japan and the United States

noticeably became less strident, at least for a time.

The United States government took a singular unilateral step in late 1983 to try to deal with the growing trade friction between the United States and Japan which might possibly become an issue in the presidential election of the following year. The White House believed that the intrusion of U.S.-Japan relations into the presidential campaign would be a bad thing for U.S.-Japan relations and would contribute to worsening tensions between the two countries. In order to prove that everything possible was being done to ameliorate the trade tensions between Japan and the United States and to show that the United States government was doing everything possible at the highest levels to work with Japan to take more of American industrial exports, the President asked Vice-President Bush to serve as coordinator of U.S. efforts in this regard. He took this action after consulting with Prime Minister Nakasone and receiving a positive signal from him. The Vice-President was to head a process within the administration to bring about a unified planning and implementation policy. Certain specific issues occupied the time of the Bush team and these issues were satisfactorily resolved from both the American and Japanese points of view. In the Spring of 1984, the Vice-President traveled to Tokyo, met with the Prime Minister and announced the end of his successful activity as personal representative of the President.

As I wrote earlier, it seems to me that perhaps now is the time to once again move to highlight the U.S.-Japan relationship and what it means in today's world. The new American President

could show his complete and unequivocal commitment to the Japan-U.S. global partnership by appointing a high-ranking individual either from within or outside of the administration, to coordinate the various actions needed to implement the Tokyo Declaration of January, 1992. It is particularly essential to do this now with the end of the Soviet threat and the need for the closest U.S.-Japanese cooperation in order to help devise a new world of peace, stability, and progress for all peoples.

As the United States and Japan consider ways to strengthen and broaden their bilateral ties and their global partnership, it is imperative that the Security Treaty now in existence between the two countries remain firmly in place. This is no time to begin dismantling an alliance structure which has served the interests of both countries very well indeed. While it is true that the threat of a military confrontation with the former Soviet Union has vastly diminished, nonetheless, the world remains a dangerous place with huge numbers of deadly weapons still stored and ready for use in a number of countries around our globe and much in evidence in the Asian and Pacific region. The United States and Japan must retain their defensive military vigilance and this requires the re-affirmation of the Security Treaty and the alliance which flows from it.

President Clinton has said on a number of occasions that America's domestic economic well-being is heavily reliant upon a healthy international economy of which the United States is an integral part and in which the United States plays a leading role.

American leaders sometimes seem to forget that the United States remains the world's largest economy and that this situation is not going to change at any time in the foreseeable future.

In order to further U.S.-Japanese cooperation in a multilateral forum, the United States should place much greater emphasis than has been the case in the past year or so on APEC. This organization has an almost unlimited potential for coordinating economic policies among the nations of Asia and the Pacific and the United States should do everything in its power to throw its weight behind a stronger, more effective and broadened APEC. The APEC meeting to be held in the United States in Seattle later this year should be used as the occasion for Washington to introduce concrete ideas to accomplish their goals. Before the APEC meeting, the closest coordination between Japan and the United States should take place on these efforts.

If the Japan-United States global partnership is to fully realize its meaning, this requires that Japan participate more completely as an equal with the United States. Japan cannot wait for American suggestions or recommendations about ways to implement key elements in the partnership but must, instead, come up with its own ideas and put them forward in an assertive and forceful manner. This might even entail the use of the principle of gaiatsu in reverse. Up to now, when we speak of gaiatsu, we are talking about American pressure on Japan. if there is indeed some validity to gaiatsu, it should be equally applied to both Japan and the United States. In my own view, the word gaiatsu somehow conveys a meaning

with an implication that the country applying it is in a stronger position than the country to which it is being applied. Therefore, in a partnership relationship gaiatsu is not an appropriate mode of action. Instead, each country in a partnership should state its opinion and make its policy suggestions in an open and straightforward manner as befits close friends and allies.

Certainly this is a matter of the first importance in the area of trade. The United States should have no illusions about the serious consequences that might ensue if certain actions are taken which will be seen to mean that the United States is backing away from its long-time commitment for free and open trade. It is imperative that the Japanese point of view be straightforwardly passed on to the Clinton Administration in as many fora as possible. The recent visit of Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe to Washington gave the Japanese government the opportunity to express its opinions on this critical issue directly to the president and to other high ranking officials and Congressional leaders. And it is not sufficient for either Washington or Tokyo or the European countries to proclaim in pious tones that they are against protectionism and in favor of the continuation of a free and competitive international trading system. Their actions must conform to their words. If not, our world could be in for a repeat of the kinds of conflicts over trade which contributed so heavily to the international and national disasters of the 1930s.

On other matters of great importance to both the United States and Japan, Japan should not be hesitant as an equal partner of the

United States, to inform Washington of its strongly held attitudes. On the issue of policy toward China, the new Washington administration must understand that Japan has, in the past supported and does now, strongly support the policy presently held by both the United States and Japan to remain economically engaged with Beijing. Japan, as I understand it, believes that the way to influence China toward a more open society is to assist China in its efforts to modernize and that to critically curtail such assistance, through the denial of Most Favored Nation (MFN) status by the United States, would be a grave mistake and would impact unfavorably on U.S. and Japanese trade and investment with and in China. Also, such action by the United States would make it much less likely that China would lend its weight to important peace-keeping and similar-type actions by the United Nations. An internationally responsible China is imperative for a peaceful, stable world and, surely, for a peaceful and stable Pacific region which is a basic, fundamental foreign policy objective of both the United States and Japan. In no way is this to denigrate the significance of human rights and democracy in any policy toward China. It is rather to clearly affirm Japan's view that a China as fully engaged as possible with the democratic, developed countries will be more likely to move toward a more open and pluralistic society than would be the case if Beijing were to be placed in an increasingly isolated set of circumstances.

While Foreign Minister Watanabe was in Washington on February 11 and 12 in meetings with the President and Secretary of State

emphasis was placed by the American side on the broad nature of the "most important bilateral relationship the United States has." President Clinton stressed that the United States and Japan must work together, not only to resolve the trade problems between us, but also to further stability and democracy in Russia, to ensure global economic growth and to resolve together the major environmental problems facing our world.

Japan has done many things over the past several years in the area of improving the world environment and the United States should recognize Japan's leadership in helping to clean up our globe. In the United States Vice-President Gore has been in the forefront of the environmental movement and it would be appropriate for him to represent the president in strengthening cooperation with Japan in preserving the environment through a number of projects. Such projects would include: urging non-governmental institutions to contribute more to international programs to preserve the environment, cooperating to manage and conserve world forests, and helping developing countries make wiser use of their natural resources.

One of the most urgent problems facing our world is what to do about and with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and, most specifically, Russia. Japan should ensure that its voice is listened to by both the United States and Europe as plans are devised and programs put into practice to deal with this problem. Japan should develop, in detail, what should be done and work closely with the United States at the highest levels on this.

Japan and the United States, will, in their global partnership arrangement, work together to provide effective and necessary aid to the CIS to assist them to reform their foreign and domestic policies, economic and political, to extend humanitarian, food and medical assistance to meet continuing needs of the citizenry of these states, to help them to convert production facilities from military to civil use and to aid in the training of CIS leaders and future leaders in the ways of handling of affairs, both official and unofficial, in a democratic, free-enterprise state. As Japan assumes one of the major roles in these efforts vis-a-vis the CIS, the United States must not waver in its support of Japan's position on the Northern Territories issue. This is a sine quo non of U.S.-Japanese partnership in dealing with the CIS.

But perhaps the most crucial element in the United States-Japan partnership is that having to do with global economic growth. Both Japan and the United States are suffering through recessions at this point, together with their allies in Western Europe. Without global economic growth, these economic downturns can only become more severe, even if temporary upturns occur as is happening now in the United States. And in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and in much of the southern hemisphere human want and unabetted debt is the rule. Economic growth in one country or in one part of the world is dependent upon economic growth world-wide. It is essential that this fact be understood by Japanese and American leaders as they plan for ways to improve the standard of living in their own countries. The market for Japanese and

American goods and services requires a growing, not declining or stagnant, world economy. It is not possible, in other words, to focus only on the internal ills of one nation's economy and believe that by so doing these ills can be taken care of and that good economic health will necessarily ensue. In the interdependent world of the 1990s and beyond, a world-wide plan for economic expansion is needed if any one nation, no matter how seemingly powerful, is to prosper. Certainly the old adage, "If we don't bang together, we will hang separately," is more true today in global economic turns than has ever been true in the past. Japan and the United States, as the world's two greatest economies, must lead the way in taking responsible actions to promote global economic growth.

For Japan to play, in full, the responsible role she must play on the world stage, she should become a member of the United Nations Security Council. It makes no sense to have Japan sit on the sidelines and not be a part of this highest UN body. The United States must see, as one of its high priorities, the seating of Japan as a permanent member of the Security Council. This action will simply be recognition by the United Nations of world power reality--a recognition that is essential if the United Nations is to achieve its broadest and deepest potential in resolving international crises.

As the United States and Japan accomplish a more mature global partnership, based upon policies determined in Tokyo and Washington, the ambassadors of the two countries have to be more

effective than ever in fulfilling their traditional dual jobs of reporting accurately to their home governments on the situation in the country to which they are assigned and, at the same time, precisely and, without error, conveying the policies of the government and the people whom they represent to the government and the people to whom they are accredited. In order to best accomplish his mission, the ambassador should have as great and in depth understanding as possible of the country and society in which he will be living. This does not require that he or she be a Japanese or an American specialist but it does necessitate a more than casual understanding of the United States and Japan and, most importantly, an intense desire to learn.

In the past, some have described the United States-Japan relationship in Confucian terms-- the United States has been referred to as the "elder brother" and Japan as the "younger brother." Too often in previous days, the American ambassador has tended to give lectures to the Japanese on what the United States expects their policies should be on issues ranging from trade to international crises. This sort of behavior should be stopped. It is not becoming to an equal relationship and, in fact, serves to create a tense and uncomfortable atmosphere which interferes with the cooperative relationship so needed by both countries. The attitude of a student is much more becoming and appropriate for the representative of one guest nation to another. The ambassador must open his or her ears and listen to what is being said, either directly or indirectly.

And directness of communications is ever more necessary if the partnership between Japan and the United States is to be truly equal and successful. The ambassador and his staff's play a clear and precise role in the area of communications. They must make certain that there is no misunderstanding between the two governments on issues of major import for, with misunderstanding, however unintended, comes suspicions and doubts about the good faith of one or the other partner. The ambassador has a heavy responsibility in seeing that misunderstandings are kept to a minimum and that language translations, which are too often contributory factors in such misunderstanding, be made as accurate as possible.

If the ambassador is to operate at top efficiency, he must have a solid and close relationship with his own government officials, beginning with the President and the Prime Minister. This is especially true of the American ambassador. Since the American president rarely has a special understanding of any given foreign country and, in this case, Japan, he will tend to pay attention to the person he sends to Tokyo, if that person is someone in whom he has a personal trust and confidence.

If the United States-Japan global partnership is to become an enduring relationship, both countries and both official and unofficial players must work hard and continuously at making it develop. This means that government officials, businessmen, academic and cultural leaders, and others must all see themselves as critical participants. The opportunity for success is now. If

we succeed, the world will become a more stable and peaceful place. If we fail, our children and grandchildren will condemn us for a "road not taken."

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