

*Note: this translation is provided for reference only; the Japanese version is official*

## **Japan's National Interests and Its Roles in the International Community**

**Shigeru Ishiba**

Minister in Charge of Regional Revitalization

### **Introduction**

I am happy to be here in Washington, D.C. for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Security Forum hosted by Sasakawa USA. I stood here two years ago to give remarks at the very first Security Forum. And my good friend Adm. Blair and I sometimes exchange opinions when he visits my office in Tokyo. The bond between Japan and the U.S. has matured, and Sasakawa USA's role has become all the more significant, considering the need to maintain our bilateral relationship at every level. So I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the organization.

### **Issues faced by Japan**

This time, I am here as a Minister to observe U.S. efforts in Continuing Care Retirement Communities and other areas related to regional revitalization such as parks and other amenities that can attract visitors. I believe that Japan is facing a silent emergency. If Japan's current birth and mortality rates continue on their present course, Japan's current population of 127 million is going to shrink by half to 52 million by 2100. In another 200 years, we will be down to 14 million. And if we calculate even further based on current birth and mortality rates, our population will be down to 4.23 million in 300 years, 4,000 by 2900, and 1,000 by 3000. Japan would disappear.

Most people imagine overseas threats when they talk about emergencies, but the three pillars of a nation consist of territory, citizens, and sovereignty. Therefore, Japan's population decline is nothing short of a silent emergency because the nation's populace is quietly disappearing.

The policy of regional revitalization in which I am engaged is being implemented with a sense of urgency. Up until now, successive administrations have regarded regional development as a key issue. In the context of the Cold War balance of power, Japan enjoyed advantageous conditions due to rapid economic growth and an increasing working-age population. Those conditions, in turn, facilitated employment and income growth in target regions through public projects and investment incentives, without allocating too many national resources to security matters.

However, it is now necessary to recognize the national crisis we face and fundamentally change the way we develop our policies. With end of the Cold War, Japan's stagnating economy, aging population, and unprecedentedly low birth rate combined to form a situation we have never before experienced.

### **Potential for growth in regional economies**

Japan's less urban regions are blessed with natural beauty and unique histories and culture. However, productivity in these areas in primary industries and the service sector—including tourism—has remained low. Of course, that means there is huge potential for growth in these areas. At the same time, while Tokyo is the center of people and wealth, the city has an aging infrastructure including the capital freeway and old wooden homes that are particularly susceptible to earthquakes. As a result, we are facilitating regional economic growth at the same time that we are addressing the vulnerability of Tokyo.

Tokyo also has an extremely low birth rate. The five million people who migrated to Tokyo in the fifteen years between 1955 and 1970 are now contributing to the Tokyo's rapidly aging population.

Local regions have traditionally been dependent on public works and investment incentives. From now on, however, these regions must develop through other means. Japan is blessed with rich soil, ample water, moderate temperatures and abundant sunshine—the attributes of a successful agricultural sector. With appropriate shifts in policies and awareness, I believe that Japan's agriculture can thrive.

The Japanese automobile industry has been successful in developing overseas markets for its products. Why then hasn't Japanese agriculture been successful, since it too "makes things?" I believe the answer lies in policies too slow to change and a low level of public awareness regarding the uniqueness of agriculture. We can see the same pattern in the fisheries and forestry industries, where resources are abundant.

Japan's appeal as a tourist destination is based on four components: four distinct seasons; a diverse and beautiful environment; tradition, culture, and arts; and a rich food culture. In these four areas, Japan excels compared to many other countries. As mentioned, agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and the service sector—including tourism—all have tremendous potential for growth, especially in local areas.

Since regional matters really can really only be understood by locals, we asked all 1,718 municipalities in Japan to develop key performance indicators and to formulate comprehensive local strategies that incorporate plan-do-check-act (PCDA) methods. The national government is trying to support this bottom-up approach by providing information, funds, and human resources.

### **Japan's role in the international community**

Other countries in Europe and Asia face similar problems of aging societies and dwindling populations. For the future of Japan and for the sake of the international community, it is our generation's responsibility to find solutions to these problems.

In addition to leading efforts at revitalizing Japan's regions, I am also in charge of our National Strategic Special Zones. I believe that Japan can integrate regulatory reforms developed in these special zones with broader regional economic growth plans and implement new initiatives such as tourism Destination Marketing/Managing Organizations and Continuing Care Retirement Communities that have never before been attempted. If we succeed, Japan can export its efforts to other countries.

## **Breaking with “democracy by deferral**

These initiatives may also heighten citizens’ awareness in their choice of mayors and local legislators. Elections in Japan, especially local elections, have had low turnouts since many people believe that it doesn’t matter who wins. If we can shift our perspective, however, so that citizens come to believe that local matters can be solved by local people, and that citizens are key players in finding solution, the public will naturally become more proactive in choosing their representatives and keeping them accountable.

In terms of bottom-up initiatives, the leadership mayors provide can have a huge impact. Part of my plan regional revitalization is to encourage a break from indifferent and indirect “democracy by deferral” by establishing and spreading bottom-up initiatives. Many democratic nations are now facing a serious challenge with a growth in extremist views due to economic dissatisfaction and a growing sense that democracy is failing.

A break from indifferent and indirect “democracy by deferral” would increase awareness of the sovereignty of the people. Economic and population growth have often led to contradictory demands: calls for expanded public works projects and social welfare programs but also opposition to increased taxes to pay for them. Politicians who fear losing elections too often try to curry favor with constituents by supporting these contradictory demands, which ultimately will leave future generations to pay the bill. And that, in turn, can spur greater popular support for authoritarian political leaders.

Those people who fail to vote based on how they would conduct themselves if they were in public office also effectively fail to understand that the people are sovereign. Indeed, perhaps that would prefer a monarchy. Japan’s democracy established after the WWII did not result from a popular revolution. Rather, the allied powers simply granted democracy to Japan in the wake of its defeat in the war. As a result, there is a serious risk that Japan may lose what I believe is a tenuous appreciation of democracy—a risk that deeply troubles me.

## **Japan’s efforts to bolster the Japan-U.S. alliance**

It is undeniable that the Japan-U.S. alliance functions as a public good for the entire Asia-Pacific region; moreover, I believe that the importance of the alliance will continue to grow over time. Yet, in the U.S. presidential campaign, one of the candidates has proposed changes to the alliance, which are the cause of deep concern in Japan. However, that candidate’s views clearly reflect his ignorance of the true nature of the alliance.

The United States is finding it more difficult now to sustain its leadership position than it did during the Cold War and immediate post-Cold War periods. If Japan or Korea chose to build nuclear weapons, as one candidate has talked about, the current order, based on the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, would weaken and regional instability would accelerate. Ultimately American national interests would be

damaged. At the same time, if Japan and Korea maintain only lightly armed forces without nuclear weapons, China's growing military capacity is going to expand. That too runs counter to U.S. national interests.

Thus, it is important and necessary for Japan to take initiatives that bolster and complement the Japan-U.S. alliance. The security-related bills that passed the Diet last year took a tremendous effort. The change Japan made on in its views on the exercise of collective self-defense—that it is possible in certain limited circumstances—should be understood in that context.

The opposition party claims that those bills are unconstitutional and must to be overturned because of a risk that Japan will be steered into a U.S.-led conflict. This view, however, is based on ignorance of the Constitution of Japan, the United Nations Charter, and changes in the Asia-Pacific security environment, which is why it has not gained support from the people.

The change that Japan made on collective self-defense is not enough to make everything run smoothly. There is always the “alliance dilemma”—the risk of entrapment or abandonment by one's ally. This risk needs constant management.

When the LDP was in the opposition, it maintained that “the full-scale utilization of the right to collective self-defense is feasible without constitutional amendment, and so it shall be mandated by a fundamental law on national security.” Prime Minister Abe, however, has said that a “constitutional amendment is necessary for the exercise of collective self-defense, now more than ever,” and this remains the current position of his government. Even with such a constitutional amendment, we must seriously consider revising the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty as well as the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement so that the Japan-U.S. alliance transition from “asymmetric bilateral relations” to “symmetric bilateral relations.”

In 1955, ten years after the end of WWII, Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu met U.S. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and asserted that “Japan will exercise its right to collective self-defense and defense of the U.S. as far as Guam. American troops stationed in Japan should withdraw.” Dulles rejected the idea, citing the JSDF's lack of capacity and Japan's constitutional interpretation, which ran counter to the proposal. In addition, Dulles said that although Shigemitsu was making a claim along the lines of the alliance that the U.S. Had with the Philippines, the benefit of the Japan-U.S. alliance for the United States is the utilization of Japan's military bases rather than having Japan as an escort. It has been more than 60 years since that meeting. Has the international community and the Japan-U.S. alliance stayed the same? I strongly believe the answer is no.

### **The future of the U.S. troops stationed in Japan**

National security requires not only legal structures but also other practical preparations including operational guidelines, equipment, human resources, and training. Much more needs to be done by Japan.

With regard to the U.S. troops, I wonder how many people have an accurate understanding of the differences between the U.S. troops stationed in Japan and Australia, in terms of domestic laws.

The U.S. troops in Australia are stationed in “rented” military bases. American troops in Japan, however are on bases owned by the United States, and so the JSDF has no control over the bases’ management. This arrangement results from the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, which provides a trade-off between “the promise to protect” and the “provision of space and facilities,” rather than reciprocal protection. However, the process of the JSDF renting the bases to the U.S. is making some progress. The JSDF’s involvement in the management of space and facilities in the military bases has provided a sense of reassurance to local residents.

I personally believe that Japan, in the long run, should aim for a new system in which bases are “rented” to the U.S. troops stationed there. For that to happen, it is necessary to improve the JSDF’s capacity, as well as seek an improved alliance with “mutual protection” based on collective self-defense.

### **The state of deterrence**

Deterrence depends both on the possession of equipment and active training on the ground. Joint exercises between the JSDF and the U.S. troops in the southwest islands of Japan provide one example of such active deterrence. I believe that the Japan-U.S. alliance’s readiness for both expected and unexpected situations will contribute to the regional stability.

Strengthening bilateral partnerships on equipment is also important. It is undeniable that some security issues we face can only be addressed through the use of enhanced defense equipment. Therefore, technological capability, especially in the field of cyber, robotics, IoT and ISR, needs to be improved continuously through collaborative R&D efforts between Japan and the U.S. Specifically, further advancement in robotics and unmanned aircraft are needed for the missions in 3D (Dangerous, Dirty, Dull) environments.

Although Japan is considered a technologically-advanced nation, technologies involving high cost-performance are often found in smaller enterprises and venture companies that are not traditionally included in the defense industry as it has existed thus far. Therefore, it would be beneficial for Japan’s growth strategy to include companies that work on defense-related matters. The Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Agency (ALTA) can help in that respect in that it was established to facilitate the buildup of defense capabilities in a flexible, cost-effective, timely, and advanced manner that includes both the public and private sectors in Japan and the U.S.

### **A system of multilateral, multi-layered cooperation**

The roles laid out for ALTA are not limited to the bilateral framework between Japan and the U.S. The threats we face, especially the ones posed by terrorist groups and countries with unclear intentions, are equally threatening to other countries in Asia and Europe, so creating partnerships among these countries will enhance the Japan-U.S. alliance as a public good.

Japan has already concluded defense and security agreements with France and England and is now exploring potential joint projects on existing and new equipment. We launched a bid for submarines in Australia, but sadly missed winning that opportunity by a hair. And even though the easing of the Three Principles on Arms Exports solved a majority of the legal hurdles for Japan, for many countries, Japan's credibility in providing technology related to defense equipment remains untested and so presents a major challenge.

### **Sustainability and Diversity**

I believe that the key words for the success of Japanese policies going forward are "sustainability" and "diversity." Both regional revitalization and the strengthening of the Japan-U.S. alliance are imperative in ensuring the sustainability of our nation. Furthermore, key areas, including social welfare; enhancement of regional productivity; and agriculture, forestry, and fisheries should all aim to be independently viable and sustainable.

Diversity in the Asia-Pacific region, which we sometimes have trouble embracing, should be honored since we have so many languages, religions, races, and political systems. This diversity offers the chance for innovation and new ideas. I believe that the development of United States, from its establishment to today, has benefited greatly from its embrace of its own diversity.

I would like to contextualize two key words in the Japan-U.S. alliance: sustainability and diversity. In order to uphold the values represented by these words, it is critically important that we place emphasis on U.S. goals of protecting not only its national interests but also advancing universal principles of freedom and democracy.

I would like to close my remarks by expressing my deepest gratitude to those who are here with me and all the people who have been cultivating the Japan-U.S. relations. Thank you very much for listening.