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# Japan-U.S. Public Diplomacy

*Built on Mutual Trust and Shared Values*

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## Abstract

*Minister Takehiro Shimada reflects on his two tours at the Embassy of Japan in Washington, D.C. and the various programs he has been a part of. He describes in detail work that has been done to benefit the Japan-U.S. relationship including relations between the countries' leaders, assistance initiatives, public diplomacy efforts, and optimism for the future. In his concluding sentences Minister Shimada notes that although the Japan-U.S. relationship is better than ever, it should not be taken for granted. Tending to bilateral relationships is like gardening. In order to enjoy a beautiful garden, it is necessary to have unrelenting efforts such as daily watering, regular trimming and mowing and sometimes even meticulous planning. As we continue to look to the future we must cultivate and actively engage in supporting the young people who will prepare to lead two of the leading democracies in the world.*

It was my great privilege to have multiple opportunities to work at the Japanese Embassy in Washington D.C. as a diplomat in charge of public diplomacy; first between 2005 and 2008, and second between 2017 and 2020. One of the most important missions for Japanese diplomats in Washington is to further develop our bilateral relationship as the closest ally of the United States. In particular, as the Minister in charge of Japanese public diplomacy towards the United States, the fundamental task of my service is helping the embassy facilitate mutual understanding and trust between the people of our two countries. In this sense, I found it very fortunate that in the past decades, including the two terms I served in the Capital, our bilateral relations have been deepening and continue to be mutually appreciated.

In a democracy like Japan or the United States, in which sovereignty resides with the people, elected leaders cannot implement their policies, including diplomacy, without the support of the people. In modern societies where people can freely – and often anonymously – express their views through the internet, across borders, and where national leaders can express their visions directly and instantly through social media, mutual trust across the nations provides a very solid basis for diplomats to carry out public diplomacy.

Notably, while I was in Washington, our leaders, namely President George W. Bush and Prime Minister Koizumi and President Trump and Prime Minister Abe, enjoyed, and have been enjoying, strong personal bonds of friendship. I believe that it is not a mere coincidence, but natural that our leaders cherish their personal friendship as heads of state working closely to pursue global peace and prosperity based on the common values of democracy, rule of law, freedom, respect for basic human rights, market economy and so forth.

Through my experiences as a Japanese diplomat stationed in Washington for a total of about six years, I came to be convinced that common values must be the core and the foundation of our relations. I also believe that the role of values we mutually believe in should become critical in choosing the directions of our lives and countries in this time of uncertainty when the Post-War World Order on which we have been enjoying peace and prosperity are being challenged. Coincidentally, the current COVID-19 crisis raised these very questions; what the most important values for us to live with are, and how we should construct the Post-Corona society on the basis of the values we choose.

In 2011 when the Great East Japan earthquake occurred, I was in Tokyo as an official of the Cabinet Secretariat engaging in coordinating international support. I will never forget the memory that American diplomats and military service members stationed in Japan remained steadfast and persistently stood beside us to extend full-scale support for the Japanese people facing a national crisis. Of course, it is not only me but all Japanese people who truly appreciate and still vividly remember the strong support under the banner of the “Tomodachi Initiative” (Tomodachi means “Friends” in Japanese) by the Government, the people and the United States.

Now, the COVID-19 crisis reminds us that a friend in need is a friend indeed. I recognize how common values are important to distinguish true friends on whom we can rely in this occasion of genuine need. Even in this context, I cannot overemphasize the importance of public diplomacy efforts to facilitate the peoples’ understanding of Japan as the closest friend that shares common values with the United States. While mutual trust among people cannot be built within a day, this trust is a testament to the long accumulation of confidence through years of people to people exchanges.

Based on that understanding, I would like to provide an outline of public diplomacy efforts with a rough sketch of the current Japan-US bilateral relationship in various fields. Indeed, our alliance has been strengthened in almost all aspects of the bilateral relationship such as political, economic and social, even in the very short 10 years when I was absent from Washington. In other words, in this decade, when we frequently witnessed the global order established after the Second World War being challenged, and Japan, especially under the Abe administration, has taken a greater responsibility and role in the international society in promoting global peace and prosperity, the importance of the US-Japan alliance has significantly increased.

For example, one of the most symbolic endeavors in recent geopolitics is the collaboration to secure a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific.” Although the Indo-Pacific region has become one of the strongest engines of global economic growth, with the further emergence of various threats, such as the spread of weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters, and unilateral attempts to change the status quo, etc., there is a growing need for the countries of the region to work together to secure a “Free and Open

Indo-Pacific.” As responsible members of the region, Japan and the US, together with other countries supporting the idea, have been working closely to develop free and open maritime order, based on the rule of law, across the region through addressing those various threats, as well as through enhancing connectivity within the region by developing quality infrastructure in accordance with international standards. We intend to develop the Indo-Pacific region as an “international public goods,” bringing stability and prosperity for every country as well as securing peace and prosperity in the region as a whole.

In the global economic arena, Japan and the US, as the first and second greatest advanced economies of the world, which cover approximately 30 percent of the global GDP, our economy has been deepening its interdependency and we have been strengthening collaboration in advancing global economic systems based on our shared values. According to the most recent data by the US Department of Commerce, Japan’s cumulative direct investment in the US is the second highest after the UK (approximately 469 billion USD in 2017) and direct investment by Japanese companies is contributing to the US regional economy in the form of job creation (approximately 860,000 people in 2016). The strengthening of the multilayered relationship of our two countries through vigorous investment and employment creation has become a rock-solid foundation for Japan-US relations. I am so proud to find that symbolic companies in the manufacturing industry like Toyota, Honda, Hitachi and many others have been contributing to the local communities where they established their roots and were accepted as upstanding US citizens.

To maintain and facilitate global economic growth in a stable manner based on the market mechanism and the rule of law, Japan and the US have been further deepening partnerships in the field of international organizations such as the World Trade Organization. The Japan-US Trade Agreement and the Japan-US Digital Trade Agreement took effect on January 1st this year. As feelings regarding the uncertainty over global economic prospects have been intensifying due to the COVID-19 crisis, I hope that Japan and the US will deepen collaboration to take the lead in securing global economic order based on our common values for the sake of sustainable global prosperity and welfare in the long term.

Based on the accumulations of collaboration and cooperation in multilayered fields and levels between Japan and the US, both peoples have been enjoying mutual trust and respect in the recent decades. In fact,

according to the opinion poll on US attitudes toward Japan, which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan commissioned public opinion research agencies to conduct, 85 percent among general public and 89 percent among opinion leaders in the US perceived Japan as a reliable partner. And 92 percent of the general public and 100 percent of the opinion leaders favor the idea that Japan and the US should cooperate for peace and security in the Asia-Pacific region. In addition, 69 percent among the general public and 89 percent among the opinion leaders responded that Japan should play a more proactive role.

With regard to the background of such a high level of trust with Japan and the Japan-US relations among the American people, I believe that apart from the practical cooperation in various fields mentioned above, development of people to people exchanges especially increasing numbers of young American people who are interested in Japan and who have experiences of visiting Japan, are important factors to account for that trust. This is one of the reasons why the Embassy's public diplomacy team has put a lot of energy and resources into the field of people-to-people exchanges, especially in the younger generations who are shouldering responsibilities to construct the future of our relationship.

One of the typical success stories in our public diplomacy efforts is the JET (Japan Exchange and Teaching) Program. The primary purpose of this program is to promote grass-roots international exchanges at the local level in Japan. The Japanese government invites young college graduates from around the world to participate in various initiatives by the local governments and be involved in foreign language education at Japan's local government offices, Boards of Education, elementary, junior and high schools. The United States is the original country of origin for JETs since this program was launched in 1987. Now, about 1,000 young Americans visit Japan as JETs every year and as of 2019, approximately 35,000 American people have participated in the program in the past 33 years. These JET alumni are now following careers at various levels in the US and are also playing pivotal roles as private and even professional diplomats acting as bridges between our two countries. There are 19 chapters of JET alumni which are actively organizing their own activities. The Japanese Embassy always enjoys close communication and collaboration with the DC chapter established more than 30 years ago, which takes the lead in coordinating the USJET Alumni Association (USJETAA) to support their networking efforts.

In addition, JUMP (Japan U.S. Military Program) is an initiative in supporting the networking of past and present service members, families and government civilians who have served in Japan. This program is still a very young initiative, launched in 2015, but is increasingly expanding its activities as the first public- private partnership between the Japanese Embassy and Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA. JUMP provides a lot of opportunities such as social events and lectures for service members to engage with each other. It has become a powerful foundation for sustaining the solid alliance and relationship between Japan and the US. It is really encouraging and even touching to find the enthusiasm for and attachment to Japan and Japanese culture which the American service members embrace. I hope that with this program, we will be able to further deepen our mutual trust and friendship among the people and families in military service.

The partnership with the Japanese American people (Nikkei) is also very important pillar for our people to people exchanges. The year 2018 marked the 150th anniversary of the overseas migration of the Japanese and the arrival of the Nikkei people in the US. Based on the history of the Japanese Americans and the roots they have in Japan, the Government of Japan wishes to strengthen the bonds with them in building a multilayered and robust relationship between the two countries. From this perspective, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been engaged in efforts to strengthen the relationship with the Nikkei people through exchange programs, including inviting Nikkei leaders in the US to Japan which started in 2000. When I was in Washington for two terms, I had the honor to know and work with the late Senator Daniel Ken Inoue, the late Ms. Irene Hirano Inouye, who unfortunately passed away this spring, and Secretary Norman Yoshio Mineta, all of whom worked tirelessly to strengthen the bilateral relationship. I will never forget their genuine passion and devotion to US-Japan friendship. And I'm convinced that their enthusiasm was based on the conviction that our alliance and partnership contributes both to our mutual national interests as well as the betterment of the world beyond the bilateral context. I renew my commitment to the common values that we share for the duration of my diplomatic career.

The Embassy thinks highly of promotion of Japanese language education in the US. According to the periodical survey conducted by the Japan Foundation, there are about 170,000 Japanese learners (8th in the world) in the US and the number has been in a gradually increasing trend. One major reason for American learners to start studying Japanese seems to be the interest in Anime and Manga. Whatever the reason may be, to

learn a foreign language is one of the best ways to deepen understanding of the country where that language is spoken. We believe that the Japanese language education in the US, beyond deepening mutual understanding between the two countries, will also provide a lot of opportunities for American kids to improve their skills and become global leaders with a broader comprehension of our diverse and complex international society.

The most serious challenge that Japanese education in the US faces is the lack of Japanese teachers to catch up with the increasing number of Japanese learners. These days, senior Japanese teachers who have been playing the central role in supporting Japanese language education, especially at the local schools across the States, are reaching the age of retirement. How to supply competitive Japanese language teachers to replace these positions is our biggest hurdle. In this context, one remarkable solution that the Chicago Public School Talent Office has introduced is the Visiting International Teachers Program, through which Japanese teachers are granted the Visiting International Teacher License to teach Japanese language at the local schools in Chicago if the teacher meets the required criteria of that system. Another impressive story about Japanese language learners is that in Virginia, a group of school kids asked their principal not to terminate Japanese classes when the school authority was planning to streamline their foreign language courses. As such, in order to facilitate Japan- US grassroots exchanges through Japanese language education, it is very important to promote in close collaboration with stakeholders like local school authorities, teachers, students and parents. Of course, the Embassy must not do anything that would be misunderstood as an intervention into the public education system. But the Embassy of Japan always open its windows of communication with anyone who wishes to facilitate Japanese language education which would nurture future global leaders to bridge between Japan, the US and beyond. In this context, in 2018 the Embassy launched a regular meeting with the aforementioned stakeholders to promote Japanese language education in the US as a platform to exchange views, information and challenges that members are facing.

In addition, I always enjoyed grassroots exchanges in close collaboration with the DC community to which my Embassy belongs. Every year we participate in the “Embassy Adoption Program” under which the DC educational authority designates a local elementary or middle school for an embassy in DC to voluntarily visit the school and share cross-cultural lessons. It is really heartwarming to see the kids actively engage in the

program developed by the young staff of the Japan Information and Culture Center. My Embassy is proudly committed to the grassroots exchanges as an engaged member of the DC community. In terms of our soft power to reach out to the local people, I'm so proud that Mr. Rui Hachimura who joined Washington Wizards last year made a cancellation of the event might have brought. Young event staff made maximum use of their IT skills and introduced a brand-new scheme to celebrate the friendship online. Ms. Diana Mayhew, the president of NCBF, appeared everywhere to give interviews and make speeches to promote the significance of the festivities, and showed strong leadership in the virtualization of the opening ceremony. Mr. Ryan Shaffer, newly elected president of JASWDC in 2019, took the initiative to successfully host the 28th Japan Bowl Championship, the biggest nation-wide high school competition on the knowledge of Japanese language and Japan, online for the first time in the history of the program.

It was a shame that we could not celebrate the flourishing Japan-US friendship as usual. However, the enthusiasm of young Americans and the unparalleled guidance of many leaders of the societies which have been the driving forces of promoting the Japan-US friendship through the NCBF reflect how deeply our ties are enrooted in US society. I believe the experiences to overcome this crisis should definitely bring a great deal of insight and wisdom for the people of our two countries to show fresh ways to celebrate our friendship under the "New Normal" world. I am truly looking forward to celebrating the festivities in innovative ways to showcase another beautiful side of our bilateral collaborations.

In terms of nurturing future global leaders who recognize the significance of the role of the Japan-US alliance should play in the global context, I need to touch upon the functions of the U.S.-Japan Conference on Cultural and Educational Interchange (CULCON). CULCON was established by an agreement between Prime Minister Ikeda and President Kennedy in 1961 as a binational advisory panel that serves to elevate and strengthen the vital cultural and educational foundations of the U.S.-Japan relationship, and to strengthen connections between U.S. and Japanese leadership in those fields. CULCON, as the official organization based on the agreement, is supposed to submit recommendations on the fields to both leaders every other year. Panels from both countries consist of the representatives of such sectors as government, business and academia, and regularly exchange views to forge operational programs for the governments to implement. It is really encouraging for me to see that, in recent years, CULCON is placing greater importance on the intellectual

exchanges among young scholars and experts in various fields to nurture future global leaders, with the understanding that cross-cutting knowledge and wisdom are indispensable for the current complex and borderless world.

Finally, as I outlined above, the current Japan-US relationship is better than ever. However, we should not take it for granted. I always remember that a wise man once compared bilateral relationships to gardening. In order for us to enjoy a beautiful garden, we need unrelenting efforts such as daily watering, regular trimming and mowing and sometimes even meticulous planning. With regard to our bilateral relationship, I believe the mutual trust and confidence between the people based on common values are the foundation of our alliance. We need to continue to engage with the public, especially with the younger generations, so that they can better understand the value of our alliance—an alliance whose role is increasingly critical in these times of global uncertainty where people are looking for the right direction. Even from this perspective, it is my hope that the people of both our countries will deepen their understanding of the roles of public diplomacy and extend their support as they are the backbone of two of the great leading democracies in the world. Whatever duty I take in my future assignments in the diplomatic service, I would like to actively engage in supporting the young people who are shouldering the responsibilities involved in supporting and strengthening our alliance.