Moving Forward Together:
The Future of the US-Japan Alliance

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About the Japan-US Security Seminar

The Japan-US Security Seminar has earned a reputation for playing an important role in promoting candid, off-the-record dialogue between the two nations, aimed at strengthening the alliance by anticipating and offering suggestions to address potential alliance problems. Traditionally, participants include current and former government officials, analysts, and scholars who are the most knowledgeable in the two countries on alliance management. This year's seminar held on March 15-16, 2013 was the 19th annual meeting and jointly sponsored by The Consulate General of Japan in San Francisco, the Japan Institute of International Affairs (JIIA), and the Pacific Forum CSIS.

Pacific Forum CSIS

Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS (www.pacforum.org) operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

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Moving Forward Together:
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Last week, Ralph Cossa emailed asking if I would give the keynote tonight at the 19th Japan-US Security Seminar. I quickly replied that it would be an honor to do so and offered my condolences to the family of the original keynoter who obviously dropped dead. Ralph's reply was perfect. He said, Rich Armitage was normally his "go-to guy" in this situation and though Rich was very much alive, he couldn't make it. Notice Ralph didn't say that Rich was the original keynoter. He just said that Rich was normally his "go-to guy" in this situation. It wouldn't surprise me if everyone since Douglas MacArthur has been asked to speak here tonight but I am not embarrassed to accept because it is an opportunity that I have looked forward to for many hours.

Seriously, it is an honor to pinch-hit for Rich. He recruited me to the account and no one knows more about the importance of Japan to the security of America than Rich.

In attendance tonight are folks like Jim Kelly, Torkel Patterson, and Ambassador Mike Armacost who patiently answered my many questions over the years, and Jim Zumwalt, Marc Knapper, and Chris Johnstone with whom I am proud to say I served in Tokyo. Every one of these fine public servants has been a treasure to the US-Japan relationship and a friend to me. They are the real experts on that relationship and I am humbled to make comments in their presence.

The recent past has not been easy for our alliance. Over the last eight years, eight Japanese prime ministers have met with two American presidents. This constant turnover of prime ministers has made it extraordinarily difficult to develop the close personal relationships that have so benefited our alliance in the past. I am thinking here of Nakasone-Reagan and Koizumi-Bush to illustrate my point. To be sure, nations will almost always act in what they perceive to be their own national interests, but there can be little doubt that mutual trust and respect between leaders helps. Friendship at that level never drives policy apart. But developing that kind of rapport is awfully hard when you are meeting your counterpart for the first time or you are worried that they won't be there in a month or two.

Turnover at the top has permeated the whole relationship. Cabinet secretaries have been harder to find because they are not sure that the ministers they meet will be there long enough to carry out the policies they might agree upon. Bureaucrats have become more risk averse because no one wants to get ahead of policymakers who may change and take with them the political cover needed to do their work. It is a testament to the underlying strength of our alliance that the instability that has marked Japanese politics over the last few years has not done more damage. Hopefully, on the American side we can learn from the experience and do some things differently in the future that will be to our mutual benefit.

It is also worth noting that during this period of turmoil the underlying purpose of the alliance was never really questioned by the Japanese public. In my judgment, the principle cause

of the Liberal Democratic Party's (LDP) loss of the Upper House in 2007 was not because Japan wanted to go it alone or Japanese voters questioned the need for a close alliance with the United States. It was because the government lost 64 million pension accounts a couple of months before the election and never came up with a plausible explanation as to what it was going to do about it. The American alliance and foreign policy in general were hardly mentioned in that historic election. The subsequent 2009 Lower House election was again all about domestic issues. It turned on the public's belief that the LDP had forfeited the reform agenda of former Prime Minister Koizumi and reverted to its old ways of doing business. It was not until the Upper House election of 2010 that the US-Japan alliance became a factor in electoral politics and then it was in my opinion because Japanese voters feared that Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama had driven the United States away from Japan at a time of dangerous change in a new world order. After the mishandling of the triple disaster, Japanese voters completed their turn away from the Democracy Party of Japan (DPJ) last December by orchestrating another rout of incumbents. But, even Mr. Shinzo Abe, the huge winner of that election, has acknowledged that victory came more from people voting against the DPJ than voting for the LDP.

It was with that background that Mr. Abe went to Washington at the end of February. On behalf of Japan, he wanted, in my estimation, to push a restart button with the Obama administration. By all accounts, he succeeded. His meeting in the Oval Office and lunch afterward got very good reviews inside and out of the administration. I have been told that he knew his brief and discussed it confidently with the president. No doubt there will be some in the administration who will still want to see if he can put the Japanese government back together again in July before getting too excited, but I think it is fair to say that the overall impression Mr. Abe left in Washington was one of a leader who will likely be around for a while. That is a very positive thing for a town that increasingly talked about the inability of the Japanese to get their act together. The image of Mr. Abe as a person ready to lead has been enhanced by the decisiveness he has shown since the summit with regard to the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP). Washington is hungry for a Japanese leader who has a vision for where he wants to take Japan and a vision for what he thinks the US-Japan alliance should be. Mr. Abe convinced a lot of people that he could be just that kind of leader.

Mr. Abe's image in Washington was bolstered again by the speech he gave at CSIS that afternoon. Speaking before several hundred Japan hands and observers, Mr. Abe answered in English a question Rich Armitage has been asking for sometime: namely, would the Japanese be satisfied to occupy a place in the international order as a middle power rather than a major player on the world stage? Prime Minister Abe answered emphatically that Japan was back and would never be satisfied to be a middle power. It is clear that an Abe government is out to increase rather than diminish the influence of Japan in the world.

Later that night, I was fortunate enough to be one of 10 people asked to dine with the prime minister. I came away from that dinner and that day believing that the worst of the last few years is finally over. Having been ambassador when Mr. Abe was chief Cabinet secretary and then prime minister, I think I know him pretty well. This time he seemed to me to be more self-confident and more self-assured. Frankly, he seemed to be enjoying himself a lot more as prime minister. Whether his health is better than the first time around, his advisers are wiser or the years in the wilderness have been transformative, he seems determined now not to waste the

opportunity a second chance has given him. It is important to remember that Mr. Abe was raised to be prime minister. The question in his life had always been when – not if – he would one day reach the top. As a result, that first experience as PM was terribly disappointing to him and his family. Now, having survived a near-death political experience, he seems more determined than ever to leave a legacy that will reshape Japan.

His critics sometimes want to portray Mr. Abe as a rightwing zealot bent on returning Japan to a militaristic past. I think they are wrong about that. Mr. Abe's government will take a conservative approach to solving the nation's problems to be sure, but he is not a blind ideologue. He longs for the day when Japan can again take its place in the international order as a "normal" nation.

He believes that Japan has earned the right to be considered "normal" because of the way it has conducted itself as a model citizen of the international community for almost 70 years. That does not make him some rightwing nut who would be cruising around the streets of Tokyo shouting from a sound truck if he weren't in the Diet. He is an intelligent, thoughtful person who deeply believes that a healthy, strong alliance with the United States is the best way to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia.

So what do I think an Abe government will likely be doing over the next few years to reform Japan? First, I think Mr. Abe has decided that Japan must be at the table if it has any chance to affect the outcome of the negotiations on the TPP. That does not mean that the Japanese will be pushovers when it comes to protecting their interests. They are tough and sometimes exasperating negotiators, but they realize now that it is safer to be at the table than to wait for the outcome and risk being shut out of the game altogether. Mr. Abe knows that nobody will look after Japan's interests better than the Japanese and I think he is prepared to argue that point to the Japanese public. I also believe that he fears that if Japan is not a part of a huge trading block in the Pacific its economy will be shut out of future growth. And he knows that the growth and revitalization of the Japanese economy is absolutely essential to Japan's taking a leadership position in the world on matters of security. I don't know if the Japanese people are ready to remove Article 9 from their constitution, but I think Mr. Abe's government is anxious to argue that the constitution can be reinterpreted to allow for collective self-defense. This would be a really important change because of the effect it would have on our own missile defense and maritime security.

When I was ambassador, I frequently spoke on America's need to know what the Japanese would do if a missile was launched from the Asian mainland and a Japanese destroyer was in a place where it could shoot it down. Under the present interpretation of the constitution, the Japanese could only shoot that missile down if it was headed for Japan. While that might be the technical state of our alliance today, that alliance could never survive if the American people thought the Japanese had a chance to prevent a tragedy on American soil and did nothing. Mr. Abe understands that and he puts no greater premium on anything related to security than the maintenance of a strong alliance with the United States.

Still some want to argue that his desire to make Japan stronger through the multiplier effect of a more robust US-Japan alliance is just a cover for secret military ambitions.

The other night at the dinner, Mr. Abe sought to allay people's fears about that by saying that all he really wanted to do was to remove some of the impracticalities from past constitutional interpretations. Right now, he said, a Japanese soldier dispatched on a peace keeping mission for the United Nations cannot shoot a belligerent coming at him with a gun until he is within 20 meters. What is the soldier supposed to do, Mr. Abe asked, tell the belligerent to stop so he can measure the distance between them? The guests laughed and understood his point. He said he wasn't a radical as much as he was a realist and thought those kinds of unworkable solutions needed to be changed in Japanese law. I agree.

When it comes to China, I believe Mr. Abe thinks of himself as a realist more than an ideologue. His philosophy to me seems pretty close to mainstream opinion in America on two points. First, do not tempt the Chinese with weakness. Second, Japan is stronger when it acts in alliance with the United States instead of going it alone. Keep our alliance healthy and we both reduce the chance for conflict. With regard to the Senkakus, Mr. Abe does not seem to me to be a saber rattler. He is not going to be bullied by the Chinese into giving up those islands but he is also not threatening to rain down fire upon them if they don't acknowledge Japan's sovereignty. He prefers to settle the dispute peacefully and he thinks the chances for doing so are better if the Chinese don't see a realistic military option to substitute. Mr. Abe is concerned, as are most Asians, with Chinese assertiveness over disputed islands, but his policies don't seem all that different to me than those of Vietnam, the Philippines, South Korea, and others in the Pacific. Again, it is something that does not seem all that radical to me.

Finally, Mr. Abe will continue to be a hardliner when it comes to North Korea. Having first come to prominence in the public eye because he believed defectors who said that the DPRK was kidnapping Japanese citizens for intelligence purposes, Mr. Abe still wears the enameled blue ribbon in his lapel that is meant to remind people of Japanese abductees. He will not rest, I am sure, until the whereabouts of all those abductees are finally known. But, Mr. Abe like every other prime minister I worked with in Japan, always emphasized to me that the primary purpose of the Six-Party Talks was preventing North Korea from acquiring nuclear weapons. He understands the destabilizing effect that a nuclear North Korea could have on the entire neighborhood of Northeast Asia. He also understands that the DPRK is a known proliferator to places like Syria and Iran. Trouble in those spots could severely impact Japan's future energy supplies in the Middle East. Simply put, he does not want the North Koreans to acquire nuclear weapons or the missiles that can deliver them. Should negotiations ever begin again, he will likely take the hardest line of anyone in the region.

Finally, I believe Mr. Abe understands the conceptual need for force transformation in our alliance, something that seemed totally beyond Mr. Hatoyama's comprehension and woefully inadequate on the part of many DPJ members. While every paragraph in our agreement may not be to his liking, I think he understands how much work went into the product from both sides and how important it is to achieve a positive outcome. He also understands that it was not easy for our side to get the various US services to sign off on the Futenma relocation plan.

Earlier I said we could learn some things from the experience that we have had over the last few years to strengthen our alliance. To begin with we must not assume, as I think we did before, that the US-Japan alliance enjoys bipartisan support in Japan. It does in the US, but we

are not totally there at the present time in Japan. Our experience with Mr. Hatoyama and Mr. Ozawa should remind us that we can take nothing for granted. They did not understand the strategic need for the alliance and they didn't understand its basic requirements. The notion that the US-Japan alliance could exist offshore and be called to Japan only if it was needed was naïve at best and dangerously foolish at worst. To think that Japanese leaders actually thought that America would accept such a fundamentally flawed arrangement caught many of us by surprise. Americans and Japanese have to be prepared to educate our publics constantly to ensure that our alliance is understood as vital to the security of both our countries. Neither of us can be shy about saying that Japan and the United States are the thread that runs through the peace and stability of the region. We also need to keep opposition leaders better informed and not just depend on the goodwill of the party in power.

The US-Japan relationship has been going through a bit of a rough spot, but I think the worst is over. My sense is that Washington and Japan are now ready to reengage in a way that we have experienced in the past but seen little of in the present. That engagement is still vitally important to the security of both our countries.

I say all that with only one caveat. It is my greatest hope that the Japanese government will not attempt to revisit some of the thorny historical issues that have caused it such pain in the past. The so-called "comfort women" issue is particularly disconcerting to the American public and any American president of whatever political party. You already see the very name of the issue being challenged in America. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said we are not talking about women who were giving "comfort," we are talking about "sex slaves" that were repeatedly being abused. The reason this issue is so toxic in America is because the political right and the political left come together on it. The right sees it as condoning prostitution and the left sees it as the exploitation of women. There is simply no support of any kind for the position taken by some in Japan that the issue should be reexamined. American political leaders and more importantly the American public have made up their minds on this. By pursuing it further, you will force this president or any subsequent president regardless of party to respond in a way that will not be supportive of what some in Japan want to do. The Kono Statement has served the best interests of Japan in the past and it will continue to do so in the future. Please, please do not go down a different path. It will lead to no good end. It has always been better for us to think about the future rather than the past and that will not change.

The United States and Japan are ready once again to strengthen an alliance that has served the best interests of peace in the Pacific for more than 60 years. We are still on the right side of history. We are still a force for good in the world. We are still two peoples who have much to do and if we do it, we will justly earn the praise of generations to come. Thank you for your attention and thank you for supporting one of the greatest alliances in the history of the world.

Questions and Answers

Question 1: *Mr. Ambassador, thank you very much. We are all blessed to have a major league pinch-hitter. It's about time to talk about who the next ambassador to Japan is going to be. I'm not going to ask you to name who the next ambassador should be, but perhaps you could share your views as to what qualifications are required and necessary to be a successful ambassador to Japan under these circumstances – besides being part owner of the Texas Rangers.*

I think the best asset that any ambassador could bring to the job would be the ability to listen. Americans like to talk and they like to advise and that's all good. But they also need to listen. And if you listen you can be a good ambassador. It also helps if you know the president. I found that pretty helpful. In appreciation of the uniqueness of the relationship, and I don't think you're going to get any American ambassador – man or woman – who will not appreciate the importance that America places in this relationship, you just can't get close to it without understanding. And it is not only important to Japan but it's important throughout Northeast Asia. I always remind an audience: if there were no American presence in Japan, would Japanese feel safer tonight? I don't think so. But I don't think people in South Korea would feel safer, and I don't think people in the Taiwan Strait would feel safer. I don't think that many people would say it would be better if there wasn't a US-Japan alliance. And you would probably be surprised at some of the people who take comfort in the alliance. That's a precious thing and whoever becomes ambassador needs to work every day to see that that kind of relationship continues to exist. And I should add one other thing. I have a great relationship with John Roos. Sometimes Japanese don't understand that American policy in Japan is bipartisan. 99.9 percent of what John Roos worked on is what I worked on. And we talk a lot. Mike Armacost has been a great friend. It is in America's interest to have this relationship and I think any ambassador that you would receive would know that.

Question 2: *I would like to ask the question about the comfort women issue. Even if Mr. Abe doesn't discuss the issue it is sometimes raised by counterparts. What should Mr. Abe do?*

I think the Kono Statement is a fine position to take and he hasn't asked me on this but I would recommend that he reaffirm that. And I might add that is what he told President Bush prior to the summit in 2006.

Question 3: *Thank you Ambassador for your insightful talk. I heard a very positive overview of Mr. Abe and you highlighted your concern about the comfort women issue. What are other concerns the US government or US friends have about Mr. Abe?*

I'm here as a private citizen, not an ambassador. But I think people don't know Mr. Abe very well and I think that he suffers from a caricature that his critics sometimes paint him as. I don't think he is that person. I think he is a very thoughtful and serious person, and he has a real idea of where he wants Japan to go. I've been around politicians my whole life. Most are domestic politicians and even when they become president or prime minister they remain so because they were elected for domestic reasons. I think Mr. Abe has put a lot of time and effort into thinking about what Japan's role on the world stage should be, and that makes him somewhat different. That's a good thing when it comes to maintaining, strengthening, and deepening the ties with the

United States because he's thought about them a lot. As he begins to be known, I think that people are going to like him. They're going to see a person that they believe they can work with. I'm not an Abe apologist, that's not my job. I'm just giving you my opinion, having observed him and talked to him. The person that I talked to and have talked to in the past is not the person that I see caricatured in the press. My advice is to have more of the meetings like he had with the president. He made a fine exposition of his ideas to the president. And believe me when the president has a good reaction everybody knows about it; when the president has a bad reaction they know about that too. So I think he had a good experience, and that's something to build on. It's a great thing for the relationship and one that we haven't had in a while.

Question 4: *My question is about collective self-defense. You talked about the Japanese interpretation of collective self-defense and I agree with you – if Japan does not shoot down a missile that is aimed at the US, the alliance is dead. But there's another aspect of collective self-defense, and it's about the US obligation to defend the Senkakus. I have several chances to lecture on the Senkakus and every time I ask my audience whether they think the US will come to support Japan in case of conflict over the Senkakus, about 70 percent says no. My sense is that the United States is missing opportunities to enforce its strategic position in Asia by not taking sides on the sovereignty issue. Is there any likelihood that the US will take sides in the coming future?*

The United States took sides when they said that the islands were covered by the security treaty. What would have happened if the United States had not said that? Would you think that it would be closer to resolution? I think that it would be a lot more dangerous than it is today. The United States is basically saying that the parties ought to resolve this between themselves. It is after all an issue that has existed since 1896. Japan and China have to come to a reasonable conclusion as to what ought to be done on this. But the United States has said that the military option should not be on the table for the Chinese. But the argument that you make is a very good one, and it's a very old one. The United States has dealt with it many, many places around the world. It is essentially the Gaullist argument that was made by France, and that is will the United States risk New York for Paris? In Japan, it's will the United States risk New York or Washington, or Seattle or Los Angeles for Tokyo? The answer is that we have been doing that ever since the beginning of the alliance, and it seems to have worked. The point is often made that it is easier to convince the person that you are deterring than it is to convince the person who depends on your deterrence. I think we have a credible deterrent and the Japanese people ought to take great confidence in that. Let me add one other thing. The proudest moment that I had as ambassador was in 2006 when the North Koreans tested missiles on July 4th. I briefed Mr. Abe as well as the foreign minister and the defense minister that morning and talked to the prime minister and then I went out and spoke to the media and I was on television all over Japan. I said that the United States stands with Japan today as we did yesterday, as we will tomorrow. That seemed to have a good effect. Later the North Koreans exploded a nuclear device in October and a reporter asked Prime Minister Abe, does this mean that Japan has to develop its own nuclear weapons. Prime Minister Abe said no, that's what we have the American alliance for. If there was no confidence that we would be there on that day, no Japanese prime minister could answer that question that way. That answer can be made today because it's still true today – as it was true in Europe throughout the Cold War, and I hope that the Japanese will remember that and take some comfort in it.

Question 5: *I have some questions about Abe-san's summit in Washington. I think President Obama embraced the US-Japan relationship but kept his distance from Abe because there is a concern that Abe is a nationalist who can cause serious regional tensions and I think we saw that when Victor Cha at CSIS asked him about Japan-Korea relations and the prime minister's comments were reflective of his grandfather's perspective as opposed to a forward-looking perspective on Japan-Korea relations. I am really worried about that.*

I think that Mr. Abe is largely unknown to this administration. I think the president reacted very well to Mr. Abe. This was the first time that they have met and that's the point that I tried to make earlier. If you keep changing prime ministers every year the president doesn't have the opportunity to have a deeper relationship. I've been at 11 summits and it's always whether they click or not as to how it works. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't. You have to give President Obama an opportunity to deepen a relationship because I think he wants to do that. And the way that Mr. Abe was received, the time that he spent with him – I think there was an extra 45 minutes as I understand – they're all very positive signs. So let's give these guys a break here so they might be able to do something with regard to the situation in Korea. It's been difficult for a while now, and I'm not talking about the last eight years. When Roh Moo-hyun was the president of South Korea and his numbers would go down, you could almost depend on some sort of anti-Japanese statement coming out of the Blue House. It was a play to domestic politics. Is there potential for difficulties in the US-Korea-Japan trilateral? Yes. But if you have serious people at the table, and I believe you do now, then good things can follow.

Question 6: *We've primarily talked about Japanese politics tonight but I'd like to ask a question on American politics. The first response to Mr. Abe's comments about TPP on the US side came from the president's own party, which warned him about lifting tariffs on Japanese automobiles. Can we deliver on TPP and what are going to be the challenges from our side on moving forward with Japan on that?*

There is challenge in America. Trade is popular when you shop at the store. You worry about it at the place where you work because at every plant that closes somebody stands up and says that job went somewhere else. I don't think that's true. We live in an economy in which jobs are more likely to disappear than to be exported somewhere else. But trade is tough and I would remind you that in the Bush administration, an administration that was very pro-trade, with a president who was very pro-trade, the president received trade promotion authority by 1 vote in the House: 217 to 216. President Obama has not been able to get trade promotion authority because it is so difficult in the Congress. To say that he doesn't even try isn't fair to him. It's not something that he could realistically get. Mr. Abe has got a situation in which people are not jumping up and down to get in the TPP. Trade is tough all over the world, yet I can think of no issue that brings more prosperity to more people and brings more people out of poverty than trade. In the United States, 20 percent of the jobs in this country are directly related to trade. One in 5 jobs. That's more than people working in the automobile industry and virtually any other industry. Our political leaders have to say there is a benefit to trade and sometimes that takes courage to stand up in front of the town hall meeting and say, I'm for trade. But that's the hand that all of us are dealt and we have to play it, and it's important that we do.

About the Author

J. Thomas Schieffer served as U.S. Ambassador to Japan from 2005-2009. During his tenure in Tokyo, he was involved in negotiating the most far-reaching reorganization of the U.S.-Japan alliance since the 1960 signing of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security.

In 2009, Ambassador Schieffer received the Distinguished Public Service Award, the Defense Department's highest civilian award, in recognition of his work in strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Ambassador Schieffer's diplomatic career began in 2001, when he was appointed U.S. ambassador to Australia. Prior to his diplomatic service, Ambassador Schieffer was an investor in the partnership that bought the Texas Rangers Baseball Club, and he served as team president for eight years.

Ambassador Schieffer also has had a long involvement in Texas politics. He was elected to three terms in the Texas House of Representatives and has been active in many political campaigns. Ambassador Schieffer provides a wide range of consulting and management services to individuals, companies and sports leagues with interests in the United States and Asia. He attended the University of Texas, where he earned a BA, an MA, and studied law.