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Foreword

ASIDE FROM THE fact that the city of Shimoda is the location where Admiral Perry landed to open the era of US-Japan relations, many associate the name of “Shimoda” with the Shimoda Conference. This has been remembered as the first of the nongovernmental bilateral policy dialogues on the US-Japan relationship, and also for the impressive participation of political leaders. That meeting took place in the fall of 1967. There had been, by then, a growing recognition that the important, and yet complex, relationship between our two growing countries could not be managed by the governments alone. We were amazed at the sight of the powerful American politicians who joined us for the meeting. Mike Mansfield, the Senate majority leader came as a keynote speaker, and we had six other prominent politicians: John Brademas, Edmund Muskie, Donald Rumsfeld, Jeff Cohelan, James O’Hara, and Wendell Wyatt. (They were mixed in with prominent intellectual and business leaders such as UC Berkeley’s Robert Scalapino, the futurist Herman Kahn, and Columbia University Professor Herbert Passin.)

Efforts to broaden the nongovernmental policy dialogue were not easy then, and political leadership was very much needed. The constraints against such dialogues were many and they were visible in the first Shimoda Conference. There was strong ideological opposition to such a meeting on US-Japan relations, mainly coming from the left. The gateway to the Shimoda Tokyu Hotel, the conference site, was packed by leftist demonstrators who yelled at me, calling me “the running dog of the American imperialists!” Representatives of the demonstrators were allowed to submit their protest note to a few representatives of the organizers, including none other than future Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone. The Central Committee of the Japan Socialist Party banned their Diet members from attending the first meeting. The right wing, represented by the infamous Bin Akao, balanced this when he made a spectacle by throwing his cane across the hotel lobby. In short, it took years before we started establishing the kind of dialogue between us that could solidify our alliance relationship.

In his memorable keynote speech, Mike Mansfield emphasized the critical roles played by politicians in the advanced democratic nations, not just in terms of domestic affairs but also in the diplomatic relationship. He went on to stress the importance of deepening and broadening action-oriented parliamentary exchanges. It certainly was not easy to start political dialogue with the United States and to involve all the different political parties in Japan, but we heeded the strong appeal by Mike Mansfield and began the US-Japan Parliamentary Exchange Program in 1968. I am very proud to say that some 180 US politicians have come to Japan on this program, which grew out of the Shimoda Conference series, while nearly the same number of Diet members have visited the United States. Unfortunately, both the Shimoda Conference and US-Japan parliamentary exchange have become less dynamic in recent years.

This initiative to reconvene the Shimoda Conference has particular significance for my organization, the Japan Center for International Exchange (JCIE), because we are celebrating its 40th anniversary. It was 40 years ago that I, along with some of my colleagues, left my former boss, Tokusaburo Kosaka, “who was one of the rising stars in Japan’s business community,” to establish JCIE. In 1962, after I returned from the grassroots of Wisconsin, home of the Green Bay Packers, Kosaka brought me on to take on the work of the Shimoda Conference, parliamentary exchange, and other related activities, mainly to enhance the US-Japan relationship. I am deeply and personally indebted to him for this, but after he entered politics, I felt that I had to become independent and create a full-fledged civil society organization in order to be effective in pursuing the ambitious goal of contributing to Japan’s relations with the rest of the world. To make a long story short, I decided to jump from the cliff, as it were, and leave Mr. Kosaka in order to build an independent institution, which was very much a rarity in Japan. I am deeply indebted to many friends in the United States and Japan who helped me go through this process and who supported my conviction that nongovernmental participation is necessary to strengthen relations between our nations.

My intent in relating this history is not just to express my deep gratitude, but also to start to explain why I believe that dialogues like the Shimoda Conference are so important and why it is especially critical at this time to think more seriously about how we should revitalize the US-Japan relationship. This relationship is not just about bilateral issues anymore; rather it is about what type of Asia and what type of world we wish to see. We are at an important point in our relations with one another, and we have been witnessing dramatic change, both at the global level as well as in the regional order here in East Asia. The changes we see around us make me even more conscious of the fact that, to paraphrase Mike Mansfield, “the US-Japan relationship is the most important bilateral relationship bar none,” at least for Japan.

If we are to deal effectively with the challenges before us—some regional in scope, such as how to peacefully accommodate the rise of China, and some

that are more cross-border in nature, such as environmental degradation or the spread of communicable disease—we need deeper US-Japan collaboration that involves diverse sectors of society. But revitalizing this relationship, which some describe as drifting, requires us to identify precisely what our two countries should be doing together and to think concretely about what our priorities need to be, and I hope that this conference has helped contribute to the process of doing this.

It is important to acknowledge the people who made this New Shimoda Conference possible a full 17 years after we convened the last Shimoda meeting. In particular I wish to single out Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara for graciously encouraging this idea from the very start, and then for agreeing to host a dinner at his official residence to close the conference. I also need to recognize my friend, Motohisa Furukawa, who has been distinguishing himself as one of the brightest stars in the new generation of Japanese leaders, as well as the other 10 Diet members who somehow managed to find the time to join us despite the intense pressures of the budget debate.

Most importantly, I also wish to relay my gratitude to all of our friends who traveled from the United States to join the meeting. I especially wish to thank Congresswoman Diana DeGette, who played a lead role in the Congressional delegation that joined us, and her colleagues—including Representatives Susan Davis, Mazie Hirono, Nita Lowey, and Tom Petri—as well as Senator Jim Webb, who was kind enough to give the keynote address. Also, I must note how much I appreciate the efforts of Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki, whose support and encouragement in championing this initiative has been absolutely vital. Finally, I wish to thank Gerry Curtis and Hitoshi Tanaka for producing such thoughtful and provocative background papers, my longtime friend Charles Morrison for the intellectual leadership that was essential to structure this conference and run it, and my colleagues in both JCIE's Tokyo and New York offices who made this possible and whose names are too numerous to list.

The fact that so many senior and emerging leaders gathered for the New Shimoda Conference on rather short notice shows the deep commitment that key figures on both sides of the Pacific have to forging a stronger and more meaningful role for US-Japan partnership in Asia and around the world. It is in the worst of times that we really know who our friends are, and unfortunately those times descended upon us shortly after the meeting. Seventeen days after the New Shimoda Conference, Japan was struck by a massive earthquake, a deadly tsunami, and a nuclear crisis—the greatest catastrophe to face Japan since World War II and the worst natural disaster to ever strike an advanced industrial country. The strength of the US-Japan partnership has been poignantly demonstrated by the immediate response of Americans—the US government; its military forces; US citizens from all walks of life; and, notably, many who participated in the New Shimoda Conference—that is saving lives and providing comfort to the afflicted.

It is my sincere and deep hope that, once this emergency has passed, we may build further upon the partnership that has been tempered in the fires of this crisis and jointly play a more effective and meaningful role in contributing to a more stable and peaceful world.

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