

A New Era Requiring New Political Will

Speech given at the Brookings Institution

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Thank you. Thank you very much. I am extremely grateful to Strobe Talbott, President of Brookings, for giving me this opportunity. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Richard Bush, and every one of his able staff for welcoming me here again. I am glad to be with you all.

(Iraq and Afghanistan)

Let me begin by touching on Iraq and Afghanistan. In January, I was in Iraq, representing the government of Japan. I spoke with Jalal Talabani, President of Iraq, and other senior officials, and left the country with a strong view that the situation on the ground is improving steadily. Then I thought that this achievement, remarkable as it is, has only been made possible by the more than 4,000 men and women in uniform, those American soldiers, who sacrificed their lives. I shall never forget that, and no one in Japan should ever forget that. True, it will take more time before the Iraqi people gain full independence. But they are moving forward, not backward. That much is certain.

Now, as for Afghanistan, it has still a long, long way to go. So, what I will tell you today is that I will do whatever it takes for Japan to do more to further the stabilization of Afghanistan. My country did provide financial support and the amount, 2 billion US dollars was by no means small. Japan also played an important part in disarming Afghan soldiers. I am very

proud that more than 100 Japanese men and women, though not in uniform, are now in Afghanistan building schools and helping Afghan teachers. Still, it is my hope that Japan will do even more to work with Americans, Canadians and members of NATO nations on the ground in the difficult terrain of Afghanistan.

(The Economy)

Now, ladies and gentlemen, this is my second visit to Brookings. Last time I gave a speech here was four years ago, in 2005. To end that speech, I quoted from Miles to Go, a book by Daniel Patrick Moynihan. The quote went like this, "Politics is almost always in some measure an argument about the future, and persons claiming to be knowledgeable in this regard will almost always find an audience among politicians." For me, this quote means that one must have the courage to swallow bitter medicine, if it is from someone really knowledgeable. I am engaged in politics only to build a better future for Japan and for the world.

Now, as we stand in the middle of a recession that some call a depression, and as I look back over the four years since I was here last, the question to be asked is the following. Did you listen carefully to the men and women who have the knowledge and the compass to map a better future? We must also ask ourselves, do we have the courage to swallow the bitter medicine, and above all else, do what we should do? Please remember, in my country, the bubble burst in 1990. We knew at that time that we would have to fix the banks and dispose of toxic assets. But primarily, we did not listen to the wise counsel of those with valuable knowledge who were not necessarily few in number. More importantly, we did not have enough political will to put those measures into practice. Because doing so in Japan then would have been just as unpopular a move as it would be now in the US. So unpopular in fact, that an entire decade was lost before a cabinet was formed in 2001 that was finally determined to make the necessary reforms. Will you do what you should do? Or, will you choose not to? That's the question you should ask yourselves.

(Innovation)

The current economic crisis is said to be the sort of crisis that comes once in a century, and I believe that in the midst of this crisis we are perhaps being excessively shortsighted. Of

course, we have to address immediate issues such as mortgage problems and unemployment. However, statesmen also have an obligation to tackle tomorrow's problems. Statesmen have to build systems and projects that will allow their citizens to enjoy benefits over the long term and invest in those systems and projects. What is the key to such long-term systems? I believe that technological innovation is the most important factor. As Prime Minister, one of my goals was to make Japan once again a center of innovative excellence, hence my initiative called "Innovation 25."

It is a long-term strategy whereby until the year 2025, Japan should grow by technological innovation and the productivity growth this allows. Japan's population is already declining as well as aging. The labor force in Japan will decline further. In the face of these trends, there is no question that the only way to maintain our power is to improve our labor productivity through innovation. Japan cannot stop investing in scientific research, and research and development efforts, if it wants to grow and prosper. That point will surely resonate with Americans. However, I pushed the Innovation 25 initiative not only for the sake of Japan. It was also for the betterment of the world as it is my strong desire that Japan's growth through innovation will help make the world a better place to live. This leads me to tell you of the other initiative I still hold dear. I speak of my plan, called Cool Earth 50.

(Climate Change)

If you ask men and women on the street today, where they think innovation can make the biggest difference, the answer will most likely be "climate change". For a long time, I have had strong faith in the importance of innovation to prevent global warming. That was the reason why I put forward the Cool Earth 50 initiative before the 2007 G8 Summit in Germany. It had a double meaning actually. Reduce emissions by 50%, by the year 2050, hence the name Cool Earth 50. That was and still is an extremely ambitious goal, and it will be impossible for us to achieve it until we cover many more miles in technological innovations. The responsibility for achieving this target, heavy as it is, will in the end fall on the shoulders of the Americans and the Japanese, as we are both, more capable than anyone else of innovation.

It was in 1903, as many of you may know, that the brothers Wilbur and Orville Wright succeeded in flying a powered airplane. But even three years later, newspapers around the world ran articles questioning whether they were “flyers or liars.” Still, they did not yield or give in. The strong will and determination that the Wright brothers had are the core ingredients that make innovators. This strength runs deeply in the blood and genes of many Americans, and I believe the same is true of many engineers and scientists working in Japan. You know that those in the real estate business assert that what is important is location, location, and location. I would say that when it comes to the challenges of an aging society, a declining economy and above all climate change, what is important is innovation, innovation, and innovation. That was the reason why I used the word, innovation, many times in my proposal for Cool Earth 50. Indeed, the initiative will be a challenge in regards to both climate change and declining productivity. I find a similar motive driving President Obama’s program, the Green New Deal. And the similarity between the two reminds me how much we can do together to better the world as alliance partners.

(The Japan-US Alliance and China)

In mid-February, Secretary of State Clinton came to Japan. That was her first trip overseas after taking office. She said, in Tokyo, that she wanted to strengthen the alliance. I agree. We must work on that. She also said that she wanted to tackle not only bilateral issues but also global issues. She then went on to say that cooperation would be required between the US-Japan alliance and China to tackle issues of global concern. I could not agree more. These three nations, the US, Japan and China, three of the largest economies in the world, must join hands whenever necessary, and with greater frequency than ever before to tackle issues of global magnitude.

I was the one who made a fence-mending trip from Japan to China. Indeed, Beijing was the destination I chose to visit first as Prime Minister. I can now admit it was fun to disappoint those pundits who had argued for some time, that Shinzo Abe, as Prime Minister, would damage Japan-China relations. On the contrary, my trip laid the foundation for a bilateral relationship that is win-win for both sides. The Japanese and the Chinese are now enriching what we call our "mutually-beneficial strategic relationship." I think that I did a job that was vital because as I said just now, China must work with us.

That being said I must touch on the Chinese military buildup. I will not go into detail, as you have many experts at Brookings. I will say very little, for example, on their aircraft-career programs, or about what they are doing in the Pakistani port town of Gwadar. Look at the Chinese defense budget which has been showing continuous double-digit growth for more than twenty years. The Chinese maintained initially that it was only to increase the salaries of soldiers. But this has not been verified. I would like you to join me in saying to the Chinese, that what matters is transparency, transparency, and transparency. At any rate, for its neighbors, China poses great uncertainties. Its defense programs, economic management, environmental damage, and its society which is being shaken by the mounting frustration of the poor segment of its population, are all reasons for concern. That is why Japan and the US must invest more into our time-honored alliance bound by the same set of common values, especially when our great neighbor China is undergoing such a shaky, transformative period of growth.

(North Korea)

I cannot end my speech without touching on North Korea. North Korea remains the biggest threat to security in our part of the world. Kim Jong-Il, despite the warnings we all sent him, launched a missile in a self-claimed attempt to put a satellite in orbit. We cannot forgive this outrageous and provocative act of launching a missile over Japanese territory. I support an attempt to foster direct dialog between the US and North Korea. I do that on the condition that we stick to core principles, such as to make the Korean Peninsula a nuclear-free area in a verifiable fashion. We can by no means allow Kim Jong-Il to call for brinkmanship diplomacy, and we must make no compromise on the abduction issue. Japan, for its part, will have no normalization with North Korea until they send back to Japan all the abductees who are still alive, and come clean on the fate that the rest of them had to face.

The number of abductees totals 17. That is the number that the Japanese government has so far recognized. 12 of these victims have yet to return home. But, according to a survey by an NGO in Japan, there are still many more Japanese men and women in North Korea who were kidnapped by Pyongyang. Kim Jong-Il must make clear how many abductees remain alive, and send all of them back, I should stress *all* of them back to their home country of Japan.

And to Kim Jong-Il, I say this. Japan will simply never give in. Don't play games with us as there is no room for compromise. But remember there are incentives here. If you do what is right, you will be rewarded by the international community, and by the region's most advanced economy - Japan. That is the incentive structure the US and Japan must work on to try to push Pyongyang onto the right track. In Tokyo, Secretary Clinton made it absolutely clear that the abduction issue should be part of the six-party process. I can tell you that in saying this, she touched the hearts of the Japanese.

Well, time is running out.

(Finally: the Will of Statesmen)

Both Japan and the United States, as great democracies, can weather the world however stormy it is. In democracies, statesmen are a critical part of the system. They hear the vox populi, and do what ought to be done, though it may be bitter, rather than easy to digest. Therefore, the strong wills of the statesmen count most. That is what I tell myself, every day when I wake up.

Thank you so much.

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