National Security and Politics

Cory Hanna

When I joined the Air Force, it was with undergraduate degrees in history and political science and a specialty in Space and Missile Operations. At the time of my Mike Mansfield Fellowship application, I was working as an Operations Support Flight Commander in the 22nd Space Operations Squadron, responsible for the world-wide operation of the Air Force Satellite Control Network. By this point of my service, I had almost two years' experience working in satellite command and control and over seven years' experience in intercontinental ballistic missile operations and testing. While neither of those specialty areas had afforded me any opportunity to deal with Japan, I was intrigued by the description of the Mansfield Fellowship Program in the Air Force announcement. I had just completed a master's in international relations, and the potential opportunity to learn a foreign language, live in a foreign country and be placed within a foreign government to observe, learn, and interact was intriguing. I felt honored to have been selected and was eager to begin my time in such an amazing program.

My goal during my fellowship was to examine Japanese defense operations and policymaking and explore the defense relationship between Japan and the United States, especially in the area of missile defense cooperation. I requested and received placements in the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the Office of Nagashima Akihisa (Lower House—Democratic Party of Japan). To the extent practicable, I wanted to be actively involved in the Ministries' and the Diet member office's day to-day activities in order to examine the similarities and differences in operations, policymaking, and priorities between Japan and the United States. The planning done by the Mansfield Foundation and the National Personnel Authority, and especially the Ministry of Defense (MOD), provided for an excellent year of placements—placements which introduced me to many of the topics I have been working on in the years since, and to colleagues and counterparts I still interact with professionally.

Each division and office I was placed in welcomed me whole-heartedly and my new co-workers made a strong effort to only use Japanese in our daily interactions; they only switched to English when the sophistication level of my questions required the use of English on my part. Throughout the year my listening skills grew, and in

discussions on topics such as politics or defense I could, and still am, able to ascertain the gist of the conversation. Additionally, my understanding of Japanese culture, defense and foreign policy and policy-making grew immensely.

Unlike most Fellows, I did not return to the United States at the end of my Fellowship in September, but rather moved to Yokota Air Base on the western edge of Tokyo. There I was one of the officers assigned to the operations directorate at Headquarters, United States Forces, Japan (USFJ). I was involved in the development and execution of military exercises, refinement of plans, and the strengthening of bilateral coordination and interoperability. I worked regularly with my former colleagues at MoD, particularly the Japan Joint Staff, who were now my counterparts.

I was at our headquarters when the Great Tohoku Earthquake and Tsunami occurred on 3/11. After the first quake stopped, my office turned on NHK and I watched live as the tsunami devastated Sendai. Not long after, I answered the first phone call from the Japan Joint Staff asking if we were standing up our operations center and if we would be there if they needed us. We were needed, and over the next few months the alliance undertook the largest bilateral operation in its history—Operation Tomodachi.

I left Japan in July of 2011 for an assignment as the Japan Country Director at Headquarters, United States Pacific Command. Here I again deal with issues involving Japan, serving as a subject-matter expert in planning efforts and assisting in the development of policy. Currently, I'm organizing a bilateral discussion on Dynamic Defense and have been playing a role in the current Roles, Missions and Capabilities study. There is absolutely nothing that could have prepared me better for my current position than the time I spent a Mansfield Fellow.

Cory Hanna participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of the United States Air Force from 2007–2009. During his Fellowship year in Japan, he served in full-time placements in Japan's Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Foreign Affairs and in the office of the Honorable Akihisa Nagashima, DPJ Member, House of Representatives. He currently is Japan Country Director, Headquarters, U.S. Pacific Command, U.S. Air Force.