

## Bill Heinrich

The Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program for me was the opportunity of a lifetime. I had been interested in Japan for a good many years, had studied several times in Japan, gone to graduate school to deepen my understanding of Japanese politics and policy, had worked several summers in a Tokyo think tank, and had ultimately accepted a job in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research as a Northeast Asia analyst. But I still felt that I had a gaping hole in my resume: the absence of any hands-on experience in the Japanese government. Being awarded a Mansfield Fellowship has filled that gap admirably. My primary aim was to understand better how the Japanese government was dealing with a rising China.

My year in Japan coincided with the Japanese political transition from the redoubtable Junichiro Koizumi, who had served as Prime Minister for five years. As I entered the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), my new colleagues in the policy planning office were madly scrambling to devise a foreign policy based on the "values diplomacy" advocated by Koizumi's successor Shinzo Abe and fully supported by his foreign minister Taro Aso. I saw more than one copy of Abe's book on desks in the office and in conversations with some of my office mates had caught a distinct whiff of frustration in the office that Japan's postwar tradition of pragmatic, "omni-directional" diplomacy was being challenged. At the same time, I saw no evidence of trying to undermine or otherwise work against Abe's plan. What I saw here at the working level was what I would hope to see in any professional bureaucracy—a small group of people working very hard to transform a politician's vision into workable policies.

That effort coalesced around the arc of freedom and prosperity, an ambitious idea of supporting democracies and free markets in a long swathe stretching across Eurasia from Vietnam to Eastern Europe. This was first elucidated by Aso in a speech in late 2006 and probably had its origins not in our office but elsewhere in the Foreign Policy Bureau. Though many observers would claim the arc represented an effort to contain China, our office director was adamant that it was not. In his words, Japan had no hope of containing China with its rapidly expanding size and position on the Asian mainland. But rather than just give up, Japan would try to counter growing Chinese influence by offering struggling nations an alternative source of aid and advice. No MOFA official with whom I ever talked expected great success, but at

least it was a strategy that offered the possibility of Japan remaining relevant in Asia by narrowing its strategic focus to a set of key nations.

Witnessing the birth of a new approach to foreign policy was not the only benefit of my year. My second posting was to the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau's Regional Affairs Office, where I landed across from the person who had to manage the highly sensitive history issues. This was not the office I had hoped to join—my aim was to get on the China Desk—but this stint provided a fascinating glimpse at how MOFA bureaucrats respond to pressure from politicians. I arrived in the office just as rumors were swirling that U.S. Congressman Mike Honda from California was planning to submit a resolution asking Japan to formally apologize for coercing young women to serve as sexual slaves to Japanese soldiers during World War II. The so-called “comfort women” issue that had for years bedeviled Japan–South Korean relations was now spilling over to U.S.-Japan relations. This greatly worried MOFA officials, who knew that a number of conservative Japanese politicians—among them Prime Minister Abe—asserted there was no documentary evidence linking the Japanese military or government to these abductions. These politicians sought to defend Japan's international reputation, and especially to convince the United States, its sole alliance partner, from appearing to line up against an “unrepentant” Japan.

This was a very hot seat for MOFA, especially the young official who handled this issue. He was forced to spend hours after work attempting to mollify angry conservatives who apparently felt a U.S. politician who had not thoroughly studied the comfort women issue should not be offering a resolution that would tarnish Japan's reputation. When in the office, he and I spent a great deal of time discussing this issue—him providing a highly nuanced and detailed explanation of how Japanese understood this issue and why MOFA believed the best course was to maintain the status quo; me urging Japan to make further steps because it had already lost in the court of world opinion. Even if we never persuaded the other, I came away with enormous empathy for him, and respect for the professionalism he demonstrated in very trying circumstances.

I left MOFA in April, well before the Honda resolution, which eventually passed the U.S. Congress in late July. My next stop would be the office of Kono Taro, a younger member of the Diet with an illustrious pedigree and a reputation as a maverick in the then-ruling Liberal Democratic Party. After seven months in the MOFA, I had the chance to see the other side of the policymaking equation: the view from Nagata-cho. I had only a few weeks in Kono's office, I had to share him with five other interns, and he was not in the habit of allowing his interns to trail him as he went about his duties.

Still, I turned the situation to my advantage by focusing on something in which Kono was taking an active role: like most every other Diet member, he would be helping in the campaigns of local politicians as they sought to win comprehensive elections held in mid-April. Governors, mayors, prefectural and city assemblies were up for grabs. Since Kono's home district was not far from Tokyo, I had the opportunity to see just how deeply involved members of parliament are in grassroots-level politics—to the extent that his staff doubled as staff for local politicians he supported. Kono was also out at train stations stumping for these candidates. This was a layer of domestic political activity that I had long been interested in but never had a chance to examine in any detail.

My final posting was at the Ministry of Defense (MOD), which in January 2007 had transitioned from its status as an “agency.” Ever since the Japan Defense Agency had moved to Ichigaya—where its complex of impressive buildings appeared to be guarding the western approaches to central Tokyo—it had looked like a ministry. Now it had been officially promoted and would be freed from the influence of other ministries that had long lorded this superior position over the agency. Unfortunately, no sooner had the MOD begun exercising its new authority than its powerful Vice Minister Moriya Takemasa—whom I met my first day at the ministry—became embroiled in an influence-peddling scandal that eventually forced him to step down.

One of the best things about being at the Defense Ministry was the sheer number of briefings they can offer. You name an issue or an office, the MOD can find someone with a sheaf of PowerPoint slides who can provide a comprehensive briefing on it. By the time I had completed my stay at MOD, I had been briefed on every conceivable subject having to do with the defense of Japan. Not surprisingly, nearly all of them mentioned China. In addition, there were trips to nearby Japan military bases and other facilities. For me, the most memorable was a visit to the building where the first prototype of the Battleship Yamato had been tested in the 1930s. It was amazing to me that this long building in downtown Tokyo had not only withstood U.S. bombing raids during World War II, but was still in use!

Reflecting back on my year in Japan, I regard the Mansfield Fellowship as the capstone to my academic and professional association with Japan. Having the opportunity to be inside the Japanese government provided me with a far richer understanding of Japanese decision-making in the areas of defense and foreign relations than I could ever have acquired through reading books or even working at the U.S. embassy. Since returning to the State Department I continue to dine off my experiences and contacts. While there is always more to learn, I believe that my understanding of how Japan works improved dramatically.

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**Bill Heinrich** participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of the U.S. Department of State from 2005–2007. During his Fellowship year in Japan, he served in full-time placements in Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense and in the office of the Honorable Taro Kono, LDP Member, House of Representatives. He currently is a foreign affairs analyst at the U.S. Department of State.