

National Security and Politics

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I departed the United States Congress with an extreme amount of excitement, but also with a dollop of trepidation because I was stepping into the unknown. An unknown culture, unknown language, unknown way of life; though I had traveled to Asia on many occasions, the two-year Mansfield Fellowship provided a unique opportunity that many legislative advisors typically are only able to study. I was embarking upon a practicum in comparative international policy and politics from a position within the establishment. My selected placements, coupled with twelve months of intensive Japanese language study, solidified my aspiration to learn from my Japanese colleagues and for them to also have an exchange with me as a representative from the United States Senate.

The year of my departure for Japan was the 50th anniversary of the U.S.-Japan Security Alliance. Our relationship with Japan is a significant one; the United States agrees to assist in the defense of Japan, while Japan grants the United States the use of bases that serve the dual purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and maintaining peace and security in the region. My goals during the Fellowship year were two-fold, first to observe the critical role the United States has in the region regarding security and Japan's interaction with its neighbors, and second to observe the legislative and budgetary process. To understand these processes, my primary placements were at the Ministries of Defense and Foreign Affairs and the National Diet of Japan.

During my placement at the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I was to present policy recommendations to senior leadership concerning the future direction of Japan's security policy. The Democratic Party of Japan's (DPJ) agenda regarding security policy was focused on engagement for stabilizing Afghanistan, the review of the National Defense Program Guidelines (which can be compared to the United States Department of Defense Quadrennial Defense Review), and the relocation of the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. The office I had been assigned to was working on the best way to support the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and the security alliance in areas other than a foreign aid package.

In the months that followed, I observed how difficult the current political climate and the limiting authorizing legislation governing deployments of the Self-Defense

Forces (SDF) restricted the scope of activities the SDF could participate in. The DPJ's coalition partner, the Social Democratic Party, had traditionally been opposed to overseas SDF activities except humanitarian operations such as international disaster relief. I focused my policy proposal on regional threats including North Korea and China as well as possibilities of the Ministry submitting a bill to the Diet that would give the SDF more flexibility in participating in missions overseas. Having the opportunity to compare how the Ministry decides if they should submit legislation or try to create and conduct an activity under the current policy provisions was insightful. I was able to be very involved in the work within my divisions. Typically, I explain the insight gained with the saying "the luck of the draw" or "it's all in the timing." There were brewing tensions between Japan and China over the disputed Senkaku Islands, as well as North Korea's firing of shells at the South Korean Yeonpyeong Island, and I had a bird's eye view of how a country responds to crisis.

I was also assigned to the National Diet of Japan in the personal office of Tetsuro Fukuyama, a Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary, at that time. It was great to be able to discuss what I observed and heard with the Member, but equally important, his legislative advisor, who not only was knowledgeable about the process, but also able to provide insight on policy implications and the current political environment in Japan amongst the various parties and coalitions. I was allowed access to the *tousyutouron*, a debate between the Prime Minister and the party leaders, as well as the budget hearings for the upcoming fiscal year. Here is where I fine-tuned my Japanese and absorbed jargon very familiar to my work back in the United States Senate.

My experience in the Diet opened the door for me to present lectures on the United States budget process and compare how the Congress allocates foreign assistance funding in contrast to how Japan allocates funding—and I did all of this in Japanese including a written PowerPoint presentation in *kanji*. You never know how much you know about a subject until you sit before a room full of foreigners and explain in great detail how a branch of the United States government functions and then compare those functions to their government. The Mansfield Fellowship presented a learning environment not only for me, but my Japanese colleagues as well. I was told repeatedly by senior Japanese leadership that they did not understand the congressional appropriations process and they assumed when the President of the United States submitted his budget to Congress that was the end of the process. Unlike in the United States, where amendments are offered by both the majority and minority, debt ceiling is debated, and rationale for funding various projects is discussed, amendments to the Japanese budget are uncommon and require members to collectively (at least fifty, in fact, in the Lower House) to submit an amendment to the budgetary legislation being considered before the plenary session.

The consensus style of decision-making in Japan—waiting for the “political conditions” to adjust to effect change—was a fascinating lesson learned. Could there ever be true consensus? In the terms of security policy, where situations can arise at any moment, isn’t flexibility the most optimum scenario? The Japanese style of working within a system in which the Prime Minister could change at any moment and threats of dissolving the Lower House were constant only intensified the pressures my colleagues felt as they tried to craft effective policy.

Through the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake that shook everyone’s resolve residing in the country at that time, to the constant threats exhibited by China and North Korea, I was and will continue to admire the dedication and pride my Japanese colleagues had towards creating a Japan for the future. I was pleased that I was among them during such troubling times, but also in those moments when distant neighbors as far as Okinawa traveled to the Tohoku region to assist those who lost everything in the tsunami. I observed the selflessness of a nation, working hand in hand with strangers from all over the world to rebuild Japan.

I would be remiss if I did not say thank you to those who fittingly founded the Fellowship Program in honor of the legacy of Mike Mansfield, former majority leader of the United States Senate and United States ambassador to Japan. I was honored to represent the great body of the United States Senate and follow the footsteps of such a consummate leader and politician. My journey to the land of the rising sun exposed an inner strength, and I am grateful for the opportunities, challenges and experience gained as a Mike Mansfield Fellow.

Rachelle Johnson participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of the U.S. Senate from 2009-2011. During her Fellowship year in Japan, she served in full-time placements in Japan’s Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and Toyota Motor Corporation. She also completed placements in the National Diet of Japan in the offices of: the Honorable Mieko Nakabayashi, DPJ Member, House of Representatives; the Honorable Kazuyoshi Nagashima, DPJ Member, House of Representatives; the Honorable Takako Ebata, DPJ Member, House of Representatives; and the Honorable Tetsuro Fukuyama, DPJ Member, House of Councillors. She currently is a professional staff member of the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs.