National Security and Politics

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In January 2012, the U.S. Department of Defense issued a new document entitled "Defense Strategic Guidance." One central theme of this guidance document was, as Secretary of Defense Panetta said in his statement at the release of the Guidance, to "rebalance U.S. global posture and presence" to "increase the institutional weight and focus … in Asia-Pacific."

My own pivot towards the Asia-Pacific started many months before the new Strategic Guidance. Until 2010, I was known as a European policy expert inside the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD). Over six years, I had handled country desk portfolios for nineteen countries, including as Country Director for France, and had served for two years as the Deputy Director for European Policy. But I had seen the winds shifting towards Asia and I had discussed on several occasions a shift to the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Asian and Pacific Security Affairs. However the timing was never right until March 2010 when John Hill, one of the very first Mansfield Fellows and the Principal Director for East Asia, called me to discuss a job with the Japan Team. We discussed that I could be named Deputy Director and that in order to get a good knowledge of Japan, we would look into an application for the Mansfield Fellowship. After some meetings within the Pentagon bureaucracy, this plan was confirmed and in April 2010 I moved to Asian and Pacific Security Affairs. Later that spring, I applied and was accepted for the Mansfield Fellowship.

In early July, I was part of a delegation to Japan, my first time to visit. During an official lunch hosted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I ate sashimi for the first time—it was the start of a beautiful friendship. In September 2010, I began ten months of intensive Japanese language training. I started at zero and eventually felt comfortable enough to have detailed conversations about basic topics with my teachers. By July 2011, it was time to journey to Japan. After six weeks in Kanazawa on the Japan Sea side of the country, I was able to join my family in Tokyo and our adventure truly began.

I began my work in the Defense Ministry's Internal Bureau Missile Defense Section. I had experience with U.S. Missile Defense plans in Europe as well as with U.S.-Japan bilateral Missile Defense Cooperation. I was assigned to produce two in-depth

reports on special topics as well as a bi-weekly report about worldwide developments in Missile Defense. Most of this work was conducted in Japanese, which was difficult but rewarding. I really enjoyed the time and space to think deeply about the issues I was researching. Without having day-to-day assignments, I believe that the time I had to fully research my opinions has given me a better sense of the topics surrounding international missile defense cooperation as well as U.S.-Japan cooperation in this vitally important area.

At the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), I was placed in the European Policy Section. I think the best part of this placement was informing my MOFA colleagues about U.S. defense policy and how the Pentagon operates. I followed this with a one-month stint in the private office of a Diet member, Shuji Kira. As the first foreign person to work in his office, I was able to assist by explaining U.S. policies and issues.

In May, I returned to the Defense Ministry and worked in the Strategic Planning office. I conducted two long-term analyses and briefed my findings. In addition, I wrote a scenario that looked ahead to 2030. This effort supported an ongoing effort by the Japanese Defense Ministry to better understand potential security needs in 2030.

My time working with my colleagues in Japan is invaluable. I now better understand their lives, work pressure, and bureaucratic system. After returning in fall 2012 to assume my new job as the OSD Senior Country Director for Japan Policy, I know with confidence that the friendships and insights that I took with me will continue to pay dividends for many years to come.

For me, the best part of the experience was exploring Japan and its culture. My family and I travelled extensively—I ended up visiting twenty-six of Japan's forty-seven prefectures. Some were invigorating—like skiing (for the first time ever) in Niigata Prefecture or climbing Mt. Fuji to see the glorious sunrise. Other experiences were valuable chances to reflect, such as visiting the tsunami-devastated areas in Miyagi prefecture. On the whole, my family and I undertook an experience we will never forget.

Andrew L. Winternitz participated in the Mike Mansfield Fellowship Program as a representative of the U.S. Department of Defense from 2011–2012. 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 Shuji Kira, DPJ Member, House of Representatives. He currently is Senior Country Director for Japan at the Office of the Secretary of Defense.