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[1977?]

The Outlook
for U.S.-Japan Relations

by Senator Mike Mansfield

It is commonplace to say that there is a special relationship between Japan and the United States. But this is an inadequate term to describe the interdependence and mutuality of interests that have come to bind these two countries together. A stable Japan, which poses no military threat to the nations of Asia, is essential to stability and peace in the Pacific and the world.

Aside from the umbrella of security provided by the mutual security treaty, the United States relationship is essential to Japan as a source of food, raw materials, and as a market for Japan's industrial output. To the United States the Japanese tie is essential in a different, but no less important, sense. The waters of the Pacific lap the shores of all the world's major powers -- the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan -- and it is in the environs of Japan that the interests of all are most entwined. Japan is a fundamental pillar in the U.S. policy to maintain stability in the Western Pacific. For the United States, which has fought three wars in Asia within a generation, the role of Japan in the structure of peace in the Pacific will continue to be of utmost importance in the years ahead.

Japan and the United States share a strong mutuality of interests in Asia and the Pacific. Both understand the importance of sound relations with the People's Republic of China. Both are concerned about Soviet intentions in the Pacific. And both are firm supporters of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, as a new force for economic cooperation and progress in Southeast Asia.

Japan's position as an island nation and an astute foreign policy have relieved its people of any discernible fear of attack from abroad. It enjoys good relations with all of the major powers and diplomatic and commercial relations with practically every nation of the world. The security commitment from the United States permits the spending of less than one percent of its gross national product for defense purposes. Japan's foreign policy, built around the umbrella of the security pact with the United States, has paid rich dividends by freeing resources for economic growth that would otherwise be devoted to unproductive military spending.

The U. S. security treaty arouses less controversy than at any time since the relationship was formalized twenty-four years ago. Both the Japanese and the American electorates have now spoken. In neither country was the U.S.-Japan relationship a

significant political issue. There is now a more rational, less emotional, public dialogue in Japan over security issues than in the past. Contrary to some predictions, the fall of Indochina did not result in any lessened confidence in the U.S. commitment. Japanese and American policy interests in the Far East are well served by continuation of the present security treaty relationship. Japanese confidence in the United States commitment is a key factor for stability in the area. I see no evidence of a move to change Japan's military status in such a way as to cause her neighbors concern.

Japanese and American economic interests are inextricably entwined. America is Japan's largest market and Japan is our most important market, aside from Canada. Currently the United States absorbs some 24 percent of Japan's exports, down from a considerably higher proportion several years ago, marking the diversification of Japan's foreign markets.

There have, of course, been problems with U.S.-Japan trade in the past -- over steel, textiles and other items -- but with time, restraint, and concessions on both sides these problems have been surmounted. Other economic issues are to be anticipated in the future. But with continued goodwill, cooperation, and understanding of mutual needs, these problems should also be manageable.

Although the Japan-U.S. relationship began nearly a century and a quarter ago, the unique meshing of the two countries' interests began with the end of World War II. But, as the visit by Commodore Perry a century and a quarter ago signaled the end of one era for Japan, an era of isolation from the outside world, the United States and Japan have entered a new era in their contemporary relationship. They have now reached a new plateau, where trust in affairs of mutual concern is essential to both countries. America cannot afford either to preach to the Japanese, to patronize them, or to ignore their legitimate interests. The only basis for trust is to treat each other on the basis of equality.

Since the post-World War II occupation began, Americans have had a tendency to take the Japanese tie for granted. The Nixon "shocks" arising out of a failure to consult on measures to support the dollar, to suspend soybean exports, and on the new China policy have not been forgotten. There should be no more such unnecessary and undiplomatic treatment of our closest major ally in the Pacific.

The Lockheed affair has had no significant adverse impact on relations between the two. This is a testimonial both to

the strength of the ties and to the intelligence of the Japanese people. This scandal may set in motion significant changes in Japan's political structure and alignments with consequent important implications for the future of the relationship. The American political system has not only survived the Watergate affair, in the end it may be strengthened by it. It is entirely possible that the Lockheed scandal will have the same effect in Japan.

U.S.-Japan relations are good but they could be better. The era of patron-client is over. A new relationship on the basis of equality and a mutuality of interests has begun. President-elect Carter has stated his determination to consult more closely with Japan on matters of common concern. This commitment to strengthening the ties between our two countries augurs well for the future.