

POINT OF VIEW / Robert Dujarric

# Japan's needs its own experts in Washington

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Japan thinks that it has been sidelined in the six-party talks on North Korea's nuclear program, according to some reports.

Some sources believe the departure of old Japan hands such as former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage and Michael Green, a former senior director for Asian affairs at the National Security Council, from the U.S. side is one reason.

As these friends of Japan have left, one of the George W. Bush administration's newest top officials, Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson, is noted for having much greater interest in China than Japan. Meanwhile, Robert Zoellick, well-known for his focus on China as a stakeholder in world affairs, is returning to Washington as head of the World Bank. And none of the powerful Democratic leaders in Congress have any expertise in Japan.

Japanese officials are thus concerned the loss of such personal connections will weaken the nation's ties with the United States.

This reflects a flaw in the Japan-U.S. relationship. For small countries, not having personal connections in Washington means they cannot easily access senior officials there. But Japan is a \$5 trillion (about 600 trillion yen) economy that is vital to U.S. power in Asia. It should not need intermediaries to reach the top of the U.S. adminis-

tration. Other major U.S. allies such as Germany and Britain do not rely on their American "friends."

So, why does Japan need friends? First, Japan is not a Western nation. Germany, like Japan, is a large economy and a major U.S. ally. But Germans find it easier than Japanese to work with Americans. They are Westerners, and their country has helped shape American culture for centuries. Therefore, unlike the Japanese, they do not feel they must hire "friends" to bridge the trans-Oceanic gap.

Second, Japanese society relies on intermediaries and "fixers" who use their connections to sort out problems. This contrasts with the more direct approach of Americans.

But Japan should realize that depending on Japan hands has disadvantages. Some friends, like Richard Armitage, have had impressive titles but a deputy secretary is neither a top decision maker nor someone with easy access to the president.

Moreover, Armitage, who had refused to work for Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, was close to Colin Powell, who was never a member of the Bush inner circle. The real heavyweights in foreign policy in the United States government are the president, his closest confidantes, and sometimes the vice president and a few Cabinet secretaries. Key senators and congressmen can also play leading roles.

Many of these men and women are

politicians or political operatives whose primary focus is electoral politics, rather than foreign affairs.

Moreover, when the secretaries and the most senior advisers are area specialists, they are not Japan experts.

In fact, there are few Japan specialists in America. And, even during World War II and the Cold War, Japan has never been a No. 1 priority for the United States in the same way that Germany and Europe, the Soviet Union and now Southwest Asia and China, were.

Expertise in Japan is just not the road to the pinnacle of U.S. policy-making circles.

Instead of relying on Japan hands, Tokyo needs a multi-stage strategy to strength its position in the United States. First, Tokyo should feel more confident about its importance to the United States and stop being overly concerned about the replacement of working-level officials in Washington. Second, Japan needs a larger cadre of officials who can operate in America and enable it to bypass intermediaries. During my more than a decade in Washington, I observed that many Japanese officials and scholars there focused primarily on cementing contact



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with individuals who dealt with Japan and East Asia.

Moreover, except for the diplomatic corps and a few ministries, many officials sent by Japanese ministries and agencies arrive in the United States without sufficient familiarity with American culture and politics to be effective. Once in America, they work very hard, but they are at a great disadvantage.

In recent years, I have noticed that Chinese officials and academics who come to the United States are sometimes better prepared to engage Americans than their Japanese counterparts. Once Japan has its own cadre of "America hands," it will be able to broaden its network there and interact directly with Americans without relying on "sherpas."

Third, another area on which Japan should focus is American academia. Numerous professors from Asia and Europe teach in the United States, but few Japanese are among them. America's future leaders are taught by Indians, Chinese, and Europeans, but not by Japanese.

Thus, America's elite is more familiar with the rest of Asia than with Japan. Japan needs to export its professors to teach politics, history and economics at U.S. universities.

*The author heads the Institute of Contemporary Japanese Studies at Temple University Japan in Tokyo.*