Japan’s Strategy for Peace: New Komeito’s Perspective

Tuesday, September 10, 2013
Washington, D.C.

Moderator:
James L. Schoff,
Senior Associate,
Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Speakers:
The Honorable Natsuo Yamaguchi,
Leader,
New Komeito Party

Transcript by Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.
JESSICA MATHEWS: Good afternoon. My name is Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. It’s a pleasure to welcome all of you here this afternoon.

The alliance between Washington and Tokyo has been a central pillar of American foreign policy for more than half a century and a foundation for peace and stability and prosperity in the Asia Pacific region. With a renewed U.S. focus on Asia, that partnership between our two countries has taken on still greater significance.

[00:01:02]

Let me interrupt myself to say that, for those of you who need it, the Japanese on the simultaneous translation is on channel five and the English is on channel six.

 Appropriately, given the size of the challenges that face our relationship – managing relations with a rising China, tackling North Korea and nuclear ambitions and negotiating a Trans-Pacific Trade Partnership – certainly the value of a close and cooperative relationship between the U.S. and Japan has never been more obvious.

In July, the ruling coalition of the LDP, the Liberal Democratic Party, and the New Komeito Party won a decisive victory in elections for Japan’s upper house giving them control of both houses of the Diet for the first time in half a dozen years.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe now has the comparative luxury of three whole years before the next elections, but he has a very ambitious agenda and faces a number of very tough challenges.

[00:02:12]

Under the leadership of Natsuo Yamaguchi, the New Komeito Party promises to play an influential and important role within the coalition on both domestic and foreign policy issues.

The LDP and the New Komeito Party have different approaches on a number of issues, in particular on defense reform and relations with China and how those matters are resolved will have significant ramifications for Japan and, of course, for the United States and the rest of Asia.
To discuss these topics and Japan’s role more broadly, we’re honored to have Natsuo Yamaguchi, the chief representative and leader of the New Komeito Party and member of the Japanese House of Councilors, here with us today.

Mr. Yamaguchi has significant foreign policy experience, having served as parliamentary vice minister for defense from 1993 to 1994, and, since then, as a member of multiple defense and foreign affairs committees in the Diet. He has – he works closely with Prime Minister Abe and with his cabinet and takes a particular personal interest in Japan’s relationships with China and with the U.S.

We’re delighted to – and honored to welcome Mr. Yamaguchi and his colleagues to Carnegie on what is the first trip by a president of the New Komeito Party to Washington for a decade.

Jim Schoff, who heads Carnegie’s work on Japan and North Asia, will moderate the discussion following Mr. Yamaguchi’s remarks. As I mentioned, please go to channel six for the English. But now, please join me in welcoming the Honorable Natsuo Yamaguchi for this afternoon’s remarks. (Applause.)

NATSUO YAMAGUCHI: President Matthews, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honor to be here today. Thank you very much. And my name is Natsuo Yamaguchi, and Natsuo means a man of summer. I came yesterday, so summer is back to Washington. (Laughter.)

And now, in Japanese.

(Audio break) – by extending assistance to refugees. This situation is very dynamic and changing, but our basic stance is as I have just outlined.

Recently, I met with U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in New York and we confirmed that Japan will cooperate with the U.N. and the international community to improve the humanitarian situation in Syria.

Let me tell you about the NKP and the upper house elections. In July, the parties in power won the elections and the situation where different parties control the upper and lower house was
eliminated. No national elections need be held for three years and, therefore, it’s called a golden three years.

Political stability requires numerical and qualitative stability. The LDP does not have a majority in the upper house. Only with the NKP does it achieve numerical stability.

Japanese politics since the end of the Cold War, with a diversification of the values of the people, has been such that no party has been able to achieve majorities in both the upper and the lower houses. In 1993 and ever since, we have had a history of coalition governments beginning with the Hosokawa government. And more than half the time, it was an LDP/NKP coalition that was in power.

The NKP is known as being moderately liberal. We have the largest number of representatives when you count regional assemblies. We have 30 percent women representatives.

Harnessing these characteristics of our party, we have made progress in welfare, women, child rearing, SMEs, areas – policy areas that are close to the lives of the people we’ve made achievements. We are putting emphasis on social security and peace diplomacy, all the while respecting the market economy.

Our party, the NKP, along with the LDP, has formed a coalition and been able to broadly respond to the needs of the people, gain experience at making realistic compromises, and succeed in achieving qualitative stability.

Next issues of the Abe government and U.S.-Japan relations. The top priorities for the Abe government are economic revitalization and accelerating recovery effort following the great east Japan earthquake. This policy was in place at the formation of the government and confirmed by Prime Minister Abe and myself following the upper house elections.

It is important for us to escape deflation, all the while maintaining fiscal discipline. If you say that it is three arrows, then following the monetary and fiscal arrows, then the growth strategy arrow implementation will be the main topic of debate for this fall.

The TPP, the Trans-Pacific Partnership. During the February U.S.-Japan summit, was confirmed as contributing to the growth of the U.S. and Japanese economies, but also, from a strategic perspective, to furnish the framework for the future prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region, its importance to exert efforts to reach agreement.
In order to promote economic the revitalization that I’ve been mentioning, then the peace and stability of the Asia Pacific region is indispensible. The Asia-Pacific security environment is only getting tougher.

The U.S.-Japan alliance, which is at the cornerstone of Japanese diplomacy, is becoming, therefore, more important as well. There will no doubt be many debates about the future shape of Japanese security policy.

The Japanese government’s policy to date has been under the peace constitution to limit the right to exercise – the exercise of the right of collective of – self-defense rather to responses to armed attacks on territories under Japanese administration and then to use the capabilities of the Self-Defense Forces overseas to the extent that no force is used to cooperate with U.N. peacekeeping operations, disaster relief operations and humanitarian operations.

This policy has been in place for a long time and is well established both among the Japanese public and the international community. The NKP has supported such government policy. If one were to try to change this, then why, how, what effects would it have? It would have to be thoroughly debated to gain the understanding of the Japanese public. Neighboring countries too would need to be convinced of how this would contribute to the peace and stability of the region.

To strengthen the U.S.-Japan relationship requires not just government-to-government contact, but contact between the parties and parliamentary exchanges. Such personal – broader personal relations are needed. My visit here is one step in that direction and we want to create opportunities for our new younger parliamentarians as well.

In 2010, I visited China. And the head of the International Department of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Wang Jiarui, said that with countries that have multiple parties, democratic countries such as the U.S. and Japan, that it is important to have exchanges with political parties and with parliamentarians. This made an impression on me.

Let me touch on the future of Japan-China relationship. Improving relations with China and the ROK are important challenges for the Abe government. All three of our countries have had either elections or changes in government over the past year or so. And, unfortunately, actions and words by overly inward-looking politicians have been too prominent. We’re finally at the point where governments have stabilized and this is a favorable occasion to try to improve relations. The NKP in particular, ever since Japan normalized relations with China, has had longstanding dialogue and exchange with China. And we enjoy friendly relations with China.
In January, I carried a letter of Prime Minister Abe to China and met with Xi Jinping, state general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party. This was my fourth meeting with General Secretary Xi. And the dialogue of politicians that had been closed during the previous administration was reopened, which was significant. This was something that only the NKP could do. And, along with Prime Minister Abe, we achieved the qualitative stability with the LDP and the NKP.

Last year was the 40th anniversary of the normalization of Japan-China relations. And it was a failure. This year is the 35th anniversary of the conclusion of the Treaty of Friendship and Peace between Japan and China. It would be folly for the world of politics to have two failures two years in a row. Japan and China do have their differences, but it’s important to focus on broad common interests and make progress and to together form the rules for the international community. The peaceful development of Japan and China is a core interest of both countries.

The NKP, from the 4th to the 6th of this month, sent five young parliamentarians to China. On the 5th of September, at the G-20, Prime Minister Abe had the time to exchange brief greetings with President Xi of China. Prime Minister Abe said that the door of dialogue is always open. We intend to aim toward the realization of a summit meeting by engaging in various levels of dialogue. The NKP is prepared to engage in any necessary mediation between the governments of Japan and China with a view to improving relations.

Let me briefly also touch on Japan’s relations with the Republic of Korea. The ROK is an important neighbor that shares our basic values and interests. It’s important to improve our relations of cooperation by taking a big-picture perspective. The NKP also has long, friendly relations with the ROK. We have taken the policy stance to try to improve the status of Koreans resident in Japan. Harnessing this stance, we want to work for an improvement of relations through dialogue.

During this visit to the U.S., I have enjoyed the cooperation of the U.S. government and the U.S. Congress. I am grateful. Let me also pay my deepest respects to the work done by former Ambassador Roos during his time in Tokyo. The next ambassador of the U.S. to Japan, Ambassador Kennedy, will no doubt be very warmly received by the Japanese public.

In conclusion, let me quote Walt Whitman, an American poet that I’m very fond of: alone through struggles and wars, the goal that was named cannot be countermanded.

Thank you very much for your kind attention.

Thank you very much. (Applause.)
JAMES SCHOFF: Thank you very much. We’d now like to turn this into a question and answer period. And I’d like to invite Yamaguchi-sensei to have a seat here.

MR. YAMAGUCHI: OK.

MR. SCHOFF: And I will take the liberty of being the host and starting off with the first question. But let me make sure – (inaudible). Thank you again for your wonderful speech. And a couple of issues obviously are of great interest to me.

Q: Can you get a mic?

MR. SCHOFF: I should be miked. (Off mic.) Is this better? I’m getting a thumbs-up from the back. That’s important.

There are a couple of issues that I’m particularly interested in. And it’s a wonderful opportunity to have you here to be able to ask you in person. You talk about the collective self-defense issue and the need for thorough debate and careful consideration. But I wonder if I can ask a little bit about your view or vision about the issue because you seem somewhat skeptical or cautious in comparison to some of your colleagues from the LDP.

[0:21:52]

And I wonder – I can think of many reasons why a reinterpretation of Japan exercising its right of collective self-defense could be very good for the region in terms – overall, in terms of allowing Japan to be a truly full and equal partner in various multilateral cooperation activities designed to preserve peace and stability.

But I wonder if your skepticism or your party’s skepticism comes from a legal perspective in the sense that do you view this primarily as something that is not consistent with the constitution, or is it more of a policy issue from your perspective that maybe this is just bad for regional relations and this will upset the diplomacy in the region or it could entangle Japan into regional disputes or international disputes of some kind? Or is it more political in your mind that it’s legally possible to do, but it’s just politically not good for the coalition that you should focus instead on economic issues and not tackle these issues now?

[0:23:12]
So I wonder from your perspective, legal, policy, political, which are some of the most important issues in your mind to address in the near term?

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) Thank you for those questions. So how do I look at that personally from various perspectives? That was the way the question was asked, but there have been long debates, mainly in the Japanese Parliament, about these questions for a long time. And, as I said earlier, the position that has been taken for a long time has been that of the government. The prime minister – Prime Minister Abe’s government has maintained this government position.

However, the security environment is getting tougher and, therefore, there is a trend to say, let’s have more debates about security. But we’re not yet at the stage where the public can understand this. That’s my feeling. I am not trying to come to a foregone conclusion, but I think that the position that the government had was systemic and strong and stable. And so if it were to be changed, then, as I said before, why are we changing it?

How are we changing it? What effects would any changes have? This is something that both the people of Japan and our neighboring countries and our ally partner, the United States, might be expected to get effects from.

Therefore, the public will have to be able to understand. We have to debate this in such a way that the public will understand for that purpose. Then it has to be logical. It has to be consistent. It has to be persuasive to the public. There have to be substantive reasons. And neighboring countries and our ally have to have any concerns allayed. They can’t feel that there’s any danger involved. I think that all of that is important.

[0:25:51]

MR. SCHOFF: Thank you very much. My understanding is that your mic is OK. My mic is the one that’s – at least we gave our guest the functioning microphone. (Laughter.) So I’m now concerned that maybe I’ve given too many talking points to draw out the debate on collective self-defense in Japan, but I for one am eager to hear how that debate plays out.

One other quick question, if I may. You have a very unique access and opportunity to interact with top leadership in China and leadership within the Chinese Communist Party at various levels. And you mentioned Taniai-sensei’s visit from your party just last week to Beijing and the discussion of possible resumption of mutual visits back and forth between the Chinese Communist Party and New Komeito Party.
And I wonder in that press conference or in the statement that I saw, Tanai-sensei talked about wanting to discuss in this party-to-party diplomacy the broad range of bilateral relations and broadening mutual beneficial relations, which I think is very wise to do because the relationship is much more important than just the Senkaku issue. But obviously some kind of formula for getting beyond this current tension and in particular the physical presence of coast guard ships and other ships in the area is going to be important.

[0:0:27:41]

Some kind of formula for finding a way to talk more about the broader relationship. Do you intend for the party-to-party diplomacy to kind of explore what kind of formula is possible? And from your interactions with your Chinese counterparts, what do you sense that they’re looking for? What do you think might be possible as a strategy over the longer term to overcome this challenge?

[0:28:14]

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) The NKP has had a lot of party-to-party exchanges with the Chinese Communist Party. And when you consider the characteristics of Chinese politics, government-to-government agreements, even though they might be in place, the government in China is controlled by the party. So unless the party is allowing the government to implement it, then it’s not truly an agreement.

The Japanese government recently acquired ownership of the Senkaku Islands and what happened before and after that? There were communications between government representatives, but main politicians in the Communist Party, were they on board? I do not think so. It did not understand.

There was a gap in communications and understanding, which has caused this situation of a standoff. And this is something that could be said of all areas. So direct politician-to-politician contact between Japan and China must be used to create agreements. Both countries have to have these kinds of roles and functions. The previous government was really lacking in that area. So our government, the NKP and the LDP, have somewhat different takes. However, in all areas we want to have more and more dialogue to get more and more understanding between politicians to make agreements one by one. Broadly speaking, there are areas of differences, but we have to overcome those to seek broad common interests.

We have to try to create broad common interests. And effort is necessary for that. Our relations are having difficulty getting better, but as I said earlier, the governments in both countries
are more or less stabilizing. They have a solid base now. And taking advantage of that, we should increase our dialogue and seek agreements. For example, on the Senkakus, unexpected incidents, to avoid them, effort to create a crisis management system is necessary also. Common interests and regions – and regional interests; for example, Japanese technology and experience, could be used to mitigate the problem of atmospheric pollution in China. This is an area of great common interest that would affect both of our populations.

And so dialogue and agreement, we need to make efforts to reach those.

[0:32:08]

MR. SCHOFF: OK, thank you for indulging me on that front. And I should have said from the very beginning, as Jessica introduced me, my name is Jim Schoff and I'm senior associate here at Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. And it's my pleasure to open this up to the broader floor.

Chris. When you do ask your question, please wait for the microphone. Speak slowly for our interpretation and state clearly your affiliation. Thank you.

Q: Thank you, Jim. Thank you much. Yamaguchi-san, really very interesting and very important speech. Thank you so much for being so thorough. Jim has led off on Senkakus. So I would like to ask something more specific.

[0:32:54]

In the course of your speech, you mentioned in passing that it’s important to work on relations with your Korean neighbors, our friends and mutual allies. And along the lines of what you were talking about with the Chinese, I found myself thinking, all we have heard from the Korean leadership, President Park in the last year, year and a half, has really been based on trust and her words for it being truthful about history. They haven't really talked about other things. It seems very centered on this still trying to come to grips with can you trust Japan because they are still debating within themselves what the history was. That feeds directly to the concern about possibly changing the constitution, possibly having a more forward-looking defense thing.

If the Koreans don’t fundamentally trust where Japan is coming from, then all these other things will happen. So do you have a party position on how to deal with the Korean trust issue? Do you think that what you’re talking about with China – heightened parliamentary exchanges – would be a way to at least start bridging this trust gap between the two neighbors? Thank you so much.
MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) With the ROK, we have 5 million visits between the two countries. When one talks about the people, we have very strong relations. I think that politics is almost in the way of good relations between the two countries.

As to the history problem, domestically in Japan there were some statements by various politicians, but Prime Minister Abe, at the parliament, has talked about the Kono statement, the Murayama statement, various statements made by previous governments, saying that the Abe government will firmly keep these and abide by them.

And that great damage and suffering was caused to the people of Korea. And that we are acutely aware of this in Japan and must keep this awareness. And so Prime Minister Abe has made very strong statements in that area.

There may be debates on history among scholars, but our government has clearly confirmed these issues.

Now, as to the political session being stalemated between the two, there have been difficult statements made, but there’s finally some movement. For example, there is a parliamentary league between Japan and the ROK that has been in place for many years. It was a bit confused during the last government, but it’s finally starting to function again. Probably soon after I get back to Japan, the exchanges will, no doubt, be restarted. And we’ll have finally politicians going back and forth again and achieve, again, a summit meeting. And we will be taking these valuable steps one by one. I’m confident of it.

MR. SCHOFF: Thank you. And I’m – welcome to take other questions. Yes, have a question here. Microphone is coming.

Q: Thank you both. Thank you for your wonderful speech. My name is – (inaudible) – with Hong Kong Phoenix TV, Washington bureau. I have two questions. One on the Senkaku Diaoyu Island. Today, the Japanese chief cabinet secretary said there is a possibility that Japan is going to have government workers stationed on the island. Is this some move that you would encourage Japanese government to take?
And secondly, talking about Japan and China relationship, I know you have been making effort to realize this China and Japan summit between the two leaders. And there was this unexpected brief meeting between Mr. Abe and Mr. Xi this month. And I’m wondering what – in your view, what is the significance of this meeting and would this pave the way for the future summit? As reported, the Japanese government may propose upcoming meeting in the APEC. Thank you.

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) Having Japanese government employees stationed on the Senkaku Islands for the moment is not something we think that we ought to do. What’s more important, rather, is in the Senkakus, regardless of differences of opinion, how do we overcome that to improve the relations between the two countries. We have to think about that, get good ideas, and we need wisdom, including various behind the scenes efforts that are underway, how can we get past this? We have to find a way. We have to get results.

For that – your other question, what was that exactly, second question?

[0:39:32]

Q: Second question is about the unexpected brief meeting between Mr. Abe and Mr. Xi. What is the significance of that meeting and would that meeting –

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) Prime Minister Abe has said that the door of dialogue is always open, that he would always answer it. At the G-20, I understand they had a chance to exchange words. And I think that we ought to take this positively.

Nevertheless, without building up to it, preparing for it, to have suddenly a sudden meeting, how will both publics take it. Both governments, I think, are interested in a public reaction. So at APEC or at ASEAN, there are these summits that are planned, we have to take advantage of all opportunities. That is the basic policy of the Japanese government.

MR. SCHOFF: I actually paid attention myself to the text of that press conference because I thought this might come up today. And I think Suga-san, although he mentioned that in response to a question that that option had not been taken off the table, the whole rest of his quote was all talking about the pursuit of a mutually beneficial strategic relationship and really focused on that element I think.

[0:41:15]

Do we have some other questions here? Yes.
Q: I’m Yuta Kawashima, Arms Control Association. Should I speak Japanese or English, which is better for you?

MR. SCHOFF: Whichever you feel more comfortable asking the question in.

Q: All right. Then, I’m speaking in English. Thank you for the excellent speech. And I’d like to ask you on the issue of future U.S. and Japan nuclear defense relationship. This must be a sensitive, but – I’m sorry – so Prime Minister Abe is trying to get out of the post-World War II regime, which means that he is trying to reinforce the concept of self-defense of Japan. It must be a very hard task to reconcile between the self-defense and so-called nuclear umbrella from the United States. But for – in the context of the strong political tension among East Asian countries, for Japan’s most – more effective defense strategy in East Asia, could you a little bit more elaborate the issue of U.S. nuclear – U.S.-Japan nuclear defense strategy, especially focusing on U.S. nuclear – the concept of U.S. nuclear umbrella? Thank you.

[0:42:55]

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) Most of the Japanese public feel that Japan’s security is assured largely thanks to the American nuclear umbrella. And we have the three non-nuclear principles that we have taken for many years. Japan will not create nuclear weapons on its own. It will not possess them. And it will not bring them into the country. As to bringing them into the country, this was politically debated quite a bit, but in any event, Japan itself will not arm itself with nuclear weapons. This has been a clear policy that has been maintained for a long time. And it remains in place in the Abe government.

President Obama has talked about aiming for a world without nuclear weapons. And many in the Japanese public have that message resonate deeply with them. We’re the only country to have suffered a nuclear attack. Not just the people of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but many people in Japan feel that Japan should have a leadership role that has the right and the responsibility to do so in seeking a world without nuclear weapons.

So for an attempt to be made to arm Japan with nuclear weapons, I think is something that will not occur. I’m confident of it.

[0:44:45]

MR. SCHOFF: Thank you. Do I have another question? Yes.
Q: Thank you very much. My name is Genie Nguyen with Voice of Vietnamese Americans. I’d like to ask you about the position that you think Japan should lead in the Southeast Asia area, especially with ASEAN, in three different aspects. First is the economy. Let’s talk about—we have Japan now is a partner of the TPP and so Vietnam is also a partner of TPP. And so we do hope that Japan would take the leadership in the area. So how do you think the TPP and the RCEP would affect the region’s—especially the relationship between Japan and Vietnam? How can Vietnam look to Japan to develop better relationship with that, with the rules of our region and everything, with the TPP?

The second question I think has to do with the South China Sea. I think Vietnam and China—the Southeast Asian countries share a lot of concerns with Japan in relationship to China. And I admire you for developing better relationships and talking more exchanges, more dialogues with the party, with the Communist Party of China. So do you think Japan can also support Vietnam in that aspect in talking to the leadership of China both in the parties, the PLA, the CCP, and the PRC? Because recently, China has given a proposal for the COC, the code of conduct, and they still maintain the claims that 80 percent of the Southeast Asia Sea, they call South China Sea, still belongs to them. And that does affect the economy, development of the whole region.

[0:46:49]

The third question is a small question.

MR. SCHOFF: What if we just keep it to two? Is that OK?

Q: OK, thank you.

MR. SCHOFF: Thank you.

[0:47:00]

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) So there’re two points. One, Japan has entered into TPP negotiations. The goal is to aim for agreement by the end of the year and in various fields. And the interests that Japan has with Vietnam and Southeast Asian countries I think are in part common. And I think that there is an aspect of it, where that Japan will advocate for those. But what’s important is to get a good agreement overall.

As to RCEP and FTOH (ph), which crosses the Pacific, Japan’s government would like to create these large agreements. So within that, the TPP is one important system. Thinking
strategically, we have to try to maximize the interests of all of the countries involved, especially the ASEAN countries, Vietnam, have longstanding economic exchanges with Japan. And we have to keep the future development of such economic relations in mind as we negotiate.

And as to maritime issues, maritime rules, international rules, it’s important for related countries to share rules. Actions that are not in conformity with rules should not be engaged in. Cooperative relations that will result in everyone following the rules are important. Trade rules are carried out by having trade on the sea, and so we also need rules about the sea.

By the way, I’ve had four meetings with President Xi Jinping. And he often repeats there were four political statements that developed Japan-China relations. The U.S.-Japan – Japan-China joint statement, the Treaty of Friendship, and also the fact that China does not at all seek hegemony. He said this many times. And the Treaty of Peace and Friendship also talks about not solving problems with force and not seeking hegemony. This is clearly stated in the treaty. And the spirit of this and also actions that are in conformity with this rule must be carried out by both Japan and China. And it also has to be the case that all the countries of Asia see that these rules are being followed.

[0:50:18]

Q: Yamaguchi-sensei, can I just ask you about the process by which your party and the LDP coordinate foreign policy approaches to these various challenges? There’s a lot going on. And do you have a formal process within the coalition by which you debate and discuss these policies? And is that very high level or is it – is there a committee or how do you manage that process and how do you get involved in that?

[0:50:48]

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) We have over 10 years of experience and we do this at various levels. For example, in both parties, there is a policy coordination committee that looks at – they have working groups on security and diplomacy. And the working groups of both parties get together. And we can also have – set up project teams, set up for special purposes.

And we also have a decision-making body at a higher level and once that we have – once we reach agreement between the two parties, it’s reflected in government policy and implemented.

This system has been in place for over 10 years and is quite robust. But as to issues of great importance, I speak directly with prime minister of – Prime Minister Abe.
MR. SCHOFF: Glenn.

[0:52:00]

Q: My name is Glenn Fukushima. I’m with Center for American Progress. I have two questions. The first is that you mentioned this is the first time in 10 years that the leader of the New Komeito has visited Washington, D.C. What is the main purpose of your visit? There’s been some speculation that perhaps your main purpose is to better understand the U.S. position on issues like collective self-defense and to have the New Komeito perhaps become more flexible with regard to this issue in cooperation with the LDP and with the U.S. government. But is that the case, number one?

Number two, what is your overall assessment of the state of U.S.-Japan relations? Do you—you’ve mentioned things like TPP, Syria, the economy, and constitutional revision, but what in your view are the most important issues confronting the U.S.-Japan relationship now? Are there any specific problems or requests or complaints that you have about the current relationship? Thank you.

[0:53:10]

MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) My visit here is to talk about the role of the NKP, the existence of the NKP in the coalition, and to make this well known among the – in the United States. It’s not a mission for a specific policy purpose. But the timely topics that you mentioned – collective self-defense, Syria – just happened to have contracted me.

The NKP has sought out opportunities to visit the United States, but we are a country that has elections continually, which got in the way. We have a stable situation now. We don’t have to have elections for three years. This is an ideal opportunity.

And after we decide to come, then the Syria issue arose. Syria and collective self-defense are very important. And so the thinking in the U.S. and opinions of people in the U.S. are something that we’d like to take the due note of. When we formed the government, we were very clear with the – that we would have Mr. Abe as the prime minister and we decided on what we would do.

And as to changing the constitution, this is not something for the government to do. It is the purview of the Diet. And so we will – both the LDP and the NKP – make necessary efforts and we’ll give top priority to economic revitalization and U.S.-Japan cooperation, the TPP, which also contributes to that. That is our thinking.
Also, as to the great East Japan earthquake, the U.S. carried out Operation Tomodachi, which resonated deeply with the people of Japan. We also want to show this to the people of the world. And also we have benefited from technology and experience of the U.S. in dealing with the aftermath of the accident.

And we feel that time and dialogue and discussion and debate are necessary to reach agreements. And that our government will be in place for a long time if it takes – if it chooses topics appropriately with appropriate priority.

[0:56:14]

MR. SCHOFF: Thank you. We’ve just about run out of time. I might be able to squeeze one last question in, I hope. I think Sheila –

Q: If you have time. If you don’t have time, it’s OK, but it’s – (off mic).

MR. SCHOFF: Let’s try to get to that and then we’ll conclude.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Yamaguchi –

MR. SCHOFF: Wait for the microphone.

[0:56:33]

Q: Hi. This is Sheila Smith from the Council on Foreign Relations. Thank you very much for coming to Washington. We’ve been looking forward to the conversation with you and I can’t let this opportunity go by without asking you a rather direct question about the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Jim began with the conversation about constitutional revision, and your party’s position on this issue I think you’ve been very clear about. Many Americans in Washington, though, would like to understand your position on questions such as would the Self-Defense Forces be legitimately able to work and to use force on behalf of the United States military when the two militaries are working together?

It’s a very direct question, but I wonder what your sense is of the Japanese public support for that position and Komeito’s support for that. Thank you.

[0:57:20]
MR. YAMAGUCHI: (Through translator.) The Article 5, Paragraph One of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty says that the U.S. and Japanese forces can together respond if there’s an armed attack to territories administered by Japan. As to other situation, there might be various opinions. So if we change this, then how will the public and neighboring countries respond?

We have to create a process that can deal with that. At present, I do not think that most of the Japanese people think that way. The way that we’ve used the Self-Defense Forces up to now have – has been the result of the NKP trying to convince the public. The result is that the opinion of the NKP is the limit, if you will, of the SDF’s actual range of operations.

So if necessary, we will make efforts to prepare for any future debate.

[0:59:08]

MR. SCHOFF: Well, Yamaguchi-sensei, it has been a terrific pleasure to have you here with us today and a great honor. And we’ve really appreciated your time, both in your prepared remarks and your answers to this wide range of questions.

I just want to thank everyone here for coming today and for being a part of our Japan program. And I wish you the very best with the rest of your visit and the coming year. (Applause.)

(END)