

**Dokkyo International Forum: Japan and International Society after 3.11**

**Panel I: Japan and International Society after 3.11**

Prepared Panel Remarks – December 1, 2012

**Andrew Oros, Ph.D**

Associate Professor of Political Science, Washington College, Chestertown, MD, USA

This morning session is focused on issues related to international efforts, how different countries look at 3.11, and the impact and implications of 3.11 on Japan's foreign relations.

Before I begin to address those topics, however, I would like to pause for a moment to commemorate the great loss of life and hardship the people especially of the Tohoku region have endured as a result of this tragedy. Although the recovery has been impressive in many ways, many are still suffering. My students and I were able to lend our personal assistance to villagers in a town in Miyagi prefecture on the one-year anniversary of 3.11 last year, and know there is still a long way to go for true recovery.

**Comparing 3.11 with Natural Disasters in Other Countries: Towards an Effective International Response**

Unfortunately large-scale natural disasters are not uncommon in the world. Just last month, Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast of the United States, leaving tens of thousands of people still homeless in New York and New Jersey. Millions of people lost electricity and thousands still lack it, over a month later. Even the New York City subway system shut down – the largest system in the largest city in the US. Thankfully there were few deaths – in the low hundreds.

At the time of 3.11, a previous hurricane which hit the United States, Hurricane Katrina, which struck New Orleans in August 2005, was the disaster on the minds of most Americans as they viewed Japan's 3.11 tragedy on television. American citizens were shamed by the ineffective government preparation and response to Hurricane Katrina that led to around 2,000 deaths and hundreds of thousands of people leaving the area permanently because they had lost their homes and their jobs.

In less developed countries, however, powerful disasters can cause a much greater loss of life as well as financial loss. The Haiti earthquake of January 2010 was a magnitude 7.0 on Richter scale and yet caused an estimated 316,000 deaths – 316,000. The Indian Ocean earthquake of December 2004 measured roughly 9.3 on the Richter scale (the third largest ever recorded) and resulted in a tsunami that caused over 230,000 deaths in 14 countries. The Wenchuan earthquake of May 2008 in Sichuan, China measured 7.9 on the Richter scale: Nearly 70,000 people were killed, with an estimated \$123 billion in economic losses.

By contrast, the much larger 3.11 earthquake in Japan of roughly 9.0 on the Richter scale led to around 20,000 deaths – a terrible tragedy, but far fewer losses than would have happened probably anywhere else in the world. Thus, one lesson from 3.11 is that despite all that did go wrong, Japan prepared for the disaster and subsequently handled the disaster much better than most places in the world would have. As someone who travels frequently, I can tell you personally that this is a message I often heard privately from friends in China and in South Korea – that however bad it was in Japan, the same disaster in those countries would have

been much worse. In the small sea-side village where I participated in disaster relief efforts last year, no one died as a result of the tsunami despite virtually all of the buildings in the village having washed away. They were prepared to evacuate in a disaster, were given advance notice, and fled to the hills.

### **Lessons Learned from the 3.11 Disaster and Response**

One question posed to this panel relates to what sort of international response we should plan for or expect to such a crisis. Here I think we should break up the 3.11 disasters into two parts: (1) the earthquake and tsunami relief, and (2) the Fukushima nuclear crisis.

On the earthquake/tsunami relief, I think we see a few lessons. Lesson 1 is that Japan has much expertise to offer the world – as much in preparation for inevitable disasters as in providing assistance once one happens. Apart from expertise, I believe that Japan has a moral responsibility as a wealthy state that has benefitted from the assistance of others to develop capabilities to offer emergency assistance to other states overseas. Japan’s Self-Defense Forces are developing such capabilities, and should re-double their efforts – even in the face of calls by some to reduce their budget to focus more at home. Joint planning with other states should also be a part of our preparation. Of course Japan is preparing together with its treaty ally, the United States, but I also think this is an area where Japan and China might engage in some joint preparation. This would help prepare for a future emergency and also allow perhaps build some much needed trust among the two militaries.

Lesson 2 is that even a country as rich and prepared as Japan needs help in the event of a very serious disaster. Thus, it’s good to have friends! And Japan has many – a point I’ll develop further in a few minutes. It’s good to think about how such assistance might work – in advance. In the case of Operation Tomodachi, the US government – based out of the US Embassy in Tokyo – used systems put in place to deal with natural disasters elsewhere, which allowed for a very speedy and coordinated response.

On the nuclear side, although obviously it did not go as well as we would all have liked, I think the same two lessons can be derived. Lesson 1 is Japan has much expertise to offer to other states based on what it learned in this case. Although much went wrong at Fukushima, it is important to note that Japan’s other coastal reactors were safely shut down. And when Fukushima did go wrong, Japan’s advanced technology was important to coming up with a solution. Finally, I think the Japanese government deserves great credit for its frank investigation of what went wrong as reported at the 1-year anniversary from the commission chaired by Yoichi Funabashi. There are not many governments in the world where such a speedy and transparent report would have been issued – one that benefits not only Japan but all states who maintain nuclear power reactors.

Lesson 2: Again, even a country as rich and prepared as Japan needs help in the event of a very serious nuclear incident. Thus, again, it’s good to have friends! And, it’s good to think about how such assistance might work – in advance. I believe that Japan should be at the forefront of reminding other nuclear power states about this reality – just as it has been for over 65 years in reminding other states about the potential perils of nuclear war based on its unfortunate

position as the only state that has been a victim of a nuclear attack. Japan should not be shy about advocating for better nuclear safety protocols just because of the Fukushima incident.

### **Japan and International Society after 3.11**

Given time constraints, I think I have time to answer just one more question posed to me: What did the disaster reveal about Japan’s relations with other countries?

First and foremost, that Japan has many, many friends in the world – both individual citizens and nation states. I first came to Japan as a high-school summer exchange student to live with a Japanese host-family over 25 years ago. Even as someone with a long experience of friendship with Japan, I was struck by how many everyday Americans asked me how they could help in Japan’s relief efforts – including from those with no connection to Japan at all. Students at Washington College immediately began fundraising for disaster relief, and continued their efforts for one full year until 18 of them travelled with me to a seaside village in Miyagi prefecture to deliver the funds raised plus books for a new library and to work with locals to help re-build. As a specialist in Japan’s foreign policy, I know that surveys regularly show that Japan is a country widely admired and liked across the world – but I think many average Japanese did not realize that. This widespread like of Japan was apparent in the heartfelt, quick, and extensive response to 3.11

It was striking as well that two countries where surveys show Japan is not widely liked – China and South Korea – also quickly offered help. In fact, Chinese Prime Minister Wen’s personal warmth and compassion shown during his visit to Japan shortly after 3.11 was widely thought to outshine that of Japanese Prime Minister Kan! Unfortunately, the quick warming of Japan’s relations with South Korea and China did not last long, however. Soon after, South Korea objected to a new passage in a Japanese school textbook that soured relations at a time of national tragedy for Japan. And China’s over-reaction to radiation concerns from the Fukushima plant led to a wide-scale banning of food imports from Japan that also soured relations. (I’ll also note as a military security specialist that Chinese military forces tested Japan’s Self Defense Forces ability to continue to protect the southern portion of Japan during this crisis – a test Japan easily passed, but one that soured moderates towards China within Japan’s Ministry of Defense.)

By contrast, the disaster illustrated to average Japanese the value of the US-Japan military alliance – as US ships and aircraft were able to quickly offer assistance because they were based in Japan, they did not need to travel to Japan first. The ability to offer a quick response surely saved lives. The response also was surely more effective because US military personnel were familiar with Japan from living here, and had direct experience working with Japan’s Self Defense Forces. I would like to say a few more things about the impact of the disaster on the US-Japan alliance and on Japan’s Self-Defense Forces, but due to time constraints I will have to leave that to our discussion or to this afternoon. For now, though, let me just add that “Operation Tomodachi” – meaning “friendship” in Japanese – is an excellent symbol of what the disaster showed about Japan’s foreign relations.

**In Conclusion: Implications for Japan’s Security, Diplomacy, and Economy**

In conclusion, I would like to briefly address what implications 3.11 has for Japan’s security, diplomacy, and international economy. Very briefly, on military security, it has reinforced the value of the US-Japan alliance (except, perhaps, for Japanese on Okinawa), and also greatly boosted the popularity of the Self Defense Forces (an issue that I think will be touched upon this afternoon). Despite these greatly increased support rates and approval of the Self Defense Forces, however, the response to the 3.11 disasters also reinforced the idea that the SDF’s primary purpose is as a humanitarian relief force (for better or for worse). It also has not directly led to greater funding for the Self Defense Forces: the budget is still declining, despite much material needing to be replaced. Finally, the 3.11 disasters re-opened debate over a long-standing broader security concern for Japan: energy security.

On diplomacy, the 3.11 disasters and response showed many Japanese the value of Japan’s long successful diplomacy of creating friends in the world – and who Japan’s true friends are. On the economy, an issue that I could not discuss much in these remarks, two big implications are: (1) that Japan’s resilience in the face of crisis was noted by Japan’s economic competitors, and yet (2) vulnerabilities in the production supply chain were also noted and are in the process of being addressed.

Thank you for your attention. I would welcome your questions or comments later.

END