

## **Summary of Opening Remarks by Akihiro Iwashita, Director of the Slavic Research Center (May 8, 2009)**

I have a lot of good memories from my ten-month stay here at the Brookings as a visiting fellow of the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies (September 2007 - June 2008). I'm very happy today and excited to be back. I would like to talk about my experiences here at the Brookings in order for you to understand why I thought of and realized the plan of the symposium on the "US-Japan Alliance: Beyond Northeast Asia."

I'm a researcher on foreign relations, having started my career from Russian studies and widened toward China, Central Asia, South Asia, now reaching the entire Eurasia. I often joined non-Northeast Asian seminars at the Brookings and went to other think-tank seminars on Russia, South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and others; for example, at Georgetown University, the Carnegie Peace Endowment, SAIS, the Wilson Center, and CSIS. Of course, thanks to the helpful guidance of Richard, as a Japanese citizen and a CNAPS fellow, I also became familiar with Washington's Northeast Asian foreign policy circles, basically covering China, Taiwan and the Koreas. Then, I discovered some interesting phenomena. I was often the only Japanese participant at non-Northeast Asian events. Most Japanese researchers here in DC have little interest in non-Northeast Asian events such as on Central Asia, Russia and India, which sometimes closely relates with Northeast Asian politics and economies.

As time went on, I recognized these phenomena are not only true for Japanese but also for Americans. I rarely saw US experts on Northeast Asia at conferences on Central Asia at SAIS. I did not see any US experts on South Asia at a Russian seminar at Georgetown. It seems also true within the Brookings. The Brookings organizes many seminars every day and has many talented experts on each region. However, even at the Brookings, few experts on Korea join a seminar on Central Europe. A researcher on Russia has little concerns about Japan. I have rarely seen the Brookings senior fellows joining together in a session during my stay at the Brookings.

An invisible but real line dividing the different area studies is much stronger than I expected. A lack of interaction among them seems to seriously damage the foreign policy making process. Imagine the consequence of a so-called "strategic thinker's" discourses on such worst-case scenarios as World War IV and united "evils" against the US. These sorts of discourses, which lack deep expertise on each area, made a sporadic "evil" into a

united “demon” against the US, such as the former President’s thinking which linked Afghanistan with Iraq. To calm down the old “strategic thinking” and reshape a rational foreign policy under the Obama presidency, the time has come to lay the groundwork for a more sound and reliable area-centered expertise beyond the borders and the sectionalism on current area studies. In this sense, today’s event is remarkable not only for Japanese but for the US. We must seek together a new methodology for reshaping foreign policies throughout the world.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to Richard and Kevin for understanding my idea and for endeavoring to invite a Brookings all-star team beyond the dividing line that separates the different areas of expertise. Today is a great day for us.

Of course, today’s direct aim is “selling Japan” or introducing the Washington audience to Japan’s expertise on area studies beyond Northeast Asian studies and circles, as I write in the handout. Also, getting Japan right in the Northeast Asian policy making circles and showing Japan’s true potential as an ally are important tasks. Of course, recently, the alliance is stretching for cooperation on Iraq, Afghanistan and others beyond Northeast Asia. However, we have yet to coordinate our regional expertise together. That is, we have yet to truly understand each other. Today is the first step to enhance the US-Japan alliance for this orientation.

Our Slavic Research Center has brought together a good team, I believe. Some names belong to other institutions. However, Professor Keiko Sakai was a non-residence professor of our Center last year. Professors Yoshifumi Nakai and Osamu Yoshida belong to a huge, ongoing comparative studies project on Eurasian great powers, targeting Russia, China and India, under our Center’s management. Mr. Shinji Hyodo is often invited to our delegation. Two years ago, when our Center jointly organized a symposium on Russia with the Kennan Institute, he was there. In this sense, we are the virtual team of the Slavic Research Center. I am convinced that all of you here will enjoy our presentations and will be inspired by the intensive discussions.

I’m deeply appreciative to the Brookings Institution for collaborating with us to realize today’s important symposium.

Thank you for your attention.