

## JIAP OBSERVATION

# **BROOKINGS TO JIAP DIRECTOR OH # \$ \* ! YOU LADY!**

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With this expletive The Brookings Institution's Vice President of Communications **Ron Nessen** slammed down the phone. Mr. Nessen's outburst ended a testy conversation with your reporter as to who were the eight Brookings scholars he noted as Japan experts to the *Washington Post* (12/10/02). In the *Post* interview, he said, "We have eight senior scholars who are working on economic security issues important in Japan." Although, I had been warned of Mr. Nessen's condescending demeanor, it was difficult to believe that I would even have to talk to him with such a simple question or that such an untoward attitude would emanate from a PR professional. I was wrong.

As I reported (APW 11/27/02), shifts in Brookings' program priorities and perceptions of funding resources prompted the director of Foreign Policy Studies **Mr. James Steinberg** to warn well-known Japan scholar **Dr. Ed Lincoln** (JIAP Board Member) that his contract was unlikely to be renewed in June. He noted simply that there was little interest in the Japanese economy generally and it seemed financially risky to have an expert at Brookings focused solely on Japan. This story was reported widely in the Japanese press and well as in the *Washington Post* on Tuesday, December 10 in its "Ideas Industry" column as "**Japanese see Sunset at Brookings**" (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A32507-2002Dec9.html>).

### **Who are these Japan Experts at Brookings?**

Several JIAP members expressed surprise at Mr. Nessen's statement that there were eight scholars at Brookings working on Japan. No one was able to note more than three scholars that could be described as somewhat familiar with Japan. Thus, your reporter promised them that she would find out exactly who the eight were. To this end, on Wednesday, December 11, your reporter called the Brookings Communications office.

The young woman answering the phone noted that she was not sure whom Mr. Nessen had in mind by his statement, but that Brookings had a number of scholars familiar with Japan. She named Robert Litan, director of Economic Studies and Michael O'Hanlon a senior fellow in the Foreign Policy Studies program who specializes in security issues. Beyond that she was stumped and referred me to Kevin Scott. Mr. Scott, the Administrator for the Center for Northeast Asia Studies (CNAPS), was hesitant to talk to me and said he was not "authorized" to answer my question. I would have to talk to the Communications office. CNAPS is a Brookings policy research center that hosts visiting fellows from Northeast Asia. Only one fellow is Japanese. In addition to Dr. Lincoln, only one affiliated fellow, Dr. Katy Oh (a nonresident senior fellow) has Japanese language abilities. The Center's director, Richard Bush, is a well-respected China expert.

The next day, I again called the Communications office. This time I spoke with **Mr. Colin Johnson**, Chief Media Relations Officer [(202) 797-6310 [cjohnson@brookings.edu](mailto:cjohnson@brookings.edu)]. He too noted Mr. Litan and added the CNAPS fellows who were knowledgeable about Japan. At this point, he seemed hesitant to continue the conversation and said that I would have to talk to the director of communications. I then identified myself. He recognized my name from the 12/10 *Washington Post* article and noted that he was familiar with the work of the "Policy Network." (whoever they are; but, no matter.)

Here, Mr. Johnson flatly refused to list of eight alluded to in the *Post*. He said I would have to talk to Mr. Nessen, as he did not know what scholars Mr. Nessen had in mind when he talked to the *Post*. I tried to emphasize that I just wanted to confirm a list, and not expand upon any story. Indeed, I did not have any other questions. Mr. Johnson, however, was insistent that I speak to Mr. Nessen.

### **Reaching the Vice President of Communications**

Later that day, I called Mr. Nessen, Vice President of Communications [(202) 797-6301, [messen@brookings.edu](mailto:messen@brookings.edu)]. He answered his own phone and recognized my name. He said he had read my original article. When I expressed surprise at this and asked him where he got it, he shuffled the papers on his desk eventually finding the article and read me the top line, which noted that the piece first appeared in the *Asia Policy Weekly*. This told me that he had the stand-alone essay JIAP posted on our website as well as forwarded to a few interested scholars and journalists. He did not have JIAP's newsletter itself.

It was clear that Mr. Nessen had not done his homework. He did not know the connection between JIAP and the *Asia Policy Weekly*. He did not know my connection to the *Asia Policy Weekly*. He did not seem to take seriously that my "readers" are the leading scholars and analysts on Japan and Northeast Asia, which included Brookings' CNAPS. He then proceeded to try to evade my questions and to bully me, and he seemed to regard JIAP as some sort of fringe group unfamiliar with Brookings and Asian studies

Keeping Nessen on point—who are the scholars who worked on Japan issues—was difficult. He was persistent in telling me how committed Brookings was to "working on economic security research on Japan and or of importance to Japan." He noted how Mr. Steinberg had visited Japan in November; Brookings' new President Strobe Talbot went in April; and CNAPS director Bush was there in October. He also explained what CNAPS does.

Throughout his monologue, I repeatedly tried to ask for the specific names he had in mind when he was talking to the *Post*. Little by little, and with much consultation by Nessen to a masterlist of Brookings scholars, he provided names. It is possible he was using the search function on his computer as "Japan" is *not* listed as a category in Brookings official list of *Scholars By Area of Expertise* (<http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/scholars/aasubj.htm>).

He mentioned at length Dr. Robert Litan who he said was in Tokyo presenting a paper to the Tokyo Club Foundation. His paper, he impressed upon me, was generously funded by the Japanese--Nomura and a donor who did not want to be identified. He could not, however, give me the name or focus of the conference Dr. Litan was attending nor could he give me the name of the paper being presented. He also could not spell correctly Litan's name.

For the record, the Tokyo Club Foundation for Global Studies [<http://www.tcf.or.jp/profi/PROFITop.html>] was established by Nomura Securities Co., Ltd. in 1987 to promote studies in the management of the global economy. The Tokyo Club organizes cooperative research among five prominent research organizations among G-5 countries and among ten Asian think tanks. It arranges symposia and holds frequent meetings to discuss particular papers and specific issues. Brookings is the representative American think tank. Their 10<sup>th</sup> annual conference was held December 4-5 in Tokyo with this year's theme "Capital Market Development and the Economy." Dr. Litan presented a paper on "Corporate Disclosure in a Global Age." Indeed a paper of interest to the Japanese, but not one on a Japanese issue.

After a bit more prodding, Nessen proceeded to list the scholars he felt who worked on Japan at Brookings. They are, in the order presented. The websites noted will link you to their biographies.

1. Dr. Robert Litan, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/rlitan.htm>
2. Dr. Ralph Bryant, <http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/scholars/rbryant.htm>
3. Dr. Barry Bosworth, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/bbosworth.htm>
- \*4. Dr. Lael Brainard, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/lbrainard.htm>
- \*5. Dr. Ed Lincoln, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/elincoln.htm>
- \*6. Dr. Warwick McKibbin, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/wmckibbin.htm>
7. Dr. Richard Bush, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/rbush.htm>
8. Mr. James Steinberg, <http://www.brookings.edu/scholars/jsteinberg.htm>

As JIAP members will note, Dr. Lincoln is the only Japan specialist on this list. He is also the only one with Japanese language skills. The only other scholar with Asian language skills is Dr. Bush who is fluent in Chinese. No Japan analyst in Washington knew of Dr. McKibbin's work; he is a non-resident fellow working in Australia. Of the eight (see asterisks), only three specifically mentioned Japan as an area of expertise in their Brookings biography. Most surprising, Nessen did not mention Drs. O'Hanlon and Oh, who were on everyone else's guess list.

After going through the list, Nessen proceeded to tell me that in no way was Brookings abandoning the study of Japan and repeated how many experts Brookings had. I tried to note to him that the issue, to me, was not that Brookings was "passing Japan" but that Brookings was letting go of an important scholar. It was, I edged in, however being interpreted by the Japanese as Brookings abandoning Japan. I then tried to ask which of the scholars had Japanese language abilities. He ignored the question and proceeded to admonish me for not calling him before I wrote my article as he "had numerous facts that undermined the piece." Although very curious as to what those facts were, I wanted to return to the question of language skills and edged in a question.

This elicited a strong retort from Nessen that I was interrupting him and that if I wanted to learn anything I better listen to what he had to say. Flustered, I noted that I "know better than to muddle with [where did that word come from!, I meant interrupt] someone who worked in the Nixon and Ford Administration." Immediately, Nessen raised his voice and shouted "**I did not work for Nixon and Oh, #S\*! You lady.**" He then slammed down the phone. In fairness to Mr. Nessen, I misspoke. He had not worked for Nixon. He simply worked in the White House during the *Nixon Era*.

#### **Who Is Ron Nessen?**

What kind of man whose job is to be the "face" of Brookings hangs up on reporters and researchers? Mr. Nessen's background suggests that he would be smarter than that. He was appointed Vice President of Communications in March 1999 by then-Brookings President **Michael H. Armacost**. Nessen came to Brookings after several years as senior VP of public affairs and communications at the Cellular Telecommunications Industry Association (CTIA <http://www.wow-com.com/>). He is best known as President Gerald Ford's press secretary (1974-77). Nessen was appointed White House Press Secretary in September 1974, replacing Jerald F. terHorst who had resigned in protest of Ford's grant of an unconditional pardon to former President Richard Nixon. Prior to his White House appointment, Nessen was a NBC TV News correspondent. During his White House tenure, he is remembered for his guest host appearance on the April 17, 1976 *Saturday Night Live* show where he played himself opposite Chevy Chase as a bumbling and confused President Ford. The skit is regarded as one of the TV show's classic dialogues (to read the transcript, see: <http://snltranscripts.jt.org/75/75qnessen.phtml>). Unlike the scholars Nessen now represents at Brookings, he does not hold an advanced degree (<http://www.ford.utexas.edu/library/faintro/nessenfl.htm>).

#### **Regime Change & Japan Passing**

The impending dismissal of Dr. Lincoln is primarily an internal Brookings issue of purpose and personalities. In part it reflects the newness of Brookings President **Strobe Talbott**, former Deputy Secretary of State (Clinton Administration) started on July 1, 2002. He is just beginning to put his people and programs in place. He inherited both Nessen and Steinberg.

Westerners understand that Mr. Steinberg would be more comfortable with someone other than Lincoln and that he has his own vision of what are important foreign policy issues. To him, reshuffling the Brookings Foreign Policy Studies staff is his prerogative. It is also unlikely that he would proceed with a program shake up without the tacit consent of his superiors.

Japanese officials and reporters, however, place these conflicts within a larger context. They are taken aback by the inability of Brookings administrators to understand the importance of Dr. Lincoln and the need for a full-time, dedicated expert on Japan's political economy. They are troubled that Brookings, the première international think tank, will not have a respected scholar on the Japanese economy. It confirms their worst fears that America's elites and foreign policy establishment have written off Japan.

They are also annoyed that the years of unrestricted donations to Brookings that average nearly \$300,000 have been unappreciated. Many see the Brookings move to eliminate the study of the Japanese economy and simply assign Japanese expertise to other economists as an insult. The Japanese press [*Nikkei*, *JiJi*, *Sankei*, and specialized newsletters], at the active urging of Washington's Japanese representatives, has run recently a number of articles describing the Lincoln dismissal as a sure sign that the US has given up on Japan. For example, the December 12 *JiJi* press headline screamed, "Key US Think Tank to Drop Japan Economy Research." Although these views may not reflect the reality at Brookings, they do reflect the deeply held feelings of influential Japanese. Come March when Japanese corporate and governmental budgetary decisions are made, many anticipate significant cutbacks of Japanese funding to Brookings.

### **Tough Shoes to Fill**

To some extent, Brookings officials have come to acknowledge the concerns of their Japanese donors. To be sure, unrestricted Japanese donations in 2001 probably amount to an estimated 1.84 percent of Brookings' revenue from contributions as noted in the Institution's 2001 990 tax return. Within the past week, Mr. Steinberg has contacted, much to their astonishment, several JIAP members and friends to inquire as to who might make a good replacement for Dr. Lincoln. Steinberg appears to be reconsidering the need to have a scholar focused on the Japanese economy. He is reportedly prefaces his request with an emphasis that he is looking for someone more modern, more regionally flexible (i.e., can examine other Asian economies) than Dr. Lincoln. The latter "criticism" is curious, as Lincoln's forthcoming book is *East Asian Economic Regionalism*.

Observers agree, it will be difficult to find a replacement for Dr. Lincoln. There currently are few candidates that have the same stature and respect that he has. There are even fewer that would feel comfortable taking "Ed Lincoln's chair." One suggestion is that Brookings might have to import from Japan a scholar. JIAP speculates that good candidates are: Mr. Heizo Takenaka, professor of Keio University and currently a minister of Economic and Fiscal Policy and Financial Service Agency; Dr. Eisuke Sakakibara, former Vice-Minister of Finance for International Affairs in 1997 who now heads Keio University's Global Security Research Center; Dr. Takatoshi Ito, professor of Tokyo University since this April and former Deputy Vice Minister of Finance Ministry from 1999 to 2001; Dr. Richard Koo, Chief Economist at Nomura Research Institute since 1998; and Dr. Naoyuki Yoshino, professor of Keio University and Managing Board Member of Japan's Deposit Insurance Corporation since 1999.

### ***Kyodai Ai* [Brotherly Love]**

The biggest surprise in this episode is the degree and depth of Japanese support for Dr. Lincoln. Former critics have gone out of their way to pressure Brookings to retain Dr. Lincoln. One explanation for this is an understanding of the strength of Japanese relationships. Those who know Dr. Lincoln are familiar with his expertise on the US Civil War and his participation in reenactments. "Corporal" Lincoln's enthusiasm is infectious and a number of prominent Japanese nationals stationed in Washington have come to share his interest both in study and on the "battlefield." Thus, they perceive Lincoln's forced departure from Brookings as *both* a personal and national insult. As a testament to famed Japanese group loyalty, they have rallied to their friend and comrade-in-arms. In Japanese, he is their *kyodai* or brother. The ties that bind are ones of traditional *kyodai ai* or brotherly love.

Although Japanese officials have been critical of Lincoln's work and have publicly harangued him for his "tough love" views on fixing the economy and US-Japan trade relations, they also recognize that they need his honesty. In the increasingly bitter bureaucratic battles among the Japanese economic ministries, Dr. Lincoln's well-researched arguments have proven to be important *gaiatsu* (outside pressure). He is one of the few scholars they deeply and sincerely respect. He is a noble adversary and respected as such.

[*N.B.*: For a picture of the US-Japan Civil War band composed of Japanese nationals see the front page photo in the 10/27-11/2/02 issue of JIAP's *Asia Policy Weekly*. They "rallied" for the 11<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Party of the Japan Information Access Project.]

### **Why Care?**

Why does Brookings need a specialist on the Japanese economy? No other Washington think tank has one and many who study international economics are familiar with Japan. The reality is that Japan is a

significant country with a difficult language and culture. Certainly, it is more important than France (of which Brookings has devoted an entire policy studies center). The real issues that the US have with Japan are economic and political, not military and security. Japan is the second largest economy in the world; it is the great creditor nation; it is the top foreign aid donor; it maintains the highest foreign reserves; it is the largest investor in the US; it maintains the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> largest military budget in the world; and among the top 10 companies patenting in the US, seven are Japanese. The US is not dealing with a bunch of yahoos.

### **Can Ed Stay?**

No, Ed cannot stay. The situation has embarrassed the leadership at Brookings and questioned their policy and personnel judgments. The issue is bigger than Ed. Although not the subject of this reporting, it is about the future of Brookings and the role of think tanks in Washington. As noted in my previous reporting, Mr. Steinberg is not one inclined to go back on his decisions. Some in Washington believe to change your mind is to show weakness, not magnanimity. Steinberg is no more likely to find funds for Dr. Lincoln than Nessen is to apologize to me.

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