

# The Linked Destinies of the Islamic World and Japan

*Dialogue across Cultures and Civilizations as the Cornerstone for Mutual Understanding*



Roundtable 1.

**Japan and the Islamic World: Toward the Building of a New Relationship**

Roundtable 2

**What Japan Means to the Arab and Islamic World: What Is Now Demanded of Us?**

*The views and opinions expressed in the following roundtables are those of the individual speakers and do not necessarily reflect those of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation.*

Roundtable 1

## Japan and the Islamic World: Toward the Building of a New Relationship

**Daisaburo Hashizume**, Professor, Tokyo Institute of Technology  
**Yasushi Kosugi**, Professor, Kyoto University  
**Ken'ichi Matsumoto**, Professor, Reitaku University  
 Moderator: **Akira Iriyama**, President, The Sasakawa Peace Foundation

### Japan doesn't realize its influence in the international community

**Akira Iriyama:** If we look at the United States as the axis of Israel and the Arab world as the axis of Islam, we can say that so far Japan has leaned toward the Arab axis, dominated as it is by oil-producing countries. But the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks in the United States and the war in Iraq have thrust the Japan-U.S. alliance into new prominence. Doesn't this mean that Japan's relations with the Arab or Islamic world are bound to change?

**Ken'ichi Matsumoto:** After 9/11 President George W. Bush posited the new paradigm of civilization versus terrorism or the international community versus terrorism. But now the Iraq war has ended and no evidence has emerged of the weapons of mass destruction that were the reason Bush gave for attacking Iraq. Saddam's dictatorial power kept the lid on tensions between Shiites and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds, but I imagine that in future these sorts of contradictions will burst out into the open. Because such problems can't be explained by the "civilization versus terrorism" paradigm. As Samuel Huntington pointed out in his thesis of the "clash of civilizations," the existence of the fundamentally different modern Western civilization and Islamic civilization doesn't fit within the confines of the "civilization versus terrorism" paradigm.

**Yasushi Kosugi:** At the time of the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, Japan, which had believed it was on good terms with the Arabs, was startled to be accused of being unfriendly. Japan hadn't spoken out clearly on the Palestine problem, and although Europe had permitted the Palestine Liberation Organization to set up offices, Japan hadn't. To shore up its friendship with the Arab oil-producing countries Japan let the PLO open an office in Tokyo.

At the time of the Iraq war Japan announced its support for the United States but didn't swerve significantly toward Israel. After the war Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoriko Kawaguchi went all out to play the neutral-diplomacy card, paying a courtesy call on PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat when she visited the Middle East. But Japan made its decision to support the United States without thinking through the consequences for relations with Arab countries. In this sense, there's been no fundamental change from 30

years ago. Japan isn't engaging in strategic thought commensurate with its position in the international community.

**Daisaburo Hashizume:** I think Prime Minister Jun'ichiro Koizumi made the right choice in declaring Japan's support for the United States from the very start. The only country that can deter North Korea is the United States. But even if it was the right decision, the problem is Japan's stance toward the Arab countries. In the case of America, abandoning the Arabs and backing Israel are two sides of the same coin, but this isn't true of Japan. Agreeing with America and supporting the Iraq war and being hostile to the Arab countries and Islam are two different things.

**Kosugi:** After 9/11 Bush inadvertently called the "war against terrorism" a crusade. In the Middle East this is seen as an expression of his true feeling. While taking a firm line with North Korea, the United States is continuing dialogue. In the case of Iraq, inspections were added to economic sanctions, and finally America attacked Iraq on the grounds that it hadn't kept its promises. In the region this difference in intensity is attributed to U.S. hatred of Islam.

Given all this, I think Japan needs to clearly explain to the Arabs that in choosing its options it has to weigh the problem of North Korea in the balance. But it hasn't done this. Since every country naturally has interests, the Arabs wouldn't expect Japan to back them at the expense of its own interests. Adequate explanation can be beneficial to both parties.

**Hashizume:** North Korea has already developed weapons of mass destruction, and they could do great damage to South Korea. So not even America can thoughtlessly lash out against North Korea. That's why it has included dialogue among its tactics. No such factors applied in the case of Iraq. So we can't say there's a double standard at work in regard to treatment of Arab countries and the rest of the world. Instead of just meekly following America, Japan should collect and analyze intelligence for itself and make its own judgments.

**Matsumoto:** But all Japan's intelligence comes from the United States. Isn't it true that, lacking intelligence-gathering agencies of its own, Japan can't analyze intelligence, either?

**Hashizume:** The hegemonic power is collecting the highest-quality intelligence, and it doesn't tell us much. Japan can't hope to obtain the same quality of intelligence as America. I think one's value system and stance are more important than information itself. The question is whether, on the basis of the intelligence Japan does obtain, it can take the action it thinks most appropriate in the light of its own values and judgment. Even if one has limited intelligence, one should be able to make appropriate judgments. By the same token, even if one has a lot of intelligence, one may simply be confused by it. Without a clear stance, one can't make appropriate judgments.

**Kosugi:** I don't think American intelligence is necessarily high quality. All



the intelligence it has on the Middle East comes from satellites and high tech. When it comes to the quality of intelligence regarding people themselves, Japan is pretty good. But while the U.S. government has a clear-cut stance, Japan's is extremely vague.

**Matsumoto:** Iraq is the world's number-two oil-producing country, and America had absolutely no oil concessions in Iraq. France and Russia did have such concessions, and Iraq changed the currency it used for settling oil accounts from dollars to euros. The world suspects that America saw Iraq as threatening its unipolar dominance and was determined to crush it.

**Hashizume:** In America's eyes, it's risky to have oil reserves controlled by non-Christian countries—moreover, countries inhabited by people with diverse cultural backgrounds. It doesn't want to see those countries join forces, but nor does it want to see extreme turmoil. The best situation from America's point of view is for a number of countries to maintain a balance while being somewhat hostile toward one another. This applies to Asia, too. As long as the world civilization depends on oil, this is the only strategy the hegemonic power can adopt.

**Matsumoto:** I agree with your assessment of the hegemonic power America's judgment. But Article 9 of Japan's constitution renounces war as a means of settling international disputes. We have to see America's action in Iraq as being war as a means of settling international disputes. Doesn't the Japanese government's support violate our constitution?

**Hashizume:** To be sure, Japan's support for America's unilateralist behavior contradicts Article 9. But this contradiction has existed ever since the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty was signed. If we accept that Japan had no other choice, in terms of realpolitik, we should have amended the constitution there and then. If by not doing that but instead fudging the issue in various ways we have cooperated with America in the name of realpolitik, I think we can say that Japan's support this time falls within this scope.

### Solve the Israel-Palestine problem by making Palestine a state

**Iriyama:** What, specifically, should Japan do in future?



**Yasushi Kosugi**

Yasushi Kosugi was born in Hokkaido, Japan, in 1953. He graduated from Al-Azhar University, Egypt, and later obtained an LL.D from Kyoto University. He is now professor of the study of the Islamic world at Kyoto University's Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies. He also serves as president of Japan Association for Middle East Studies and a member of the board of trustees for Japan Association for Comparative Politics. His works include the award-winning *The Contemporary Middle East and Islamic Politics*, *What Is Islam?* and *The Islamic World*.

**Kosugi:** The question for Japan is how to sell its case to Iraq. The Japanese government supported America in the recent war, but among individual Japanese there were diverse opinions; lots of people opposed the government's decision. Maybe this would help in appealing to Iraq.

**Hashizume:** There's criticism of America's behavior, but there's also a sense in which the countries of the world welcome America's dominance. For example, World Wars I and II broke out without reference to America. Only when things got out of hand did America step in and bring about peace after a fashion. After World War II America awoke to its responsibility and began working to ensure that the same thing wouldn't happen again.

**Kosugi:** In the Middle East recently, though, not only has America not acted as an honest broker, it has taken an extremely biased attitude. America was at its best at the time of the 1956 Suez crisis. Egypt under Gamal Abdel Nasser was defeated militarily, but ultimately it triumphed totally in the arena of international politics. The main cause of its victory was America's positioning itself on the side of justice, against colonialism. At that time America's role gave it a glowing image. But ever since 1967 it has been biased toward Israel.

**Matsumoto:** America's pro-Israel bias is clear, but Bush is the first U.S. president to say that Palestine should be made a state. This was a historic pronouncement. In reality a variety of problems stand in the way of achieving this. But I think the Japanese government, or the Japanese people, can send the message that Bush recognizes the creation of a Palestinian state and is looking for a way for Palestine and Israel to coexist as states. It's because this hasn't been done so far that the view of America as pro-Israeli and anti-Arab has become entrenched.

**Iriyama:** Would we be justified in thinking that if the Israel-Palestine problem were settled, almost all Middle East problems would be resolved?

**Kosugi:** That's right. If the problem surrounding Israel that has festered for over half a century were resolved, most of the many problems now occurring would be settled, and the grounds for maintaining that the Middle East and the Islamic world are being unfairly treated would be greatly reduced.

**Matsumoto:** At least, terrorist groups wouldn't be able to use the Palestine problem as a justification for their actions.

**Iriyama:** At the time of both 9/11 and the Iraq war, Japan chose to side with

America. If Japan declared its basic stance and attitude on the Israel problem both at home and abroad and demonstrated an economic commitment, wouldn't it be able to contribute to improving Israel-Palestine relations?

**Kosugi:** If Palestine created an independent state, Israel would have no choice but to compromise more, since in talks between the strong and the weak it's unrealistic to expect the weak to be forced to make concessions. At a time when America is backing Israel so strongly, it's hard for Japan to say, "Look, we'll make this much of a contribution, so you compromise that much." Still, Japan has a responsibility as an ally to tell America clearly where it thinks it's mistaken.

**Hashizume:** Since it's impossible for both Israel and Palestine to satisfy all their demands, they have to compromise. In the courts of arbitration that were common in the Middle Ages, a third party having strong influence with the two contending parties would force them to come to an agreement and make them stick to it. Today, only America has the ability to secure agreement. But America doesn't meet the arbitrator's criterion of maintaining an equal distance from both parties. As for whether Japan is qualified to act as an arbitrator, it doesn't have the power or the skill to guarantee the outcome.

**Kosugi:** One problem is that both parties aren't on an equal footing as states. I'm sure a variety of arguments could be made, but I think first both Israel and Palestine should recognize each other as independent state, then proceed to conflict resolution based on international rules.

**Matsumoto:** Even if Japan can't guarantee the outcome through power, couldn't it, as an ally, keep telling America that it should do so, and get America to do so by saying that Japan supports the creation of a Palestinian state?

**Hashizume:** Whether or not it can, I think insisting at every opportunity that creation of a Palestinian state is necessary would be a very good stance for Japan. The reason Japan couldn't control the war it started with China in the 1930s was that it refused to recognize China's legitimate government, so it was left with no government with which to make peace and thus bring an end to the war. As a result, even though it enjoyed military superiority it couldn't win the war. Israel today is in a similar position.

**Matsumoto:** If Palestine were recognized as a state and were in a state of war, resistance by means of suicide bombings should disappear. As things stand, the only way Palestine can resist Israel's state aggression is by suicide bombings. But if it were a war between states, the situation would be different; you could bring about a cease-fire and a peace treaty.

### Has the United Nations really become powerless?

**Iriyama:** How does the Arab world or the Islamic world see the United



#### **Daisaburo Hashizume**

Daisaburo Hashizume was born in Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, in 1948. He obtained an M.A. in sociology from the University of Tokyo and is now professor of sociology, Department of Value and Decision Science, at the Tokyo Institute of Technology's Graduate School of Decision Science and Technology. He has written prolifically on sociological and other subjects. His works include three volumes of collected papers, *Language Games and Social Theory*, *The Discursive Strategy of Buddhism*, *Structuralism for Beginners*, and *Lectures on Society* (two volumes).

Nations?

**Kosugi:** I suppose it's seen as a body for refugee relief and conflict settlement. After all, the Middle East is where peacekeeping operations were first conducted. Even if conflicts sometimes flare into full-blown war, total destruction can be averted if the U.N. is asked to arbitrate. I think the U.N. has a considerable function in terms of local security.

**Iriyama:** So the U.N. flag still carries a fair amount of clout in the Islamic world, especially the Middle East?

**Matsumoto:** Yes. I also think the U.N. has considerable credibility as a forum where nations can express their views. The U.N. wasn't able to carry out its security function in regard to the Iraq war, but I don't think that means people think the U.N. is finished. Even if they feel that the U.N.'s function has been weakened because America went ahead and attacked Iraq without a second U.N. resolution, there's still a very strong sense internationally that the U.N. should be used as a forum for dialogue.

**Kosugi:** Since every country, whether it has a population of 50,000 or a billion, is recognized as being on an equal footing as a sovereign state in the General Assembly, countries can gain a sense of achievement and autonomy in the international community. I believe the U.N. has a *raison d'être* as that kind of forum.

**Hashizume:** Today's international order is supported by two pillars, security and the market economy. Originally, the market economy was meant to be a game whereby everyone could become happy by transferring goods, but goods can't move unless there's agreement. The have-nots can't become happy unless they build up wealth over a long period through their own efforts.

Security, meanwhile, has the function of preserving the status quo. This is very convenient for those who are benefiting from the status quo. Preserving the status quo necessitates military might, which only the developed countries can maintain. People who believe they can't pursue their own happiness through a market economy have to resort to armed force if they want to change the status quo without the other side's agreement, but the security framework deters that. This is the present situation.

Security is an important mechanism. But it doesn't function properly unless it's paired with a mechanism that gives people hope. The present U.N.

system does no more than extend a helping hand after nations are really in trouble; it's not an organized distribution system.

For example, there's the idea of collecting contributions from countries in the form of a levy based on their possession and consumption of resources and creating a mechanism for distributing funds to those left behind by the market economy. It wouldn't be just a vehicle for emergency aid but a mechanism for the somewhat more systematic transfer of goods. Since Japan isn't making a military contribution, it seems to me it could do a bit more in proposing and designing such a system.

#### **Thinking about the way Japan disseminates information**

**Kosugi:** Japan can't do anything of a military nature. So what can it do? I think Japan should strengthen its dissemination function. Up to now Japan has been preoccupied with getting out the message of its distinctiveness. But I think Japan should also make it known how it has perceived and assimilated Western modernity. Gaining possession of civilization doesn't mean jettisoning your traditional culture. I believe harmony between civilization and indigenous culture is possible. I also think there's a kind of wisdom in Japan's way of negotiating that difficult challenge through ambiguity. Japan should disseminate its model of not making an either-or choice but harmonizing the two, accepting Western civilization while blending it with traditional culture.

**Iriyama:** Islam is diffident about self-expression. Considering its illustrious history, I'd like to see Islam disseminate its message by peaceful means rather than suicide bombings. It seems to me Japan could help with that in some way.

**Kosugi:** On one hand, the conditions surrounding Islamic moderates have worsened since 9/11. Moderate, middle-of-the-road intellectuals haven't been allowed to say anything more than that terrorism is bad. On the other hand, the extremists have attracted all the attention, and now confront America militarily. Moderate intellectuals can't get anyone to listen to their views on how dialogue should be pursued. Maybe Japan has a role to play in pulling together and disseminating their views.

**Hashizume:** Japan hasn't experienced a radical reassembly of its traditional culture. No matter how far back we look, Japan has had a unique culture. There are a variety of vectors within Japanese society: it includes parts that can resonate with developed countries, parts that can resonate with Muslims, and parts that can resonate with people who are protecting indigenous cultures that have been left behind. So rather than focus especially on Islam, we could adopt the method of disseminating messages to people in many different situations, using the various wavelengths inherent in Japanese culture. There must be other ways of disseminating the message of freedom and democracy than the methods America uses.



**Ken'ichi Matsumoto**

Ken'ichi Matsumoto was born in Gunma Prefecture, Japan, in 1946. After graduating from the University of Tokyo with a degree in economics, he worked for Asahi Glass Co. before pursuing graduate studies in modern Japanese literature at Hosei University and simultaneously embarking on a career as a critic and writer. He is now a professor at Reitaku University's International School of Economics and Business Administration. His works include *Ideology of Right Wing*, *Postwar Mentality*, and the award-winning *Modern Asia's History of the Spirit*.

**Matsumoto:** In other words, Japan can focus on histories and cultures that have always been rooted in their own environments. This is an element that America, created artificially on the basis of ideas, doesn't have, an element whereby even freedom and democracy have been implanted in indigenous culture.

**Hashizume:** That's something the Japanese are good at.

**Kosugi:** I agree, but I feel it hasn't yet been put on nearly enough of a theoretical basis to disseminate.

**Hashizume:** Language is also a problem in disseminating information. What I mean is that it seems there's almost no information on Japan in Arabic. Ordinary Arabs can only read Arabic. Of course English is important, but isn't it also strategically important for the Japanese government to translate texts about Japan into Arabic?

**Kosugi:** To tell the truth, Japan has plenty of resources for disseminating information to the Arab world. After the two oil shocks in the 1970s the number of people studying the Arab world increased, since understanding the Arabs was seen to be essential. At present there are lots of people who understand Arabic. In the Arab world, too, there's a growing push to learn about East Asia; Cairo University, for example, has set up an Asian studies center.

In future, however, it will be hard for Arab countries to move further in this direction under their own steam for economic reasons, let alone any other reasons. If Japan supported such initiatives, it seems to me, things would progress rapidly.

**Hashizume:** If the number of Arabs who understand Japanese increased and basic materials about Japan were translated into Arabic so that ordinary people could read them, there'd be a big jump in the number of people in Arab countries with knowledge of Japan. This is important for building relations between Japan and Arab countries.

**Iriyama:** If works are to be translated to promote knowledge of Japan, what kinds of works do you think would be good?

**Kosugi:** How about anthologies of writings by contemporary authorities on a variety of topics, including Japan's economy, society, and education? Maybe they wouldn't be simple enough for ordinary people to enjoy reading, but I expect university students and teachers would understand them.

Essays would be okay, too. We need to think in terms of not what information Japanese people want to make known but what Arab people would find interesting. If five volumes were published over several years, they'd have a big impact.

**Matsumoto:** The Japanese historical figure best known to Turkish researchers is the nationalist ideologue Shumei Okawa [1886–1957]. The reason is that he translated the Koran into Japanese and told the Japanese about Kemal Atatürk, the so-called father of Turkey. Shumei Okawa had a kind of sympathy for Islam and the Arab world, and understood Arab nationalism.

**Hashizume:** Japanese researchers on the Middle East appear to be focusing on the huge cultural system of the Middle East and thinking about how best to convey it to Japan, but I think the opposite is at least as necessary: focusing on the questions that emanate from the Arabs and Islam and translating works that address these questions.

**Kosugi:** Just as the Japanese are studying the Arabs and Islam from a Japanese perspective, it would be fine if the Arabs studied Japan from an Arab and Islamic perspective, but just waiting for this won't make it happen. The reason is that students from Arab countries who study overseas head mainly for the West; almost all who come to Japan are studying the sciences. This isn't the same as wanting to study Japanese culture. I think we also need to disseminate information to the Arab and Islamic world, doing our best to surmise its needs.

### Building a new Japanese-Arab relationship

**Iriyama:** So how do you think we should relate to Arab and Islamic societies in future?

**Matsumoto:** The number of Muslims in Japan is growing, but that's because we're accepting workers from Afghanistan, Iran, and Iraq. If our university research institutions hired researchers and scholars from Islamic countries, Islam would enter Japan on a cultural level.

**Kosugi:** I totally agree. There are already Ministry of Education and Science scholarships for earning degrees and short-term training programs run by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, but there's nothing in between. For example, I think we need to put together one-year programs attuned to recipients' cultures. Carefully crafting programs is very time consuming. Japan is willing to spend money but tends not to want to spend time. But cultural exchange takes time. We could, for example, invite several dozen or several hundred Palestinians every year to undertake education here. Investing in human resources who would be useful when Palestinians won statehood and started to build their own society would send a very clear message.

**Iriyama:** Aren't there any programs for study in Japan or scholarships targeting Palestinians?

**Kosugi:** There's been no movement on that front since the peace process stalled.

**Hashizume:** What about the idea of Japanese local governments accepting groups of, say, 50 Palestinians? They could be put into self-governing districts, where they would be able to work and study. Local governments could offer people the chance to live in Japan while governing themselves. They could be taught water-supply and electricity technology and the like, and administer the self-governing district for themselves. Palestinians are feeling alienated because they are being driven out of their hometowns, can't find anywhere to take them in, and have no work and no money. If Japan, though geographically distant, not only sympathized with their plight but also actually reached out a helping hand and promised to help them with nation building, it would send a very good message.

**Matsumoto:** In that case, though, we'd have to select localities with care. In the past the Japanese government accepted boat people from Cambodia and Vietnam. It built communal facilities so people could support themselves, but these facilities worked only in affluent, open locales like the Boso Peninsula. They failed in locales that put themselves forward because they wanted government subsidies. Since people in such places had a hard time making ends meet themselves, they saw boat people coming into the community as a sort of threat.

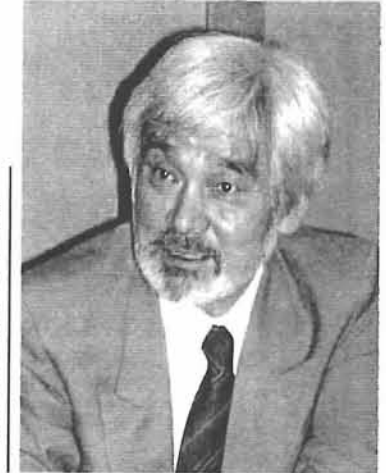
**Iriyama:** So it's okay if we build them in affluent places.

**Hashizume:** I don't think that's necessarily so. When the shortage of brides in rural districts became severe, people searched for brides as far afield as Taiwan, the Philippines, South Korea, China, and Russia. When local communities are really hard pressed, they think quite boldly. Locales that can look after themselves are best.

**Kosugi:** During the 2002 soccer World Cup Japanese local governments showed a superb ability for international cooperation. Teams from Islamic countries came to Japan, too. The Tunisian team stayed in Oita Prefecture, and apparently the Tunisian ambassador still visits Oita often, since they have a very good relationship between them. If outside support is provided, local governments can do quite a lot.

It would also be a good thing if volunteer groups proliferated. Japan has lots of NGOs and NPOs that have dealings with the Arab sphere and the Islamic sphere. But pure volunteer groups are just doing what they want to, giving little thought to what's necessary for Japan now or what's important for intercourse between Japan and the Arab world. So it's necessary to some extent to present visions or schemes that will trigger volunteer groups' spontaneity.

**Iriyama:** Is there anything besides oil that gives Japanese people a sense of



**Akira Iriyama**

Akira Iriyama was born in 1939. After graduating from the University of Tokyo with a degree in law, he worked for the Japan National Railways, Japan Airlines, and the United States-Japan Foundation before becoming executive director of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation in 1986. He has been president of the Foundation since 1993 and a professor at Rikkyo University's Graduate School of Social Design Studies since 2002. He has written and lectured widely on the nonprofit sector.

familiarity with Arabs or Islam?

**Kosugi:** On the micro level, there are heaps of Arab goods that have become part of our daily lives. But the big thing is oil, I guess.

**Iriyama:** It's easy enough to make a connection with Arab things as long as we're talking about oil, but it's a lot harder when we start thinking about Islam.

**Hashizume:** As well as being geographically distant, Japan belongs to neither the Christian nor the Islamic sphere, so the Japanese aren't equipped with the mental tools for understanding to begin with. In the Christian sphere, there are some tools even if they involve prejudices, but because the Japanese don't even know enough to have prejudices they are simply uninterested.

**Kosugi:** The Islamic sphere extends over both the East and the West, so there are various ways of approaching it, I think. For Japan, I suppose, the closest Islamic sphere is Indonesia and Malaysia. Since the oil shocks there's been an image of Islam as equated with the Middle East, but before then the Japanese image of Islam was Southeast Asia and Central Asia. What if we returned to that? Even though so many Japanese companies are operating in Indonesia and it's the country with the world's largest Muslim population, until the fall of the Suharto regime we didn't associate Indonesia with Islam. It's a wonder we were able to ignore that and relate to Indonesia solely in economic terms.

**Matsumoto:** At one time there was a fuss because the Aji-no-moto brand of seasoning, which is sold in Indonesia, used an enzyme found in pig fat, a taboo in Islam. That was a problem caused by lack of cultural awareness.

**Kosugi:** We can't understand today's international community without taking religion into account. Despite that, the Japanese have taken the modern paradigm of the separation of religion and politics at face value and ignored the problem of religion. In a sense, we're now reaping the consequences. The fact is that during the period from 9/11 until the Iraq war, Japan was surprised at how religious even America was. If we want to make our way in the international community, it seems to me we're at risk if we don't understand that this kind of basic knowledge is essential.