



# The Art and Challenges of Diplomacy

*Asia in Washington's* podcast episode "The Art and Challenges of Diplomacy," featuring Ms. Margot Carrington, was published on May 12, 2021 by the Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies. Policy Research Fellow. Neave Denny served as producer and Lauren Mosely as the sound editor. The following transcription was edited by Jada Fraser and Adriana Reinecke. You can find us on [Apple Podcasts](#), [Google Podcasts](#), and [Soundcloud](#). To keep up to date with upcoming Reischauer Center events and programs, please follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).

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Adriana Reinecke

Welcome to *Asia in Washington*, the podcast examining key questions animating debate in DC on the Indo-Pacific region. I'm Adri Reinecke, here with my co-host for the day, Lauren Mosely, recording in Washington, DC at the Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies at Johns Hopkins SAIS. You can find a transcript of today's episode on the Reischauer Center website at [www.reischauercenter.org/podcasts](http://www.reischauercenter.org/podcasts).

Lauren Mosely

Thank you for having me. As a quick introduction, I'm also a Policy Research Fellow here at the Reischauer Center. This past year I've focused primarily on East Asian-Caribbean relations. However, I also work behind the scenes with the podcast. I admit, I'm a bit nervous to be on the other side of things today. All that being said, I'm delighted to welcome today's guest Ms. Margot Carrington to *Asia in Washington*. Ms. Carrington retired from the Department of State in 2018 after a 25-year career as a US diplomat, which culminated in a four-year tour as Minister Counselor for Public Affairs, US Embassy Tokyo, a senior role overseeing a \$10 million budget and 70 American and Japanese staff. Ms. Carrington was the ambassador's lead advisor on public diplomacy, managed all USG bilateral exchange programs, and raised the profile of the United States through traditional and social media. She also served as chair of the binational commission that administers the Fulbright Program in Japan. Just prior to her retirement, her achievements in strengthening US-Japan cultural exchange, and in underscoring the importance of women's advancement, were recognized with the Lois Roth award for cultural diplomacy, the US Department of State's most prestigious award for public diplomacy.



Adriana Reinecke

Today we'll be speaking with Ms. Carrington about her 25-year career as a US diplomat. Ms. Carrington, we're excited to have you on the Asia and Washington podcast today. Your recent seminar at the Center felt close and intimate, and we're excited to have the chance to broaden the audience and go deeper into some of the topics you mentioned in today's episode. So, thank you so much for joining us.

Margot Carrington

Well, thank you. And I'm a great supporter of the Reischauer Center and love what you do to bring the US and Japan closer together. So, I'll be happy if my conversation today helps achieve that in a small way. Thank you for having me.

Adriana Reinecke

We're very much looking forward to it, and I'm sure Dr. Calder and Dr. Books will say the same. So, to begin, can you briefly highlight for us one or two of what you consider to be some of the greatest successes of your career, and then maybe one or two of the biggest challenges?

Margot Carrington

Sure, I think if I'm looking at my career overall, something that I've been doing in retirement — I guess that's what happens when you leave your career; you have more time to look back on it — I'd have to say a challenge was the fact that the State Department remains a very male-dominated institution. So, women still are not reaching the executive ranks in the same proportion to their numbers. And I felt this really acutely in Japan. When I returned from my second tour in 2003, I came back with two children. My son had been born during the end of my first tour in Japan, and then during my second tour in Malaysia, I had my daughter. So, I came back with two children, now really trying to balance work and life, as they say, and it was incredibly difficult.

And I was also in an environment where very few women were trying to do both. At the time, oddly, there was really only one other female FSO in the whole US embassy that was also a mother, which is hard to believe. Things have changed, fortunately. So, I would have to say that if I'm looking at challenges in my career overall, that keen sense of how hard it was to break the glass ceiling, if you were a working mother, certainly ranks high among those challenges. And in fact, I decided in 2010 to apply for a wonderful sabbatical program that we have funded by a nonprofit, the Una Chapman Cox Foundation, which works in conjunction with the Foreign Service to allow one or two FSOs a year to do a sabbatical project, and mine was to look specifically at the barriers to women's advancement in the Foreign Service. So, that could be an interesting topic for another podcast, but I'd have to say that I was keenly aware of the challenge and then tried to do something to work towards solving it, I guess.



And I know we're interested mostly in Japan, but I just want to mention a little bit about Malaysia, where I also spent five years of my career — one year spent learning Malay at University of Malaya. And, I think, if I look back on successes of that part of my career, we were working very hard to promote US education among young Malays. We were in fierce competition with Australia, which was another English-speaking country close to Malaysia, very inexpensive as a destination; and the UK, which was not as close and not always as inexpensive, but very prestigious. And so, there were a lot of choices for young Malays, and we were trying to convince them that the US was an equally appealing destination. And I was happy that, after a lot of work, we succeeded in small ways, including by encouraging more programs that would allow such things as Malaysians studying for two years in Malaysia, and then two years in the US and obtaining a US degree — those are called like “two plus two programs,” usually. I knew nothing about this whole field until I got there and realized there was a lot to this promotion of US education.

And then the other, I think, great achievement of that part of my career was the first-of-its-kind — for Malaysia — program under the Ambassadors Fund for Cultural Preservation, where we worked with a local nonprofit to identify a very unique Dutch-era townhouse in the city of Malacca, which we then provided US government funds, under this program, to help preserve. And it's still there — I haven't been able to go back to Malaysia to see it, but I would love to one day because that was a very fulfilling, rewarding program to be involved in.

As far as challenges, I have to mention that 9/11 happened during my tour in Japan, and I was a new mother, expecting my second child. And while there was definitely an outpouring of support for the US, there was a small segment of Malaysians that felt that somehow the US deserved this for its policies towards the Muslim world. And that was very difficult, to sort of feel that we might be a target, that we might be somehow at risk as US diplomats. That was felt by people in the US, by people in all other posts as well. We then, after that, faced the challenge of trying to convince Malaysians — and especially Muslim Malay, who are the dominant ethnic group in Malaysia — that the US should go into Afghanistan, should go into Iraq, and it was a very, very, very difficult, challenging time for public diplomacy. So, I just want to mention that, just outside of Japan.

When it comes to public diplomacy in Japan, without a doubt, the greatest challenge for us stems from the large US security presence there. And while it's important to note and remind people that we're there at the invitation of the Government of Japan, and they shoulder a significant portion of the cost, the presence of so many US service members there inevitably leads to local tensions. But in some cases, it can be quite destructive to the relationship. And I'm thinking, in particular, to something that happened in 1995, when I was a very new officer in Japan — it was my first tour and I'd just been there two years, just out of Japanese language training. But we had



the really horrific rape of a 12-year-old girl by three service members. And you can easily say that the effects of that are still felt today, in many ways. But it upended the relationship in a way that, at the time, we felt it acutely, but it was hard to imagine that we would still be talking about it and talking about the effects of it so many decades later. One of the outcomes [was a] reexamination of the US presence in Japan and where those elements should be deployed, which is still ongoing and hasn't been resolved. So, certainly one of the greatest challenges. And of course, as everybody who watches Japan and the Asia Pacific knows, that presence is so important to addressing DPRK provocations, the rise of China, and now increasingly, Russia. So, in terms of the ongoing relationship, it's really important that we get this part right.

Lauren Mosely

Thank you so much for all of that. That was very insightful. I know that during your seminar, you also mentioned a success during your career was President Obama's 2016 visit to Hiroshima. I'm wondering, how do you consider, or how do you approach organizing such a high profile and symbolic event like that? What are some of your primary considerations leading up to such an event? And maybe you can talk about how you want events like that to be perceived or remembered, and what were some of the main diplomatic objectives you sought to achieve?

Margot Carrington

As you say, there were a lot of considerations, and in all of the preparation, obviously, we had to be taking our cue from the White House. And that was a little tricky, because the White House was grappling with its own sort of considerations about some of the domestic concerns about a visit to Hiroshima by President Obama: what that would signal, would it be the equivalent of an apology by the US? — which clearly nobody wanted, or wanted it to be perceived that way. But I think because all of this was playing in the background, the White House decided that they would not announce the visit ahead of time, and instead, it would happen on the heels of President Obama's attendance at the G7 summit at Issei, in Mie Prefecture, which was very close by, not far, luckily.

So, those of us on the ground in Hiroshima had a really difficult challenge. We were there scouting all of the sites and determining issues that go into preparation, such as press placement, and where we might have the press filing center — which is always a huge operation that allows for the press to work on the back end of all of their recordings and articles that are being written etc. But we were sort of doing that on the sly, so to speak. But yet, anybody watching on the ground in Hiroshima couldn't help but notice a huge contingent of US Embassy people, a lot of people from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. So, it all felt silly, in a way. That's just sort of the backstory.



You know, and I just want to back up a little bit, because it's important to remember how much lead-up there was to this event happening. I, as you know, served in Japan over many different tours. So, I'd been privy to discussions going all the way back to the early 2000s and possibly earlier, but I wasn't privy to those about whether the US ambassador should attend the Hiroshima and Nagasaki commemorations. And it wasn't until 2010, that a US ambassador did, and that was Ambassador Roos, who attended Hiroshima that year. Of course, subsequent to that all of the other ambassadors have attended, including Ambassador Kennedy, obviously, when I was there. But again, there was that concern: Does it signal a US apology? It had to be handled very, very carefully. Fortunately, we had an overall agreement that now the way had been paved for the President to come. And we had a lot of other, I would say, wonderful material to work with, which included the fact that Ambassador Caroline Kennedy was our ambassador — her father had made some very compelling moves towards banning nuclear testing, so that was part of the Kennedy legacy. And we'd had the fact that President Obama shortly after his inauguration, had given a speech in Prague calling for a non-nuclear world. So, there was a lot of backstory to the fact that it now seemed like the ideal time for this visit to take place. So, the way was paved for us in that sense, but we still had to be extremely careful.

And so we wanted the overall strategic messaging to be about US-Japan reconciliation, about this incredible journey that the US and Japan had been on, going from the bitterest of enemies during World War II, to the closest of allies, the closest of friends. And Hiroshima provided the perfect backdrop for that; it was a beautiful way to tell that story. And again, that concern about a demand for an apology — I just want to mention that the visit was not without any controversy locally. There were some in Hiroshima, or people who also, I guess, came to Hiroshima, to sort of call for that apology. You know, there's some coverage of the fact that there were some demonstrations, including when President Obama was arriving at the Peace Park. But what stood out for me was how that was completely drowned out by the huge level of local support. The road was just lined with people who were cheering as President Obama arrived, and that was, again, the overall impression and part of the overall message that we had wanted.

One of the considerations we're also working with was that we wanted *hibakusha*, the victims of the actual bombing in Hiroshima — and Nagasaki, but in this case, Hiroshima — be included in some way, in the commemorations. And because of the way the visit was really being put together — in a way that wasn't too public — it wasn't until the eleventh hour that we got the okay on that particular point. And so, the US side invited some *hibakusha* with whom it had had contact, and MOFA, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, invited some. And for us, it was clear that one of those people had to be Mr. Shigeaki Mori, because of his incredible work ensuring that American POWs and POWs from other allied countries, who had been affected by the bombing, also be recognized at Hiroshima. So, he spent really his own free time working on this for decades and decades. And there's a beautiful film called *Paper Lanterns* that documents his



entire history of trying, again, to make sure that history reflected this particular fact that US POWs had also lost their lives in Hiroshima. So, we made sure he was part of the group there at the Peace Park. And when it came to deciding who in particular would meet one-on-one — very briefly, but still, in a very significant way — with President Obama, for us, it was clear it had to be Mr. Mori. And if you look closely, you can see that Mr. Mori is almost in tears at this point. It's really the President comforting him. And it's just a beautiful, beautiful image. And I still get choked up when I look at it. That was certainly one of the key symbols of the visit.

The other, I think, symbolic aspect that we were also considering was, of course, the importance of paper cranes, because of the beautiful story, and heartbreaking story, of Sadako-san, who was folding paper cranes during her hopeful recovery. And, of course, she never did recover from the effects of the bombing and died at a very young age. And so, I, along with probably other people, had suggested that there be something related to paper cranes that the President would give during this visit. And he ended up with Ambassador Kennedy folding cranes, that he then donated. And what was amazing about this, was just, it was sort of the perfect touch, because it was something that he had spent time doing, showed an understanding of the importance of that symbol, and he donated them to the museum where they were put on display. And later — this surprised me in some ways, but probably shouldn't have — the cranes were displayed all over Japan at different museums, and would attract hordes of people. Again, because it is such an important symbol to Japan.

The other thing that surprised me, to be quite honest, President Obama gave a beautifully crafted speech that just threaded that needle of not being an apology, but yet, making it clear that the US understood the suffering that had occurred in Hiroshima and underscored the importance of avoiding such a horrible, devastating event in the future. And again, it was just a beautifully written speech. I remember my counterpart from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came up to me afterwards, and one of the first things he said was, “Oh, my God, that speech!” You know, talking about a family at the breakfast table, and just it was beautifully, beautifully done. Well, what we didn't expect to happen, was that, just within weeks of the President's speech, it had been translated into Japanese and published in book form, and was a best seller at all the bookstores in Japan. So, you know, talk about a fantastic, enduring effect of the visit that we didn't even have to really be involved in. You had the fact that now everybody was reading the speech, and commenting on it, and thinking about it weeks after the visit had concluded, so it had an amazing, enduring impact in that sense. And I should say Prime Minister Abe gave an equally stirring, beautiful speech. And the two of them just together presented such an amazing image of reconciliation, which was our goal.

So, I think in all aspects, this was an incredibly successful visit. All of the things that we worried about that could go wrong, did not. It all went very smoothly. And what's interesting is that, in



terms of the enormous impact that it had, the President was on the ground for a very, very short time. And I think that's another thing that maybe was not apparent to very many other people. But he helicoptered in, he came to the Peace Park, he gave a beautiful speech, there was a laying of wreaths, he toured the museum — sorry, the order of that is actually the other way around — and then he was gone. For security reasons, they'd been keeping the Peace Park very closed off. And, in fact, there were even fewer people within the park because some kind of problem at Haneda Airport that morning had made it difficult for Diet members to fly in. There were very few people just even seated there for the actual event. Of course, TV coverage, you know, broadcasted it widely, of course, to everybody else. But it was incredibly quiet during the visit; very solemn, which you would expect, but also quiet because there were just so few people there. Of course, the press was quiet as they know to be during this, and off to the sides. And then as soon as the President and the Prime Minister left, the gates were opened and everybody who'd been standing back just flooded into the park to see the wreaths that were placed there, and to take pictures in front of the wreaths. And this went on for hours into the night. And so again, that's one of my enduring memories of that very special day.

Adriana Reinecke

It's really wonderful to hear the backstory of that, because I do remember that coverage and I do remember being moved and choked up. So, it's really fascinating to get to hear from you, who was very much involved in it, sort of everything that went into that visit. Just moving on, we have so much we would like to ask you. And you know, you just mentioned the idea of this enduring sentiment that carried on after the Hiroshima event. One thing that you had mentioned during your seminar was the challenge of developing programs that do have this sort of staying power, such as the TOMODACHI Initiative. Based on your experience, what do you consider to be some of the most important factors that go into developing these sorts of programs or visits or events that are enduring that 'have legs,' as you said?

Margot Carrington

That, in fact, is the million-dollar question, you know, in public diplomacy, of course. And I think when you're talking about programs with a long-lasting effect, usually you then are turning your attention more to exchange programs, because by their very nature, you're investing in people who are going to amplify the program and make sure it endures.

So, to give you an example, Fulbright is one such program, I would say. We've tried a lot with our International Visitor Leadership Program to create that same sense, but people who take part in that program just come for two weeks to the US. And, of course, with COVID, and everything else, a lot of those programs have been on hold. But if you look at the Fulbright Program, we invest in promising young leaders and give them a chance to study in the US. So, they're here for a significant amount of time. And they begin to really identify as Fulbrighters. And that pays



huge dividends moving forward, because when they return to their country — and that's an important part to stress, they have to return to their country, they're required to return to their country — they then become your key interlocutors for other programs. They can serve as possible sources for other future Fulbrighters, they can help you recruit. In that sense, you are creating something that's going to have an enduring impact.

And, of course, TOMODACHI, for me, if I'm talking about just Japan — because of course, that program is limited to Japan — that's a program that ensures that the participants feel a long-lasting connection to the TOMODACHI identity, and they then become powerful messengers themselves. The role and the hope is that you create something that's going to have a lasting effect, that's going to pay dividends in the future. And I think the TOMODACHI program, in creating this idea of the 'TOMODACHI generation,' has really done that very, very successfully. When I meet TOMODACHI alums it's very clear to me that that TOMODACHI name, that affiliation, means a great deal. And the word itself, meaning 'friend,' for the non-Japanese speakers, couldn't have been better chosen, because these are now the next generation of young people who are going to carry forward the US-Japan relationship. And I think, I'm really grateful that they exist, and that they care so much about this incredible alliance that we've built.

Lauren Mosely

Having seen firsthand a number of highs and lows in the US-Japan relationship over the course of your career, I'm curious what you consider to be some of the more challenging aspects of the relationship, or the aspects that the relationship will face in the coming years. What role would you like to see US-Japan cooperation playing in the region moving forward?

Margot Carrington

Okay, well, definitely, I think, one of the issues we touched on earlier was the US security presence which is going to continue to be a great challenge. And fortunately, we're working very closely with Japan and with local governments to work through some of those problems, which is fortunate, because if you look at what's going on in the region, that security presence could not be more important — as I mentioned earlier — the DPRK and its continued provocations, the rise of China, and now a much more assertive Russia, which is an issue for Japan because of the disputed Northern Territories. So, I'm really glad to see that the relationship continues to work through some of the tensions that exist, while at the same time keeping their eye on the bigger prize, which is why that security presence is so important, and what it is that the US and Japan together are trying to do to meet these security challenges.

And of course, at the same time, US-Japan cooperation is important in so many other areas: everything from health — which, in the midst of this COVID crisis, we're acutely aware of — but also climate change issues; the US and Japan work so closely together on science and





technology; on the space program, which was always a wonderful program to work on in Japan because who doesn't love everything related to space and exploration and all of the neat things that we do through NASA and JAXA cooperation.

And I've been really pleased to see, too, that our new US envoy to Japan, Ambassador Rahm Emanuel, has so quickly understood what it is about the US-Japan relationship that's so special and so important. Watching him come on the ground, and very quickly identify the key areas where the US and Japan really need to cooperate closely and being able to message why that cooperation is so important. So, even on things like Ukraine, very quickly, he was praising Japan's statements and Japan's actions when it comes to Ukraine. In fact, the embassy, for the first time ever, was lit up with the Ukrainian flag thanks to Ambassador Emanuel's suggestion. I know from working in an embassy, I can just imagine people there were going, "You want to do what? And you want to do this, like tonight or tomorrow?" The effect and the message that it sent was incredibly powerful. As I look at that, I'm really hopeful that the relationship is in good hands, that it's on track, that it's going to continue to play the important role that it has played since the end of the War.

Adriana Reinecke

Thank you so much. You know, it's been really interesting to hear you talk to really a huge range of sort of facets to your role as a diplomat. And I'm curious, maybe how do you view the balance between public diplomacy that you see with community outreach or initiatives like the TOMODACHI initiative, versus diplomacy that's directed towards those in leadership roles, whether in the public or private sector? You know, are the two essentially the same? Are there fundamental differences in the way that you might approach something that is community-directed versus more leadership, or high-level, like the Obama visit?

Margot Carrington

Well, it's acutely important that you be aware of which audience you're trying to reach, what you're trying to accomplish with that message, what behavior you're trying to change. And increasingly, in public diplomacy, I'm really glad to see an emphasis being placed on how we measure success, because it can be very difficult to assess whether or not you've made an impact. There's the traditional methods of looking at positive newspaper coverage, etc. But behavioral change — change in attitudes — is really difficult. And so, I think, the approaches are very different. You've got to always make sure that your key messages to the different audiences really reinforce each other and kind of work towards the same overall strategic goal that you have set.

So, I'll just give you one example of why it's really important that you keep that behavior aspect in mind. So, under one of the US Ambassadors in Japan, we worked on a campaign to promote



education in the US, similarly to what I had done in Malaysia. And this was done by interviewing very high-level, accomplished Japanese, who had studied in the US, and get them to talk about why that experience had been so beneficial and how it had changed them. And it was a wonderful campaign. The problem for me is that we weren't necessarily tying that to a behavioral change. And so — what's called in advertising the 'call to action' — what was the call to action that we wanted? So, on the back end of that campaign, we connected these interviews to a dashboard that then allowed students to connect with Education USA, which is our very specific program to promote American education. You know, put them in touch with somebody who could then give them counseling about where they might want to go, to understand everything involved in studying in the US. And without that piece, you had the risk of this being a beautifully crafted, impactful program, but without necessarily that next step taking place. And so, I think that's the important piece for public diplomacy.

And I have to mention in everything that we do — because I haven't had an opportunity until now — the work of our locally employed staff is just critical in all of this. I mean, they're the ones who really know your local audiences, who understand how to best reach them. And any good public diplomacy officer worth his or her salt is going to know that it's by working closely with them that you're going to craft the most impactful, significant public diplomacy programs. So, I just want to put in a congratulatory note to them, because without their help our work would not be as successful as it is.

Adriana Reinecke

Thank you so much for those insights, I think you made a really good point about the importance of instituting behavioral change. Maybe changing gears slightly — but I also think is really an important part of your role as a diplomat — is having to do with how you represent US policy. Towards the end of your last tour, you saw a fairly dramatic shift in US diplomatic rhetoric vis-a-vis Japan as the result of President Trump's election. I'm curious, how did you go about managing that transition? And how did it maybe inform how you viewed your role as a diplomat or about diplomacy in general?

Margot Carrington

So, I won't lie to you, that was incredibly challenging, and even more so, in a way, because it all came to a head right after President Obama's visit to Hiroshima, which again, as we've talked about, was by any measure a great success, and was, you know, the apex of the close relationship between the US and Japan. Then the shoe dropped, which was this idea that maybe everything we knew about the relationship was about to be upended, and by a president who had very different priorities, who saw the US-Japan relationship very different, who had very strong views about sort of trade tensions. It was almost sort of harkening back to decades earlier, when our relationship with Japan was so much about trade friction. We've evolved so much that we tend to



forget how bitter that was, in a way. But this was sort of a return to some of that rhetoric, as you say.

So, it was important, I think, for us to remember that the work we had done over those decades had really built a reservoir of trust, in a way, you know, so we had this very solid foundation. At the same time, that doesn't mean that things can't be destroyed or eroded if we weren't careful. A couple of things were at the top of my mind during that transition. And one was that it was important that we be clear that US foreign policy goals were changing, you know, certainly the rhetoric implied a big change was coming — and I'm talking now about sort of the post-election prior to the inauguration. That was, I think, the most sensitive period, because we still had President Obama in office, but we knew that the change was coming sort of right after that.

We didn't know exactly what was coming, but certainly something would be changing. Let's go now to after the inauguration — we had to be careful in the sense that goals clearly had changed. What we knew about President Trump's foreign policy was essentially “America First,” right? If you have to put a label on it, that's the label that he himself chose for it. We had to be clear, in some ways, that that was a change in direction. We also knew that we were likely going to move away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, in which we had invested so much time and effort in the intervening years, and that the goals of the Paris Agreement were probably no longer going to be a priority, or even on the agenda at all.

And so, I thought it was important that we be honest and transparent about that, and at the same time — maybe this is a topic for another podcast — I was acutely aware that the new administration might also be looking at our embassy very closely, in particular, because we had a very high-profile political appointee ambassador in Caroline Kennedy, who was very close to President Obama, because we're such an important country to Japan. And I wanted to be sure that we weren't going to draw the wrong kind of attention from the administration. So, you know, this concern about the “deep state,” as they call it. So, I felt that our website, for instance, should reflect “America First,” as part of this new change that came in with the Trump Administration. Frankly, there wasn't much else to talk about at that point, we didn't yet know very much.

But at the same time, there was some very positive things that had happened. Prime Minister Abe had very, very strategically reached out to President Trump, even before he was inaugurated, and had started to build a relationship. So, we also leveraged that as much as we could, you know, this sort of “new bromance” — I'm not crazy about that word, but that was thrown around a lot — between Prime Minister Abe and President Trump, such as their shared love of golf. We really used whatever we could.



The other thing that we felt was really important was to talk about the fact that the US-Japan relationship is a lot more about just the government-to-government relationship. And because there was so much in question about what that was now going to look like moving forward, we thought, well, let's talk about the fact that we have these really incredible grassroots ties through programs like TOMODACHI, for instance. And that's what we focused a lot on during that time. You know, there was a lot of excitement about the upcoming Olympics, so we could also focus on that. I'm not saying we were trying to shift the attention away from foreign policy, necessarily, but there was a lot more that we could talk about when it came to the US-Japan relationship that was not just a government-to-government type of relationship.

And so that's really what we did. But there's no doubt that this required all of our diplomatic skills, and public diplomacy acumen, if you will, to get this right during this critical time. And we came through it, we came through that period. We then had a new ambassador nominated by President Trump, who cared a lot about the relationship, and who really kept things quite steady for the most part. Again, there were big shifts in foreign policy, without a doubt, but he understood that the relationship was about a lot more than just the government-to-government piece.

Lauren Mosely

You've given us some great perspectives as someone who has dealt with political transitions firsthand. As you mentioned earlier, you are currently going through a transition yourself, having retired only a few years ago. What would you say are some of the similarities and perhaps some of the differences when looking to promote the US in Japan, compared to promoting Japan in the US, especially in regards to public diplomacy?

Margot Carrington

Well, so that's really interesting, because, you know, although I always was a keen observer of what Japan was doing in terms of its own public diplomacy towards the US, I was very seldom in their target audience. For one thing, I was not in the US for my career. So, now I am observing that a lot more closely and seeing that there are a lot of things that Japan does very well. I mean, I was really, really struck by the closing ceremony at the Rio Olympics, and how Japan portrayed itself as the next host of the next Olympics — just brilliantly done. And it captured what everybody thinks about Japan as a science and technology leader: the anime piece, the manga piece, all of it, in a way, was culled in at that moment, and it was very well handled.

But I am now finding myself, in a way, part of the group of people that is promoting Japan to Americans. You know, supporting grassroots organizations and supporting the important work that they do — organizations like the Japan-America Society chapters, and there's discussion now of starting a chapter here in South Florida, so I'm very excited about that and want to do all I



can to make that happen. But other organizations like the Mansfield Foundation do wonderful work in terms of building and strengthening that relationship. Of course, they also look at Korea, which is critical. And an interesting program that I'm working with them on right now is a trilateral initiative between Korea, Japan, and the US, looking at the lessons that we can draw from the three countries in terms of what works in promoting the advancement of women, and how we can make recommendations to the three governments to strengthen those program[s]. It's a good sort of melding of my experience in Japan, my experience in working on gender issues. So, I'm very excited to be a part of that.

But for me, it's just a complete flipping of the roles. And I think one of the challenges, and something that's become really apparent to me, is that, when I was promoting America in Japan, I was dealing with people who knew quite a bit about the US. I mean, you know, not just the popular culture piece, of course, which attracts a lot of people. But most Japanese have a pretty strong understanding, even young Japanese, of what the US is as a country — there's misconceptions, of course, and that's one of the things that you have to address in public diplomacy — but there's a pretty strong set of just basics that are there. When you're looking at Americans and their views towards other countries, first of all, we're in a country that's becoming more inward-looking, in my opinion, rather than outward-looking. And also, people who, in general, don't know much about the Asia Pacific, and know even less about Japan.

So, it's a challenge to be sure, but that's where, interestingly, I kind of find myself thinking that I do have a role to play in being — at the grassroots level now, I guess — that important bridge or conduit for information about why the two countries are so important to each other. So, thank you for giving me that opportunity to talk about this today, about again, why we have to make sure that these enduring ties continue into the future.

Adriana Reinecke

Well, thank you, I mean, it's obviously our pleasure to have you and to get your insights here, and to get to hear you talk about all of these things. On that note, I'm wondering if you have any advice for people who are looking to pursue the East Asian relationship, East Asian Studies, diplomacy in East Asia, or just have an interest in the region, if there's any sort of programs that you're a fan of that you want to give a shout out, or if there's any sort of things that you would like to highlight, or advice you have for people who are now just sort of setting out on their careers, we would very much love to hear it.

Margot Carrington

I mean, obviously, it's critical to start learning about the culture and studying the language, which is so important to understanding the culture. I spoke other languages before joining the Foreign Service, but I learned Malay and Japanese as part of my responsibilities, because we —



public diplomacy officers — almost always learn the language to be able to work in those countries. The study of the two languages, right on sort of the heels of one another — I did them within a fairly short time — just underscored how much you understand about the culture through the language. So, I think, with Japanese and the sort of politeness levels, that doesn't exist in a country, like Malay, which was an agricultural agrarian society. So, just starting with very basic things. So, I think that's critical.

Spending time, either through study or through work in the other countries. And of course, in that context, the JET Program, which I know, has many alums at the Reischauer Center, and all over the place. Many JET alums decide to join the Foreign Service, as well. So, programs like that are just absolutely critical, and I couldn't recommend them highly enough.

And of course, studying at wonderful universities like SAIS, and the Reischauer Center, where you've got people who have spent significant amount of time in the countries who really, really understand intimately what those countries are about is absolutely essential. But then again, working with grassroots organizations, too. If you're somewhere where there isn't necessarily the right university, working with a local Japan-America Society chapter can be a very interesting way to gain some insights.

Lauren Mosely

Thank you so much. Honestly, I wish we had more time to talk with you.

Margot Carrington

I could talk for the whole day, but I don't think you want that.

Lauren Mosely

We're not opposed to it, but for the podcast's sake, we're gonna go ahead and close up but we want to thank you so much for your time. We look forward to hopefully having you again at the Reischauer Center.

Margot Carrington

And the Japanese would say *kochira koso*, right. I am the one who should be thanking you. I really enjoyed the discussion and look forward to continued cooperation with the Reischauer Center.

Adriana Reinecke

Thank you so much.



Lauren Mosely  
Thank you.

Jada Fraser

Thank you for joining us for this episode of Asia in Washington. If you'd like to learn more about the Reischauer Center and our current research, please visit us at [www.reischauercenter.org](http://www.reischauercenter.org). If you have comments, questions or suggestions for the podcast, please feel free to email us at [EORC.Podcastsais@jhu.edu](mailto:EORC.Podcastsais@jhu.edu). Don't forget to rate and subscribe to stay up to date on the latest from Asia in Washington.

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