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PROMETHEUS TRAP (4): U.S. official sought 'heroic sacrifice' from Japan

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By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

Editor's note: This is the fourth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the differences between Japan and the United States in dealing with the Fukushima nuclear accident of 2011 following the Great East Japan Earthquake. The series will appear on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

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At 9 a.m. on March 16, 2011, Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, invited Japanese Ambassador Ichiro Fujisaki into his office in Washington, D.C.

It was 10 p.m. in Japan.

After apologizing for calling him in so early in the morning, Campbell sat in a yellow leather chair with his back to the window. A small coffee table had been set up in that corner of Campbell's office. Fujisaki sat diagonally across from Campbell.

Also attending the meeting was Rust Deming, 71, director of Japan affairs at the State Department.

Campbell skipped the usual niceties of shaking hands and engaging in small talk. Instead, he got right down to business and started out with criticism of the lack of serious effort by the Japanese government to deal with the accident at the Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant.

The three embassy officials who had accompanied Fujisaki to the meeting hurriedly took notes of what Campbell said.

Not only did he say that the Japanese government had to make every effort to respond to the situation, but he added that the government also had to make decisions. He said the accident was not an issue for Tokyo Electric Power Co., the plant operator, but for the nation of Japan.

Campbell went on to say that the Fukushima plant was in a very dangerous state and that immediate action was necessary. One phrase that caught the attention of embassy officials was "heroic sacrifice." Campbell said such sacrifice was necessary by the several hundreds of workers who would have to go in while realizing what dangers were in store for them at the Fukushima plant.

Fujisaki entered the Foreign Ministry in 1969. In the late 1990s, he served as political minister at the Japanese Embassy in Washington while the administration of then President Bill Clinton engaged in what was described as "Japan passing," referring to the practice of leaving Japan out of the discussion in making various policy decisions.

Fujisaki later served as director-general of the North American Affairs Bureau at the Foreign Ministry. After building up a vast

network of personal ties in the United States over many years, he became ambassador in 2008.

Because Fujisaki has known Campbell for many years, the consensus within the Foreign Ministry was that the two had a close relationship built on trust.

Despite their past, Campbell had harsh words for Fujisaki in their meeting. He also informed Fujisaki of the U.S. government decision to issue an evacuation advisory calling on U.S. citizens to leave an area in an 80-kilometer radius of the Fukushima plant.

Campbell said that protecting Americans was the primary responsibility of the U.S. government and that it would be forced to think about further measures if the Japanese government made no decisions. Campbell added that the policy also covered the U.S. military, and that there was no intention of sacrificing military personnel.

With that, Campbell stood up. The meeting was over. Fujisaki and the embassy officials rushed back to the Japanese Embassy.

The three officials immediately began preparing a diplomatic cable to send to Tokyo. They put into words what Campbell said, what response Fujisaki gave, as well as how Campbell ended the discussion by leaving the meeting.

That style of explaining not only the gist of what was discussed, but also giving a feel for the atmosphere of the meeting, is known within the Foreign Ministry as being "the Fujisaki style."

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The previous installments of this series are available at:

(1) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301280006>

(2) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201301300006>

(3) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302010004>

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