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## PROMETHEUS TRAP (5): Tears from an old Japan hand at the State Department

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By HIROYOSHI ITABASHI/ Staff Writer

*Editor's note: This is the fifth part of a series that has run in the past under the overall title of The Prometheus Trap. This series deals with the different responses 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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For the second time that day, shortly before noon on March 16, 2011, in Washington, Ichiro Fujisaki, Japan's ambassador to the United States, was meeting with Kurt Campbell, assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, at the State Department.

Some two hours had passed since their meeting in the morning. Fujisaki, together with Japanese Embassy staff members, had come to the State Department again after discussing their exchanges in the morning meeting with top government officials in Tokyo. The Japanese diplomat had to ask Campbell some questions raised by the Japanese government.

Fujisaki asked how the U.S. government intended to evacuate American citizens from Japan, which was facing a nuclear crisis.

Many of the State Department officials present at the meeting thought Japanese officials were concerned about the possibility that the evacuation of Americans from the country could develop into a political issue.

Campbell responded by saying it was not a political issue. It was a question of whether Japan can survive or not, he stressed.

Fujisaki was bombarded by a barrage of critical comments and acidic remarks from Campbell.

Campbell accused the Japanese government of failing to understand the seriousness of the situation. He also criticized Tokyo for leaving it to Tokyo Electric Power Co., the operator of the disaster-stricken Fukushima No. 1 nuclear power plant, to deal with the crisis.

Campbell also said Washington, as Tokyo's ally and close partner, was deeply concerned about what was happening in Japan. He repeatedly used the phrase "heroic sacrifice" in discussing the disaster and Japan's needed response to it.

How did the State Department assess the way the Japanese government was responding to the nuclear crisis?

An internal report on the issue secretly circulated among top State Department officials on that day contained one word that would answer that question--"FUBAR," or F----- Up Beyond All Recognition.

The internal report also voiced the suspicion that the Japanese government might be holding back some vital information and

commented that Tokyo was not making any visible and effective response to the crisis.

Also on that day, Campbell attended a meeting of senior officials at the State Department's Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. He informed the attendants of the department's decision to declare a "voluntary evacuation" from Japan.

Many of the senior officials attending the meeting were taken aback by the announcement, because Japan had been regarded as a safe evacuation site in East Asia.

While evacuations of American citizens from Asian countries in political turmoil to Japan had been done from time to time, the State Department had never evacuated Americans from Japan to another country.

One of the senior officials present at the meeting recalls seeing tears in Campbell's eyes.

One of the leading experts on Japan in Washington, Campbell had spent some 20 years devoting his efforts to deepening his country's ties with Japan. Now, he was facing the possibility of those ties being broken.

It was probably a painful situation for Campbell, the official said.

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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>

(4) <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/0311disaster/fukushima/AJ201302040001>

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