

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

**Ambassador James P. Zumwalt**

*Interviewed by Charles Stuart Kennedy*

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*\*NOTE: Ambassador James P. Zumwalt's complete oral history is forthcoming and will be updated to this link upon completion. March 2021.*

Chapter XII

Embassy Tokyo Response to Japan's March 11 Triple Disaster, 2011

MAY 18 & 31 AND JUNE 4, 2018

*KENNEDY: WikiLeaks coincided with the so-called "triple disaster," didn't it?*

ZUMWALT: On the afternoon of March 11, thanks to WikiLeaks and also to the Asahi Shimbun plans to report on leaked Embassy Tokyo cables, I found myself with embassy political officers Thomas Whitney, Cody Walsh, and John Mark Pommersheim, holding two fat briefing books filled with classified Embassy Tokyo reports as we met with two senior Japanese foreign ministry officials, Director-General for the Asian and Oceanian Affairs Bureau Shinsuke Sugiyama and Director-General for the North American Affairs Bureau Kazuyoshi Umemoto at the ministry's Iikura Guest House. Just over an hour into the session, as we were discussing these leaked cables, suddenly the large conference room began to shake. Japan experiences many earthquakes and most cause little damage as Japan has strong building codes, but this severe shaking continued several minutes. We began to hear the building creak and the overhead chandelier swung violently. A facial tissue box slid across the table and fell onto the floor.

I looked across at my Japanese counterparts and, almost simultaneously, we all crawled under the sturdy wooden conference table. As we sheltered under this table, I thought that all of us looked rather undignified crouching on all fours in our suits with our neckties dangling to the floor. I realized suddenly that the WikiLeaks telegrams were less important than I had believed. The earthquake dissipated the meeting tension; we were now instead wondering what was to befall us.

The Iikura Guest House building continued to creak and rumble. The butler encouraged us to evacuate down the stairs as the earthquake continued. We ignored his advice. Our earthquake response training had stressed the importance of sheltering under a sturdy table or desk or in an open doorway. Running outside would expose us to falling debris. I chose to remain under the foreign ministry's sturdy wood table instead.

Later, I learned that the earthquake lasted about five minutes, but for me at that moment, time slowed down. I thought of my childhood in California and wondered what my parents and sisters were doing at that moment. I worried about Ann, who would be at work on the eighth floor of the Tokyo American Center office building. I was concerned about the situation at the Embassy Tokyo chancery and our housing compound as the ground shook under all of us. I worried about my driver, Norio Onodera, who was waiting patiently outside in an embassy car. All these thoughts raced through my mind as the shaking continued.

When the earthquake finally subsided, we abruptly ended our meeting. Director General Sugiyama called his wife on his cellphone, but the rest of us were unable to obtain a dial tone on our phones. Tom, Cody, John Mark, and I gathered together all of our classified telegrams and returned downstairs to our waiting embassy car. Mr. Onodera looked grim. We started driving back to the embassy but, after only a few blocks, traffic slowed to a crawl and then stopped completely. As we passed the Hotel Okura Tokyo, I saw through the car window hundreds of hotel staff and guests milling about the parking lot. I realized that I could return to the embassy more quickly on foot. I asked Tom and the others to remain in the vehicle and to secure the binders of classified telegrams when he returned to the office. I got out to walk the final few blocks to the chancery compound.

When I arrived, the embassy had already launched its emergency building evacuation. The staff had left the building and each section was assembling in their designated spots so that the floor wardens could take roll. The embassy had just practiced a fire drill a few days before, so our staff understood the procedures well. I must admit that my first action was to look for Ann in the crowd, to make sure she was safe. I was relieved to see her surrounded by her staff with the rest of the public affairs section. She had led her staff from the Tokyo American Center down eight floors of the fire escape, then walked with them six blocks to the chancery compound. Three times just in the ten-minute walk, strong aftershocks caused her to lose her balance, forcing her to squat down in the street to avoid falling. Later, one of her staff told me that they were like little chicks following their mother hen (Ann) down the narrow street, making their way between shards of broken window glass and other detritus that had fallen onto the street.

The management counselor, Jim Forbes, reported that the chancery evacuation had gone smoothly, everyone was accounted for, and there were no reports of injuries. He had heard that the situation at our housing compound was similar, people had evacuated outside and nobody was injured. He also reported that our off-duty marines had arrived at the chancery and were already searching the building to make sure that there were no fires or leaks of gas or water. Ambassador Roos was standing under the entrance awning, talking to the employees through a bullhorn. Behind him, I could see cracks in the building edifice. Just as our management counselor reported that he was not sure that our chancery building was safe, the ground shook with another aftershock.

Our chancery building had been designed in the late 1960s by a Los Angeles architect who had incorporated the latest earthquake building standards. Although our marines reported that the building appeared structurally sound, we did not want to take any chances due to the frequent aftershocks. After a brief huddle with the ambassador, we decided to send our employees home. It was already after 3:30 p.m. on a Friday afternoon and, by dismissing our employees, we would gain a few days to figure out whether it was safe for them to return to work on Monday. A few essential employees from the administrative and security sections stayed behind, but the rest were dismissed. In their rush to evacuate the building, many people had departed without coats and scarves, but the early March atmosphere was chilly. We decided to allow groups of people, twenty at a time, to return to their offices for five minutes each to take their coats and purses. With the many aftershocks, they were motivated to get in and out fast! We didn't want more people in the building at a time because we wanted to keep track of who was inside the building at all times.

The ambassador, management counselor, and RSO had the situation at the chancery well-organized, so I decided to visit our alternate command center in the gym on our housing compound about half a mile away. We thought this one-story building would be a safer refuge for us to continue our work. As I recall, my driver took me to our compound, but my memory is a blur — I may have walked.

As I traveled to the alternate command center, I began to organize in my mind the information we needed to report to the State Department's Operations Center. The most important news was that we had accounted for all of our personnel and their families and they were safe. Our electricity continued to function and we had running water. We could manage, at least in the short term. When I arrived at the compound, around four p.m., the alternate command center was a beehive of activity, but it was organized chaos. People were performing the tasks for which they had trained in our emergency drills. The IT section had already set up computer workstations and printers on folding tables, then

begun assembling our emergency radio system. These tools were important because the Japanese landlines were down and the cellphone network was completely overwhelmed.

Embassy Tokyo's Consul General Paul Fitzgerald and American Citizen Services Chief Bill Christopher had organized their staff to begin fielding queries from American citizens. They started receiving requests for information, mostly by email as our internet servers continued to operate. Activity suddenly stopped as our building was rocked with an aftershock that measured 7.9 on the Richter scale. People clambered under tables or moved to stand in a doorway. Somebody's child screamed and other children began crying. I realized the downside of placing our command center on our housing compound. Curious families had begun drifting in to learn about developments. I made a mental note to speak to our Community Liaison Office (CLO) employees to organize a family lounge away from our workspace. After a brief pause, the command center work restarted.

I reported to the State Department's Operations Center in Washington via satellite phone. Japan had suffered a major earthquake, damage in Tokyo appeared modest given the severity of the quake, and transportation and communications systems were paralyzed, but we had electricity and water on our housing compound. We were experiencing aftershocks, some severe, every twenty minutes or so. Our plan was to establish our emergency command center on the compound until we could assess whether it was safe to return to work in the embassy chancery. We requested that the State Department send structural engineers to assess the safety of our chancery building. The Operations Center's watch officer informed me that one of our consulates had taken the initiative of surveying the other constituent posts and had reported that their employees and family members were all safe. This was how I learned that only Tokyo's phones were down — the links at our consulates continued to function. I appreciated our constituent posts' initiative to report in directly.

Someone set up a large-screen television where we could follow the live Japanese news reports. NHK, the Japanese public broadcasting service, began reporting on the scope of the earthquake. They reported that it had measured a 9.1 on the Richter scale — a force I simply could not imagine. The earthquake had occurred offshore about 230 miles north of Tokyo, so the damage was much more severe in Japan's northeast. NHK began broadcasting live footage taken from news helicopters of the tsunamis approaching shore. They transmitted warnings for people to flee coastal areas and seek higher ground. Then the television began showing images of huge tsunamis devastating many communities along Japanese northeast coast. I realized that we were dealing with a disaster beyond the scope of the major earthquake.

As we continued to work to ascertain the safety of the rest of our embassy community, we turned our attention to the welfare and whereabouts of American citizens living in the devastated areas. Our consular section had computerized files on American citizens who had registered with us, so they began to focus on locating those citizens living in coastal areas of Aomori, Iwate, Miyagi, and Fukushima prefectures. As our consular section addressed issues concerning the welfare of American citizens in Japan, our embassy community still faced one additional worry — our own children. The American School in Japan (ASIJ), which most embassy children attended, is located 26 kilometers away from the embassy housing compound. What was normally a forty-minute drive would take much longer due to the traffic gridlock. Our RSO began contacting each school bus driver via our two-way radio. We learned that ASIJ had evacuated its students, that nobody was injured, and that after taking roll call, the students had boarded the buses to begin the long ride home. Other schools made similar reports. We asked our CLO staff to inform parents that their children were safe on a bus — but stalled in horrendous traffic. The buses were resourceful in this crisis. When the passengers got hungry, the bus monitors and drivers pooled their money and bought food for all the children at a rest stop.

I was still working at the alternate command center when the last bus arrived on the compound at one a.m. Saturday morning. The parents waited outside anxiously. I joined them at curbside to welcome the children home. As the school bus entered the compound, the driver began honking his horn and I joined the parents in a rousing cheer to welcome their tired children home. Anxious parents were exuberant to be reunited with their children; hugs and kisses were exchanged and we all felt relieved. Despite our emotional exhaustion, we summoned the energy to celebrate this small victory.

In the first 24 hours after the major earthquake, we experienced over one hundred aftershocks, including two that measured over 7.0 on the Richter scale. All told, in the two months after the earthquake, we felt over 5,200 aftershocks (over ninety earthquakes per day), including eighty-two that measured over 6.0 on the Richter scale. During the first week after the major earthquake, we could feel the ground shake several times per hour. The U.S. Geological Survey informed us that there was a ten percent chance this earthquake was merely a foreshock to be followed by an even bigger earthquake later. That assessment was in my mind each time I felt the earth shaking — was this one going to be even worse?

*KENNEDY: People were camping out?*

ZUMWALT: Our housing compound had three high-rise apartment buildings and about forty townhouses. This housing was built in 1981. The buildings were designed to

dissipate energy and reduce stress on the reinforced concrete support pillars. Our engineers were confident in these buildings' safety.

However, all of that shaking was not kind to the interiors of the upper units. Later, I saw some photographs of kitchens from upper-level apartments. All of the contents of the kitchen cabinets and refrigerator and freezer had tumbled out onto the floor. The debris of food, glass shards from broken jars, broken china, flatware, cans, small appliances, and containers from kitchen counters was so thick one could not even see the kitchen floor. With all of the broken glass and china shards lying around, these apartments were unsafe to inhabit. The spoiling food would begin to smell unless we could organize a cleanup quickly. One apartment experienced a small fire caused by a dresser that fell onto a lamp that had toppled over onto flammable material on the floor. There was smoke damage that required some extensive repairs and cleanup. People were resourceful and many people living in our townhouses and lower apartments opened their homes to house those who lived higher up in damaged units. Our administrative section organized a cleanup over the weekend so that the inhabitants of these upper units could return home.

*KENNEDY: Going way back to the earthquake of '23 or so, the hotel —*

ZUMWALT: There was huge damage to Tokyo in the 1923 earthquake, but the Imperial Hotel designed by Frank Lloyd Wright survived largely intact. This earthquake in 2011 was much bigger, but further away from Tokyo. Few buildings in Tokyo suffered serious structural damage in this earthquake. The biggest cause of deaths in the capital was a hotel ballroom where the decorative ceiling fell on a few people underneath. In general, however, Tokyo itself experienced remarkably few casualties. Despite the chaos with the shutdown of the public transit system, there was remarkable order throughout Japan.

Our employees experienced a difficult commute that night because the trains and subways had stopped operating. Some employees walked for two or three hours to reach their homes that night. Ann invited her six employees from the Tokyo American Center (all women) to stay overnight at our home which was only a twenty minute walk away. She took a lighthearted approach to cheer up her employees, saying that they could have a slumber party! Our cook had prepared for a representational event that night, so we even had food for our unexpected guests. Ann loaned them t-shirts for pajamas and our household staff rolled out the futons for them to sleep on. When I finally returned home about two a.m., I was surprised to see all these people around! Our home, in contrast to the compound, had suffered very little damage. A few stone lanterns in our garden had toppled, but there was very little other damage. I was glad Ann had taken the initiative to host her staff, as it would have been challenging for them to return to their distant residences that night.

After ascertaining the safety of all of our employees and their families, and after beginning our American Citizen Services work, that first night we also needed to turn our attention to earthquake and tsunami disaster assistance. The U.S. government decided to send search-and-rescue teams to help Japanese authorities find and rescue people trapped in the rubble. On Saturday March 12, we were told to work with the Japanese government to identify a good arrival location airport for the chartered aircraft that would carry search and-rescue teams from the Fairfax County and Los Angeles County fire departments that would come by a chartered aircraft. These teams brought with them technicians, trained rescue dogs, doctors, paramedics, and other support personnel. We had only a few hours to work on flight clearances, animal quarantine waivers, and other necessary paperwork.

The Japanese government, while grateful for the offer of help, were understandably difficult to pin down as to where our team should go. They were simply overwhelmed with the scale of the humanitarian needs in such a wide and isolated area. Somebody on the U.S. side decided to send our teams to Misawa Air Base in Iwate prefecture, the closest U.S. military base to the affected area. When we informed the Japanese of the arrival of this team at Misawa, they asked our search and-rescue teams to work with the Tokyo Fire Department, who had set up their operations in nearby Ofunato in Iwate prefecture. The teams departed the United States on Saturday about 24 hours after the earthquake and arrived at Misawa on Sunday. The Air Force had to scramble to help the plane because it was difficult for them to arrange for refueling and other support activities as the base itself now operated on emergency generators. The Air Force was most helpful to our teams, even as the base was dealing with its own postdisaster challenges.

Once these search-and-rescue teams arrived in Ofunato, they searched house to house with their dogs and equipment. The town had been reduced to rubble. These old-fashioned wooden houses simply did not stand up to the force of the tsunamis. Unfortunately, the teams did not find any victims alive. But Japanese TV did broadcast stories about the U.S. search-and-rescue efforts. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York, the Tokyo Fire Department had sent firemen to support New York fire stations, so I thought that these American fire department teams coming to Japan in its time of need represented an appropriate return gesture of friendship. I think our efforts did give hope to the Japanese at a moment when they were suffering greatly. At this time, we also enhanced our efforts on a growing number of welfare and whereabouts cases. Helping Americans in distress was not normally a huge element of our consular work in Japan. In a typical year, we might handle one or two hundred welfare and whereabouts cases. With this disaster, that would change. Suddenly, we needed to handle thousands of cases; the demands on our consular section were almost overwhelming. Paul Fitzgerald had already

set up a 24- hour operation with his consular staff. Initially, he could reinforce the ACS section by drawing upon our visa officers to help their ACS counterparts, but as we received more and more calls, Paul told me that his consular section needed additional manpower.

The Bureau of Consular Affairs (CA) established a global network of volunteers so that we could hand off much of the telephone work to consular officers in other posts. They announced an emergency hotline and then recruited consular volunteers around the world to receive telephone inquiries. Worried relatives would call to report a missing person and the phone might be answered by a consular officer in Montreal or West Africa or Washington DC. These consular volunteers would record all of the information in a report which we could then access online in Tokyo in order to investigate. This worldwide telephone network helped us manage the volume of inquiries. We prioritized the growing number of cases where we had credible information that a missing American was located in the affected region. If we had an address for a hotel or a workplace, we could start investigating. In normal times, we could contact the police when we had a welfare and whereabouts case, but the police were overwhelmed with other priorities during this crisis.

*KENNEDY: What was your clientele?*

ZUMWALT: The welfare and whereabouts cases were a big part of our operation. Some customers wanted us to follow up; they might have information that somebody worked for company X and often they would have already tried to contact the Tokyo office of the company and ask if they had information about their employee. However, we knew that almost everyone in Tokyo was safe and had access to public services, so we focused first on reports of Americans in the affected region.

Sendai, a big city with a population of over a million people, had been affected by the tsunami. We heard reports that many people in Sendai had no heat, no water, no electricity, no internet, and no telephone connectivity. There were a number of deaths and injuries in that city, which was home to the largest number of American citizens in the affected areas, including American university students, businesspeople, and missionaries.

I became personally involved in one unusual welfare and whereabouts case. I received a call from a friend who worked for GE Japan. He told me that there had been twelve American welders, GE subcontractors, who had been working inside the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant when the earthquake struck. The company had lost contact with these American citizens and wanted our help to find them. For the next few hours of our search, we always seemed to be one step behind them. We heard a report that they



took a car and began driving south. We heard secondhand that they had been inside the reactor building and actually got wet from the inflowing water. Then we heard the disturbing news that they may have been contaminated by radiation. Finally, we located the Americans at a hotel in Iwaki in the southern part of Fukushima prefecture. They arranged for their own transportation to Narita International Airport, but I had to call Northwest Airlines because the airline was reluctant to accept these passengers on their flight back to the United States. We arranged with Northwest to furnish a place at the airport for these workers to change clothes and shower, then to be tested for radiation — which proved negative. I was happy to hear when they were safely on a flight home.

By the following Monday, we experienced a surge of other American Citizen Services work. There was a dramatic increase in demand for Consular Reports of Birth Abroad and passport renewals. Many long-term resident American citizens who hadn't seen the urgency of obtaining the proof of citizenship for their newborn children or seen the need to renew their expired passport suddenly came to the embassy to seek these documents since they now wanted to leave Japan quickly. Our consular section was busy, but we sought to provide expeditious and courteous service to the American community in their hour of need.

On Saturday afternoon, about 24 hours after the earthquake, Embassy Seoul offered to send three volunteer consular officers to help us. Then some of the China posts also called, offering their help with additional officers. We needed and appreciated the help, but these arrivals further burdened our administrative staff. For a couple of days, our stalwart management section managed this personnel intake process, but then CA took over this task. They asked us to explain our staffing needs and CA in turn arranged for volunteers to travel to Tokyo to staff these new temporary positions. At a time when foreigners were fleeing Tokyo over fears of nuclear fallout, the Foreign Service began sending in volunteers to help us manage the crisis. I was impressed by the positive attitudes and high morale of these entry-level officer volunteers. Many had some Japanese language capability and were already familiar with Japan. I made a point of meeting every incoming officer. I usually asked them why they had volunteered and many replied that helping in a crisis like this was the reason they had joined the Foreign Service. I admired their desire to serve, despite personal risks. Most of them were entry-level officers, but we did ask two Embassy Tokyo veterans to return to help us manage this large intake of consular staff. Ed McKeon, our previous consul general, now posted in Mexico City, came to help. He worked out a schedule with Paul Fitzgerald where Ed would work from seven p.m. to seven a.m. and Paul would work the twelve-hour daytime shift. We also brought in our former visa chief, now posted in the Philippines, to provide some mid-level management support for our now-large consular

section. The consular section grew from ten officers to about forty officers in less than a week. With their support, we could sustain 24/7 consular operations for two months.

The 1995 Kobe earthquake taught me the importance of employee mental health in a disaster. That magnitude 6.9 earthquake had resulted in six thousand people killed and forty thousand injured in Kobe city. An officer who had served at our consulate then later enlightened me about tension between Embassy Tokyo and the consulate in the aftermath of that tragedy. He acknowledged that the consulate was not as active as it could have been, but he said that the Embassy Tokyo leadership had failed to realize that consulate employees were under severe personal stress even as they were being asked to perform extraordinary duties. I never forgot this lesson — I needed my staff to respond to this crisis with courage and fortitude, but I could not forget that they were also fathers and mothers worrying about their families' own safety. We needed to manage the mental health aspects of the disaster in this crisis.

Another lesson I learned from the Kobe earthquake was that our public posture sent important signals to the outside community. Our Consulate General in Osaka had been criticized for its slow response in 1995. I wanted our efforts to demonstrate visibly our commitment to the American community in Japan and to our Japanese hosts. Since the State Department had provided us with so many volunteers, we had the means to expand our hours of operation to manage the surge of consular work. By March 16 or 17, we paid for advertisements in Tokyo's English-language newspapers announcing that the embassy's consular section would extend its hours of operation until eight p.m. each evening. We sent notices to the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan and foreign clubs and churches saying we would extend our hours of operation for American citizens needing these services. We then announced that we would open for American Citizen Services work on Saturday and Sunday. The mainstream Japanese media reported on these announcements too, commenting that even as many other foreign embassies began to flee Tokyo, the United States Embassy would remain. Later, many Japanese told me that they had appreciated that the United States Embassy remained stalwart in support of Japan throughout the nuclear crisis.

We also dispatched consular teams to both Narita and Haneda airports to open help desks. The team of two consular officers and two local staff wore emergency reflective vests with the words "U.S. Embassy" in big letters. They made a large sign to announce their presence and set up a table in the airport lobby. We enjoyed good relations with both the Narita and Haneda airport authorities and they readily accommodated our request for space to set up these help desks. We informed the airlines and airport management to refer American citizens needing help to these temporary help desks. As it

turned out, the Japanese airports and the airlines were extremely well organized despite the chaotic situation outside. Few Americans needed our assistance at the airports.

Yet, these airport help desks served an important public relations function. Many Americans who traveled home at this time later told me, “I saw your table at the airport. I didn’t need help, but I was really glad to know the U.S. embassy was there.” On one team’s third day at the airport, the consular officers told me that they were talking to more reporters than American citizens. I encouraged them to take the opportunity to talk to the reporters and explain to them the consular work that the embassy was performing in response to this crisis. I told them that all foreign service officers had a public affairs component to our jobs at this time. Later, the White House sent us a young political-appointee public relations employee who shut down these interactions between our consular officers and the media. He wanted to control the public messaging himself. I thought this decision was a mistake because our consular officers had a good story to tell the media and he didn’t really understand the role of an embassy in a disaster.

We also dispatched mobile consular teams to Miyagi and Iwate prefectures, two of the prefectures hardest hit by the tsunamis. We decided against sending a team to Fukushima over concerns about radiation. The Japanese government did not want to deal with disaster tourism, so they had established security perimeters limiting entry around the affected areas to essential personnel. Our RSO worked his police contacts to obtain special entrance passes for our mobile consular teams. The police warned us that we shouldn’t expect many public services — there was no gasoline, no electricity, no food, and no potable water.

Our motor pool drivers stepped up to support these mobile consular teams. I went down to the motor pool lounge to inform everyone that we needed two volunteer drivers and a mechanic for a difficult task; many raised their hands. Our mechanic was eager to volunteer. An avid surfer, he had spent his summer vacations at the beach towns that were now devastated. He wanted to go and help the communities that had been so hospitable to him since his youth. One of our volunteer drivers hailed from Iwate prefecture and he was also quite motivated to support our team as it sought to help his community.

Later, as we needed to drive people to Fukushima, even during a time of concern about radiation, we experienced no shortage of volunteer drivers. This work was unsettling because, when the cars returned, the drivers had to walk through our radiation monitoring equipment outside the embassy. (I’ll explain how this equipment got there in a bit.) If they tested positive for radiation, they needed to remove their clothes and be hosed off

completely. No one ever tested positive, but our drivers understood the risks of driving in the Fukushima region.

One mobile consular team remained a week in Sendai. They performed exceptional work under challenging conditions. Roads were blocked with rubble, city services like public transit and trash collection had broken down, and there was no heat, running water, or electricity. For this challenging assignment, our consul general selected the most resourceful and resilient entry-level consular officers. They had both lived in Japan prior to joining the Foreign Service and spoke good Japanese. These language skills were essential to communicate with local personnel at hospitals and shelters. We sent them up with two drivers, a mechanic, and two locally engaged consular staff. They brought all of their supplies with them — down parkas, boots, drinking water, meals-ready-to-eat (MREs), gasoline, sleeping bags, a camp stove, medical supplies, and tents — they were prepared.

The consular team in Sendai discovered an empty hotel whose helpful manager agreed they could camp out in an unkempt secondfloor room. Their rooms were cold with no heat and they needed to walk up an unlit staircase with all their gear, but at least they weren't outside where the temperatures dropped below freezing at night. They set up their sleeping bags on top of the unmade beds. Snow covered the ground, so our teams were glad they brought hiking boots, ski gloves, and down parkas. After each long day of searching for missing Americans, our consular officers and their LES staff would return to this dark hotel room and heat up their MREs and boil water for tea on a camp stove. Then they called in reports on their battery-operated satellite telephones. Their days consisted of visiting morgues, churches, and temples, talking to local police, government officials, and community leaders who might have information about our list of missing Americans. People had started using these churches and temples to post notices like "I'm so-and-so, I'm okay." (Nowadays, people use tools like Facebook to announce they are fine, but these social media tools were only just being invented during this crisis.) The team in Sendai reported that they encountered consular teams from the Australian and the UK embassies. These officers exchanged information on who they were looking for and began to divide up the large city into zones to avoid duplicate visits to the same places. Then they assembled in the evening to exchange information. Our team would report back, "I didn't see so-and-so, but the Australian consular officer saw her and reports that she is fine." Then we could report back to relatives that their loved one was safe. Over the course of a week, our consular teams gradually reduced their list of missing Americans.

At the end of a week, the embassy's administrative section contracted with a bus company to organize an evacuation caravan from Sendai. I think we chartered three

buses, so our team had to re-contact these Americans to inform them of where and when to meet to take these buses to Tokyo. We had some extra space, so we agreed to transport a few Australians and UK nationals back as well. I think there were about a hundred evacuees overall. There were a few people who chose not to leave but most wanted to do so; some needed assistance for return travel to the United States, so we provided repatriation loans to a few Americans. When this consular team returned to Tokyo, our consul general hosted a welcome home party in the office. He had decorated their offices with signs and balloons and we served refreshments and drinks. I came downstairs to this party to thank all of our consular officers and staff. It was a discouraging time, so people needed something to celebrate. Our team had made it home safely from a difficult assignment. The arriving team was exhausted; they had not slept well in a week. But they appreciated the recognition. We of course nominated them for richly deserved awards. Much later, we received nice thank-you letters from parents and relatives saying they appreciated our help. Their outstanding performance made me feel good about the Foreign Service and particularly about the young officers and staff in our consular sections.

*KENNEDY: Jim, let's talk about the earthquake. Had communities along the coast prepared in advance to mitigate tsunami risks?*

ZUMWALT: Tokyo itself is not that vulnerable to tsunamis because it lies in a large bay some distance from the Pacific Ocean. But coastal areas of Japan that face the Pacific Ocean are vulnerable to tsunamis. Parts of the coast that were most affected are very rough and rocky with steep cliffs and narrow river valleys. The severe force of the incoming tsunamis funneled the seawater into these valleys. In places, the tsunamis traveled inland faster than forty miles per hour. Whole buildings were uprooted and washed away. Most of the deaths and homelessness were caused by these tsunamis. The ultimate count was 22,000 killed, 400,000 people homeless, and \$300 billion of property damage. Japan needed to cope with a major disaster beyond the scope any of us had ever imagined. The United States was in a position to help.

*KENNEDY: Did we have any — I hate to use the term — assets, basically people, particularly military bases or anything like that?*

ZUMWALT: The earthquake itself and the tsunamis occurred between our consulate general in Sapporo and the embassy but the affected areas were far from both diplomatic facilities. The most affected area was in Sapporo's consular district, so they had the better connections with local officials.

*KENNEDY: As I recall, only one American, a young girl —*

ZUMWALT: There were two Americans who were killed. Both were with the Japan Exchange and Teaching program. Their names were Taylor Anderson and Monty Dickson. Taylor was from Richmond, Virginia. Taylor had been a teacher based in Ishinomaki in Iwate prefecture. As days wore on and we continued efforts to establish contacts with Americans in the region, we crossed people off our list after having discovered that they were safe. Many people, by the way, found themselves — often we would receive a call from a relative saying, “So-and-so finally called me and she’s okay.” As we winnowed down our list of names of missing persons, we became more and more concerned about our inability to locate Taylor. Our consular officer twice visited her school to interview teachers who said they had seen her after the earthquake. They reported that she had led a group of children to the school’s emergency tsunami evacuation point on a nearby hill. One observer said she last saw Taylor on her bicycle riding away. But several days later, the police called us with the sad news that they had found her body. Taylor had drowned while bicycling from her school to her home. It was very difficult to inform her parents in Virginia of her death.

The other deceased American, Monty Dickson, was an Alaskan. He had been working in Rikuzentakata, a town in Iwate that had been devastated by the tsunami. The authorities did not find his body for over three weeks because it had been swept out to sea. Finally, on April 6, the Japanese police identified his body based on a DNA sample provided by Monty’s brother. In both cases, the parents told us that it gave them some comfort to know that the U.S. Embassy had been looking for their loved one. Even though we were not able to help these two young Americans — our effort had been appreciated and noted. The deaths of these two Americans were a tragedy, but of course, so many Japanese were killed that day. It was an emotionally draining period.

We needed to set those emotions aside in order to help Japan; those assistance efforts demanded our full energy and attention. One big challenge was logistical — 400,000 people had been left homeless when it was still winter in this northern region of Japan. People had moved to makeshift shelters in schools and community centers, but these shelters lacked electricity, running water, and heat. Most of these shelters needed bedding, medical supplies, food, potable water, and blankets. Yet the roads were blocked, crumbled and buckled by the earthquake and covered in debris by the tsunamis. The Sendai airport runway was literally under a foot of seawater. Japan mobilized half of the Self-Defense Forces personnel to assist affected communities.

USAID’s Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) stepped up to this challenge. The closest OFDA representative to Tokyo lived in Bangkok. Bill Berger was quite experienced, having worked on earthquake preparedness in Nepal and on the U.S.

humanitarian responses to many disasters such as the Christmas Eve tsunami in Indonesia. When Bill heard about the disaster in Japan, on his own initiative, he traveled to Tokyo. He boarded a plane out of Bangkok on Saturday, twelve hours after the disaster. There were no flights into the Tokyo airports yet, so he flew to Seoul and landed there Saturday evening before catching an onward flight to Tokyo. By Sunday, this expert on disaster response had joined our team to support our planning efforts. Bill's contributions were critical because we lacked training on how to mobilize and organize a disaster response. His mantra was "logistics, logistics, logistics." "The key, he said, is not food or water or blankets, it is moving those items to where they are needed."

President Obama quickly declared a disaster. We had a disaster relief fund of \$100 million to tap. Bill Berger began working to set up a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to coordinate U.S. civilian and military disaster response work.

In the short term, our best logistics capability in Japan was the U.S. military. However, using our military is also expensive. The key was to work out plans where the military would provide needed capability quickly, but then turn things over to civilians as the civilian agencies geared up to respond to the crisis. The United States Marine Corps engineers are good at rebuilding airfields and moving rubble to clear roads. The marines flew helicopters into the damaged Sendai airport and began clearing the airfield runway so that civilian transport aircraft could begin to ferry in needed supplies to that gateway airport.

I will focus this account on ways the U.S. Embassy became involved in this relief effort but do want to acknowledge the outstanding work of the U.S. Armed Forces in Japan and other military forces under the Pacific Command in Hawaii. Over 22,000 American marines, sailors, and airmen became involved in the relief effort. Their work that was quickly dubbed Operation Tomodachi. (Tomodachi means "friend" in Japanese.) For the first week or so, the U.S. military supported the Self-Defense Forces efforts to transport critical supplies — food, water, blankets, medicines, and other supplies — to these shelters. The Japanese media carried extensive reports of American helicopters and trucks arriving at beleaguered shelters with needed supplies.

The U.S. military performance at this time was truly extraordinary. After the marines cleared the airport at Sendai so it could accept civilian cargo aircraft flights, they worked together with the Self-Defense Forces to clear debris from roads and helped rebuild bridges. The U.S. Navy positioned its aircraft carrier offshore and began flying helicopters to remote areas with relief supplies. U.S. Army trucks navigated damaged roads to bring relief supplies to remote villages. The U.S. military won tremendous and well-deserved accolades from the Japanese media for its disaster work. I remember one

photo of a blonde female sailor who was loading a helicopter from the aircraft carrier deck. On her arm was a large patch that said in English and Japanese “Operation Tomodachi.” That image resonated positively with the Japanese public. I was not directly involved in the military’s work other than efforts to coordinate our personnel policies and our communications with the Japanese government, so I’ll focus this account more on the civilian relief efforts, but I do want to acknowledge the military contributions.

I heard from many American military officials that they were impressed by the social order in Japan, despite the chaotic situation. For example, a U.S. Army truck driver told me that the vast majority of shelters he visited had organized themselves despite the privations they faced. When the army truck arrived with supplies at a school converted to a shelter, the schoolteachers had already organized a volunteer human chain to quickly offload the cargo from his truck. When supplies of food or drink at one shelter were inadequate, the teachers had rationed supplies among the victims, prioritizing children and the elderly. But still there were a lot of needs. This driver told me that he would radio in new requests for diapers, food, and medicine after each delivery.

Our first hours focused especially on our consular and victim relief work, but by Saturday afternoon, we began hearing alarming reports about a nuclear emergency at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant complex. Two of the facility’s six reactors were shut down for maintenance, but it was unclear if the reactor operators had maintained control of the other four to bring them to cold shutdown. (About ten kilometers away, a second large facility also experienced severe damage from the earthquake and tsunami, but its operators managed to shut down the four operating reactors safely.) After the first explosion at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear facility on Saturday afternoon, we began looking at this situation more closely, but we were still also focused on the earthquake and tsunami relief and search-and rescue efforts. On Saturday March 12, however, the Japanese started to evacuate people within three kilometers (1.6 miles) of the reactor and we realized the problems at the Fukushima Daiichi complex were much more serious than we had thought. Later, they expanded this evacuation zone to twenty kilometers (12.4 miles). Tokyo began to experience rolling electricity blackouts since so much of its power had come from these large nuclear power plants. As we began paying more attention to the nuclear component of the disaster, we were fortunate to be able to call upon the resources and expertise of the entire U.S. government.

When we heard these initial reports of a nuclear emergency, we quickly relayed to Washington DC the capabilities we lacked. Quickly — I think it was by Sunday evening — two engineers from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) arrived in Tokyo. They carried with them a nuclear power plant disaster manual that had been commissioned by the U.S. government after the 9/11 terrorist attack. This manual had



step-by-step recommendations for responses to a range of crisis scenarios. These two engineers had already practiced for managing crisis situations at similar U.S. nuclear plants.

The embassy informed the Japanese government that we had invited these engineers to Japan and that we would like to share their expertise. We arranged for those two engineers to visit the Prime Minister's Office's Emergency Command Center to learn how Japan was managing the crisis and to offer our help. I accompanied these engineers to this initial meeting which, as I recall, began around nine p.m. on Sunday night. Prior to this meeting, I had not myself focused on Fukushima, because I was busy coordinating the embassy consular and disaster relief work.

When the three of us arrived at the meeting, we met someone from the Japanese Fire and Disaster Management Agency, an official from METI (the cabinet agency responsible for nuclear power), an official from the Nuclear and Industrial Safety Agency (NISA), some engineers from the plant operator the Tokyo Electric Power Company (TEPCO), two engineers from Hitachi (the company that built the GE-designed plants), and one TEPCO plant operator who had come to Tokyo from Fukushima.

Our conversation in that meeting was as if someone had splashed icy water on my face. The TEPCO engineers were clearly frightened: their hands were shaking and their voices trembled. The plant operator had uncombed hair, dirty clothes, and smelled like he had not bathed in two days. He was clearly exhausted and became emotional during our meeting. They explained that a fifteen-meter tsunami had flooded the reactor building, disabling the emergency power generators and the cooling system of three nuclear reactors. The backup gravity-fed water-cooling system had failed because the earthquake had damaged the canal that was to flow emergency cooling water from an artificial lake downhill to the reactors. Without electricity, the backup batteryoperated sensors had begun to fail. The two NRC engineers remained calm and kept asking questions. I didn't understand many of the technical questions about the temperature of this chamber and the pressure on that gauge. But I did understand the chilling answers to almost every question — “We don't know.” As the NRC engineers later told me, we were almost blind because the sensing equipment needed to measure data in order to make informed decisions had either been destroyed by the tsunami or lost power as the batteries expired. For the second time in three days, I began to fear for my safety and for the safety of my staff, both American and Japanese.

*KENNEDY: How'd your Japanese hold up?*

ZUMWALT: These Japanese scientists and engineers all spoke good English, but my language skills came in handy. I could interpret for our American engineers the side conversations among the Japanese participants and sometimes I could fill them in on the nuances that did not come across in their English. The Japanese engineers were internationally trained, very well-educated, qualified scientists and engineers for running the nuclear plant in a normal situation, but of course it was easier for them to communicate in their native Japanese.

I returned to the embassy with the two NRC engineers in our car. They began discussing the situation at the plant and how to prevent a nuclear meltdown. I interrupted the conversation to ask them “How bad is this for Tokyo? Do we need to start thinking about an evacuation?” Their answer was the plant was 160 miles away; if this were in the United States, we wouldn’t evacuate a city that far away from a nuclear power facility. They said that a large-scale, rushed evacuation could cause a panic resulting in many deaths and injuries. If there were large amounts of radiation emitted into the atmosphere, they advised, it was less risky to urge the city population to remain indoors rather than to flee outside onto roads where they might be exposed to even more radiation. I took a deep breath as the engineers returned to their technical conversation. Despite my fears, I decided that I needed to listen to this expert advice. For the next six weeks, coordinating the U.S. response to the nuclear crisis would become almost all-consuming for me.

By Monday morning, our consular team was geared up and operating smoothly — our Consul General Paul Fitzgerald and our former Consul General Ed McKeon had that operation well in hand. One of my main roles was to assist them with staff morale — to welcome new arrivals and to meet with the officers and Japanese staff daily to encourage their work. I would visit the consular section after every team’s shift and they took pride in informing me about how many welfare and whereabouts cases they had resolved each day. Bill Berger from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance continued to do an outstanding job coordinating and mobilizing the U.S. disaster response. I talked to Paul, Bill, and Ed frequently but, by Monday, my main focus shifted to working with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission engineers on the nuclear crisis.

The NRC team needed reinforcements. On Monday afternoon, I visited our fifth-floor economic section conference room which our admin section had set up as the NRC Tokyo office. I was surprised to see that their suitcases were still in the office; 24 hours after their arrival, these two engineers still had not had time to check into their hotel because they had been so busy consulting colleagues in the United States or talking to their Japanese counterparts. I knew they could not function without sleep, so we arranged transport to their hotel and for them to take an afternoon nap before our next meeting

with the Japanese government Monday evening. We worked to bring in more NRC experts so that they could sustain their work over a long period.

Nobody really understood the current situation at the nuclear power plants due to the failure of the sensing equipment. The NRC team recommended venting internal gases to prevent a hydrogen explosion and flooding the reactor with seawater to cool the fuel. The Japanese political leadership resisted venting as they did not want radioactive particles to escape into the air. TEPCO management initially resisted the flooding proposal as seawater would destroy the delicate nuclear reactor equipment. TEPCO continued fruitless efforts to inject fresh water into the reactors to cool the nuclear fuel. Pressure inside the reactor containment vessels was building, making it difficult to inject water from the outside.

I returned home Sunday night (actually Monday morning) around two a.m. and woke up at five a.m. to return to the office. As I was getting dressed, I watched footage of steam and gases escaping from the Fukushima nuclear power plant as the result of an explosion. CNN and other networks were broadcasting breathless stories about the accident. My heart sank when I saw these images. Before I left home, I asked Ann to pack each of us a “go bag” in a backpack with a change of clothes, our passports, medicine, credit cards, and some cash in case we needed to depart quickly.

Our NRC engineers told me that this explosion was probably caused by hydrogen pressure from inside the reactors. They surmised that hydrogen had built up because the plant operators did not open valves to reduce the pressure inside the containment vessels. Now much larger quantities of radioactive gases would escape into the atmosphere. The question we now faced was how dangerous is this situation? Should Japan expand the zone of evacuations? We realized we lacked expertise on the medical aspects of this crisis. Our embassy doctor was a wonderful physician, but he was not an expert on radiation sickness. Again, we asked for help and some important people came to our aid. One was from the National Institutes of Health, Dr. Norman Coleman. Norm had received his medical degree at Yale and had taught at both Stanford and Harvard medical schools with a specialty in radiation oncology. Norm was the Associate Director of the Radiation Research Program at the National Cancer Institute. As important as his specialized knowledge was, Norm’s avuncular personality imparted a sense of calm in a very stressful environment. He rapidly became a valuable resource to help us evaluate our medical risks from radiation exposure. Norm also was widely respected by the Japanese medical community. His connections in Japan gave us insights into the advice that Japanese experts delivered to the Japanese government.

Norm advised us that it was important to communicate risk in ways that people can process the information and make decisions based on science. He encouraged us to bring a health communications expert onto our team. After conveying this request, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta sent a health-risk communications expert named Jena Telfer who had a Ph.D. in Communications. Jena provided us outstanding advice on communicating risk. She noted that our audience's ability to process information was affected by their psychological state. She explained that emotions like fear and anger can interfere with messages conveying health information. Our embassy website became one of our most important communications tools. Despite the lack of working mobile phones and electricity blackouts, the internet continued to function and many people visited our embassy website to read our travel advisories. The fast-moving crisis situation meant that we needed to update our website frequently. We began uploading information from the U.S. government about topics like drinking-water safety, radiation in seafood, and atmospheric radiation exposure risks. Our website rapidly became a portal to refer our audience to existing information from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the CDC, and the American Cancer Society, among others. We needed to convey good medical advice to counter the uninformed rumors and unscientific information on the internet. We wanted the website to serve as a reliable place where people could find credible information.

*KENNEDY: Did Japan suffer from a scandal-type press?*

ZUMWALT: The Japanese media reports on the crisis were largely responsible and accurate. Even though the purpose of Embassy Tokyo's website was to advise American citizens, many Japanese, especially in the media, came to consider the U.S. Embassy to be a reliable and credible source for information about issues like radiation exposure risks. Because of the State Department's clear "no double standard" policy that we must provide the same safety information to the American public that we provide to our own employees, we would post online our advice on health risks in Japan. We updated this health information on our website daily, sometimes more frequently. We began seeing Japanese media reports that would quote the U.S. Embassy about a topic like drinking-water safety or radiation residues on seafood, fresh fruits, and vegetables.

Nobody could predict how the problem at Fukushima would develop. The initial response from the Japanese government was to calm the public. Chief Cabinet Secretary Yukio Edano, the primary government spokesperson, issued a reassuring statement that the government had the situation under control. I knew this statement was not true from my own meetings with the plant operators. Jena advised us that our most important communications asset was our credibility. If we did not know something, then we needed to be honest. Edano lost credibility when, less than a day after he said the situation was

under control, the public saw televised images of the first Fukushima nuclear plant explosion.

After the first explosion, the Japanese government communications approach moved to the other extreme. They began communicating data points without providing context to help people assess new information. For example, one day — maybe Monday or Tuesday — the water authority measured a very small elevation in the amount of radioactive iodine-131 in one of the scores of city water samples that had been tested. We asked our experts who said that this single, lowlevel reading was not of great concern. They explained that there are many places with low levels of naturally occurring radiation and they would want to see data from multiple sources before recommending steps to address any potential problem. But the Japanese government conveyed this information to the public without this important context. The government instead said that, as a matter of precaution, people preparing baby formula might want to use bottled water. In the atmosphere of fear, many citizens concluded that Tokyo tap water was unsafe to drink. This caused panic-buying and soon there were no bottled drinks of any kind to be found in Tokyo. Tokyo is a city filled with vending machines and convenience stores but, in a matter of hours, they had been picked clean of any beverages. Because our embassy had prepared in advance for emergencies, our management section had already stored a one-month supply of drinking water on our compound. Coca-Cola assured us they could produce as much bottled water as we needed. Many on our staff became stressed about drinking-water availability, so we informed them that we had an adequate supply of bottled water for everyone. I noticed that many embassy staff began bringing bottled water to our meetings, so I began to bring my glass which I filled from the drinking fountain in the auditorium before our all-hands meetings. I wanted our staff to see that I was drinking the tap water.

Jenna advised us that we needed to put information in context to help the public understand what it means. Henceforth, as we published data from the Japanese government about radiation levels, we would say something like “this amount of radiation is the equivalent of eating two bananas.” She was good at finding contextual statements we could post on our website from reputable sources like the NIH or the CDC. The mental health of our embassy staff remained an important concern for me. Some were afraid for their own health and I faced demands from some staff to evacuate the post. Some of this fear was caused by the many aftershocks, but for others the greatest fear was the unknown nuclear radiation. We talked to the State Department and agreed on a “voluntary departure” for family members but not for employees. Under Secretary for Management Pat Kennedy and his team arranged a charter aircraft on March 16 to fly out embassy families who wanted to depart. I recognized that this movement of embassy families would garner media attention, so I worked with our public affairs section to

message the context of this decision. Our main message was that the United States was standing by Japan, we were confident that Japan would recover and rebuild, that the U.S. Embassy staff would remain in Tokyo to continue our work, but family members would be allowed to go home if they chose. Most family members chose to leave, some because they were afraid and many because the schools had closed and, with a two-week spring break ahead, they thought it would be nice for their children to spend time in the United States.

My wife has subsequently become a disaster mental health volunteer for the Red Cross; she obtained a master's degree in Social Work after she retired from the Foreign Service. Ann told me that, in any disaster, about fifty percent of people experience some degree of psychological trauma. Some Embassy Tokyo employees were fine, some had mild psychological trauma, other had more severe symptoms. The vast majority of the embassy staff handled the situation well, managing their personal stress and performing well on the job. But there were a few people on the far end of the trauma spectrum who were no longer able to contribute positively to our mission. Our regional psychiatrist proposed a good plan for this situation. He said, "The children of some tandem couple parents need a medical escort, so why don't we designate these people who really need to depart as the medical escorts for the children?" In this manner, we sent two or three employees home to escort the unaccompanied children on the voluntary evacuation flight.

Later, several Foreign Service employees approached me to say, "Thank you so much for letting my family leave. Now I can focus on the job." They were willing to work hard and expose themselves to risk, but their concern about their families had been a burden and a distraction. By removing their families from this chaotic scene, they could focus full-time on their important jobs. After the evacuation, morale immediately improved. Those family members in the community who had been a negative influence had departed.

After most of our family members left post, our management counselor proposed another way to boost morale. The State Department has a system of hardship pay whereby staff working at posts with difficult conditions can receive extra pay. He applied for and received a special decision whereby Tokyo was designated a hardship post for one month due to the risk from radiation and due to the harsher living conditions. Because it only lasted one month, I do not think our employees received much in the way of increased pay, but they appreciated that our embassy management and State Department leadership had acknowledged their extraordinary efforts — this step did boost morale.

*KENNEDY: This brings up a question. I haven't been in an embassy that had a psychiatrist. Was this something relatively new? What role do they play?*

ZUMWALT: In Asia, the State Department had four regional psychiatrists, assigned to Tokyo, Beijing, Bangkok, and one other post. Each had regional responsibilities. Much of their work is with embassy employee children who need counseling and advice. The Tokyo-based regional psychiatrist, Fred Summers, traveled frequently; he had patients in twelve or fourteen posts and would visit each post maybe quarterly or twice a year. We were fortunate to have a psychiatrist located in Tokyo to help us with stress management and coping strategies.

I began meeting Fred daily. He was a wonderful advisor on the status of community morale. The day after the evacuation flight with American embassy dependents departed, he told me “Ninety percent of my workload departed on that plane!” He told me that especially small children had been experiencing difficulty coping. He explained that the frequent aftershocks interfered with children’s sleep patterns. We never discussed any individual patients as I didn’t want to learn private medical information, but I did want to understand our community’s mental health situation. Fred became an important source of information on that issue.

Fred also followed his own advice on self-care and mental health. One day, he came to me and said he really needed to go on a scheduled vacation for his own mental health. He then added that he had a solution. Our previous regional psychiatrist, now posted in Bangkok, was willing to come to Tokyo to fill in for two weeks while he was away. We said fine, so Dr. Marcia Meckler came and filled in very admirably during that two-week period. It was interesting to me that even a professional whose job was to help others was himself stressed. His attention to monitoring himself taught me something about my own self-care.

Many embassies in Tokyo closed during this crisis. I stayed in close contact with the UK, Canadian, Australian, and New Zealand embassies and they, like us, remained in Tokyo throughout. However, other large embassies closed, including the French, Italian, and German embassies, as well as the EU Commission.

My chef at the DCM residence was a French national. About a week after the earthquake, he called us in a panic since the French embassy had informed him that he needed to leave immediately for Haneda Airport, where the French government had arranged for an evacuation airplane for French nationals. He needed to arrive at Haneda within the next four hours or they would leave him behind. He asked us what he should do. We told him that it was his choice, but we were staying. Ultimately, he decided to stay. I then called my counterpart DCM at the French embassy and heard an out-of-office message saying, “We have left Tokyo and are now at our cultural center in Kyoto if you need to reach us.” This was how I learned that French diplomats had fled Tokyo. I called the German DCM

and there wasn't even a voicemail, the phone just rang and rang. After the earthquake, the Japanese media ridiculed the large number of embassies who had left, but many of these reports also noted that the American embassy had remained.

With the inflow of volunteers from the State Department and other agencies (at one point, we hosted fifteen staff from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Tokyo), the embassy expanded from about 150 to 400 direct-hire Americans. That increase presented a challenge for our management section — these new arrivals needed, computers, computer logins and accounts, office space, security and health briefings, hotel reservations, currency conversion, and transportation to and from the airport. We requested a few volunteer general services officers (GSOs) and a budget officer who had previously worked at Embassy Tokyo to come temporarily to help manage this increased administrative workload. Since many expatriates had begun to flee or cancel their business travel to Tokyo, the Hotel Okura Tokyo next door to the embassy was delighted to furnish us as many rooms for employees on TDY orders as we needed. They had shut down one wing completely and, for a few weeks, most of the guests in the other hotel wing were U.S. Embassy temporary visitors.

*KENNEDY: What about your economic and political sections? What were these officers and others doing?*

ZUMWALT: I described how the consular section and management sections were quite busy. Our public affairs section was also busy managing our dynamic website and our almost-daily press releases. Ambassador Roos had just launched his Twitter account, so our public affairs section worked closely with him to populate his Twitter feed with content related to the U.S. support for Japan's efforts to provide disaster assistance. In contrast, the economic and commercial sections had extra capacity because they were no longer supporting trade negotiations or promoting U.S. exports. Nobody was interested, for the moment, in political or defense attaché reporting either. I turned to these four sections to staff our new embassy operations center. Because of the time zone difference, most phone calls from Washington came during Tokyo's night and most of our communicating with the Japanese government occurred during the daytime. We realized we needed a 24/7 operation separate from consular just to handle the volume of policy communications among the embassy, Japanese government agencies, Washington government agencies, the Pacific Command, and U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ). I appreciate that both the commerce and defense departments allowed us to "borrow" officers to staff this operations center.

Our embassy staff included two State Department Operations Center veterans who had been senior watch officers, Economic Officer Paul Horowitz and Political Officer Evan



Reade. I asked them to create a plan for staffing a sustainable round-the-clock operations center at the embassy. They recommended that we establish four eight-person teams — a captain, a deputy, a keeper of the log, two press monitors, a military liaison, an office management specialist, and someone for technical and IT support. (Later, we added military embeds from USFJ to each team.) They recommended that we organize four teams that would work from eight a.m. to four p.m. two days, then four p.m. to midnight two days, then midnight to eight a.m. two days, then take off two days before starting the cycle over again. This arrangement allowed us to sustain our operations for an extended period while avoiding employee burnout. This proposal meant we needed 32 staff for these positions. I did not want outside volunteers for these teams because working in this nerve center required the Japanese language and government contacts. We did incorporate one volunteer. John Nylin came to Japan on his vacation from Embassy Baghdad to work for two weeks during the crisis. John had been a Pol-Mil officer in our political section and had wonderful contacts with USFJ and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces. I remember asking John if he really wanted to work for us during his well-deserved vacation from Baghdad, but he was eager, so we gratefully accepted his help.

We set this center up in our shuttered basement cafeteria. Every eight hours, a replacement team arrived for the next work shift. The function of these teams was to gather information in one place into our log of activities, monitor the Japanese media, report to Washington, receive and act on phone calls and emails from Washington, liaise with USFJ, and to alert the front office to important developments, much like the Operations Center does at the State Department. Fairly quickly, we launched a sustainable operation to handle events as they unfolded. At the end of this crisis period, we sent our log of the incoming and outgoing phone calls, meetings, and decisions back to Washington as a written record of Embassy Tokyo's actions during the crisis.

Our political, public affairs, and economic sections, the Foreign Commercial Service, and our defense attaché offices contributed most of their staff to this round-the-clock watch office. In addition to Paul and Evan, I asked Ann to serve as one of the watch team captains. She became an important source of information for me on developments in this crisis management center. Each team included Japanese nationals from the press section who reported on Japanese media stories of interest. Our Pol-Mil officers performed the military liaison function. Our entry-level officers became the scribes who kept a 24/7 log of embassy activities.

We quickly learned the importance of open communications with the U.S. military. One morning early in the crisis, the U.S. military broadcast service, the Armed Forces Network (AFN) suddenly began transmitting public service advertisements urging

parents not to let their children play outside out of an abundance of caution regarding the radiation risk. That announcement caused panic among some of the embassy staff and their families. They demanded to know what the military knew and expressed concern that we were hiding information. We quickly told USFJ that we needed to coordinate our messaging on the health risks to the public and to our employees. We explained to them the State Department's "no double standard" policy about risk communication. After that incident, we worked together more closely on our respective public messaging. We also worked to share with USFJ the opinions of the subject matter experts who had joined our staff. We dispatched our consul general in Naha, Raymond Greene, to work at Yokota Air Force Base full-time as our embed with USFJ. Prior to his assignment in Okinawa, Ray had been our Pol-Mil unit chief in Tokyo and he was well-respected by the USFJ leadership. Likewise, USFJ sent four army colonels to embed with our embassy operations center teams to improve embassy-USFJ communications.

A few days into the nuclear crisis, the State Department asked us to begin contingency plans for evacuating Americans and for closing our embassy in Tokyo and moving the ambassador and a small staff to Consulate General Osaka. Because our in-house experts advised us that we were unlikely to experience health-threatening radiation in Tokyo, I was confident we would not evacuate Americans from Tokyo and that this plan was unnecessary. But we did ask some of our consular and Pol-Mil officers to work with the U.S. military on a plan to evacuate American citizens from the Tokyo and Tōhoku areas using military and chartered civilian transport. I asked our RSO to begin to work on "tripwires" for decision points on an evacuation. Most of these tripwires were health and safety related — for example, if safe drinking water were not available or if there were civil unrest that made travel in the community unsafe. I was confident that we would not face this sort of situation in Japan, but recognized the need for planning.

We also began contingency planning for closing our embassy about a week after the earthquake. We began to shred classified materials, a challenging task for those agencies who had stored a large volume of materials. We told every State section and every agency to reduce their classified holdings to a one-hour burn time in case we needed to depart suddenly. Having come from Embassy Beijing where we had been quite disciplined about minimizing our classified holdings, I was surprised to learn how much classified material was stored inside our building. Embassy shredders began operating continuously. Our communicators became busy accepting bags of classified material to burn in their chemical incinerators.

We began quiet contingency planning to move our embassy operations to Consulate General Osaka. Only a few people in the embassy were aware of this effort because I wanted to avoid unfounded rumors that we were planning to evacuate Tokyo. I asked an

officer from our political section, John Mark Pommersheim, who had been on an advance team that opened an embassy in a newly independent state of the former Soviet Union to plan for a move to our post in Osaka. I called our consul general in Osaka, Ed Dong, to inform him and swore him to secrecy. We did finalize a contingency plan to move the ambassador and a few staff to Osaka if necessary. I believe we actually sent a truck down to pre-position some communications equipment. Our plan for the embassy chancery building in case we needed to evacuate staff was that a special Marine Corps team would secure the building and then hunker down in the embassy basement. I planned to stay with these marines inside the embassy as the last State Department employee if necessary. We were fortunate with this planning for two reasons — we did not need to implement the plans and the rumors did not leak out.

For the first few weeks, we needed to pay close attention to embassy staff morale. The Japanese and foreign media were full of alarming reports about radiation risks. I was hearing very different advice from our experts but realized that our staff would be reassured if they heard directly from these experts. Full transparency was the best policy because our employees remained understandably concerned about their personal safety. Dr. Norm Coleman from NIH spoke at many town hall meetings for the American community and for our employees and family members. Norm was reassuring and would explain how radiation worked, why it was a concern, how radiation occurs naturally, and that different parts of the world have different radiation levels. He tried to put our situation in context. We did about two or three large town hall meetings, one for the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan where they rented a hotel ballroom and hosted about three hundred people to hear Norm speak.

For the embassy staff, I decided to hold daily all-hands meetings in our auditorium. At eight a.m., everyone on our staff, American, Japanese, or third-country national, was invited to the embassy auditorium for an expanded country team meeting. Often, Ambassador Roos was busy on the telephone and unavailable to chair to these meetings, so most days I presided, sitting below the stage of the auditorium and facing the rows of chairs filled with our staff. Especially early on when anxieties were high, we might have as many as 250 people attending. I would start these meetings by asking the Nuclear Regulatory Commission to brief on Fukushima nuclear power plant developments. I could hear a pin drop because people were paying such close attention to their briefing. We also then went around the country team for briefings from our newly formed embassy operations center, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC), the National Institutes of Health, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), the Department of Energy (DOE), the Defense Attaché Office (DAO), the Regional Security Office (RSO), the Community Liaison Office (CLO), and the consular, public affairs, management, and other sections. For example, the NRC would brief on the status of efforts to safeguard the

nuclear reactors at Fukushima, consular would brief on its success in locating missing Americans, and the DAO would brief on U.S. military efforts in Operation Tomodachi. NIH's Norm Coleman would explain the minimal medical risks of the levels of radiation Tokyo was experiencing. Our press section would explain our public posture to remind everyone to stay on message.

Fred Summers, our regional psychiatrist, would remind everyone about steps we all needed to take to manage stress. He would talk about the importance of getting sleep and exercise and eating properly. At one point, Fred came to me to ask whether he needed to continue with his daily stress management briefings. I encouraged him to do so because his briefings gave permission to people experiencing stress to come see him for a private consultation. Everyone responds differently in a crisis and I wanted all of our employees to know that Fred was available if they needed individual professional help to cope with the crisis.

These meetings served three purposes. The first was to coordinate our efforts by providing everyone with what air force pilots call "situational awareness." It's important to understand what all other members of the team are doing in order to perform one's own tasks successfully. The meetings also served to reassure our staff that we were striving to provide a safe work and living environment. The third goal was to provide positive reinforcement so that everyone remained motivated. Many of the contributors to these meetings were proud of their accomplishment and I wanted them to be able to showcase their outstanding work to their peers.

There was one comical incident during one of these all-hands meetings. The Japanese phone company had begun to send out mobile phone alerts four or five seconds prior to an earthquake. This meant that our telephones would vibrate prior to each major aftershock. I happened to be talking from my seat on the auditorium stage when my remarks were interrupted by the buzzing of hundreds of mobile phones resonating in the crowded confines of our auditorium. A few people got up to evacuate the room and others stirred in their seats. Since our auditorium was one of the safest places to be during an aftershock, I made a point of remaining seated and continuing to talk calmly. After a while, most people returned to their seats and we continued the meeting.

One unsung hero that helped shape Japan's response to the crisis was the DOE. In the early days after the first and then second explosion at Fukushima, the Japanese were hamstrung by the lack of information on the amount of radiation that had been released into the atmosphere. They did not know if the outer chamber of the reactor had contained the radioactive fuel or if the fuel had burned through and was leaking into the groundwater or the atmosphere. They were also concerned about the large quantity of

spent fuel stored in the reactors. If the ponds cooling this spent fuel had leaked, these used fuel rods would soon begin to release large quantities of radiation into the atmosphere. After the initial effort to flood the reactors with seawater and boric acid, we thought the nuclear fuel in the reactors was covered in seawater, but we didn't know how much radiation was leaking into the atmosphere or the groundwater. With so little information, it was impossible to assess accurately the radiation risks.

The DOE provided some sensitive equipment that could be loaded onto an aircraft and flown overhead while it measured the ground radiation below. The U.S. Air Force flew this equipment and technicians to operate it to Yokota Air Force Base. Fairly soon, a small U.S. Air Force aircraft with this equipment began flying lazy S-shaped patterns over areas around the reactor. After returning to base, the data was offloaded and the DOE could print out a map showing precise ground radiation levels on different areas around the Fukushima nuclear plant.

Their first report was reassuring since far less radiation had escaped than people had calculated using worst-case scenarios. We realized that there had been two radiation plumes, one north and one west, which reflected the different wind patterns when the explosions occurred. Thanks to this data, we could be much more accurate in determining where it was unsafe to live or travel. I believe this aircraft flew patterns in the sky for about for fifteen days gathering additional data. With this information, the Japanese government could safely send in technicians for a short period of time to install ground equipment to continuously monitor radiation levels. Thanks to the efforts of these DOE technicians and the air force team that flew the airplane, we could dramatically reduce the fear of radiation and make informed decisions to protect the safety of workers in the initial period after the nuclear meltdown.

*KENNEDY: Were there references to Chernobyl?*

ZUMWALT: There were references to Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. This accident was not as bad as Chernobyl but was more serious than Three Mile Island. The Japanese government initially claimed that this accident was less severe than Three Mile Island, but they needed to change this assessment as more information became available.

Many amazing local employees accomplished incredible tasks over several weeks. Many were motivated because they understood that the U.S. Embassy had mobilized to help their country and they welcomed the opportunity to help us to respond effectively to Japan's needs. The morning after the earthquake, I was walking to work along a busy four-lane street with an elevated highway overhead shortly after seven a.m. It was Saturday morning and the street was deserted. I spied one of our drivers running down

the opposite side of the normally busy street. I wondered why he was running and hurried my pace to catch him as he crossed to my side of the street. I asked, "Why are you running?" He said, "I'm late for work, I was supposed to arrive at seven!" Knowing that the trains and subways were not running, I asked him "How did you get here?" He replied, "I walked. I started walking at four a.m. because it takes me three hours on foot to come into the embassy." I said, "You don't need to run. People will appreciate that you came in, nobody will complain that you were five minutes late." But I was impressed with his work ethic. He understood that he filled an important job; we needed him to drive us to crucial meetings and he did not want to report late for work. His attitude was typical of so many of our Japanese employees.

*KENNEDY: After a couple of days, the emphasis had gone from identifying and getting Americans out to concentrating on helping.*

ZUMWALT: We needed to perform all of these tasks, ensure the safety of our staff, help Americans in distress, and assist our ally Japan all at once. But you are right that the focus shifted over time, particularly after the voluntary departure of most of our dependents.

Our consular local staff was also amazing. Our Consul General Paul Fitzgerald came to my office one day, about three or four days after the tsunami. He asked me to visit the American Citizen Services section and to talk to Mrs. X, the senior LES of that section, a really valued and resourceful employee. If we had a vexing ACS problem, she would be the one we would ask for advice. Paul told me that she was from the Pacific Ocean coast of Aomori prefecture and her hometown had been inundated by the tsunami. Paul said, "I've been trying to send her home because she has not heard from her parents and she doesn't even know if they're alive." He felt badly for her.

I accompanied Paul down to the consular section to talk to her and said, "I really appreciate what you're doing. Your work is important. But if you need to go, we understand. Your parents are important too."

She turned to me and said, "I don't know whether my parents are alive or dead, but if I go now, it doesn't make any difference. Whatever happened to them happened; I want to be useful here helping others."

She was so stoic, I had to stifle a tear because her personal situation was so hard for me to accept. In this moment, I felt completely helpless. I'm not sure how I would have handled a situation like hers myself. Later, we heard her parents were fine. Her cousin had come to transport them outside the tsunami-affected area.

Although most of the embassy family members departed Tokyo on March 16, five days after the earthquake, there were perhaps fifteen spouses who remained behind. They needed to participate in our efforts in order to reduce the time they spent mulling over the horrible news about Fukushima on the television and the internet.

I talked to one of our CLOs (community liaison office employees) who had stayed behind. I asked her to organize a project for spouses who wanted to contribute to our efforts. By this time, Tokyo's food distribution network had broken down. In normal times, we had a choice of perhaps eighty places to eat and six convenience stores within a ten-minute walk of the embassy. But after the first weekend, all of the restaurants had shuttered and the convenience store shelves were completely barren. For some of us working long hours at the embassy, this lack of food options was a hardship.

Our CLO organized a "food-support network" to feed our embassy staff. She set out a schedule where spouses signed up for times when they would cook a hot meal for those working at the embassy. I must say that morale at the embassy increased when they learned that family members began raiding their freezers and pantries to prepare donated food for us at work. When the meal was ready, someone would announce on the embassy loudspeaker that lunch (or dinner or breakfast) was served. Family member morale also improved after they were provided an opportunity to contribute to our efforts. I made a point to visit the cafeteria as often as I could to thank our volunteers. Susie Roos and Ann mobilized our chefs to cook for the office during this time as well.

In the rush of business in Tokyo, we did not pay adequate attention to our family members who had departed post. With our voluntary departure, our family members were scattered around the United States. We began to realize they were feeling lost and isolated because they lacked sources of information on our activities. We asked two of our CLOs, who had departed post to work from Washington, to reach out and communicate with our family members now scattered around the United States. We communicated with them closely about the situation in Japan and their spouses' good work. The CLO office set up a Facebook closed group to post information and pictures of their spouses at work. Removing family members from the country was not the end but just the beginning; we needed to stay in touch with them so they could continue to feel that they remained a part of our community.

Several times early in the crisis, Under Secretary for Management Pat Kennedy called to talk to me directly. Kennedy's focus was on embassy staff morale and our ability to manage the workload during this crisis. Our calls were usually brief and I always thanked him for the outstanding support we were receiving from the State Department.

The second time he called, Kennedy must have been surprised. His call came in the day I had ordered all embassy offices to reduce their classified holdings to less than a one-hour destruct time. Our colleagues from another agency just one floor below me had begun continuously feeding papers into their shredders. Suddenly, one shredder overheated and began smoking and that event set off the chancery fire alarm. I had begun to descend from my ninth-floor office down the fire escape when Pat Kennedy called my mobile phone. As I answered, Kennedy could hear the fire alarm reverberating and the echo of feet pounding down the metal stairs in our fire escape as I exited the building. He asked me what was going on because he could hear the alarm and people running. I just said, "We have a fire alarm and the embassy staff is evacuating the chancery. I don't think the situation is serious, but I need to find out. Can I call you back?" I'm sure he must have wondered how well we were managing the situation.

I wouldn't be honest if I didn't admit that the United States government made three big errors that I wish we could take back. In hindsight, I wish I had pushed harder to avoid these mistakes.

The first two mistakes were the State Department travel warnings of March 16 and 17. The Japanese government had announced an evacuation zone of three kilometers around the Fukushima nuclear plant and then later expanded that zone to 20 km (12.4 miles). This second evacuation order affected about twenty thousand Japanese residents. We informed Washington that very few Americans lived in this rural area and that the Japanese government had promised to assist in the evacuation of any foreigners as well as Japanese living in this zone. The State Department, however, was increasingly nervous about the health impact of radiation leaks for Americans living near the Fukushima nuclear reactors. One day, the department asked us how many Americans lived within 50 miles (80 km) of the reactor and we estimated there were at most about 150 American citizens living in this zone. What we should have said was "There are only about 150 Americans living within 50 miles of the reactor, but there are tens of thousands of Japanese living there, so before issuing a State Department travel advisory, we strongly recommend that we consult first with the Japanese government as such a broad travel advisory that is so different from Japanese government advice would have a major impact on citizen perceptions of Japanese government credibility." Our failure to explain the context of our answer led to a big problem.

We awoke the next morning to a firestorm. The State Department had overnight issued a travel advisory urging American citizens to immediately leave from the areas within 50 miles of the reactor. The Japanese media reported on the disconnect between our 50-mile (80 km) radius announcement and the Japanese government's 20-kilometer



announcement and asked us to explain why we had chosen to announce a larger zone than Japanese government. The expanded zone in our travel announcement included a medium-sized Japanese city where a panicked evacuation would have clogged roads needed by relief vehicles and generated unnecessary hardship for tens of thousands of Japanese evacuees. The Japanese government understandably was angry at us for not informing them before we contradicted their public statements. I thought Washington's attitude was cavalier — when we complained, they replied that “Only 150 Americans are affected.” They didn't realize this announcement would reverberate across Japan, further exacerbate Japanese citizens' mistrust of their government, and complicate our efforts to coordinate closely with Japan.

The following morning, the situation became even worse. Overnight, the State Department had issued a travel warning that said, “The State Department strongly urges U.S. citizens to defer travel to Japan at this time and those in Japan should consider departing.” The warning should have advised against travel to the Kanto (the region near Tokyo) and Tōhoku regions only. That would have made sense as the major Kanto airports were busy with many foreigners leaving the country. As we pointed out, Osaka, Fukuoka, Sapporo, and Okinawa, among other cities, were far away and not directly affected by the disaster.

On this second morning in a row with a travel warning headache, I was tired and cranky. My anger came through in my conversation that morning with Joe Donovan, who had been my predecessor as Embassy Tokyo DCM and was now State's EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary for Japan and Korea. Joe had been a tremendous help to me and to the entire embassy throughout the crisis. We spoke every morning and he was always most responsive to our requests and helpful in running interference to head off unwise Washington initiatives. Joe had not been the person who had devised this travel guidance but was the one to hear the force of my anger in that morning's phone call. I remember asking him rhetorically, “You mean, if we had a nuclear power plant disaster in Vladivostok, we would tell people to evacuate Moscow? This makes absolutely no sense.” Joe listened to me patiently and let me blow off steam. He did his best but, later that day, I was told that the State Department “only does countrywide travel warnings, not regional warnings.” That reply was not in accord with their previous recommendation for Americans to evacuate from an eighty-kilometer zone.

The State Department blanket travel warning made no sense. Japan was not confronting a countrywide problem. The State Department travel warning contributed to the sense of crisis and fanned Japanese public perceptions that the U.S. government didn't trust the Japanese government to manage its crisis. The American business community, especially the airlines, were quite upset about our nationwide travel warning. I agreed completely

with the American business community but could not contradict the State Department in public. I absorbed a lot of criticism from friends in the business community that week but could not acknowledge that I agreed with them. I met with about twenty members of the American Chamber of Commerce in Japan to try to dissipate the tensions. This time, it was my turn to absorb the blows and let them vent. I enjoyed excellent relations with the American Chamber and knew most of these businessmen and considered them my friends. But that day, they let me have it. They were very angry with the State Department travel warning that had in their view unnecessarily damaged their business. I agreed with them but did not say so at this meeting. This was a time for me to remember former Secretary of State Colin Powell's maxim, "Get mad, then get over it." After all, we still had a job to do working in coordination with the State Department and the Japanese government.

We tried to convince the State Department to reissue the travel warning. We acknowledged that we wanted to reduce unnecessary travel into Tokyo's airports, but travel to Japan's other international hubs — Nagoya, Osaka, Naha, and Fukuoka — was not dangerous. Ambassador Roos was especially energetic in this regard. However, the Bureau of Consular Affairs was risk-averse and did not lift their nationwide warning for quite some time.

*KENNEDY: It's known as "cover your ass."*

ZUMWALT: This action made our lives difficult at a time when we were faced with many other challenges.

The third mistake was caused by poor coordination between the U.S. military and the embassy. One medical response to radioactive iodine exposure is to take potassium iodide tablets to block the absorption of radioactive iodine in the thyroid. This reduces the long-term threat of thyroid cancer. The State Department arranged to send us hundreds of thousands of doses of this medication from the national stockpile in case we needed to distribute it. Our medical experts advised us not to distribute these dangerous medicines to individuals but instead to devise a distribution plan to implement should the situation worsen. They explained that this medication, while needed if one is exposed to radioactive iodine, should not be taken unnecessarily. But the U.S. military decided that they would proceed with distributing this medicine to their troops and family members "just in case." The military began broadcasting public service announcements informing people where on base they could obtain this medication for themselves and their families.

Upon learning that the U.S. military had begun distribution of the medication, there was an outcry in the resident American citizen community for these medicines despite the

expert medical advice to refrain from wide-scale distribution. State decided this pressure was too much and instructed us to distribute this antidote to Americans living in the Tokyo area. We pushed back as we could not assess the medical implications for every American citizen in Tokyo, but once the military moved ahead, we really had little choice. Our Mutual Defense Assistance Office volunteered to organize our distribution effort and we recruited other embassy staff to help them with this effort. They mobilized volunteers to set up tables and take IDs, marking people off our lists as we distributed the potassium iodide tablets. We set up two distribution centers — inside the U.S. Embassy compound and at the New Sanno Hotel, which is a U.S. military rest and recreation facility in downtown Tokyo.

This was the first time in my life I was glad to be over fifty, because NIH advised males in that age group not to take potassium iodide in any case. The thyroid cancer risk after exposure would occur twenty or thirty years in the future, so the short-term risks for older men in taking these tablets outweighed the potential future benefit. I remember hearing Norm Coleman say, “If you’re a forty-year-old male, you have a 40 percent chance of developing cancer in your lifetime. With exposure to this radiation, you would have a 40.001 percent chance.”

I did not want to treat our local staff differently from our American employees when it came to health issues. We told our LES we did not think you need it but, if you feel better keeping this antidote on hand, we will provide you the doses for you and your family. Some employees chose to accept the potassium iodide. We did not ask Washington for permission to distribute this antidote to our Japanese staff because I was afraid their answer would be negative. We had a disconnect — the Japanese government wisely was saying they would not distribute its stockpile to the public before it was needed. Our experts agreed. But the U.S. embassy acted as if it did not believe the Japanese government’s advice. The genesis of this problem was poor coordination with the resident U.S. military. From their perspective, they decided to distribute this drug because they had a better chain of custody and they could educate their disciplined community about how to handle this potentially dangerous drug. But they did not consider the spillover impact of their actions on the American and Japanese civilian communities.

*KENNEDY: Not quite the same, but somewhat similar situation to what happened during the first Iraq War with gas masks and our embassy in Tel Aviv and all. The military was distributing gas masks to its people but not to embassy people — what the hell is this?*

ZUMWALT: Exactly. Around this time, we began to require post permission for government employees to come to Japan on TDY travel. Most of our visitors played

constructive roles, but some burdened our management section without advancing our mission.

One group of visitors who came was a team from the State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security's Weapons of Mass Destruction Countermeasures Division. They were trained in mitigating chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear (CBRN) threats. Without consulting with me or the ambassador, this team set up equipment at the embassy entrance that would scan everyone coming and going for radiation. I learned about this when my driver asked me whether we were installing this equipment because the radiation in Tokyo had gotten worse. When I next exited the embassy, I told the team members, "This technical capability is amazing — but what is the plan if someone tests positive for radiation?" I also asked for the percentage of false positives that might be generated by this equipment. No one had answers. I told the team to disassemble the equipment immediately and that we could discuss later how to employ it. I was concerned that the appearance of this equipment could send the wrong signal and increase our employees' fears that we were living in a dangerous environment.

In making the decision to dismantle this equipment, I relied on our experts' advice. The NRC engineers had assured me that people in Tokyo were unlikely to be exposed to radiation from the Fukushima nuclear power plant. This State Department CBRN team wanted to install the equipment because they had the technical capability to do so, but they had not considered the policy implication or the message that would send to our staff. Finally, after much discussion, I compromised by allowing this team to set up this screening device in an unobtrusive location by our motor pool garage. We used it solely to test personnel who were returning from an area known to have radiation. I saw no need for universal testing of all of our employees and visitors as they came and left. Since we did not allow embassy employee travel to Fukushima without permission, we would only need to test a small number of our staff.

Jim Forbes, the embassy management counselor, told me that this CBRN team also wanted to offer their chem-bio-radiation training course to all embassy staff. At such a busy time, I was not convinced that this training would be a good use of our staff's time. I asked to see their course materials before scheduling any training sessions. This team showed me their PowerPoint slides. The very first slide showed a photo of a withered hand that had been exposed to excessive nuclear radiation. That slide may have been useful to seize the attention of bored audiences, but this graphic warning was not what our staff needed to see at that moment.

I said, "No, we will not allow that training right now." What I thought to myself was "We are in the middle of a crisis, our staff is overburdened and stressed, and this is not a good

time to scare our employees even more about the dangers of radiation.” The CBRN team was quite angry with me because they did not understand or appreciate the mental health situation among our employees. They asked their bosses in Washington to overturn my decision to cancel their training programs. I told these people, “Look, you’re welcome to go home if you don’t have anything productive to do here, but we are not allowing this training of our overburdened staff during a crisis.” I called Joe Donovan and said, “Joe, I’m too busy. Please turn this training off. I do not have time to deal with this issue right now.” Joe totally agreed and I did not hear about this issue again. It was good to have support from Washington. Joe was a wonderful backstop.

As a result of this visit, we announced that all official U.S. government visitors must be approved by the front office before they could come to Japan. Jim Forbes had very good judgment, so I asked him to screen these visit requests. Most visitors were not a problem, but I had learned my lesson: restricting visitors was something we should have done sooner. We needed reinforcements, but we needed problem-solvers not problem-creators.

One visitor who was most welcome was Secretary Hillary Clinton, who arrived five weeks after the earthquake. To be honest, preparations for her stay represented a major extra workload on a busy embassy. But her visit provided an important opportunity to express sympathy with the Japanese people and support for its recovery efforts. Her visit was also very positive for embassy staff morale. She came to an employee town hall meeting and said all the right things to our staff about the important work they were performing.

However, behind the scenes, I could see that her advance staff was frightened to visit Tokyo. By this time, five weeks had elapsed after the disaster and Japan had mitigated the immediate dangers at the nuclear power plant. We had gotten accustomed to living in the shadow of Fukushima, but Secretary Clinton’s staff was not. I thought their concerns were exaggerated, but seeing the secretary’s staff operate with these underlying fears helped me understand why Washington was, in our view, sometimes overreacting to the nuclear crisis. They were more afraid for our health than we were. Because of health concerns, Secretary Clinton’s staff only wanted her to remain on the ground for four hours with no outside activities and no overnight stay. I tried to shield my staff from the fears of her advance team as much as I could. Secretary Clinton herself was fine; she did a good job in her government meetings and her town hall meeting lifted the spirits of the embassy staff.

In August, Vice President Joe Biden came to Japan. His visit showcased our solidarity with Japan and our commitment to helping Japan’s recovery efforts. Vice President Biden displayed a great deal of empathy during his visit to the Tōhoku region, which

reinforced our public diplomacy messages. His visit to the Sendai airport reminded many Japanese of the heroic efforts of the U.S. Marine Corps to clear the airport runway to receive emergency support flights in the early days after the disaster. Vice President Biden's town hall meeting with embassy staff and their families boosted embassy morale.

Throughout the crisis response period, a lot of people in Washington were monitoring and evaluating our performance from afar. On one hand, I recognize that oversight of our decisions was needed. But on the other hand, sometimes I thought their monitoring showed a lack of trust. State's Bureau of Medical Services (MED) sent many visitors to evaluate us. They said their purpose was to help our medical unit, but often their doctors would only stay three workdays. Later, I realized that MED wanted to monitor how the post was holding up. That was a reasonable concern in such a challenging situation. But I thought they did not appreciate how supporting each visit burdened us at a busy time.

My daily post-disaster routine was to rise about 5:15 a.m., leave home at 6 a.m., and walk to the embassy, arriving at 6:30. These half hour morning walks to the embassy were the only time I had to myself all day. I also sometimes grabbed a half-hour nap on my office couch during the day. These walks and my nap were most important for my mental health.

I began the workday by meeting the night-shift watch for a briefing on overnight developments, then would go to my office to call Joe Donovan to touch base with Washington. I then led our eight a.m. all-hands meeting in the auditorium, where all of the offices briefed on the upcoming day. At nine a.m., the workday officially began. I would visit our embassy operations center and consular team each work shift.

After a day working with our various teams, I would go to the prime minister's office at eight p.m. for our nightly meeting with the Japanese government disaster team. When these meetings ended, I would return to the embassy in order to follow up on any tasks that came out of this meeting and I would call Joe Donovan one more time, since it was now morning in Washington DC, to report to him so he could brief his superiors at the beginning of his workday. Most days, I did not return home until well after midnight. After leaving the embassy, I would return home, shower, sleep for four hours, wake up, and return to work. I ate all my meals at the embassy during this period and sometimes Ann would join me to eat in my office. I saw Ann a lot in the office since she led one of our watch teams, but we often did not interact much at home due to our different work schedules.

*KENNEDY: This raises a question: with all these embassies leaving, did they leave you with responsibility for their nationals?*

ZUMWALT: Many embassies moved their operations to western Japan, so they had not left the country. The British embassy initiated a daily phone call with DCMs of five English-speaking embassies — Australia, New Zealand, the UK, the U.S., and Canada. The UK DCM named David Fitton would email us an agenda and we could send him a note to add a topic if we wished. He chaired these sessions, which I welcomed because I was so busy. Mostly, these calls allowed me to inform them of the U.S. military and civilian agencies' actions. For me, these calls were a good way to receive a reality check. Many of the other embassies had left town — the French, Germans, Italians, and EU all just left, so there was no reason to talk to them as they weren't present anymore. The British embassy had also brought in nuclear scientists and engineers, so it was reassuring for me to hear their conclusions which validated those of our own experts. Our nuclear experts worked closely with their UK counterparts. The Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders relied on us for information; we wanted them to remain in Tokyo as a sign of confidence in the Japanese government, so we told them what we knew about the risks.

*KENNEDY: Did you run into any bureaucratic obstacles?*

ZUMWALT: Bureaucratic obstacles are a fact of life and it's important to learn how to work around problems. But I must say, in this instance the State Department was extremely responsive to our needs. My counterpart in Washington DC, Joe Donovan, would run interference for us. Every morning at eight a.m., I would make that call to Joe. It would be seven p.m. in Washington DC. He would tell me all the things he had helped us with that day and then say, "What do you need?" Each morning, I asked many favors from him. For example, early on, I told him that we needed more officers to help with the increase in management work. The next day, he responded, "Soand-so is coming in from Manila." Another day, I told him that the presence of Fred Summers, our regional psychiatrist, was extremely important and Joe then worked with the State Department's Bureau of Medical Services to offload all of Fred's casework outside Tokyo to other regional psychiatrists so he could focus exclusively on Tokyo's urgent needs. It was wonderful that Joe had our back, doing all of that work for us. Under Secretary for Management Pat Kennedy opened his purse. I never once heard of a TDY request that was denied due to budget reasons. It was recognized that responding to this disaster in Japan was a priority and the entire U.S. government was going to work together as a team.

*KENNEDY: What about on the Japanese side? Did you find that when trying to help, you were running across bureaucratic obstacles?*

ZUMWALT: Japanese bureaucratic politics were an issue in working together to assist the victims in the aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami. Early on, poor communication among Japanese agencies contributed to difficulties in coordinating our response. I think the Japanese recognized that we were trying to be helpful and we did bring something important to the table — our expert advice. Prime Minister Kan appointed a forty-year-old minister in the government named Goshi Hosono to coordinate Japan's whole-of-government response to the crisis. I knew Hosono, one of the rising DPJ stars, fairly well. Hosono began by forging bureaucratic collaboration across Japanese ministries and the situation slowly improved.

Every evening, Minister Hosono would chair a bilateral meeting with the Japanese side consisting of maybe twenty different Japanese agencies, including the Self-Defense Forces, the National Police Agency, the ministries of the environment, defense, health, justice, foreign affairs, transport, education, and METI (Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry) among others. On our side, we included our representatives from the U.S. Embassy, U.S. Forces in Japan, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the Department of Energy, National Institutes of Health, and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Each side had an important objective for these meetings. We wanted to share expertise with the Japanese government. The Japanese wanted to avoid public airing of differences between us. After our travel warning urging Americans to leave an area that was much larger than the Japanese government evacuation zone, the Japanese wanted to be sure we would not again work at cross-purposes with their disaster response.

Our bilateral nightly meetings continued for over a month. We would gather seven nights a week at eight p.m. in the Prime Minister's Office's Emergency Command Center. Initially, these meetings included maybe thirty people on our side and sixty on their side; the room was quite crowded. Every day, the deputy commander from U.S. Forces Japan, a Marine Corps brigadier general, flew into Tokyo by helicopter from Yokota Air Force Base to participate. The U.S. military had many questions — they were sending U.S. troops to help and wanted to make sure they were not sending them into harm's way. I dubbed these meetings the "Hosono process." This process really was quite remarkable and ensured that the United States remained fully informed about Japanese government intentions and policy actions. I do not think that any other foreign country enjoyed such remarkable access.

The U.S. side was co-chaired by me and Dr. Charles A. Casto, the head of our NRC team, who was quite experienced, a former nuclear plant manager. Chuck was a truly outstanding leader. He would focus on the nuclear issues and I would cover the disaster



response coordination. Even in the darkest hours when we feared the worst, Chuck always began a meeting with a positive comment about progress made or a task that was completed. He was most respectful of our Japanese counterparts, making it much easier for them to accept his advice on how to resolve the crisis at the Fukushima nuclear plant. Chuck later wrote a book called *Station Blackout*, which is one of the best explanations I have read in English about what happened at the plant when the tsunami struck.

The Japanese agencies learned quickly that they would make Minister Hosono unhappy if they had not coordinated among themselves and with us. By the third day of our meetings, U.S.- Japan communications had improved tremendously. After about a week, that meeting became more of an action-forcing event than a planning meeting. Each Japanese agency would report to both sides the decisions that were made in advance in U.S.-Japan side meetings. But in the first few days of this process, these meetings lasted for several hours as we worked through challenges together. We were tired, but the Japanese were tired too — they weren't sleeping much in this stressful situation. It was a challenging period for everyone.

At one of the very first meetings, I told Minister Hosono that we had received numerous requests for supplies like drinking water. We wanted to help but asked him to prioritize the items needed most urgently. In the first few days after the earthquake, we began hearing from many parts of the embassy and from Washington DC counterparts that so-and-so at this ministry has asked us for this or for that. Bill Berger from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance encouraged us to prioritize and “validate” these requests with the Japanese government. His point was that logistics were in short supply and if we clogged the logistics pipeline with low-priority goods, then our good intentions would only block the delivery of more urgently needed supplies. I asked the economic section to build a spreadsheet of all of these Japanese requests. They devised an excellent spreadsheet with hundreds of requested items that listed the requester, the amount, the request date, and the embassy contact who had received the request. Some of the requests, such as a request for drinking water, seemed odd so that was the example I raised with Minister Hosono.

When Hosono replied that the government didn't ask for drinking water, we handed over the hundreds of separate requests on the spreadsheet that our economic section had prepared. Hosono was amazed to see hundreds and hundreds of separate requests for help from various parts of the Japanese government on our spreadsheet. Often, the request had come from someone in the Japanese government talking to a friend in the U.S. government. We told Hosono that we would do our best to deliver supplies they needed but we wanted first to understand Japan's priorities so we could focus on the highest ones.

Minister Hosono then asked his people to work with our economic section to validate the requests. They met the next day and, by working together, they crossed off over eighty percent of the requests on this spreadsheet. Bill Berger's idea to validate requests and our economic section's good work on this spreadsheet really helped both sides identify the most critical supplies so that the strained logistical system could deliver the highest priority goods where they were most needed. The pared-down list focused on life-saving goods like medicines, oral rehydration pills, low-dose potassium iodine for children, and those sorts of things. Through this collaboration, we could eliminate requests like drinking water. The Japanese government was quite capable itself of asking private companies like Coca-Cola to supply bottled water and did not need our help for this item. The same was true for many other requests like for toiletries, instant noodles, diapers, bandages, and other supplies that were plentiful in Japan. Through this process, we learned where we could be most helpful and focused on furnishing these items.

The bigger problem than the Japanese bureaucracy was what Clausewitz called "the fog of war." Including a disaster response expert like Bill Berger on our team to guide us through these challenges was critical to our success.

The Hosono process met every single night starting about the 15th of March for thirty or so days in a row. One reason I was working so late every night was that, after attending this eight p.m. meeting, I would then return to the office, finish follow-up tasks coming out of that night's meeting, and then call Joe Donovan in Washington to report to him at the beginning of his business day in Washington.

*KENNEDY: What was the role of the ambassador at the time?*

ZUMWALT: John Roos played a very important role in conveying our views to senior levels of the U.S. military, to the White House, and to the Japanese government. He also served as the public face of the embassy in our messaging to the Japanese media. I remember he took a trip to the tsunami-affected region and the Japanese media disseminated a photo of him hugging an old homeless Japanese woman who was living in a shelter. That photograph spoke volumes — we were Japan's friend and we wanted to alleviate their suffering.

*KENNEDY: What was his role?*

ZUMWALT: John Roos saw his role as managing the highest priority policy issues. He would talk to the Pacific Commander or to senior officials at the White House about our challenges. He was very persuasive at bringing these senior people around to our way of

thinking. The National Security Council convened meetings frequently and John and I would participate via a secure videoconference link to the White House. After the fiasco with the travel advisory, we recognized that we needed to participate in these meetings to advance our views in these interagency discussions. Because of the time difference, these meetings started sometimes at two or three a.m. in Tokyo. We needed sleep too, so we could not attend these sessions every single night. Therefore, the ambassador and I began alternating — one night, I would remain awake to attend the meeting and, the next night, he would stay up to attend these interagency meetings via our secure video link.

These interagency meetings were generally chaired by Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough. Other agencies would be represented at the assistant secretary level. The reason the meetings were so important was that we conveyed information that was often used to brief the president and other important decision-makers, so we felt we had to be there to make sure our views were taken into account in this process. This decision-making process worked but it was not without issues. It was also very time-consuming — I remember one midnight meeting where we listened to a USDA expert talk at length about the risk to the California asparagus crop if radiation plumes crossed the Pacific. From our vantage point in Tokyo, we thought we had more urgent and dire issues to address in this meeting.

John also spent a great deal of time beginning to organize charity events and fundraisers for disaster victims. As I recall, he worked with megastars like Lady Gaga, Taylor Swift, and Bono on fundraising initiatives. His personal assistant, Matthew Fuller, helped him with these fundraising activities, so I did not get involved.

My job as DCM was to fill in behind John so that we had a comprehensive front office response to the crisis. He tended to stay in his office to focus on urgent matters. He was frequently responding to or initiating phone calls and joining video conferences. A few days after the crisis began, I went to him and suggested that, while he engaged with senior levels of both governments, someone needed to engage embassy staff by visiting the consular section and our command centers. I offered to do this and he readily agreed. When I visited the various parts of the embassy who were working hard, I would say, “The ambassador really appreciates what you’re doing,” because people needed to know that their contributions were appreciated. That sort of direct personal engagement work with the staff was not something John did instinctively.

*KENNEDY: There’s something about the Foreign Service — you have a crisis, that’s fun. I hate to say it...*

ZUMWALT: Ambassador Roos played an important role with our highlevel communications. Soon after the crisis in Fukushima became apparent, the Navy began considering a drawdown of their forces in Japan. Ambassador Roos contacted the U.S. military leadership in Hawaii to insist that a withdrawal would send a bad signal to Japan and weaken our alliance over the long term. He successfully delayed this decision until it became moot, as we obtained more accurate information about the actual radiation levels. Earlier, I mentioned the issue with the consular travel warning. It was John who led the effort to try to reverse that decision.

*KENNEDY: Good division of labor.*

ZUMWALT: It was. We saw each other frequently because John was working long hours too and we worked in adjacent offices. I made sure he was aware of embassy staff accomplishments and morale issues and John and his special assistant Suzanne Basalla kept me informed of his activities. We had very different roles to play. He was the public face of the embassy and the policy influencer whereas I was the inside person trying to sustain the frenetic work pace of our complex operations and high morale in the embassy.

*KENNEDY: Okay. Do you have final comments about the March 11 disaster?*

ZUMWALT: Let me talk about seven lessons I learned from the disaster.

The first is preparedness. A few days before the earthquake, the embassy held a fire drill. No one likes these drills because they disrupt our daily work. But now, I'm so glad we practiced. My office was next to the ambassador's on the ninth floor. When the fire alarm sounded the beginning of the drill, we tried to evacuate through our fire escape. We descended the fire escape to the eighth floor, but a gate blocking further descent was locked. Those doors were supposed to unlock when the fire alarm sounded, but at the time of this drill they did not, so we had to return up the stairwell to our ninth-floor office. But by that time, the ninth-floor door had closed and locked behind us, so the ambassador and I were trapped in the stairwell between the eighth and ninth floors. This fire drill identified a problem, which our engineering security office then promptly fixed. When we needed to evacuate the building after the earthquake, the building evacuation worked well. I credit our management and consular sections for excellent emergency preparedness in the embassy's Emergency Action Plan. The planning for our alternate command center proved critical to our early response to the disaster. Without our satellite telephone, pre-positioned computers, and other office equipment, we could not have reported so quickly to Washington DC. Another area where preparedness mattered was equipping our school buses with emergency radios. Because Japan's mobile telephone

network was overwhelmed after the earthquake, these radios allowed us to communicate with the children on the bus.

The second lesson is the importance of internal and external communications. During a stressful period when many on our staff were concerned about their personal safety, it was important for the embassy leadership to communicate clearly and consistently to our employees about the goals of our work and the risks we faced. Inclusive meetings were important. Every morning, the entire staff was invited to an all-hands meeting where anyone could ask questions. There were some ridiculous questions stemming from false information from the internet. I was glad when people asked these questions because for each person who asked, there were three or four others who wanted to ask but were embarrassed or afraid to do so. Rumor control was an important part of our internal communications. We needed to listen patiently and talk through the situation, often asking experts to explain. The most difficult issue in our communications strategy was people's emotional fear of radiation. Accordingly, we engaged our regional psychiatrist as a part of our communications with our employees. He was very good. Every meeting, he gave a short talk on stress management. I wanted people to feel comfortable asking him for help.

Management communications were also important to showcase outstanding work and to instill a sense of pride in the overall efforts of our embassy team. People needed to hear that management appreciated their efforts. We sometimes needed to stop and celebrate small victories.

Outside the embassy, we had two audiences. We adopted a communications strategy to communicate proactively with the American community as well as the Japanese public. Our public outreach was so important because many people turned to the U.S. Embassy for guidance and advice. I appreciated that Consul General Paul Fitzgerald constantly reminded us of our "no double standard" policy. We worked hard to distribute to the public any information about risks that we conveyed to our staff.

We were fortunate to host a health-risks communication expert from the CDC who helped us devise our public communications strategy. We used a variety of tools including press releases, ambassador media interviews, our website, and in the early days of social media, the ambassador began to tweet as well. Our actions spoke volumes and became an important part of our public communications strategy. At a time when so many foreign companies and embassies began leaving the city, our public announcements that we were staying open affected public perceptions positively.

*KENNEDY: I was in Naples during a major earthquake — where 1,800 people perished. We had barrels of clothing and people just put in used clothing —cocktail dresses. If there's anything Italians have, it's the clothing business. A lot was sports stuff, but that's what you really needed for the cold weather. There were cries of outrage in the States when they saw big stacks of clothing being dumped.*

ZUMWALT: Americans wanted to help, but we needed to channel this desire in a positive direction. We encouraged people who wanted to help to make cash donations. In-kind donations of used clothes merely clog up the strained distribution system. We listed reputable Japanese charities such as the Japanese Red Cross Society on our website. We pointed out that, with money, the people on the ground in affected areas could decide what was needed and purchase locally those supplies that were available in Japan.

A third lesson was that we needed to organize our staff workload to sustain a long-term response. Crisis responders need time for eating, sleeping, and exercise if they are to continue essential operations throughout an extended crisis. The evening of March 11, as many of our employees rushed to our emergency command center to help out, I pulled several aside to ask them to go home. I said that they were valuable employees and that I really needed them to arrive the following morning fresh and able to work an entire day. In order to do so, they should go home, eat dinner, and get a night's sleep. Later, we organized a round-the-clock shift system that enabled us to sustain our 24/7 operations for over a month.

The fourth lesson was that we needed to promote our community's mental health as we asked them to respond to the crisis. In the first few days after the earthquake, many of our families were frightened. It was an incredibly stressful situation. I needed to remember that our first responders themselves came from a community in crisis. They too were crisis victims and some were experiencing some degree of mental trauma.

The fifth lesson I learned was that organization leaders must make decisions with imperfect information during a crisis. As more information becomes available, it may become necessary to shift course, so leaders must be flexible in changing previous decisions. Many times, we could have become paralyzed by waiting for more information instead of making a decision. Carl von Clausewitz called this dilemma "the fog of war" — it's difficult to make decisions with such a large volume of incoming information, some correct and some wrong, even as other critical information is lacking. Good leadership means recognizing when it is necessary to make a decision, then making the best decision possible with existing information. At the same time, it is important to avoid wasting time criticizing past decisions. There will be time for a lessons-learned

exercise after the crisis is over. But during a crisis, focus decision-making on the present and future, not mulling over the past.

*KENNEDY: Did you find that agencies such as the Atomic Energy Commission were wanting information, but you were too busy to give it? A lot of people — everybody wants statistics and information about things — did you find yourself overwhelmed by that?*

ZUMWALT: We were also fortunate that Embassy Tokyo included many agencies already at post. As I noted earlier, the USDA was interested in radiation emission levels because they were concerned about clouds of radiation crossing the Pacific that could pollute agricultural fields in California. I was much more concerned about our own safety in Tokyo, but since Embassy Tokyo had an agriculture office, I could task them to respond to USDA's questions about the California asparagus crop and take that issue off our busy work agenda.

Your question brings me to my sixth lesson, to include experts — then listen to their good advice. During the crisis in Japan, the U.S. government consulted experts from the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the National Institutes of Health, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Science Advisor to the President, and the Department of Energy. Their expertise was critical to forging an effective response to Japan's triple disaster. Embassy Tokyo itself lacked the expertise in disaster response, nuclear physics, health communication, and radiation diseases, so we invited these outside experts into our decision-making process.

Some U.S. policymakers reacted emotionally to media stories and needed to be reminded of this expert advice. I had a few frank conversations with people in Washington who wanted to take more extreme steps than we thought were necessary. People like the president's science advisor tended to be on our side because he could process this scientific information and calm other people who were rushing decisions on issues like evacuations or moving the embassy out of Tokyo.

We also learned a seventh lesson, to organize a whole-of government response in a complex crisis. No one entity can manage a large-scale crisis alone. It is important to consult, communicate, and coordinate, then to organize all entities' contributions into a coherent whole-of-government crisis response. On our side, we were bringing in people from across government to help us with our response. These people quickly became trusted members of our country team. Because they had a lot to contribute, people respected them.

*KENNEDY: Was there much interface with Japanese authorities on this? The Japanese of course were the ones to really suffer from this way back, but next to that, we had considerable expertise. Was this transmitted to the Japanese government?*

ZUMWALT: Yes, but initially, communications with the Japanese government proved challenging. The response of the Japanese government, especially in the initial 72 hours, was rather incoherent as they grappled with an overwhelming situation. On both the Japanese side and ours, this whole-of-government response contributed to forging an effective, comprehensive response to the crisis. When the immediate crisis abated, we received tremendous praise from the Japanese media. Even outlets that tended to be more critical of U.S.-Japan relations recognized the United States had stepped forward in Japan's hour of need. Already high Japanese public favorability ratings for the United States increased by an additional fifteen percent in one year. This data showed me that the Japanese people recognized and appreciated our efforts.

*KENNEDY: When you think about it, it fits into two of the attributes of the United States. One, we're built to be helpful. Sometimes, this gets us into trouble or we get in over our heads. Not just charity, but helpfulness is part of our culture. The other one is, we have the means. Particularly, our military can do things that nobody else can do on the scale we can.*

ZUMWALT: Early on, the logistical support from the U.S. military was critically important. Civilian agencies also contributed in important ways. Many Self-Defense Force troops deployed in the disaster zone were working together with American counterparts under harsh conditions. That experience built a sense of camaraderie between our militaries. I am sure the future Japanese general officer corps will retain positive memories of working together with Americans to help Tōhoku disaster victims. That experience will have a long-term benefit for the U.S.-Japan security alliance. One Japanese friend later told me that the triple disaster was the worst tragedy to befall Japan since World War II. He then added "However, this time we had friends."

There was no clean end to the U.S. support for the disaster response; the immediate crisis slowly wound down. Once the civilians were able to take over logistical support operations, the U.S. military withdrew from their support role. The sense of crisis at Fukushima abated and work began to focus more on building in resiliency and redundancy to the emergency reactor cooling measures and then the focus shifted to long-term remediation measures. In the zones affected by the tsunamis, the emphasis shifted from responding to immediate needs to economic and social reconstruction. U.S. direct assistance became less and less critical to Japan.



*KENNEDY: You certainly had your hands full. It was an exciting period.*

ZUMWALT: It was. That period from March 11 through the end of April was by far the most difficult and stressful time in my whole Foreign Service career. But I also felt a sense of accomplishment. I was blessed with an outstanding team and excellent support from Washington.

*KENNEDY: What was your radiation level?*

ZUMWALT: Actually, we did not experience much radiation in Tokyo. The children and spouses of our staff who flew to the United States and then returned one month later were exposed to more radiation by flying across the Pacific twice than those of us who remained in Tokyo for that month. (I had not known that each time I flew in an aircraft, I was exposing myself to additional radiation as the thinner atmosphere blocked less of the sun's rays.) The radiation level in Tokyo never exceeded natural levels of radiation found in Denver, Colorado.

*KENNEDY: We went through this with Three Mile Island.*

ZUMWALT: Nuclear radiation is scary because the threat is invisible.

*KENNEDY: Did you find the Japanese media going to these things and learning from them, too?*

ZUMWALT: Early on, the Japanese media learned to check our website where they could discover a lot of scientific information. The media would broadcast an image but they often did not explain the context. Many Americans left Tokyo out of precaution after watching these broadcasts. It was a challenge to counter that narrative by placing information in context so people could make informed decisions.

We were extremely busy from March 11 until the end of April. I finally felt the situation easing the morning of April 29. The situation at Fukushima appeared to be finally under control. On April 28, Minister Hosono proposed that we take the next evening off from our nightly bilateral meetings. April 29 was a Saturday and a Japanese holiday and I did not need to go into the embassy early that morning. When I said to Ann, "Let's go out for brunch," I realized that this sunny morning marked the first time we would sit down together for a relaxing meal out of the office since the earthquake had occurred six weeks earlier. We enjoyed a nice walk by a garden with peach blossoms on our way to one of our favorite restaurants for brunch. It had been such a stressful situation, but our workload was finally easing. Life in Tokyo was beginning to return to normal.

*End of Chapter*