



JAPAN CHAIR PLATFORM

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REMEMBRANCE

Motoo Shiina: Teacher, Patriot, and Friend (1930–2007)

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The Japanese press announced today that former conservative politician Motoo Shiina has died. He succumbed to pneumonia on March 16 at 6:15 pm. After grieving in private for one week, his family today released the news to the public.

Motoo Shiina never held a cabinet post or headed a faction. At the height of his career in 1990, he was one of seven deputy directors of the Liberal Democratic Party's Policy Affairs Research Council. He only rose to four terms in the Lower House and two in the Upper House. He never held a leadership position in a faction. He never had an "initiative" or a "doctrine" or a building named after him.

But in the history of the U.S.-Japan alliance, Motoo Shiina was a giant. With modesty, selflessness, and an unswerving focus on Japan's national interest, he became the moral and strategic compass for a Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) trying to find its way through the turbulent times of the 1980s and 1990s. When the Soviet Union started on an aggressive arms buildup in the Far East in the early 1980s, Motoo Shiina quietly convinced senior LDP leaders to break Japan's 1 percent cap on defense spending, helping to contain the Soviet threat and contribute to the end of the Cold War. When Japanese political leaders were uncertain how to respond to President Ronald Reagan's missile defense initiatives in 1985, it was Motoo Shiina who helped broker a new U.S.-Japan dialogue that set the stage for the closest bilateral cooperation on missile defense in the world today. When Toshiba was accused of selling sensitive dual-use technology that the Soviets used to make their nuclear submarines quieter in 1987, it was Motoo Shiina who was tasked by Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone to bring together the feuding trade and foreign ministries to design an export control system that now stands as a model for the rest of Asia. When the United States and Japan collided over the FSX fighter aircraft project in 1988, it was Motoo Shiina who quietly went off to a seaside resort in the Izu Peninsula with Bill Bradley, Doug Bereuter, and other thoughtful members of the U.S. Congress and the Japanese Diet to chart a way through the crisis.

Motoo Shiina did all of this as a fourth-term Diet member, yet politicians many times senior to him called him "Sensei." They respected his technical expertise on nuclear technology, his fluent English, and his strategic thinking. They appreciated his humility and his willingness to give credit to others. And they admired the fact that he had only reluctantly joined politics to serve his nation and to honor the memory of his father, Foreign Minister Etsusaburo Shiina.

Shiina had a gentle demeanor and a quiet patience for the many officials, politicians, and journalists who came to him for advice. At the end of a long day in the Diet, when most politicians would disappear into the drinking establishments of Akasaka, Shiina would travel home to talk about the day over a simple meal with his wife Hideko (cold zaru soba noodles were his favorite dish).

Motoo Shiina never doubted for a moment that the Cold War would end with the triumph of liberal democracy, but he knew how important the struggle was. He was a firm believer in the common values that bond Japan and the United States, and he expressed this view at a time when most Americans saw Japan as a larger threat than the Soviet Union and many Japanese were championing unique "Asian values." But his ideas resonated with an ambitious and patriotic younger generation of politicians like Aso Taro and Shinzo Abe and anticipated the sea change in strategic culture that Junichiro Koizumi would bring in 2001.

On June 9, 2003, a beaming Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage presented Motoo Shiina with the U.S. State Department's highest honor, the Secretary of State's Award for Distinguished Service, which had only been awarded once before to a foreign national. Shiina was a very happy man that day, not because he was in the spotlight, but because the United States and Japan had caught up to his vision. The next year he retired from the Diet.

I first met Motoo Shiina in June 1986 when I worked at his hometown newspaper, the Iwate Nippo, as a summer intern. When I enrolled in Tokyo University the next year, he hired me to work in his office. He had a constant stream of distinguished visitors who came see him on the 11th floor of the TBR Building in those years: Richard Armitage, Dick Samuels, Ellen Frost, Stephen Krasner, and Jim Kelly, to name but a few. He brought me with him to LDP committee meetings, where I quietly hid in the back of the room trying not to be noticed, and to political rallies in Iwate, where he held audiences of farmers enraptured with unlikely lectures about NATO, the Cold War, and Japan's common purpose with the West. Ultimately, he was too intellectual and too principled to be a successful politician. His elections were always squeakers. In 1990, he ordered his supporters to adhere strictly to new rules limiting spending and door-to-door soliciting. They argued in dismay that the other candidates clearly would not be as scrupulous. Shiina held firm. He lost.

Even after moving to a backbench seat in the Upper House, Shiina continued to shape policy and strategic thinking in Japan. After 9/11, I asked my boss in the White House for permission to call him for advice. When we spoke he was as clear and brilliant as ever. I was not the only one who called for advice. Behind the scenes he quietly helped both governments understand what we had to do to come out of the crisis stronger as allies.

When then-Deputy Secretary Armitage presented the State Department award to Mr. Shiina, he said, "This award is not presented to Senator Shiina because he has many friends in America, though he certainly does. This award is not presented for what Senator Shiina has done for the United States, even though truthfully he has done a lot. This award is presented to a Japanese patriot who served his country."

He was our compass.

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The Japan Chair invites other essays for the *Platform*. Please contact Eri Hirano at (202) 775-3144 or by e-mail at ehirano@csis.org.

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