An Analysis of the Preliminary Negotiation Process on the Reversion of Okinawa
—Setting the Time-Frame for the Reversion of Okinawa (September-November 1967) —
Gverdtsiteli Rusudan

Abstract

This study aims to explain how the Japanese Government prepared the way for possible reversion of Okinawa in 1967. The focus of the study is on the preliminary period, September-November 1967, because we view this period as an important stage in the negotiation process over the reversion of Okinawa. It was during 1967 that a breakthrough on the Okinawa problem was felt in both Japan and the U. S., since this year marked the first time Tokyo and Washington officially discussed the possibility of reversion. The Japanese Government’s efforts culminated in the Sato-Johnson meeting, when it was decided to settle the problem “within two-three years.”

By 1967 policy-makers in the two countries had acknowledged that the problem could not continue on a status quo basis. Precise reversion issues, the definite timing, and if feasible, conditions for the return, would have to be resolved because of the increasing Japanese and Okinawan public demands. These pressures would have to be tackled in spite of the U. S. strategic/military concerns to maintain administrative control of Okinawa to carry on its long-
standing and well-established Asian/Pacific commitments.\textsuperscript{1}

Preparations for Sato’s Visit to Washington in November 1967
Miki Goes to Washington (September 1967)

In an attempt to test the mood in Washington and to establish some grounds before Sato visited Washington in November 1967, the Japanese Foreign Minister Miki Takeo went to the U.S. But, before he left, the Japanese Government already had a “scenario” of possible results for Miki’s visit. That plan was presented by Fukuda Takeo, LDP Secretary General, to Osborn on September 2.\textsuperscript{3} According to the details of that plan, it was clear that Sato wanted to assure credits for achieving some progress on the Okinawa reversion issue for himself.

During Miki’s visit, it was planned that Japan would touch only briefly the Okinawa problem, and then let out news to the Japanese press that his soundings showed very little give in the U.S.’ position on reversion. Then, the Prime Minister’s visit was to follow, during which Sato would obtain assurances from the U.S. President to move forward on reversion. Fukuda also indicated that, if possible, a reversion package obtained by Sato had to commit the U.S. to a timetable for negotiations. The question as to whether Miki would agree to Sato’s scheme to exaggerate the rigidity of the U.S. position remained opened until the pair (Fukuda and Sato) talked with Miki. So, unaware what reaction from Miki would follow, Fukuda tried to suggest to Osborn that the U.S. might want to collaborate in misleading Miki about the U.S. position. As it is clarified in the telegram from Osborn to the State Department, Fukuda admitted that the political motive behind his proposed scenario was to give Sato a more secure political position during his upcoming visit to Washington.

So, with such a plan, Sato wanted to put Miki under pressure. Sato probably tried to prevent Miki from the glory on Okinawa issue. In fact, Sato’s and Miki’s approaches toward the Okinawa problem differed. While Sato pursued a “go slow” policy, Miki was in favor of taking more active steps in bringing the Okinawa reversion earlier. In Sato’s view, it was too early to draw up a final policy of the Japanese government regarding Okinawa. As Sato told Miki on September 5, there was still time before his visit to the U.S. in November. Therefore, he wanted to consolidate his views carefully, watching developments in public opinion and moves of various parties. Moreover, in Sato’s view, Okinawan bases and their nuclear devices had serious bearing upon security of Japan and the Far East. Thus, he wanted to seek an accord between that aspect and national desire for reversion of Okinawa. For that reason, in his planned meeting with Secretary Rusk, Miki was requested “just to listen,”\textsuperscript{4} and not to raise the Japanese Government’s position on reversion.\textsuperscript{6}

By putting pressure on Miki, Sato apparently aimed to counterbalance the impression that he was less aggressive in seeking the return of Okinawa than Foreign Ministry and opposition politicians.\textsuperscript{7} After his talks with Sato, it seems that Miki more or less agreed with Sato’s point of view that the Okinawa problem had to be handled very cautiously.\textsuperscript{8} What made Miki change his stance? Miki’s decision was, probably, influenced after he was attacked by the Socialists on September 6, at the Diet Upper House Foreign Affairs Committee. Socialists wanted to exploit the difference between Miki and Sato, and even urged Miki to resign as Foreign Minister in view of his apparent loss of Sato’s confidence.\textsuperscript{9} Under such circumstances, Miki probably found that it was easier for him not to show too clearly how his view differed from that of Sato’s. Also, Miki was aware that press comments on differences between Sato and him had would most probably come to the attention of
the U.S., and he may have wanted to assure the U.S. that the Japanese Government was in agreement on its handling of the Okinawa issue.

It was in these circumstances that Miki left for Washington to have a meeting with the State Secretary, Rusk. As it will be discussed in details in the next section, the results of the Miki-Rusk talks seemed to indicate that the U.S. accepted Satō-Fukuda’s scenario. The U.S. did not show any signs that it was prepared to move forward toward solution of the Okinawa problem. In his memoirs, Ambassador Johnson wrote that after his meetings with the Secretary Rusk and Defense Secretary, McNamara, they decided “to take a very hard line” highlighting the importance of the Okinawan bases to mutual security and showing “no willingness” to compromise American rights to store nuclear weapons or use the bases freely.10 The U.S.’reluctant stance at that time was understandable as the U.S. knew that the Japanese Government’s position had not been formulated, and were even aware that the positions of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister were not in accord. The State Department did not know what actions Japan expected the U.S. to take, and so it was decided to maintain its unchanged stance in dealing with Miki. The United States was prepared to adopt “largely listening brief” with Miki on the problem of Okinawa and Bonins reversion. But, the U.S. did not make any commitments on specific suggestions until there was a full opportunity to study them carefully, so as not to “infringe on U.S. tenure or administrative authority.”11

Miki-Rusk Meeting (September 16, 1967)

During the Miki-Rusk meeting, which was held on September 16, 1967, the United States did not show any outward signs to Miki that they wanted to satisfy the Japanese constituency, which demanded early reversion of Okinawa. On the contrary, the Secretary Rusk argued that domestic politics was of “no importance,” when they dealt with the “question of survival of the human nation.”12 As Rusk stressed, the U.S. had a security commitment to Japan, but not vice versa. Under the Mutual Security Treaty the U.S. pledged one hundred million lives in the first hour of war, and so, it was difficult for the State Department to explain to the American people and to the Congress that they had committed the life of American nation to the security of Japan, but that Japan was unwilling to place the U.S. in a position to fulfill that commitment. So, Rusk argued it was a difficult and fundamental problem, which went beyond public opinion and domestic political problems because it concerned “the existence of nations, the United States and Japan.”13

Rusk also held the “China card,” arguing that it was important not to give Beijing a feeling that the U.S. was retreating from its position and its pledge in the Pacific during that period. Thus, it was important to make maximum use of the element of deterrence. If Beijing was certain that the U.S. would respond and that they had the capability to respond in case China took action, then the latter would be careful. But if China found that the U.S. was withdrawing from the Pacific region, then it could attack Japan. In that case, both Japan and the U.S. would have been in danger. Hence, it was essential to make it very clear to Beijing that by maintaining its positions in the region, the U.S. would respond and had the capability to respond.

However, Miki was not there “just to listen.” Although he did not go too far as to make any specific demands, Miki engaged Rusk in arguments about the need to take some steps forward for satisfying Japanese public opinion, which could not be ignored, since the public opinion was the key factor in the situation. As Miki told Rusk, the Japanese constituency hoped for some progress toward the return of
Okinawa. At least, return of the Bonins had to be decided in 1967. If no step forward was taken to meet that hope, a great difficulty could arise, which in turn could also jeopardize the political life of the government. Shimoda, the Japanese Ambassador to the U.S., also "put a bite" on the U.S. by saying that he did not assume that the LDP could always keep its majority in the Diet. Shimoda brought up the fact that many Socialist governors were elected by that time, and Socialist gains could increase. Also, the Chinese Communists could use such unresolved problem as Okinawa in their propaganda campaign for Japanese youth, which could turn Japan away from the U.S.

Clearly, it was not in the U.S. interest to see the Sato's government in Japan troubled, or in the worst case to see the LDP power replaced by the socialist forces. It was necessary for the U.S. to find a solution which could satisfy the Japanese constituency, but also avoid damaging the U.S. public opinion. The U.S. had to consider some measures, but without committing on when, how, or under what circumstances reversion could be accomplished. Especially, as Rusk clearly stated, the U.S. was not able to give an answer on Okinawa before 1969 at the earliest, because of the forthcoming Presidential election and the attitude of Congress during the Vietnam War.  

The result of Miki-Rusk meeting was that the U.S. indicated that there was no possibility of Okinawa reversion in the immediate future. But, the U.S. was ready to return the Bonins. Neither the State Department nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed the idea of the return of Bonins during Sato's visit in November. As for Okinawa, the U.S. agreed to study the conditions of the reversion, in order to deal with national opinion in Japan and Okinawa. But, to affect public opinion in the United States favorably, Japan also had to take some steps. Namely, Rusk hinted that increased Japanese defense capability could motivate a more positive U.S. view on Japan. Also, contributions to regional programs by Japan could be helpful to the U.S. Government to deal with American public opinion in such problem areas as the balance of payments.  

Hence, both Japan and the U.S. had reached the stage when they had to work to improve public opinion in their countries. For that purpose, Japan was asked to strengthen its own defense and its political role in Asia to make more contributions. This made clear it to the Japanese constituency, who were optimistic about early reversion, that Miki had received little encouragement from Rusk, thus dampening the belief in Japan that the U.S. was ready to make any commitments on Okinawa issue. With such disappointing results, Sato's deliberate strategy to assure credits for himself seemed to work. Sato got a chance to appear as the leader, who could make the U.S. commit on more concrete issues, when he visited the U.S. in November.

The Japanese Government's Stance before Sato's November Visit to Washington

The Japanese Government understood well the U.S.' "sign" that in order to obtain the U.S.' favorable stance on Okinawa problem in November, Japan had to take some steps in advance to show that it could be a leader in Asia. Just as Kishi had done prior to his visit to Washington, Sato had set the stage for his Washington visit by a major swing throughout East Asia demonstrating Japan's pretensions for regional leadership. During his visits, Sato voiced stronger support for the U.S. Vietnam policies. Among the countries which Sato visited were Korea (June), Taiwan (August), and South Vietnam (September). These three countries had direct relationship with the Okinawa reversion. As for Sato's visit to South Vietnam, many in Japan opposed to that idea. It seemed to them that visiting the country, in which war was ongoing, signaled Japan's commitment to the war.
Despite the opposition, Sato decided to visit Vietnam, because he believed that it would help strengthening of trust between Japan and the United States, which in turn could help to solve the problem of Okinawa reversion.\(^{20}\)

In addition, Sato visited Burma, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Laos (September), Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, and the Philippines (October). Hosoya Chihiro considered it as Sato's "preliminary diplomacy" —by promising an economic aid to East-Southern Asian countries that Sato aimed to strengthen his position in the coming summit with Johnson.\(^{21}\)

After Miki’s return from Washington, the Japanese Government tried to explain to its constituency that the U.S. position was firm, because of U.S. security responsibilities in the region. As Sato stated on October 6,

The U.S., under the terms of the Security Treaty, has responsibility for Japan’s defense, and it is natural that America attaches highest importance to security situation in the Far East. I wish to have frank exchange of views with President Johnson about all various problems connected with security. Reversion of Okinawa and Bonins is related to complex security considerations, and I do not think it is logical to expect all of these problems to be solved at one stroke in my November visit. The first thing to be done is to gain fundamental understanding of the course how reversion problems would be solved. I understand the people’s hopes concerning this matter and will do my best.\(^{22}\)

Some conservative leaders such as former Prime Minister Kishi and Admiral Hoshina supported Sato’s view. Like Sato, they emphasized that the U.S. bases in Okinawa were important not only with regard to direct defense of Japan, but also in connection with security of the entire Far East. As Kishi asserted, responsible Japanese leaders should not request return of Okinawa, if reversion would in any way weaken U.S. strategic position in connection with regional security responsibilities. Hoshina also stood on the same stance as Sato, who clearly put importance of Okinawa from security standpoint.\(^{23}\)

The opposition did not hide its anger against the Japanese Government’s weak-kneed diplomacy toward the U.S. on the Okinawa problem when they found that nothing positive would come even after Sato’s visit to Washington.\(^{24}\) Opposition parties called for mobilization of public opinion behind their position for the reversion of Okinawa bases with the same status as those in the homeland of Japan. After knowing that Miki would accompany Sato to Washington in November, even members of the Miki faction seemed to worry that their “man was being asked to accept collective responsibility” for negotiations that did not promise to produce any politically attractive results.\(^{25}\) Miki himself was pessimistic about what results the meeting would bring. According to Alexis Johnson, Miki even thought to find ways to avoid going to Washington again with Sato.\(^{26}\)

To meet that pressure, the Japanese Government worked hard to make the U.S. recognize that some precise language indicating the time for reversion had to be included in the communiqué to be issued after the Sato-Johnson talks. After coming back from Washington, throughout October and November, Miki held several meetings with Ambassador Johnson, focusing on the exact language\(^{27}\) of the communiqué, which could satisfy both the Japanese and American sides.

The problem with the wording was due to different approaches that Japan and the U.S. took on the Okinawa reversion. The American draft indicated a willingness to “jointly review periodically” when negotiations for reversions were to be undertaken. The
American formulation emphasized conditions, which had to be attained before agreement could be reached on reversion, while the Japanese draft stressed timing and implied that reversion could be completed in the near future. In particular, the most problematical aspect for the U.S. to accept in the Japanese draft was the use of the following two underlined phrases. The Japanese draft stated:

The President and the Prime Minister frankly discussed the problem of the Ryukyu and the Bonin Islands. The Prime Minister emphasized to the President the strong desire of the government and people of Japan for the reversion of these islands, and expressed his belief that an adequate solution to this problem should promptly be sought on the basis of mutual understanding and trust between the governments and peoples of the two countries. The President stated that he fully understands the desire of the Japanese people for reversion of these islands. At the same time, the President and the Prime Minister recognized that the United States military bases of these islands continue to play a vital role in assuring the security of Japan and other free nations in the Far East. As a result of their discussion, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that the two governments, guided by the aim of returning the administrative right over the Ryukyu Islands to Japan at the earliest possible date, should hold consultations through diplomatic channels to examine matters pertaining to the reversion. (Italics added).

As Miki explained to Johnson, the Prime Minister needed and "most urgently" desired that language in italics in order to bring public opinion to accept delayed reversion of Okinawa. Although the Japanese Government realized that return of Okinawa was not feasible for some time, it was essential to set up the lines for reversion if the government was to manage Japanese public opinion. Miki argued that from the Japanese point of view the last sentence of the above quotation was the most important point in the communiqué, and that the attention of one hundred million Japanese would be focused on that statement.

Ambassador Johnson stressed strongly that Washington could have great trouble with the Japanese Government draft, and that it could raise many problems for the U.S. From the U.S.' standpoint, the major difficulty was with the last sentence of the first paragraph of the Japanese government's draft (sentence that began with "as a result of their discussion"), which implied that agreement for reversion had been reached, and that consultations should begin only on how to implement. So, Johnson urged Miki to modify the Japanese Government's formulation as much as possible to bring "something" that could be given serious consideration by Washington. After interminable discussions, the pressure from Johnson seemed to have worked, and Miki agreed to the following wording.

As a result of their discussion, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that the two governments, guided by the aim of returning the administrative right over the Ryukyu Islands to Japan at the earliest possible date, should undertake jointly through diplomatic channels to keep the status of these islands under continuous review.

Johnson still argued, however, that the problem remained with the phrase "earliest possible date." It was impossible to get Washington's reaction on that draft before Sato left for Washington, and so, Johnson promised Miki to discuss the matter with Washington and to give to the Prime Minister Washington's
views on the flight from Seattle to Washington. Rusk also found that phrase to pose major difficulties, since it suggested more immediate actions than the U. S. was prepared to undertake, and urged Johnson to discuss the issue with Sato.

In sum, the U.S. was quite negative about inclusion in the final communiqué of any language which even by implication could tie U.S. hands on the timing of return of in advance of the Japanese Government’s clarification of its stance on the status of the bases after reversion. In addition, as is clear from another document signed by Rusk, the State Department received a new formula which was delivered to Rostow on Sato’s behalf by Wakaizumi Kei. The point of that new formula was to satisfy the Japanese desire to get some sense of time, but to do so through a two-stage process that could involve a decision in principle “within the next few years” with the actual date to come some time later. Sato probably thought that the decision in principle could come before June 1970, but the actual date of reversion could be 1975 or later. As the formula showed, it was politically realistic in Japanese terms, and at the same time the formula had the advantage for the U.S. as well, since it avoided any commitments for the reversion date at that time.

Hence, in these circumstances, it could be disastrous failure for Sato and LDP security advocates who remained strongly committed in domestic as well as international terms to close relations with U.S., if they let things reach a situation in which a strong popular consensus had developed for immediate reversion without base arrangements acceptable to the U.S., and got nowhere. Sato had to prove to his constituency that he sympathized with the growing expectation of Japanese people for government to take practical measures to enable early reversion. Hence, it was in Sato’s best interests to achieve some progress during his visit to Washington, or at least to create an impression of small but satisfactory progress toward reversion. At least, Japan wanted the U.S. to commit to the early return of the Bonins.

Formulation of American Stance before Sato-Johnson Summit

In an attempt to lay the ground for the Sato-Johnson November Summit, the U.S. interdepartmental Ryukyu Study Group worked out a second report in June 1967. The report concentrated on the problem of the conventional disadvantages to the U.S. military if reversion occurred and the bases were placed under the same restrictions as in Japan proper. The study reviewed what base installations were on the islands, how the bases related to the Security Treaty, and in general listed the pros and cons for the reversion. The unexpected finding of the group was that very little would be lost from a conventional military standpoint if the islands reverted to Japan. The only disadvantage would be obligation to hold prior consultations before carrying out military operations from those bases.

However, the report left separate the issue of nuclear consequences of reversion, because it was generally recognized that President Johnson was to make his final decision on the issue, and it was important not to force him in advance to rule on the issue. The fear was that because of the ongoing war in Vietnam, the newly found PRC nuclear capacity, and the general opposition by the Joint Chiefs, the President would be forced prior to the summit to turn down any recommendation opting for removal of nuclear weapons from the Ryukyus. The study was an important breakthrough in U.S. formulation of the Ryukyu policy because with the participation of representatives from the military community, the generally held idea that reversion would make the bases almost ineffective began to dissipate.

By that time, Alexis Johnson also started reporting to the State Department that Japanese public debate
on Okinawa in Japan and Okinawa moved to the new level of pervasiveness. Several major newspapers, hardening formal position, urged the Japanese Government to request "immediate" reversion of administrative rights without U.S. nuclear weapons, and without U.S. freedom to conduct military operations without prior consultation and consent. The implication of Ambassador Johnson's message was clear enough—the U.S. would have to take steps to neutralize the opposition before they got out of hand.

In addition, the Defense Department also issued several reports which argued that in the future the Ryukyus would no longer be the nuclear deterrent they once were. These reports were based upon a special Rand Corporation study which stated that because of advanced weapons technology the Ryukyus in the next ten years would not continue to play the strategic role that they had played during the first two decades of the Cold War. Nuclear weapons, in other words, were no longer required on the islands because of the enhanced technology of the ICBM and the new sophistication of the sea-launched missiles.38

Based upon the results of State, Defense, and the Ryukyuan Study group, Richard Sneider and Morton Halperin developed a three-option memo. They wanted to bring that memo to the Secretary of State and to the President. The first option recommended the continuation of American present policy—making no moves toward reversion, or "do nothing," the second one suggested reversion with restrictions, and the third option was to take immediate steps, or "do too much."39 The Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ambassador Johnson, and Secretary Bundy preferred the option two, while McNamara recommended the option three.

According to Clapp, even though the memo reached the Secretary of State, he did not support any of the options nor did he ever pass the memo to President Johnson or those individuals drafting the communique. Clapp explains that Rusk's motivation for not moving the Ryukyuan memo into higher echelons went far beyond the Ryukyuan issue itself. She doubts that Rusk himself would have signed an option of the memo unless he was prepared to support it entirely and he felt his position would be influential to the President and not easily weakened by the Joint Chiefs. As Clapp explains,

"With Vietnam on the front burner and ABM deployment against China in the works, Okinawa reversion was not the sort of problem that those at the highest levels wanted to escalate into contention. Furthermore, the relationship of Okinawa to the war in Vietnam made it all the more likely that for either the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense to get into an open disagreement with the Chiefs might jeopardize their effectiveness on other issues related to Vietnam (or even ABM deployment)."38

Nevertheless, by the time of summit in 1967, the middle level officials in State, Defense, and the Ryukyuan base interdepartmental group showed more understanding to move the Okinawa problem to a possible agreement, than the State Secretary or the Secretary of Defense wanted. But, they did not want to have open disagreement with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, primarily when it could put at risk their helpfulness in other Vietnam related issues and could cause internal friction within the administrative policy-makers. Also, the reason the State Department did not want to move prematurely was that any effort at that time could lead to the impression that Washington had already made a firm commitment on the return of the Ryukyus. That could be misleading and could result in an unfavorable Congressional reaction.

* Sato-Johnson Summit (November 15-16, 1967)
After receiving a new formula from Wakaizumi Kei just a few days before Sato arrived in Washington, Alexis Johnson had a discussion with Sato through all the way from took Seattle to Washington on November 13. Johnson wanted to clarify what exactly was in Sato's mind, and to what direction the talks with the President could proceed.

Alexis Johnson explains that he informed the President about the results of his talks with Sato on the plane before President Johnson had his meeting with Sato on November 14. But, as the U.S. Ambassador explains, after meeting with Sato, President Johnson took him to the President's office, where they had a long discussion on Sato's proposal. The President's main concern was congressional reaction to the proposed language, he worried, despite much work already done for preparing Congress to accept the return of Bonins and in future Okinawa. In order to clarify for Congressmen the plan for returning the Bonins, Alexis Johnson had some consultations with key members of the House and Senate Armed Service Committees. Rusk also had some consultations with Congress, which seemed to go smoothly. Congressmen agreed on the proposed course to proceed with consultations for the reversion of Bonins, while not making specific changes in the Ryukyus for that time. In addition, Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield commented in February 1967 in favor of returning Okinawa to Japanese administration by1970. Despite that, President Johnson remained worried about the reaction of Senator Richard Russel, the chairman of the Armed Service Committee, who strongly opposed to set a time limit for reversion.

An agreement on Okinawa was reached the next day: Japan expressed a desire for Okinawa reversion "within a few years," while the U.S. agreed to that statement without committing to any specific date. The section of the communiqué read,

The Prime Minister emphasized the strong desire of the Government and people of Japan for the return of the administrative rights over Ryukyu Island to Japan... He further emphasized that an agreement should be reached between the two Governments within a few years... The President stated that he fully understands the desire of the Japanese people for the reversion of these islands... As a result of their discussion, the President and the Prime Minister agreed that the two governments should keep under joint and continuous review the status of the Ryukyu Islands, guided by the aim of returning administrative rights over these islands to Japan and in the light of these discussions.

As Alexis Johnson points out, by including the phrase that the President "fully understands" Japanese desire to set a timeframe for reversion, the communiqué could satisfy the Japanese constituency, while allowing the U.S. to avoid specifying a date for reversion. Also, during their final meeting on November 16, Sato and Johnson seemed to reach additional agreements. Sato promised to Johnson to increase Japanese aid to Indonesia. The Prime Minister was also asked to provide educational television for South Vietnam. So, in an exchange for returning the Bonins, the U.S. obtained commitments from Sato on a greater share of the financial burden for regional assistance. Sato understood that although Japan could not offer military cooperation to promote Far Eastern Security, it could try to contribute through economic cooperation. Sato, thus, promised in the Joint Communiqué that Japan would make a positive contribution to Asian peace and stability "in accordance with its capabilities."

In sum, we can see that Japan succeeded in what it aimed for at this preliminary stage of negotiations. Japan achieved some progress—if not precise, but at least a time frame for starting official talks on the
Okinawa reversion was set. With inclusion of the phrase "within a few years," the two states, Japan and the U.S. made one big step in that direction. They both knew that the delay to set the time frame for Okinawa reversion could have had negative impact on their relationship. The preliminary period (September-November, 1967) we explained was marked by a turning point in the U.S.-Japan relationship that triggered a re-examination of the Okinawa problem. As noted in the beginning, it was during 1967 that a step forward on the Okinawa problem was felt in both Japan and the U.S., because this year marked the first time Tokyo and Washington formally discussed the prospect of reversion.

Conclusion

This study explained the preliminary stage in the process of negotiations over the reversion of Okinawa. During this preliminary stage of negotiations, the Japanese Government tried to make the U.S. realize that a time-frame, if imprecise, for the reversion had to be indicated in the Sato-Johnson Communiqué. As we saw, the U.S. wanted to avoid any clear indication of the time when the reversion would occur for the following main reasons. (1) The U.S. was unwilling to include any language which could tie the U.S. hands on timing before the Japanese Government clarified its position on status of bases after return. (2) The Johnson government did not want to take responsibility to agree on precise language for the reversion time, because Presidential election was to be held in 1968 and it was safer to delay the decision until that time. But, after Sato sent his secret emissary Wakaizumi to meet Rostow to get the U.S. recognize the necessity to make some progress on the issue of indicating at least approximate language on the possible time for reversion, the U.S. agreed to include the phrase “within a few years” in the communiqué. So, already at this stage Japan succeeded in its efforts to set the time-limit. In addition, we noted that by that time the U.S. had already agreed to the return of the Bonin Islands, which could be viewed as a step forward for the upcoming reversion of Okinawa.

We saw that the U.S.' decision to move forward was attributed to two factors. First, Sato's recent tour of Southeast Asia and Australia, in which he stood firmly behind the U.S. position in Vietnam, appeared to impress strongly both Rusk and McNamara, but not President Johnson. Second, the U.S. decided from a tactical standpoint that a solution to the problem of Japanese territory it had ruled since the Second World War should be in the work before 1970. That was the year when the U.S.-Japan Security treaty became eligible for revision. If Japan and the United States failed to reach an agreement over Okinawa by that time, then the Security Treaty could be in trouble. Under the terms of the 1960 Security Treaty, after ten years the treaty would be automatically extended until either party gave one year's notice for abrogation (an automatic extension option). However, in 1970 Japan could have requested that the Treaty continue for a particular time and then either terminated or renegotiated it again (a fixed extension option). Automatic extension would not require the treaty negotiations to be reopened, since the treaty would continue as it was. Fixed extension meant that the treaty negotiations had to be reopened, which risked resulting in similar problems as those in 1960. Thus, to continue the treaty, it was important to satisfy the Japanese government in its demand to set the time-frame for possible reversion of Okinawa. Also, the U.S. started to understand that, in order to be able to use bases not only in Okinawa but in mainland Japan as well, it needed to return administrative rights to Japan. They could see that the longer they held Okinawa, "time bombs," without specifically preparing to turn it back, the greater was the danger of an explosion that could jeopardize the
U.S.' relations with its most important Asian ally.

Although the agreement for “joint and continuous review” of the Okinawa status did not fully satisfy the Japanese constituency, since they wanted reversion to occur as soon as possible, and see Okinawa reunified with Japan, but, looking at the time when results were reached, we can argue that the communiqué indeed represented progress on Okinawa reversion. The results could be viewed as reasonable and the best that could have been achieved at that time. The desire of the Japanese people, reversion itself was almost unrealistic at that time not only because of United States’ strong arguments against reversion (Vietnam war, full freedom of actions on Okinawa, coming elections in the U.S.), but also because Japan was ready only at the emotional, but not diplomatic level to allow immediate reversion. In addition, we view results as reasonable and the best because the U. S. ‘blue sky’ position, which had been supported by the U.S. Governments since 1953, disappeared from the Joint Communiqué. The U.S. agreed to think seriously about the possibility of the reversion, and also setting the time-limit. That was a big step forward bringing the Okinawa issue closer to an overall settlement.

Notes and References

1 On the bargaining process between Japan and the U.S. over the reversion of Okinawa in 1967, I published an article “An Analysis of U.S.-Japan Negotiations over Reversion of Okinawa Based on Two-Level Game Theory” in Socio-Environmental Studies No. 9 (Journal of Graduate School of Socio-Environmental Studies, Kanazawa University, March 2004).


3 As Togo Fumihiro points out, by 1967, the Okinawa problem was how to bridge the Japanese people’s demands and the military role of Okinawa. See, 東郷文彦, 「日米外交三十年 安保・沖縄とその後」(中央公論社, 1989), p.126.

4 The document, which could show whether or not that plan was worked out by Sato himself, has not been found. However, we can suggest that Sato was the “author” of the plan, since Fukuda talked on behalf of Sato. Town in Japan 1967, (Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan 1967, Volume 10), p.144—146.


7 Sato made some efforts to remove the Foreign Ministry from the negotiating scene—partially because Sato wanted to disengage Miki and deny him opportunity to use the Okinawa issue for personal political ambitions.

8 Ibid., p.152.

9 Telegram From Embassy to the State Secretary. September 8, 1967. (Volume 10), p.162.

To that “attack” Miki countered that he and the Prime Minister got along fine, and that he agreed with Sato’s approach.


From the Japanese side, the participants were Miki Takeo (Minister of Foreign Affairs), Shimoda Takeso (Ambassador of Japan), and Watanabe Makoto (Interpreter). From the U.S. side: Rusk (State Secretary), Alexis Johnson (Ambassador to Japan), and James Wickel (Interpreter).

13 Ibid., p.246.
Thus, the United States did not "wish to become in the position of a mercenary for foreign countries, being allowed to fight only on conditions specified by her allies." What the U.S. wanted to have was, "a common joint purpose and responsibility," otherwise it was difficult for the U.S. to guarantee security, because they had pledged the life of American nation.

14 Ibid., p.249.
15 Ibid., p.249.
Togo also notes that Rusk's position was hard (katai). See, 東郷文彦,「日米外交三十年 安保・沖縄とその後」, p.134.

16 Alexis Johnson wrote that the Navy alone opposed to the idea of returning Bonins to Japan, since they stressed the importance of Bonins in case the U.S. was driven from the Far East.
In a personal message to the State Secretary, Ambassador Johnson wrote that the return of the Bonin Islands was the key to obtaining a positive response from Sato to the U.S. urgings for Japan to take increased responsibility in East Asia and to provide increase assistance to the region. See, From William Bundy to the State Secretary. October 23, 1967. See, Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan 1967, Volume 4, p. 200.

17 The U.S. wanted to see that Japan desired the early return of Okinawa not simply to gain foreign exchange. Since of American military expenditures in Okinawa were added to those in Japan, the U.S. balance of payment could become even worse.
Alexis Johnson wrote that the U.S. wanted Japan to match American initial contribution of $ 200 million to the new Asian Development Bank's $1 billion capitalization, instead of the $100 million, that Tokyo had promised. While noticing that the Japanese ministers were "skittish" to take major economic responsibilities for Southeast Asia, Johnson does not clarify whether the Japanese side agreed to the American proposal or not. See, Alexis Johnson, The Right Hand of Power, p.476–477.

18 Sato's tour on Southeast Asia and Australia, in which he stood firmly behind the U.S. position in Vietnam, appeared to impress strongly Rusk and McNamara but not President Johnson. To McNamara's comment that Sato's visit to Vietnam contributed to the U.S. policy, the President replied that the U.S. was interested in substance.

19 According to Kusuda Minoru, the purpose of Sato's Asian trips was twofold: (1) to strengthen the relationship, and (2) to make Asian countries understand the Okinawa reversion problem.

21 See, 楠薰,「首秘書官 佐藤総理との10年間」, p.155.


23 Telegram From Embassy to the State Secretary. September 21, 1967. (Volume 10), p.262.
Both Hoshina and Kishi were confident that LDP could handle opposition attacks on Okinawa issue. Reasons of their confidence are not clarified, though. However, as for Kishi, since he succeeded in the treaty ratification even after such strong opposition attacks he faced in 1960, he probably thought it was easier for Sato than it had been for him.

24 Opposition, press and some conservatives were worried that the time of the reversion was not clarified at all, and put much pressure on Sato to secure indication of the time.

25 The news that Miki would accompany Sato to Washington became known to the press on November 2. Miki, who differed in his views on the Okinawa problem, and was a political rival to Sato, was quoted as having said that the Okinawa issue was bigger than any matters of factional or political rivalry. (Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan 1967, Volume 11), pp.183–184.

26 Alexis Johnson remembers that Miki asked him several times if it was necessary for him (Miki) to go.

27 Alexis Johnson, op.cit., p.477.

28 See, 東郷文彦,「日米外交三十年 安保・沖縄とその後」, p.135.

29 Telegram From Embassy to the State Secretary. No-
The chairman of the group was Richard Sneider, the State Department's Japan Country Director. Military related members were: Morton Halperin, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, Thaddeus Holt, Deputy Undersecretary of the Army for International Affairs, who was later replaced by James Siena, and Norman Orwat, Deputy Director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for Regional Affairs.


Apparently, Sneider did not have much confidence if he could persuade Pentagon in the need to work on Okinawa reversion, and so Halperin took that responsibility to work with military people on himself.

The first report was ready by the end of 1966. The report called to keep close eyes to the pressure in Japan for reversion, which could become a problem in the years ahead. Also it suggested that concession toward liberalizing local autonomy had to be made, and concluded that some type of reversion settlement had to be produced within five years to avoid removal of the U.S. bases and abrogation of the Security Treaty.

Those who were required to sign off on the memo were the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Secretary of Defense (McNamara), Ambassador Alexis Johnson, and the Assistant Secretary of State for Eastern Affairs, McGeorge Bundy.

Miki was excluded from the Sato-Johnson conversation.

See, Alexis Johnson, op.cit., p.479.
Shimoda Takezo went to meet Sato in Seattle together with Alexis Johnson, and then took plane back to Washington. According to Shimoda, he had talks with Johnson who told him that at that moment Washington could only agree on the wording "within several years." But Shimoda explained to him that "several years" could be translated into Japanese as "suomenkan," which meant about 4-5 years. In order to satisfy the Japanese constituency, the better language was suggested by Shimoda, which was "within a few years." The phrase could be translated into Japanese as "ryousannen," which could be more acceptable for the Japanese people. Apparently, Johnson who could understand the nuance in the Japanese language agreed with Shimoda, but suggested that it was better if the phrase would be proposed from high-level. (Johnson probably meant Sato).

See. 下田武三,「日本はこうして再生した 戦後日本の外交の証言下」(行政問題研究所1984), p.169. So, the wording, was worked out in the last minutes. See. 榊田薫,「首領秘書官 佐藤総理との10年間」, p.163.

According to Iokibe Makoto, Alexis Johnson talked directly with Sato without a translator during three hours on the way from Seattle to Washington. While Sato spoke in broken English, Johnson used his broken Japanese.

See, 沖縄返還オーラルヒストリー, 末次一郎記録 (1991年11月29日)

42 See, Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan/ Documents Related to Diplomatic and Military Matters, 1967, Volume9, p.64.

43 President Johnson even made the administration arrange a dinner between the senator and Sato. McNamara, Rusk, and Ambassador Johnson also attended that dinner.

See, Alexis Johnson, op.cit.,480.

44 Ibid., p.480.

45 Jim Wickel, interpreter, after the meeting told Alexis Johnson that President, with his forceful style, succeeded in making Sato to commit on aid to Indonesia. Ibid., p.482.

On the Sato-Johnson summit, see also, 下田武三,「日本はこうして再生した 戦後日本の外交の証言」, pp.172-174; 東郷文彦,「日米外交三十年 安保・沖縄とその後」, pp.136-138.


Ambassador Johnson in a personal message to the State Secretary wrote that return of the Bonin Islands was the key to obtain a positive response from Sato to the U.S. urgings for Japan to take increased responsibility in East Asia and to provide increase assistance to the region.


During his visits to Washington Sato promised that although Japan could not offer military cooperation to promote Far Eastern Security, it would try to contribute through economic cooperation. After coming back to Japan, in his policy speech at the extraordinary Diet session on December5, Sato stated that Japan must respond to the high expectations of the developing countries of Asia within the limits of its national strength and must take responsibilities adequate with its position as one of the world's leading industrial powers.

47 See, 東郷文彦,「日米外交三十年 安保・沖縄とその後」, p.142.

After Johnson-Sato talks, which continued for an hour and a half, two states'leaders went to the Cabinet Room, where Japanese and American negotiators were waiting for them. Johnson made a joke that he found the language of the Communiqué unacceptable. It shocked all participants of both of the negotiating teams.


50 Sato himself did not believe that Okinawa could be returned soon at that time. As he stated on February19, "United States has no territorial ambition. She is looking forward to change in situation in Asia, which would permit return of Okinawa to Japan. I am not saying that there will be no changes in situation in Asia. However, I do not believe that Okinawa will be returned in near future."

See, Documents on United States Policy Toward Japan, Volume9, p.116.

51 As Ambassador Alexis Johnson writes, when he asked Foreign Office officials what they would have done if the communiqué called for the immediate reversion, they (Johnson does not clarify exactly who) "threw up hands in horror." See, Alexis Johnson, The Right Hand of Power, p.483.

52 The United States indicated that reversion of Okinawa could only take place when the situation in the Far East was no longer threatening.

53 河野康子,「沖縄返還をめぐる政治と外交」, p.257.