

## Continuity through Change: The Return of Okinawa and Iwo Jima, 1967–1972

**Nicholas Evan Sarantakes**  
*University of Southern California*

In 1972, the United States returned the Ryūkyū island chain to Japanese sovereignty, ending negotiations over the status of this chain and the Bonin islands. The return of these two island chains, which included Okinawa and Iwo Jima, was an example of diplomacy at its very best. The United States and Japan reached a settlement through negotiations that met the minimum needs of both nations. Japan regained lost territory, while the United States maintained an alliance critical to an international system that made it the predominate power in the Pacific. The return of these islands brought continuity through change.

Previous writers working on this topic have focused only on the changes Okinawa reversion brought about. The failure to mention continuity is present in studies exploring this event from either a bilateral or international perspective. Two scholars examined U.S.-Japanese relations in light of the war in Vietnam. Walter LaFeber contends that Okinawa, trade, China, and the war wrecked relations between the two countries, invoking a new era. This new relationship resembled the 1920s more than the time between 1945 and 1960. While Japan was strong, it was hardly capable of or interested in pursuing a course totally independent of the United States, *because* of Okinawan reversion. Thomas H. R. Havens argues that the war forced the United States to return Okinawa, and Japan to expand its defense commitment to include South Korea. Havens gives too much credit to the war. Even if there had been no Vietnam War, Okinawa still would have been returned. There were a number of bilateral factors, separate from the war, that compelled the United States to do so. Given that fact, studies examining the return of the island solely from Japanese and American perspectives are more likely to give a more accurate account. Even then, these works only discuss the changes reversion brought. In a doctoral dissertation published as a book in 1970, Akio

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Watanabe called the return of the islands a sign that America accepted Japan's equality with the United States. His study, however, was dated before it was published, a fact he conceded in his acknowledgments. Roger Buckley contends that American diplomats mishandled the Okinawa issue, getting nothing of value in return for the island.<sup>1</sup> The problem with this study is the assumption that diplomacy is a zero sum affair where there are winners and losers. Such is often not the case.

Now, a variety of previously unavailable material permits a fresh, new look at a significant event in U.S.-Japanese relations. These new sources range from declassified documents housed in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, the diary of the U.S. ambassador to Japan, and direct contact with several important figures in the negotiations. Examined in a context of bilateral relations, these documents show that both nations profited from the agreement returning the islands.

Relations between the United States and Japan have gone through four stages. From 1853 until the early 1900s each nation focused on domestic development. Since neither had major external interests that conflicted with the other's, intercourse between the two during this period was as benevolent as one can reasonably expect in world affairs. This state of affairs changed in the twentieth century. The United States and Japan found themselves in constant conflict with one another as they expanded into the Pacific. World War II was the ultimate fruition of this rivalry. The postwar period started in 1945 and lasted until 1972. The United States dominated the Pacific, while Japan labored to rebuild and expand its economy. An alliance with the United States facilitated the efforts of each power. Although the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty promised safety for Japan, the pact also promised security from the island nation. Many Asian and Pacific nations feared a resurgent Japan. The security treaty made the creation of a new Japanese military unnecessary and alleviated concern in many capitals. In the late 1960s, however, Japan's recovery was complete and it wanted a greater say in international politics and bilateral relations with the United States. With new economic strength, Japan had the potential to strike out on its own. The relationship was going to change, but the challenge was to maintain the alliance in a fashion that accommodated Japanese nationalism without provoking concerns

1. Akio Watanabe, *The Okinawa Problem* (Melbourne, Australia, 1970); Roger Buckley, *US-Japan Alliance Diplomacy, 1945–1990* (Cambridge, England, 1992); Thomas R. H. Havens, *Fire Across the Sea: The Vietnam War and Japan, 1965–1975* (Princeton, N.J., 1987); Walter LaFeber, "Decline of Relations during the Vietnam War," in Akira Iriye and Warren I. Cohen, eds., *The United States and Japan in the Postwar World* (Lexington, Ky., 1989), 96–113.

in other Asian and Pacific nations about a resurgent Japan. The issue came to a head over two island chains.

Although the Japanese considered the Ryūkyū and Bonin islands an “integral” part of Japan, their claim to the islands was shaky. The United States had a strong interest in the Bonin islands. The early settlers of this chain were Americans, and in the 1960s their descendants claimed U.S. citizenship. In 1853, Commodore Perry visited these islands before he arrived in Japan, and bought land from the settlers for use as a future coaling station. Japan annexed Iwo Jima and the Bonin chain in 1876, and annexed the Ryūkyūs in 1879. Once an independent kingdom, Okinawa and the Ryūkyūs had some distinct differences from the rest of Japan. Okinawans spoke a different dialect from proper Japanese and had their own culture. Japanese from their home islands discriminated against Okinawans, and Okinawa was the one prefecture that the Emperor had never visited. Despite this treatment, Okinawans wished to have full Japanese sovereignty restored.<sup>2</sup>

Americans had an understandable interest in holding on to the islands as long as possible. The battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa were two of the bloodiest in the Pacific campaign. For six weeks in 1945 the Marine Fifth Amphibious Corps fought forces of the Japanese Imperial Army for control of Iwo Jima. Americans took control of the island at the cost of 6,821 killed and 20,000 wounded. The battle for Okinawa was even bloodier. It lasted eleven weeks. In that time 7,000 U.S. troops died. At Okinawa the Japanese introduced the *Kamikaze* suicide bombers. These planes cost the U.S. Navy 5,000 sailors and an equal number of wounded, making Okinawa the bloodiest battle in the Navy’s history. The most famous moment in these two battles came at Iwo Jima when Associated Press photographer Joe Rosenthal photographed Marines raising the American flag atop Mt. Suribachi, which later became immortalized as a monument at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.<sup>3</sup>

The cost of these battles made American military planners determined “that American troops would never have to repeat this grizzly task.” With the advent of long-range bombers, the Bonin and Ryūkyūs took on a new importance. Bases on these islands allowed the United States to project its power into mainland China and northeast Asia. Such bases guaranteed that future wars in the Pacific would be fought

2. Yoshida Shigeru, *Kaiso Junen* (Recollections of ten years) 4 vols. (Tokyo, 1958), 3:113–14; Peter Booth Wiley, *Yankees in the Land of the Gods: Commodore Perry and the Opening of Japan* (New York, 1990), 172, 209–10, 348, 352–53, 371–72, 470–71; Edwin Reischauer, *My Life Between Japan and America* (New York, 1986), 205; U. Alexis Johnson, *The Right Hand of Power* (Englewood, N.J., 1984), 470–71.

3. Ronald H. Spector, *Eagle Against the Sun: The American War with Japan* (New York, 1984), 501–3, 540.

far from the continental United States. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) had many reasons for wanting control of these islands, and among them were the narrow, selfish interests of the services. Each military branch contended that it could defend the United States better than the other services, if it had bases located in these islands. The threat to peace the services foresaw was either an imperialistic Soviet Union or a resurgent Japan.<sup>4</sup>

The Japanese were unwilling to give up claim to these islands. During negotiations over the Japanese peace treaty in 1951, Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru attempted to begin talks on these islands. John Foster Dulles, the lead American negotiator for the treaty, refused. After some contemplation he changed his mind. Concerned over trade, nationality, immigration, and wishing to avoid “another Puerto Rico,” Dulles acknowledged that Japan retained “residual sovereignty” over the Bonin and Ryūkyūs.<sup>5</sup>

Dulles’s decision created considerable uncertainty over the islands’ status. While Japan had some form of title to the islands, the United States administered them. Confusion resulted from small technical issues such as licensing of doctors, use of currency, and nationality. In the long run, the vague and undefined proclamation of “residual sovereignty” created the ambiguities and confusion that Dulles had hoped to avoid. The Japanese, on the other hand, were pleased with Dulles’s decision. Although it failed to return the islands, it gave Japan a legal claim to them, which it could use in the future as a basis for their return. Yoshida scored an important, long-term victory.

Roughly a decade later, Okinawa had become a major issue in U.S.-Japanese relations. When Foreign Service Officer John K. Emmerson returned to Tokyo in 1962 as Ambassador Edwin O. Reischauer’s deputy chief of mission he immediately sensed the importance the Japanese placed on the island. “Tokyo was a different city and Japan a different country from what I had seen in 1945 and the early months of 1946.” He detected a strange mixture of lingering deference and anger over the islands. “Okinawa became the fester that would not heal.”<sup>6</sup>

This emotional state continued throughout the decade. U. Alexis Johnson critically assessed affairs between the United States and Ja-

4. Lester J. Foltos, “The New Pacific Barrier: America’s Search for Security in the Pacific, 1945–47,” *Diplomatic History* 13 (Summer 1989): 320, 323, 326, 336–37, 341.

5. Fearey memorandum, 31 January 1951, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1951* (Washington, D.C., 1977), vol. 6, pt. 1:835–36; Fearey memorandum, 1 February 1951, *ibid.*, 839; John M. Allison, *Ambassador from the Prairie or Allison in Wonderland* (New York, 1973), 157.

6. John K. Emmerson, *The Japanese Thread: A Life in the Foreign Service* (New York, 1978), 369, 376.

pan when he became ambassador to Japan. "Relations between our two countries were still at an immature and unequal stage, not befitting the great nation Japan had become." He also believed that "many aspects of the relations between our countries needed bringing up to date."<sup>7</sup>

One of these issues was the status of the Bonin and Ryūkyūs. Toward the end of the decade the issue was becoming problematic. Ambassador Johnson warned President Lyndon Johnson and the National Security Council (NSC) that the Japanese found it "unnatural" to have Japanese territory controlled by an American general. The islands, he said, were the last unresolved matter between the two countries and were quickly becoming a major issue in Japanese politics. Prime Minister Satō Eisaku wanted to continue to have close bilateral relations, but Japanese domestic politics required a resolution to the island controversy.<sup>8</sup>

The security treaty of 1960 made it imperative that the demands of Japanese politics be heeded. After ten years either nation could cancel the treaty with a year's notice. The ten years expired in 1970 and many Americans believed that the Japanese public would not tolerate the continuation of the treaty without the islands' restoration.<sup>9</sup>

This security alliance was of critical importance not only to Japanese security but also to U.S. interests. Since 1945, an unarmed Japan was a major factor in the international order for the Pacific. The American alliance guaranteed Japan's safety, allowing it to avoid rearmament. The rebuilding of the Japanese military would be a cause of concern in other Pacific capitals. A rearmed Japan would initiate an arms race as the other Pacific nations reacted to Japanese moves. It was in Japan's own interests to avoid such an outcome. The international political order was a key to Japan's economic growth and power. If Japan were to rearm, Pacific and Asian nations would in all likelihood retaliate with trade embargoes. This would devastate Japan's commerce, a major ingredient in its economy.

The prospect of a remilitarized Japan also worried many Japanese. Prime Minister Satō admitted just before the return of Okinawa that he had occasionally worried about militarists once again taking power. The treaty insured that there was no domestic threat to Japan's democracy.<sup>10</sup>

7. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 443, 441.

8. NSC memorandum, 31 August 1967, vol. 4, tab 56, NSC Meeting File, National Security File, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library (hereafter cited as LBJL).

9. John K. Emmerson, "Japan: Eye on 1970," *Foreign Affairs* 47 (January 1969): 360.

10. Armin H. Meyer, *Assignment Tokyo: An Ambassador's Journal* (Indianapolis, Ind., 1974), 104.

The stage for the return of the islands was set in the summer of 1966 when President Johnson appointed U. Alexis Johnson to replace the retiring Edwin Reischauer as ambassador to Japan. A career foreign service officer, Johnson had started his career in Japan. Interned at the outbreak of World War II, he was one of the first Americans to return to Japan after the end of the conflict.<sup>11</sup> “I wish I had time to do justice to Alexis Johnson’s full achievement,” wrote LBJ’s national security advisor McGeorge Bundy. “The long and short of it is that I think him one of the four or five outstanding professional diplomats now on active service.”<sup>12</sup> Bundy’s view was shared by his successor, Walt W. Rostow, who called Johnson “the best man in the foreign service . . . on Asia.”<sup>13</sup> Returning to Japan gave Johnson “a lot of emotional satisfaction.”<sup>14</sup>

Japanese observers also noted the importance of the Johnson appointment. Although it no longer had the bright atmosphere that had existed under Reischauer, the U.S. embassy appeared to more professional and efficient under Johnson. Since Johnson had previously worked for Secretary of State Dean Rusk in the Truman administration, the Japanese expected he would carry more weight in the State Department than Reischauer.<sup>15</sup>

After giving Johnson a year to adjust to his new job, the Japanese government initiated talks on the Bonins. In July 1967, Foreign Minister Miki Takeo raised the subject of the Bonins while discussing Okinawa. He said it was “common sense to recognize a difference” between the two island chains. Johnson agreed, but did not concede the point. He knew that Washington was unprepared to make a decision on the Bonins and believed that any action on these islands could increase demands for the return of Okinawa.<sup>16</sup>

When he relayed Japan’s request to Secretary Rusk, Johnson advised returning the island chain for the sake of U.S.-Japanese relations. “If the Bonins are returned, I am inclined to believe it will strengthen the hands of those in both Japan and Okinawa advocating faith and confidence in [the] U.S.” Privately he thought the Japanese were using the Bonins to stall for time. As long as war raged in Vietnam, the United States would need the bases on Okinawa. If the island were returned, it would involve Japan formally in the war. This was an entanglement Johnson believed the Japanese government wanted to avoid. Miki later confirmed Johnson’s suspicion, when he

11. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 41–58, 120–24.

12. Bundy to van de Velde, 19 February 1965, U. Alexis Johnson File, box 135, White House Central Name File, LBJL.

13. Walt W. Rostow, interview with author, 12 November 1991.

14. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 441.

15. *Chūō kōron* (Central review), February 1967.

16. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 470.

told the American diplomat that he hoped the Bonins would calm down popular agitation.<sup>17</sup>

Discussion soon began in Washington on the Bonins. The upcoming state visit of Prime Minister Satō in November added urgency to the debate. A decision had to be made before he arrived. The Navy was the biggest obstacle to the islands' return. It claimed that the islands might become important as a forward base if American forces were driven from Japan, Okinawa, Taiwan, and the Philippines. "I thought this was nonsense," Johnson bluntly recalled. "If we were driven from the rest of the Pacific, we certainly could not hold the Bonins or mount a worthwhile counteroffensive from this insignificant cluster of rocks."<sup>18</sup>

It was clear to those in the Pentagon that Okinawa would go the way of the Bonins. Although the Bonin islands were the topic of discussion at an August NSC meeting, General Harold Johnson, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that the United States needed unrestricted use of Okinawa. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara disagreed. He had no qualms about restoring Japanese administration to either island chain. With the secretary's opposition, passive though it was, military resistance was doomed.<sup>19</sup>

President Johnson's three major foreign policy advisors—McNamara, Rostow, and Rusk—were of one mind: Japan should take on more international obligations. "It was important that they go out in the world, instead of being in a tight bilateral relationship with us," Rostow explained. Although they differed in approach, each favored, returning the islands.<sup>20</sup>

Rostow recommended immediate action. He told the president that the Bonins should be returned in less than a year, and that talks on Okinawa must begin immediately. In return for the restoration of the islands Rostow wanted the Japanese to increase their purchases of U.S. goods, increase pledges to the Asian Development Bank, and significantly increase their economic aid to the United Nations. "In all of this, I see the makings of a mutually advantageous package deal," he told the president.<sup>21</sup>

17. Johnson to Rusk, 1 August 1967, folder 6, box 251, Japan Country File, National Security File, LBJL; U. Alexis Johnson Diary, 13 August 1967, tape 15:5, 7, U. Alexis Johnson Papers, LBJL (hereafter cited as Johnson Diary); Johnson to Rusk, 6 November 1967, vol. 7, box 252, Japan Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

18. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 472.

19. *Ibid.*, 475; McNamara to LBJ, 13 September 1967, box 76, President's Appointment File, LBJL; NSC memorandum, 31 August 1967, vol. 4, tab 56, NSC Meeting File, National Security File, LBJL.

20. NSC memorandum, 31 August 1967, vol. 4, tab 56, NSC Meeting File, National Security File, LBJL; interview with Rostow, 12 November 1991.

21. Rostow to LBJ, 11 September 1967, box 76, President's Appointment File, LBJL.

McNamara was primarily interested in getting the Japanese to increase their defense spending. Other than expressing this view, his involvement in the islands' return was minimal. The Vietnam War was a much more pressing concern.<sup>22</sup>

Rusk was more interested in military matters than either Rostow or McNamara. Although he had urged Dulles to restore Japanese rule to Okinawa in 1951, he had reservations about doing so in 1967. A reluctance to restrict the military's use of the islands while war raged in Vietnam was one reason. The Air Force was using Okinawa as a base for B-52 bombing raids on North Vietnam. More importantly, he wanted the Japanese to decide how they would fulfill their security obligations before the United States agreed to return the Ryūkyūs. During a September meeting with Miki, the secretary took a hard line. Miki proposed that a rough deadline be established for returning the islands. Rusk told Miki this was impossible. He, however, was willing to return the Bonins, hoping it would take some of the pressure off the Okinawa question. He told the foreign minister that restoration of the Bonin should not be used as a lever for Okinawa's return.<sup>23</sup>

Rusk's ambassador agreed that the United States should force Japan to make some hard decisions about their national security strategy. "The Japanese were trying to have their cake and eat it too, taking the benefits of American military protection without acknowledging they really wanted it or assuming any concomitant responsibilities." Johnson believed the United States needed the Japanese government to affirm the value of the security treaty to Japan. "Our bases would be useless unless Japan fully supported our having and using them." The Japanese often gave him the impression that they were doing the United States a favor by allowing American bases in the archipelago. "If we were going to maintain any effective American military presence in Japan the Japanese had to want it, freely, openly, and out of a conviction that it served Japan's interest."<sup>24</sup>

Lyndon Johnson's key foreign policy advisors all agreed that the United States needed to return the Bonin and Ryūkyū Islands. They also agreed that it should get something for the islands, but there was no agreement on what it should demand. The American failure to settle on a price insured that it would get very little beyond a continuation of the status quo. Continuity, however, was what the United States wanted most of all.

22. McNamara to LBJ, 13 September 1967, *ibid.*

23. Dean Rusk Oral History, 22, LBJL; NSC memorandum, 31 August 1967, box 2, NSC Meetings File, National Security File, LBJL; Rusk to author, 9 October 1991; Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 475–76.

24. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 452.



After agreement was reached among the president's key advisors, Ambassador Johnson began negotiating with Miki for the return on the Bonins. Johnson quickly concluded that Miki had an intense ambition to replace Satō. The foreign minister constantly upheld negotiations, challenged wording, and twisted public information to make it appear as if he, not the prime minister, were the sole defender of Japan's interests against the American colossus.<sup>25</sup>

One issue that nagged at Johnson was the potentially negative domestic American reaction to returning the sites of two bloody battles. Just before his return to the United States for the LBJ-Satō meeting, he had an opportunity to allay his concern. He met with Senators John Sparkman of Alabama and John Tower of Texas, both of whom served on the Senate Armed Services Committee, as well as General Matthew B. Ridgway, the former commander of Allied occupation forces in Japan. Johnson explained developments from the Japanese point of view, and the senators assured the ambassador that they foresaw no domestic problems. Aware of Tower's service in the Pacific during World War II, Johnson pointedly asked the Texan if returning Okinawa or Iwo Jima might cause any problems in the United States. Tower reassured him again.<sup>26</sup>

Despite all his caution, Johnson made a promise that nearly brought negotiations to an end. The Marine Corps had built a small memorial atop Iwo Jima's Mt. Suribachi with a 24-hour flag. Concerned about American public opinion, he told Ridgway, Sparkman, and Tower that the memorial would be maintained after reversion. In making this pledge, Johnson assumed that this memorial was similar to the one in Arlington National Cemetery. Only when he visited the island did he realize his mistake. Instead of finding a Arlington-type statue, he discovered only a small bronze plaque. The official Marine monument was at the unattended cemetery. Johnson still felt he was bound to deliver on his promise to the senators. He went as far as to suggest to Miki that the entire island be designated as a war memorial and retained by the United States. Miki said this was an unacceptable solution. He understood American sentiment about the island and was willing to do something about the situation, but warned Johnson that American retention of Iwo Jima would "blunt" the value of returning the rest of the chain. He also suggested that Johnson find an alternative to the flag. Johnson was reluctant to back down, and the issue continued to fester. In December, Rusk told Johnson that Iwo Jima

25. *Ibid.*, 483-86; Johnson to Rusk, 6 October 1967, folder 7, box 253, Japan Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

26. Johnson to Rusk, 1 November 1967 enclosed in Rostow to LBJ, 1 November 1967, folder 6, box 251, Japan Country File, LBJL.

was not a designated battlefield monument and the Marine Corps would maintain the cemetery in accordance with the arrangements in the Japanese peace treaty. In essence, the flag was a non-issue. Still, Johnson wanted some type of flag. He contacted Lieutenant General Victor “Brute” Krulak, Marine commander for the Pacific, and asked him if a bronze version of the flag might suffice. Krulak told him that it would actually be much easier to maintain than a cloth one, and imbroglío came to an end.<sup>27</sup>

Prime Minister Satō watched the Johnson-Miki negotiations with apprehension. He knew Miki wanted to replace him. Wary of his foreign minister, Satō circumvented formal diplomatic channels. To ensure that his meeting with LBJ produced an acceptable communiqué, he sent his friend Wakazumi Kei, a professor of international relations at Kyoto University, to negotiate with Rostow a few days before he arrived in Washington. Wakazumi and Rostow were also close friends. Rostow was the godfather of Wakazumi’s son. Satō was well aware of the Rostow-Wakazumi relationship, as he noted in Wakazumi’s letter of introduction. Rostow proudly noted that negotiations through this channel were never made public or leaked to the news media.<sup>28</sup>

Wakazumi and Rostow quickly agreed that the Bonins would be returned as promptly as technical issues allowed. Wakazumi then made a proposal that, in Ambassador Johnson’s words, threw Washington “into something of an uproar.” He wanted the communiqué to commit the United States to Okinawa’s return “within a few years.” It seemed that Satō was trying to use the Bonins’ return as a lever for the speedy return of Okinawa. When Satō’s plane landed in Seattle, Johnson was waiting there for him. He informed the prime minister that the “within a few years” wording stood little chance of gaining presidential approval.<sup>29</sup>

Johnson’s prediction was wrong. When Sato met with LBJ on 14 November, and proposed the “within a few years” phrase, the president was cautiously receptive. Immediately after the meeting LBJ grabbed his ambassador to Japan, and dragged him into the Oval Office. The two had a long meeting, as the president told his ambassador about Satō’s proposal.<sup>30</sup>

27. The account in Johnson’s memoirs differs in several subtle but important matters. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 478–86; Johnson to Rusk, 11 October 1967, Johnson to Rusk, 28 October 1967, vol. 6, box 251, Japan Country File, LBJL; Johnson to Rusk, 6 November 1967; Rusk to Johnson, 28 December 1967, vol. 7, box 252, Japan Country File, LBJL.

28. Interview with Rostow, 12 November 1991; Satō to Rostow, 9 November 1967, folder 7, box 252, Japan Country File, LBJL.

29. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 478–79; Osborn to Rusk, 14 November 1967, folder 7, box 253, Japan Country File, LBJL.

30. Johnson Diary, 5 May 1968, tape 16:4–5.

The president worried about congressional reaction to this wording. This issue had already been addressed. Alexis Johnson had talked to key senators about reversion, and Senate majority leader Mike Mansfield had delivered a speech in Japan only two months before. "There are no major U.S. military installations there and strategic considerations do not appear to be involved in any significant way. In sum, there would appear to be no major blocks—at least I know of none—to the restoration of the Bonins," Mansfield said.<sup>31</sup>

President Johnson remained concerned; the reaction of Senator Richard Russell of Georgia, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, worried him in particular. Assistant Secretary of State for Far Eastern Affairs William P. Bundy met with the senator. Russell "did not think well" of including a time element in the communiqué. A dinner meeting among McNamara, Ambassador Johnson, Satō, Rusk, and Russell failed to change the senator's mind. The next day a compromise was reached. Japan would express a desire for Okinawa's return "within a few years," while LBJ would agree to Okinawa's reversion without committing to any date. Bundy reported that Senators Mansfield, Russell, and J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, found this language acceptable.<sup>32</sup>

One last meeting between LBJ and Satō was arranged. During this meeting the president informed Sato that the price for the Bonins' return would be increased economic aid to Indonesia and a Japanese-built educational television system for South Vietnam. Satō gave the president an evasive response, which was not intended as a promise. A shrewd man, Johnson detected this ambivalence and immediately announced this "deal" after their private meeting. Satō sat silently as LBJ made this disclosure.<sup>33</sup>

But the president had a little joke at Alexis Johnson's expense first. When Sato and LBJ joined the assembled delegations in the Cabinet Room, the president announced that he could not accept the language in the proposed statement. According to Ambassador Johnson, "absolute silence gripped the room for thirty seconds." The president's statement crushed him, his mind raced trying to figure a way to salvage the meeting and avoid a public confrontation. The president then di-

31. Mansfield speech enclosed in Johnson to Rusk, 14 September 1967, folder 6, box 251, Japan Country File, LBJL.

32. Rostow to LBJ, 14 November 1967, November 14–15 File, box 82, President's Appointment File, LBJL; Bundy to Rostow, 15 November 1967, folder 7, box 252, Japan Country File, National Security File, LBJL; "Joint Statement Following Discussion with Prime Minister Sato of Japan, November 15, 1967," *Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1967* (Washington, D.C., 1968), 2:1036–37.

33. U. Alexis Johnson Oral History, 37–38, LBJL.

rected his next comment to the prime minister: “I think my Ambassador to Japan just had a heart attack, and I think we had better relieve his mind.” The two had actually reached complete agreement and the room burst out into relieved laughter.<sup>34</sup>

After leaving the White House, Satō went to the National Press Club to deliver a speech on the importance of the islands to U.S.-Japanese relations. In English he spoke of the work still to be done: “The early return of the Ryūkyūs to Japan, I am certain, would vindicate itself in establishing the relationship between our two countries, Japan and America, on an even firmer foundation and would contribute towards the achievement of the security and peace throughout the whole of Asia.”<sup>35</sup>

Follow-up negotiations on technical issues between Johnson and Miki began shortly thereafter. The main subject of these talks was the fate of the Coast Guard Navigation equipment and replacing a dollar-based economy with a yen-based one. These negotiations were more important as precedents for Okinawa than anything else. The Bonins were returned to Japan in June 1968 through a presidential executive order.<sup>36</sup>

With the return of the Bonins, attention focused on Okinawa. The 1968 presidential election delayed progress for a time. After the election, President-elect Richard M. Nixon appointed his old friend William Rogers as secretary of state and selected Henry A. Kissinger to be his national security advisor. The secretary-designate contacted Alexis Johnson and asked him to take the position of undersecretary of state for political affairs. Johnson was reluctant—he liked his job in Tokyo, and did not want to return to the grind of fourteen-hour days—but eventually agreed out of loyalty to the foreign service. He was at that moment the senior officer in the service, and believed he had a duty to accept the senior career position. Although no longer in Tokyo, Johnson would still be in a position to influence policy toward Japan.<sup>37</sup>

Okinawa’s importance had grown since the LBJ-Satō meeting. Satō’s new foreign minister, Aichi Kiichi, proclaimed 1969 to be the “year of Okinawa.” An emotional issue, Okinawa, joined with student riots over the implementation of the University Management Bill, was bleeding political support from Satō. There was open grumbling from opposition parties and rival factions in the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) about holding new parliamentary elections. If the security treaty was

34. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 481–82.

35. Satō speech, 15 November 1967, folder 7, box 253, Japan Country File, National Security File, LBJL.

36. Meyer, 42.

37. Johnson Diary, 12 January 1969, tape 16:22; Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 511.

going to be in effect after 1970, the United States had to return the Ryūkyū island chain. Returning the islands was the only thing it could do to influence domestic politics in Japan. In retirement from government service, Reischauer called Okinawa "an explosive problem of great magnitude and great danger to our country." Reischauer exaggerated a bit, Okinawa was not as important as ending the Vietnam War, the status of Berlin, or a nuclear nonproliferation treaty, but the essence of his message was true—Okinawa was a problem of importance for the United States. Armin H. Meyer, the new ambassador in Tokyo, succinctly expressed this view in a telegram to Washington: "As Okinawa goes, so goes Japan."<sup>38</sup>

Despite the stakes, the outlook for a favorable settlement looked good. The new president understood the importance of the issue. As a lawyer for Pepsi Cola, Nixon had visited Tokyo in 1967. While in the Japanese capital, the former vice-president had lunch and a long conversation with Johnson. The ambassador found that he and Nixon shared similar views on Asia. Johnson's treatment of Nixon did not differ from that he accorded other distinguished American visitors, but it made a positive impression on a man who distrusted bureaucracy in general, and the foreign service in particular.<sup>39</sup> Like the ambassador, the president believed that Japan should assume more of the burden for its own defense. "Looking toward the future," he wrote in *Foreign Affairs*, "one must recognize that it simply is not realistic to expect a nation moving into the first rank of major powers to be totally dependent for its own security on another nation, however close the ties." Unlike Johnson, the president believed Japan should also develop a nuclear capacity. There was nothing new in Nixon's views, as early as 1953 he had stated that the United States was wrong in prohibiting Japanese rearmament.<sup>40</sup>

Kissinger, Nixon's closest foreign policy advisor, also had similar view on Okinawa. He knew that the military considered the island critical to America's strategy in the Pacific. "But important as Okinawa was strategically, our continuing occupation of it in the late sixties mortgaged our long-range relations with Japan."<sup>41</sup>

Work began on the Okinawa question almost immediately. Kissinger established an interagency study group to discuss Okinawa the day after Nixon's inauguration. It was also a subject at the NSC meeting

38. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 542; *Chūō Kōron*, October 1969; Edwin Reischauer Oral History, 5–6, LBJL; Meyer, 27.

39. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 511.

40. Richard Nixon, "Asia After Viet Nam," *Foreign Affairs* 46 (October 1967): 121; Stephen E. Ambrose, *Nixon*, vol. 2, *The Triumph of a Politician, 1962–1972* (New York, 1990), 115–16.

41. Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, 1979), 325.

held on the same day. Although Kissinger's contempt for the bureaucracy was legendary and Johnson later would savagely criticize him for ignoring the professionals in the State Department, the two of them, along with Nixon, were thinking alike on this issue. "For once," the presidential advisor remarked, "the United States government was united on an issue."<sup>42</sup>

The unity Kissinger fondly remembered stopped at the doors of the Pentagon. The military showed considerable reluctance toward returning the island. On 8 March, Kissinger sent Nixon a JCS memo urging that the United States retain the right to store nuclear weapons in the Ryūkyūs, and on the 18th, a memo of his own warning against delay. The political pressure in Japan was unstoppable. Increased agitation threatened the bases physically and risked the continued power of not only Satō but also the LDP. Who was going to replace the LDP was an issue Kissinger left unaddressed, letting Nixon fill in the blanks with his own fears. Johnson had long talks with the joint chiefs trying to make them realize that Okinawa had to be returned. The only question was whether it would take place in a manner that helped or hurt the United States. During these meetings, JCS Chairman Earl Wheeler also insisted that the military retain unrestricted free use of the islands. Although the joint chiefs finally reconciled themselves to the return of the islands, there was little difference between their new stand and the position they had taken earlier. They still wanted the right to store nuclear weapons and unrestricted use of the islands in the defense of Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam. "It was difficult to imagine what areas we would want to defend from Okinawa other than those specified," responded Kissinger. At an NSC meeting on 30 April Johnson warned that the United States should be sensitive to Japanese opinions on nuclear weapons.<sup>43</sup>

Nixon apparently agreed, and decided to split the difference between the diplomats and the soldiers. If Japan would agree to allow the unrestricted use of Okinawa for the defense of its three Asian neighbors, he would drop the insistence on nuclear storage. However, fearing that the JCS would raise a political fire storm over the nuclear issue, Nixon did not inform the joint chiefs of his decision. This decision became public knowledge nonetheless. The only mention Nixon makes of Okinawa in his memoirs is a complaint over this leak. He fumed that America's negotiating strategy had been revealed, doing great damage. Johnson was more worried about the ruckus the Pentagon might raise over nuclear storage. Kissinger told him not to worry,

42. *Ibid.*, 326–27; for Johnson's latter views of Kissinger, see *Right Hand of Power*, 514, 516–18, esp. 521–24.

43. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 541, 544; Kissinger, 327–28.

he would tell Wheeler to “pipe down” and have Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird “keep quiet.” Johnson observed later: “Whatever he said to them, they never raised any fuss.”<sup>44</sup>

Shortly afterwards negotiations with the Japanese began. “The Okinawa negotiations that followed . . . demonstrated how much nervous strain could have been avoided and how much more effectively our government would have functioned if the White House and the State Department had managed to achieve the same compatibility on other subjects,” Kissinger wrote in his memoirs. The deadline for completion of these talks was Sato’s visit to Washington in November. It was hoped that a joint statement announcing Okinawa’s return could be released then. The more tedious talks on technical matters would follow. Ambassador Armin Meyer conducted negotiations in Tokyo, while Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Marshall Green chaired an interdepartmental working group, and Johnson acted as a trouble shooter. Kissinger had little interest in Japan, took a back seat during the negotiations, and let Johnson administer the talks.<sup>45</sup>

The major issue of these negotiations was Okinawa’s strategic role. American negotiators wanted Japan to assume more responsibility for its own defense. They also wanted effective bases on Okinawa after its return. Satō had stated in his previous visit that Japan needed to increase its role, and now the U.S. negotiators wanted this to be acknowledged publicly. The nuclear storage question was used as a lever to obtain this acknowledgment. Satō initiated two efforts to break this deadlock. Wakazumi, still serving as Satō’s private trouble shooter, published an article in *Foreign Affairs*. This essay had two purposes. It was an attempt to influence attentive American public opinion. Wakazumi warned these readers about the damage reversion could do to U.S.-Japanese relations. “The Japanese and American governments,” he wrote, “must deal with already explosive issues such as Okinawa and trade restrictions in such a way as to prevent public outcries which might compel renunciation of the treaty by Washington or Tokyo.” The article also functioned as a public aide-mémoire. Wakazumi outlined three possible future scenarios of Japanese national security. Japan could end the U.S. alliance and enlarge its military establishment, which would include a nuclear force; the U.S.-Japanese alliance might be continued on a very narrow basis, with the United States providing nuclear protection only; or the alliance could be continued on the “basis of equality and mutual interest.” The last option

44. Kissinger, 329; Richard Nixon, *RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon* (New York, 1978), 389; Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 545.

45. Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 521, 542–43; Kissinger, 328–29.

was the preference of the Japanese government. In this scenario, Japan would have four goals for the 1970s and beyond: maintain friendly relations with the United States; contribute personnel, material, and funding to United Nations peace-keeping efforts; improve relations with its Pacific and Asian neighbors; and “make positive contributions to building the foundations for peace and security, especially in Asia, though cooperation with the developing nations in achieving growth and prosperity.”<sup>46</sup>

Satō also sent Foreign Minister Aichi to Washington in September, hoping to break the deadlock formally. Not much happened in these “somber” meetings. The Wakazumi piece represented the type of thinking that Johnson had wanted to see, but the article could easily be dismissed as the musings of one college professor, not a policy of the Japanese government.<sup>47</sup>

Shortly after these meetings, the Commerce Department added another wrinkle to the problem. Japan should make commercial concessions on textile imports in return for Okinawa. Kissinger was not very excited about having a mundane economic issue included in important political issues. Satō responded by once again sending Wakazumi. Kissinger did not understand the economic issues involved and wanted to consult a person knowledgeable about Japan. Johnson recommended that Kissinger link nuclear storage to textile concessions. Kissinger did so, and concessions on textiles followed shortly. The joint chiefs’ continuing demand that some right be retained to reintroduce nuclear weapons made negotiations even more complex. Finding some compromise that satisfied the chiefs and assured Japan that the weapons would be banned proved difficult. Johnson and Kissinger finally “came up with a formula as ingenious as it was empty.” The communiqué would refer the nuclear issue to a clause in the 1960 treaty about consultations prior to emergencies. This satisfied both sides. Satō said nuclear weapons would not be introduced without Japan’s approval, while Nixon claimed that nuclear weapons could be introduced in emergencies. Two days before Satō’s arrival, Wakazumi called and informed Kissinger that domestic opposition was too strong to the agreement on textile concessions. He asked him if it could be delayed until the formal trade talks scheduled for later in Geneva. Wishing to be rid of the textile matter and afraid the entire agreement might come apart, Kissinger agreed.<sup>48</sup>

46. Johnson to author, 8 October 1991; Kei Wakazumi, “Japan Beyond 1970,” *Foreign Affairs* 47 (April 1969): 512–19.

47. Kissinger, 335; Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 543–44.

48. Kissinger, 331–35.



The meeting between Satō and Nixon went well. Nixon accurately described the importance of the U.S.-Japanese bilateral relationship when he greeted Satō: “whether we have peace and prosperity and progress in the Pacific will depend more than anything else upon the cooperation of the United States and Japan.” Two days later hyperbole replaced thoughtfulness when Nixon called his talks with Satō the “most significant meeting that has occurred since the end of World War II.”<sup>49</sup>

The communiqué announced the return of Okinawa and set 1972 as the actual goal for the end of technical negotiations. The statement also announced that U.S. bases would fall under terms of the security treaty. It also ruled out the introduction of nuclear weapons. When negotiations were finished, Nixon surprised Foreign Minister Aichi by presenting him with a package of Japanese cigarettes. Aichi had vowed not to smoke again until Okinawa was returned.<sup>50</sup>

Inside the White House, immediately after Nixon and Satō finished presenting the communiqué on the White House Lawn, Presidential Press Secretary Ron Ziegler introduced Johnson to the White House press corps for an off-the-record, background press conference. Before answering press questions, Johnson proudly said, “Without being rhetorical or oratorical, I think it is fair to say that this is an historic occasion.” He explained the dual importance of the joint communiqué just released, and Satō’s forthcoming speech at the National Press Club, before fielding questions mostly on defense issues and nuclear storage.<sup>51</sup>

Half an hour later, Satō gave his speech and declared Japan’s new active role in Asia. “Japan in cooperation with the United States, will make its contribution to the peace and prosperity of the Asian-Pacific region and hence to the entire world.” Then he became more specific, explaining how Japan would achieve this task while keeping to its war-renouncing constitution: “Since the United States plays the central role in preserving global peace and also holds great responsibility for the security of Asia, I believe that it is Japan, rather than the United States, that should take the leading role in such fields as economic, and technical assistance towards the nation-building efforts of the Asian countries.” Satō also acknowledged the importance of the security al-

49. *State Department Bulletin* 61 (15 December 1969), 551, 554.

50. *Ibid.*, 555–56; Kissinger, 335; Meyer, 45.

51. Johnson backgrounder, 21 November 1969, in Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad, Japan and Okinawa: Hearings before the Subcommittee on United States Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad*, 91st Cong., 2d Sess., (26, 27, 28, and 29, January 1970) (Washington, D.C., 1970), pt. 5:1439–45.

liance with the United States played in regional stability: “In the real international world it is impossible to adequately maintain the security of Japan without international peace and security of the Far East.”<sup>52</sup>

In January 1970, Johnson explained the importance of Satō’s remarks to a subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. “Hitherto, the Japanese Government, the Japanese people in general, have tended to take the attitude that their security arrangements with the United States had significance only insofar as the security of Japan itself was concerned. That Japan was not interested in nor concerned with the security of other areas nor should it in any way get involved with security of other areas.” The speech itself was representative of a “new stage of thinking in Japan, and it certainly represented a new stage of public statement by any authoritative Japanese spokesman.”<sup>53</sup>

Returning home a triumphant hero, Satō dissolved the Diet and called for new elections. The results were impressive. His LDP won 300 seats out of 486, taking the largest parliamentary majority in post-war Japan. “The campaign was won upon a foreign policy plank,” Johnson told the subcommittee. A careful examination of the 1970 election shows the election was not quite the mandate the Diet seats implied. LDP’s vote percentage actually declined. One bitter opposition politician dismissed the elections results as a “victory of political tactics.” Whatever the reasons behind the election’s outcome, one fact remains clear: Satō had gone from a position of weakness to command of his party and his government.<sup>54</sup>

In the United States the issue made no impact on the political landscape, yet Nixon was proud of his accomplishment. In February he released his first foreign policy report and explained the reasons for Okinawa’s return. Although largely written by Kissinger, the passages on Okinawa reflects Nixon’s writing style. Okinawa was restored to Japan in order to strengthen U.S.-Japanese relations which were key to Pacific stability. “This was among the most important decisions I have taken as President.”<sup>55</sup>

The technical negotiations that followed were long and drawn out. Issues involving such mundane matters as civil aviation and auto registration, as well as bigger issues such as currency, customs, and banking had to be resolved before the return could be completed. Over 200 pieces of enacting legislation by the Japanese Diet were required. Ja-

52. Satō speech before the National Press Club, 21 November 1969, *ibid.*, 1429–30, 1432.

53. Johnson testimony, *ibid.*, 1162.

54. Meyer, 46; Havens, 204.

55. “First Annual Report to Congress on the United States Foreign Policy for the 1970s,” *Public Papers of the Presidents: Richard Nixon, 1970* (Washington, D.C., 1971), 142.

pan also agreed to pay \$320 million as reimbursements for public utilities built on the islands since 1945. A final treaty was produced in mid-1971 and signed in June in satellite-linked ceremonies in Washington and Tokyo. The Senate approved the treaty on 10 November by a vote of 84 to 6. The return of the island chains ended in Tokyo on 15 May 1972. In a formal ceremony attended by the Emperor and Vice-President Spiro Agnew, authority was finally transferred.<sup>56</sup>

The long process that returned the Bonin and Ryūkyū islands was a diplomatic triumph. A new stage in U.S.-Japanese began to the mutual advantage of both parties: there were no losers. Both nations profited. Japan recovered lost territory; the United States preserved the international structure in the Pacific region. Farsighted statesmanship avoided a disastrous crisis and preserved an important partnership.

56. Meyer, 44–50, 55, 57, 59, 61; Johnson, *Right Hand of Power*, 547–48.