



## “Secret” 1965 Memo Reveals Plans to Keep U.S. Bases and Nuclear Weapons Options in Okinawa After Reversion 1965年「秘密」メモが明らかにする、復帰後沖縄における米軍基地保持と核兵器持ち込み選択肢保留の計画

Steve Rabson

### “Secret” 1965 Memo Reveals Plans to Keep U.S. bases and Nuclear Weapons Options in Okinawa After Reversion

Ambassador Edwin Reischauer provided the framework for the Japanese government's betrayal of Okinawan aspirations and Japan's "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" in the 1969 Reversion Agreement.

Steve Rabson

At a meeting of high-level U.S. military and civilian officials held at the American Embassy in Tokyo on July 16, 1965, Edwin O. Reischauer, who served as U.S. ambassador to Japan from 1961-66, put forward a post-reversion U.S. strategy for a permanent American military presence in Okinawa including an option to introduce nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup> According to a declassified Memorandum of Conversation, "Ambassador Reischauer said [that] if Japan would accept nuclear weapons on Japanese soil, including Okinawa, and if it would provide us with assurances guaranteeing our military commanders effective control of the islands in time of military crisis, then we would be able to keep our bases on the islands, even though 'full sovereignty' reverted to Japan." Both of these provisions later became key elements in post-reversion policy negotiated in the 1969 U.S.-Japan Okinawa Reversion Agreement, which took effect on May 15, 1972. Reischauer's views expressed in the 1965 memo are at odds with his public description of meetings on reversion he held with Japanese government officials. "On more than one occasion I had told Japanese officials [that] I believed the United States would comply on terms acceptable to Japan, which meant all nuclear weapons removed, as in the American military installations in Japan."<sup>2</sup>



Edwin O. Reischauer

In the 1965 memo, Reischauer predicted correctly that reversion would be such a "politically important symbol" for Japan's ruling conservative party (LDP) that the U.S. would not have to "give Japan any real say in the use of our bases." In accepting U.S. conditions, the Japanese government ignited bitter protests in Okinawa, breaking its own oft-stated promise of a post-reversion Okinawa with military bases reduced "to mainland levels" (*hondo-nami*) and "without nuclear weapons" (*kaku-nuki*). What was officially called in Japan *Henkan kyotei* (Reversion Agreement) came to be known in Okinawa as "*henken kyotei*" (discriminatory agreement).

The 1965 memo also reveals a "secret action plan," supported by Ambassador Reischauer, to funnel American money clandestinely to the Okinawa LDP through its mainland counterpart in hopes of influencing elections to the Okinawan legislature that were permitted, with certain

restrictions, under U.S. occupation rule. "Ambassador Reischauer [said] that we should not incur . . . the danger of exposure. . . . Okinawa is also like a small country prefecture in Japan, where political maneuvers—particularly involving money—are well known. It would be risky to take clandestine political action in Okinawa using direct U.S.-Ryukyuan channels. . . . It would be much safer to use only the Japanese route, permitting the Japanese LDP to handle the money." Reischauer thus confirms that the U.S. government channeled funds to the LDP on the mainland during the 1960s. "The Japanese conservatives are going to be involved with funds and other activities in the Ryukyuan elections anyway, and it would be a perfect cover to simply add to their resources rather than trying to carry it out directly in the Ryukyus."

Funneling secret U.S. money to the LDP on the mainland is widely believed to have helped the conservatives retain power there throughout the occupation and after, but it was less successful in Okinawa. Opposition candidates in Okinawa continued to win elections, culminating in the victory of reversion movement leader Yara Chobyō over his LDP opponent in the November, 1968 first election of a "Chief Executive," the highest Okinawan official during the U.S. occupation. Formerly appointed by the commanding general, the direct election of a Chief Executive was approved reluctantly by Lieutenant General Ferdinand T. Unger. "I was not unmindful that such a change risked the election of a member of the opposition parties," he recalled in 1975. But with "the political uproar" in Okinawa, "my firm belief [was] that the alternative of denying a popular election . . . could provide even greater escalation of the reversion movement." He viewed the election as a "palliative [that] might momentarily satisfy Okinawan aspirations and thereby give us more time in putting off the day when our freedom of operations would be circumscribed."<sup>3</sup> In fact, that "day" never came. The "freedom of operations," proposed three years earlier by Ambassador Reischauer, became part of the 1969 Reversion Agreement, betraying "Okinawan aspirations" for a reduced U.S. military presence after reversion and a ban on nuclear weapons.

According to the 1965 memo, Reischauer expressed concern that a "nationalistic reaction of the Japanese and Ryukyuan has been exacerbated by developments in Viet-Nam." He subsequently wrote in his autobiography that "by this time we had become so deeply enmeshed [in Vietnam] that I was ready to accept the [Johnson] administration's argument that the quickest and easiest way to end the war was to force North Vietnam by military might to desist from trying to conquer the South."<sup>4</sup> In 1965, Admiral Ulysses S. Grant Sharp, Commander of U.S. Pacific forces, maintained that, "without Okinawa, we cannot carry on the Vietnam war."<sup>5</sup> To reduce the risk of "disturbances" in Okinawa, Reischauer proposed an increase in U.S. aid, revision of the Price Act to increase compensation for owners of land the U.S. had seized for base construction, and a loosening of the ban on flying the Japanese flag. It is difficult to measure precisely his influence at the time, but all three of these recommendations became U.S. policy.

Reischauer's advocacy of early reversion had met with considerable resistance from the Army. Interviews of former occupation commanders in the Army War College archives include angry denunciations, even questioning his loyalty.<sup>6</sup> But, clearly, the kind of reversion Reischauer advocated was far from what the Japanese government later promised Okinawans. According to the 1965 memo, when Army Secretary Stanley Resor asked him if he "envisioned a new treaty with Japan placing Okinawa outside the limitations of the Constitution," Reischauer replied that "something like that would be necessary, although there is no explicit prohibition against nuclear weapons in the Constitution." The "something like that" he refers to anticipates the 1969 Reversion Agreement making the U.S. military presence more or less permanent and maintaining the option to introduce nuclear weapons.

U.S. policies he recommended for Okinawa were continued after reversion by the Japanese government, with Japan paying the bills. In an effort to dampen anti-base sentiment, the government in Tokyo increased post-reversion rental payments—this time by six-fold—suddenly enriching the owners of land that had been seized two decades earlier for base construction. The Japanese government's post-reversion "sympathy budget" that showers money for development projects on localities in Okinawa heavily impacted by the bases has been compared to the occupation-era "High Commissioner's Fund" from which U.S. commanders paid for the construction of public buildings. Taking Reischauer's recommendations a step further, the U.S. government imposed a "carrot and stick" policy that threatened economic retaliation if Okinawans resisted occupation policies. Continuing this strategy after reversion, the Japanese government under the LDP repeatedly threatened to withhold development funds to Japan's poorest prefecture if its citizens voted for local candidates opposed to the bases.

Reischauer's 1965 memo invites comparison with recommendations he made twenty-three years earlier in a memo he authored during World War II. His September 14, 1942 "Memorandum on Policy towards Japan," written when he was an instructor of Far Eastern Languages at Harvard, advocates, even at this early stage in the war, the rehabilitation of Emperor Hirohito as "a valuable ally or puppet in the postwar ideological battle." He also writes that Japanese Americans, who "have been a sheer liability to our cause," could be turned into an "asset" by enlisting them in the U.S. armed forces. Historian Takashi Fujitani notes that Reischauer, as a recent Ph.D., "was not a major actor in military or political circles, [but] was sometimes sought out as a Japan expert by the State and War departments and whose ideas may have even swayed those with more power." What Fujitani describes as "the document's condescension toward Japanese people" and its "purely instrumentalist and manipulative stance" are evident two decades later in the 1965 Memorandum of Conversation.<sup>7</sup>

The attitudes Fujitani identifies have similarly been reflected in postwar U.S. military policies implemented in mainland Japan and Okinawa, often with the complicity of the government in Tokyo. Reischauer confirmed in a 1981 interview that U.S. naval vessels carrying nuclear weapons routinely visited ports in Japan, with the tacit approval of the Japanese government, violating the LDP's oft-stated "three non-nuclear principles" prohibiting their manufacture, possession, or introduction.<sup>8</sup> Many decades after the end of occupations in mainland Japan and Okinawa, U.S. forces in Japan still retain extra-territorial privileges in the application of civil and criminal laws through the Status of Forces Agreement. Moreover, the missions of U.S. bases in Japan, and especially in Okinawa, have been less about defending Japan than projecting military power and reconnaissance capabilities elsewhere. This was true for Okinawa during the Vietnam War, when troops trained and deployed to the war zone, when long-range bombers flew out of air bases, and when the islands served as a prime site for GIs on R & R from the war zone. In recent years, Okinawa has been an important venue for troops training and deploying for wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In April, 2001, a U.S. Navy surveillance plane flying out of Kadena Air Base in Okinawa was intercepted in Chinese air space over Hainan Island and forced to land. Chinese authorities detained and interrogated the twenty-four crew members until a letter of apology was issued by the United States Government. Kurt Campbell, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, acknowledged these wider missions in January, 2010, when he pressed the recently elected Japanese government to accept a U.S. Marine air base in Okinawa for the purpose of "creating a more sustainable military presence in the region."<sup>9</sup>

After defeating the LDP in elections last year, the new government, led by the Democratic Party of Japan, has promised to lessen Okinawa's burden of bases and to reach "a more equal partnership" with the United States. Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio has said he will consider the results of the mayoral election in Nago, location of the proposed base, before making a decision on its construction by May 2010. In the election on January 24, the DPJ-supported candidate Inamine Susumu, running on a platform of opposition to the base, defeated the LDP-supported incumbent Shimabukuro Yoshikazu, who had agreed to accept it with certain conditions.<sup>10</sup> Meanwhile, U.S. State and Defense Department officials are keeping up the pressure on Hatoyama to cave in.<sup>11</sup>

[U.S. Policy in the Ryukyu Islands](#), Memorandum of Conversation, July 16, 1965. Record Number 79651. *The Asia-Pacific Journal* expresses

its appreciation to former Okinawa Governor Ota Masahide for providing this document from United States archives.

*Steve Rabson is professor emeritus of East Asian Studies, Brown University, and an Asia-Pacific Journal Associate. He is the author of [Righteous Cause or Tragic Folly: Changing Views of War in Modern Japanese Poetry](#), and co-editor of [Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa](#). He served as a U.S. Army draftee in Okinawa for eight months in 1967-68. He prepared this introduction for *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, and wishes to thank Mark Selden, Gavan McCormack, and an outside reviewer for their helpful suggestions.*

Recommended citation: Steve Rabson, "'Secret' 1965 Memo Reveals Plans to Keep U.S. bases and Nuclear Weapons Options in Okinawa After Reversion," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 5-1-10, February 1, 2010.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Matsumoto Tsuyoshi, "Revealing 'Secret U.S.-Japan Nuclear Understandings': A solemn obligation of Japan's new government," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, 51-3-09, December 21, 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Edwin O. Reischauer, *My Life Between Japan and America*, Harper and Row, New York, 1986, 321.

<sup>3</sup> "Command Interviews" conducted in April, 1975, and collected in the U.S. Army War College archives, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

<sup>4</sup> Reischauer, 285.

<sup>5</sup> Admiral Sharp commented in the *Morning Star*, official newspaper of the U.S. Pacific Command (December 10, 1965).

<sup>6</sup> "Command Interviews."

<sup>7</sup> T. Fujitani, "The Reischauer Memo: Mr. Moto, and Japanese American Soldiers," *Critical Asian Studies*, 33: 3 (2001), 380.

<sup>8</sup> See "Japan : Time to Confess, Nuclear 'Lie' Strains U.S. Ties," *Time*, June 8, 1981:

The revelations, since buttressed by other former U.S. and Japanese diplomats, exploded across Japan. Last week Socialist Leader Ichio Asukata declared that the government of Prime Minister Zenko Suzuki 'deserves 10,000 deaths' for the nuclear deceit. Leftist and labor organizations rallied to protest port calls by U.S. naval vessels and demanded on-site inspections of all U.S. bases in Japan . . .

The nuclear question has strained U.S.-Japanese ties before. In 1974 retired Seventh Fleet Rear Admiral Gene R. LaRocque told the U.S. Congress substantially what Reischauer told *Mainichi Shimbun*. At the time the U.S. simply reassured Japan that it was not violating the agreement. Now, U.S. Ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield has again advised Tokyo that the U.S. is honoring its commitments. Suzuki cites his own proof: since the U.S. has never asked for the "prior consultations" required for admitting a nuclear-armed vessel, he concludes serenely that "no nuclear weapons have ever been brought into Japan.

That pleasant fiction faces widespread doubt. A poll by *Asahi Shimbun* last week showed that only 21% of the legislators in Japan's Diet believe the government.

<sup>9</sup> "Campbell: Stick to Base Relocation Deal," *The Japan Times*, January 24, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> "Isetsu hantai no Inamine-shi ga tosen: Nago shicho-sen" (Candidate Inamine, opposing base relocation, wins Nago mayoral election), *Okinawa Taimusu*, January 25, 2010.

<sup>11</sup> See Campbell (above) and "U.S. admiral: Base move not down to mayor," *Japan Times*, January 28, 2010.