

Briefing Memorandum

Local Defense Obligations after the Reversion of Okinawa

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Introduction

There have long been news reports on the serious impact that the United States Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) Futenma relocation problem is inflicting on US-Japan relations. This problem is structurally complex, involving three separate elements: the feelings of residents living around bases, related municipalities, and relations with the United States. Problems surrounding US military forces in Japan that lie outside of Okinawa Prefecture also present a similar relational structure. However, in terms of Japan Self-Defense Force bases, recently we can observe a general trend where the bases are welcomed by some and at the same time opposed by others. However, in 1972, when Okinawa was reverted to Japanese control, there existed a similar structure as can be seen in the Futenma issue of today; on the one hand there was the Japanese Government that emphasized adhering to the agreement concluded with the United States, and on the other hand there were the local residents and related municipal governments that associated the reversion with the return of the old Japanese Imperial Army.

This briefing will introduce an outline of the problem related to Japan's local defense obligations in Okinawa after the reversion of the prefecture to Japan, while underscoring the implications of those issues on problems with US bases in Okinawa seen today.

1. The Circumstances of the reversion of Okinawa

(1) The United States' Asia Strategy

The United States executed a full-fledged intervention in Viet Nam in the 1960s in order to hinder the spread of communist forces in Indochina. A maximum of 540,000 ground forces were sent to Viet Nam from bases in mainland Japan, Okinawa, Philippines, Guam, and other locations. However, the course of the war continued on a negative path, and after President Richard Nixon took office, the United States began to pursue an "honorable exit" from Viet Nam while at the same time encouraging defense efforts from its allies, such as Japan and the Republic of Korea, among others, and also suddenly forging closer ties with China. In other words, the United States changed its strategy by taking the defense burden that it had actively shouldered in the past to prevent the

communization of Asia and transferred it to its allies.

(2) Domestic trends related to the reversion of Okinawa

Negotiations on the reversion of Okinawa moved into full swing in 1964 when Eisaku Sato became Prime Minister. During his visit to Okinawa a year after taking office, Prime Minister Sato remarked that, “The post-war period will not end for Japan until Okinawa is returned to our country,” thereby garnering attention for exhibiting his personal determination to realize the reversion of Okinawa to Japan, both domestically and internationally. Prime Minister Sato visited the United States in 1969 and held a discussion with President Nixon. At the press conference after their meeting, the leaders declared that Okinawa would be returned to Japan in a nuclear-free state in 1972. The Japan-US Security Treaty would then be applied to Okinawa just as it does to mainland Japan, and as a result, US military bases in Okinawa would be subject to the prior consultation system. This was the concept of “Kaku-nuki, Hondo-nami” (an Okinawa with no nuclear weapons and the same as mainland Japan). As the details of negotiations regarding the reversion became clear, public opinion concerning proposals for the reversion agreement split between conservative advocates and the reformist opposition. The reformists argued for the complete, unconditional, and immediate return of Okinawa, where all US bases and nuclear weapons would be removed, and they thereby opposed the government’s proposed reversion agreement for Okinawa. Even as domestic public opinion diverged, in June 1971 the Okinawan Reversion Agreement (the Agreement between Japan and the United States of America Concerning the Ryukyu Islands and the Daito Islands) was signed by the governments of the United States and Japan. Later, in November of the same year, deliberations were held in the Diet on the reversion agreement by the House of Representatives’ Special Committee on the Okinawa Reversion Agreement, but the issue proved to be highly complex, and thus the agreement was forced through the Lower House in its present state. The reversion agreement was enacted by Okinawa Prefecture on 15 May 1972.

(3) The United States’ objectives in reversion negotiations

The United States had two objectives in the reversion negotiations. The first was to ensure the right to free use of bases. The Viet Nam War was forecast to continue even after the reversion of Okinawa and the United States recognized the importance of Okinawa in its East Asia strategy. Thus, the free use of US bases in Okinawa was vital. The second objective was to elicit the greatest level of commitment possible from Japan related to the reversion, including financial commitment and in terms of local defense obligation. The price of the Viet Nam War had tightened the United States’ purse and the cost of their East Asia strategy was a significant burden. It utilized the reversion of Okinawa as an opportunity to seek policy measures that would have Japan shoulder a portion of this immense burden.

It is said that in the reversion negotiations there was a secret pact between Japan and the United

States which allowed the United States de facto free use of bases and to bring nuclear weapons into Japan in emergency situations, in addition to additional compensation that was separate from the compensation accompanying the transfer of US assets to the Government of Japan as prescribed in the reversion agreement. Moreover, the United States succeeded in linking these negotiations to lightening the burden on the US military stationed in Okinawa by having the Japan Self-Defense Forces perform local defense duties such as patrols.

2. The US-Japan response to local defense accompanying the reversion

Negotiations between officials from the United States and Okinawa regarding local defense after Okinawa's reversion are considered to have entered full swing from around June of the year before the reversion agreement was signed. According to a cable sent to the United States by the US Embassy in Japan on 20 June 1970, the framework for the agreement had been finalized in a discussion with Defense Bureau Director Motoo Shishido the previous day. The wire noted the conveniences that the United States should provide for the forces, equipment, and deployments of the Japan Ground, Maritime, and Air Self-Defense Forces, and this content was reflected in the Okinawa Defense Agreement, or the so-called Kubo-Curtis Agreement, which was concluded after the signing of the reversion agreement on 29 June by Defense Bureau Chief Takuya Kubo and the Chief Military Representative from the US Embassy to Japan (Lieutenant General), Walter L. Curtis Jr.

This agreement stipulated that within half a year after reversion, 3,200 Self-Defense Forces (SDF) would be stationed in Okinawa so that the SDF could take over defense obligations from the United States regarding air defense, surface-to-air missile units, the operation of aircraft control and warning systems, ground defense, maritime patrols, and search and rescue. Nevertheless, the Japanese and US Governments were both harshly questioned by opposition parties regarding the local defense burden in Okinawa when the reversion agreement was ratified and in the Diet thereafter.

In Japan, there was an onslaught of criticism due to the fact that the agreement was concluded as an intergovernmental agreement but was not submitted to the National Defense Committee (now the Security Council of Japan) or any other body, and because the sheer amount of forces deployed in Okinawa was offensive to the Okinawan residents themselves.

In April 1972, Prime Minister Sato, who had taken the matter very seriously, made large-scale revisions to the SDF's deployment plan in Okinawa and requested the understanding of the United States. Later, after multiple revisions were made to the plan, it became no longer possible to continue scramble missions conducted by the Air Self-Defense Forces (ASDF) from 1 July as stipulated in the Kubo-Curtis Agreement, as plans for construction to lengthen the runway at Naha Air Base in

preparation for the deployment of F104J fighters to the base for the ASDF faced severe delays. As a result, Japan requested the US Air Force temporarily take charge until construction was complete.

Meanwhile, in the United States, doubt began to set in in Senate Hearings and other forums over the small size of SDF units deployed in Okinawa as well as the repeated downsizing of units and requests for deadline extensions from the Government of Japan, leaving the US Government scrambling to come up with a response.

3. Okinawa's response

The Government of Japan was able to alleviate the anti-SDF sentiment of local Okinawans by taking into consideration the feelings of Okinawan residents and announcing the revision of the plan. Chobyō Yara, then Chief Executive of the Ryukyu Islands, commented that, "The attitude and stance of Okinawan residents is one of peace and anti-war, thus we must be unified in our opposition to the deployment plans for the SDF." What is more, on 18 January 1971 Parliamentary Vice-Minister of the Defense Agency Kyoichi Noro paid a visit to Okinawa to provide an explanation of the SDF deployment plan, but Chief Executive Yara did not attend the meeting. Reformist Ryosho Taira, then Naha City Mayor, declared that Naha would not accept a commissioned operation to recruit SDF in Okinawa, refused to handle the processing of trash from SDF stations and other posts, and refused to house the SDF in its city-operated housing. Moreover, reformist leaders of other municipal governments around Okinawa followed Mayor Taira's lead.

The reason for such a growth in anti-SDF activity was not simply anti-war, pro-peace sentiment; the decisions of Okinawans were influenced by their disgust with the Japanese Imperial Army who had previously controlled the islands during the war. In an April 1972 magazine interview, Master Sergeant Tadashi Kayama, who was involved in the mass killings of residents on Kume Island by Imperial Japanese Navy units stationed there, explained that he had executed island residents on suspicion of espionage and went on to offer other comments that justified his string of actions. Kayama's comments further stirred up anti-SDF sentiment among Okinawan residents as the impending deployment of the SDF had become synonymous with the image of the old Imperial Japanese Army. Because the deployment period coincided with the release of Kayama's comments, the result was a heightened loathing of the deployment of the SDF in Okinawa.

4. Actual unit deployment

Based on the Kubo-Curtis Agreement, within the first six months following the reversion of Okinawa, the government initially deployed 3,200 SDF personnel, 25 F104J fighters, six P2J antisubmarine patrol aircraft, four Nike surface-to-air missile units, and three Hawk surface-to-air

missile units (control over all surface-to-air missile units was transferred to the SDF from the US military stationed in Okinawa). In the end, SDF numbers in Okinawa had increased to around 6,400. However, after several revisions to the government's proposal, it decided to reduce SDF personnel numbers to 2,900, the number of F104J fighters to 18, and cutback all other units as well. Opposition to the SDF continued after Okinawa's reversion as well, impacting the activities of the SDF both publicly and privately. At the same time, however, defense officials from the United States exploited every available opportunity to make comments to encourage Japanese defense efforts, including the strengthening of local defense in Okinawa. On 22 April 1972, the first SDF forces to be deployed to Okinawa, a central ASDF unit, arrived at Naha Airport. From this time a complex structure began to form involving three components: 1) local sentiment, 2) related municipalities, and 3) relations with the United States.

Conclusion

Thirty-nine years have now passed since the reversion of Okinawa. It is safe to say that sentiment towards the SDF has taken a turn for the better within the prefecture. In recent years, in particular, the calls by Yonaguni Island to attract the SDF would have been indisputably out of the question in the previous context. Today, however, there is more anticipation of the economic effects that accompany the deployment of the SDF, not to mention the impact of the military buildup of China or the incident last year when a Chinese fishing boat collided with a Japanese patrol vessel in the waters surrounding the Senkaku Islands.

However, local residents likely feel differently about small-sized ground units, like those set to be stationed in Yonaguni, and air force units, which could potentially cause noise pollution and accidents resulting from crashes. There is also a difference in impact between the US military, which brings foreign culture and living habits into the region, and the Japanese SDF, which is completely Japanese.

The causes for disparity found in the local sentiment of those residing around bases lie beyond the scope of this paper and I would like to pay due consideration to that issue at another time. The bottom line is that one can expect to find the origins of Japan's security problems by unraveling the post-war history of security in Japan.

The purpose of this column is to respond to readers' interest in security issues and at the same time to promote a greater understanding of NIDS. As you know, a "briefing" means a background explanation, and we hope these columns will help everyone to better understand the complex issues involved in security affairs.

Please note that the views in this column do not represent the official opinion of NIDS.

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