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Balancing Okinawa's return with American expectations: Japan and the Vietnam War 1965–75

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Abstract

The Vietnam War greatly destabilized Southeast Asia and led to almost a decade of fighting by America and its Asian allies. It was fought on the principle that if communism was unchecked it would overrun the region, with the Southeast Asian countries falling under communist control like 'dominoes'. While countries such as Thailand, South Korea, and Australia provided military support to assist American strategic objectives, Japan, however, was constrained by its peace constitution and thus unable to provide direct military assistance. Nonetheless, under the leadership of the avid anti-communist conservative leadership of Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, Japan still managed to play a role in the Vietnam War. Although Japan initially entertained the notion of facilitating mediation, with Okinawa's reversion hanging in the balance

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after 1967, Japan's leadership took a more hawkish approach on Vietnam in order to ensure that Washington would agree to reverting Okinawa to Japanese administrative control.

1 Introduction

This paper sets out to answer the question as to how did Japan respond to the Vietnam War? Clearly, Japan's constitution banning the overseas dispatch of military personnel to engage in combat precluded any military role. However, simply sitting on the sidelines ignoring such a large-scale conflict in its economic sphere of influence involving its sole security provider would also seem improbable. This paper will show that although it flirted briefly the idea of mediating in this conflict, geopolitical realities drove Japan to take a definitive position in this conflict firmly on the side of the United States in order to accrue a number of tangible political advantages. This research clearly shows that Japan was more strategic and purposeful in its responses than is commonly thought, while also shedding further light on the multidimensional postwar United States–Japan relationship.

Much of the literature has pointed out that it was an intensely unpopular war among the Japanese population, as shown by the large-scale demonstrations across Japan in response to US bombing missions (Havens, 1987; Shiraishi, 1990; Kan, 2005). The *Zengakuren* student riots were particularly bloody, violent, and anti-American in nature. However, by simply framing the Vietnam War as being distasteful to a large number of Japanese, much the same way as it was for most Western countries at the time, overlooks Japan's important political and economic role in this conflagration within the framework of it being an important Asian state actor and a close security partner with the United States. Havens' *Fire Across the Sea* can, therefore, be criticized for overly focusing on the public's sensitivity toward Japan tacitly supporting the United States in Vietnam at the expense of failing to fully examine the intricate political processes that underpinned this policy. Undoubtedly, one of the reasons for this shortfall in analysis was that Havens was unable to incorporate diplomatic archives as it was written just 12 years after the war in Vietnam ended. Schaller's seminal work *Altered States* (1997) also offers a superb chapter on 'Japan, the United States and the Vietnam War 1964–1968', yet Schaller's analysis singularly relies on the

American geopolitical framework of the Cold War as its primary analytical baseline, while also restricting itself to American and British primary sources. This paper in contrast, however, draws extensively from *both* American and a range of Japanese diplomatic (archival) documents, with many of the latter being obtained under freedom of information legislation. While touching on Japan's attempts to mediate in this conflict, this paper also explains how and why Japanese officials reached out to Hanoi diplomatically in the early 1970s, viewing a communist victory as inevitable and driven by the promise of economic gain. Consequently, this research methodology gives the paper a more unique Japan-centered analysis, thus shedding new light on Japan's particularistic diplomatic aims vis-à-vis its relations with the United States as well as Southeast Asia during this period.

Significantly, this was a period that also saw Japan undergo a period of dramatic economic growth and wealth accumulation under its 'income doubling' plan, which resulted in not only internal domestic stability and prosperity but also the beginning of trade friction with Washington and Europe. Undoubtedly, Japan's government directed economic policies and aggressive export-led growth at times adversely affected its relations with the external world. Nixon explicitly pointed out to Sato that in view of Japan's burgeoning trade surplus its 'trade and investment restrictions. . . . had become a "hot issue" in our economic and industrial communities' (Memorandum of Conversation (Nixon–Sato), November 20, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 4, p. 253). Specifically, Japan's 'current account surpluses, its levels of imports compared to other countries, and its sectoral and structural policies and practices' were all proving to be sources of 'serious and continuing political and economic friction' for Japan from this period onwards (Janow, 1994, p. 91). The $3 billion trade deficit with the United States alone by 1972 was beginning to provoke resentment in the United States and accusations of 'free riding' as the American economy underwent a dramatic downturn in this decade. Furthermore, as Iriye prudently reminds us, from the US perspective 'Concealed underneath the more melodramatic trade friction across the Pacific was the genuine concern in the nation that Japan was fast turning Asia into a collective economic superpower' that would shut out American interests (Iriye, 1994, p. 49).

During this period under review, as economic frictions fanned emotions in Japan and the United States, Sato frequently urged that

a 'calm [and] unhurried approach' during which their respective governments could 'steer a wise course' with their industry groups, while 'showing an understanding of the political problems faced by the other', were the two 'crucial elements' both sides should not overlook if they were to achieve a successful solution to their bilateral trade problems (Telegram from US Embassy Japan 8740 to Secretary of State, October 22, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 6, p. 72). Fortunately, due to reasonably cool heads at senior leadership level on both sides, bilateral trade tensions failed to enter into the sphere of security and defense policy-making to a major extent, nor did they affect the return of Okinawa. They did, however, demonstrate the unprecedented and substantial influence that Japan's economy was beginning to exert in the global economy, even to the extent that Japan could now impinge directly upon American economic considerations, thus providing perhaps the first significant 'stress test' of their post-war bilateral partnership.

Against the context of this newfound global economic influence and Tokyo's preference for low-profile diplomacy (*tei shisei*), Japan's role in the Vietnam conflict was complicated and entwined at a number of levels. At one level, it was firmly bound to the United States by the Mutual Security Treaty, and was therefore obligated to some degree to provide at least non-military assistance to its ally, who it should be noted, frequently took the opportunity to remind Japan that it was fighting to keep it free from the communist threat in Asia. At another level, by the late 1960s, Japan was economically closely tied to Southeast Asia, viewing the region as strategically important as it offered both potential markets for Japanese goods and important natural resources. Consequently, any major conflict in this region was decidedly unhelpful as it could potentially create serious instability that could fracture Japan's well-established regional trading patterns. On the other hand, however, like the Korean War before it, the Vietnam War also offered Japan a number of lucrative commercial opportunities. Political imperatives at the domestic level also cannot be ignored, with the return of Okinawa playing a central role in Japanese policy-making on Vietnam during this period, as will be underscored in this paper.

Using a diplomatic history approach, this paper will examine how Japan responded both politically and diplomatically to this Southeast Asian conflagration, shedding light on the motivations and rationale that underpinned its policy-making. Moreover, it will show that Japan

cleverly balanced nationalist desires for the return of Okinawa with Washington's expectations that Japan offer explicit support for its efforts in this conflict, while hoping that popular disapproval of the war would not foment political instability that would threaten the government (as it had in 1960 following the revision of the security treaty). In the interests of parsimony, a description of the conflict itself will not be provided, thus assuming that the broad contours of the conflict are familiar with the reader.

Focusing on the policies of Sato Eisaku (Japan's longest serving prime minister), this paper will be separated into four key parts. Following this introduction, the two main sections of the paper will focus on the policies pursued by the Japanese leadership during the Johnson administration (1964–68) and the Nixon administration (1969–73). The concluding section will summarize the overarching factors that underpinned the Japanese government's responses to this conflict.

2 Japan and the Vietnam War during the Johnson administration: 1964–68

Admittedly, at first, Japan was seen as relatively unconcerned over the developments in Vietnam. The Japanese Ambassador to Washington in 1964 remarked to Secretary of State Dean Rusk that 'the Japanese people are not very interested in Southeast Asia and do not pay much attention to what is going on there . . . . the Japanese people have a casual way of thinking about Vietnam' (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation, Box 2376, November 25, 1964).

Perhaps in the early stages of the war, Japan was more focused on its own economic reconstruction and restoring its place on the world stage than the Vietnam War. By 1965, however, Japanese politicians and business elites saw a number of potential opportunities for Japan, in the diplomatic and commercial spheres, respectively. The commercial opportunities were quite obvious and easy to identify, only requiring a brief overview, whereas the political and diplomatic opportunities for Japan to offer itself as a potential mediator were far more intriguing and will be dealt with in more detail.

Economically the rewards for Japan were considerable. For instance, of the $10.3 billion total, President Lyndon Johnson gained congressional approval for in 1965 around 5–6 percent found its way onto

Japanese firms' balance sheets (The Far Eastern Economic Review, April 14, 1966). Although domestic criticism accused some Japanese firms of supplying defoliants and other harmful chemicals to the United States, Japan's powerful Ministry for International Trade and Industry (MITI) countered that it was only providing jungle shoes, barbed wire, and sandbags. Less ambiguous was the large repair orders placed with Japan's top shipbuilding firms for repairs of US naval vessels, while aircraft and helicopters also underwent repairs and maintenance in Japan. On top of military procurement orders that were often placed in third countries such as Thailand, where Japanese firms then filled them, the financially backed South Vietnamese economy also became a useful export market for Japanese manufactured goods. There is substantial evidence that Honda, Sony, and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries earned tidy profits from the war in Vietnam (Havens, 1987; Shiraishi, 1990). Schaller points out that Japan earned around $1 billion per year as a result of the conflict between 1965 and 1972 (Schaller, 1997, p. 198). To the annoyance of Washington officials such as Dean Rusk, Japan also continued to trade with North Vietnam for the duration of the conflict by conducting its transactions in third countries such as Czechoslovakia or France, although volumes were low and mainly limited to importing coal.

Aside from the commercial opportunities, in a similar fashion to Japan's behind the scenes role in attempting to mediate an early conclusion to President Sukarno's confrontation of neighboring Malaysia in the early 1960s (Llewelyn, 2006), Japan also made a number of low-profile efforts to mediate in the Vietnam War, albeit in the early stages of the conflict. It is these tentative explorations to create diplomatic opportunities for political gain that will be examined below.

Not only did the close commercial and security relationship ensure that Japan fall in closely behind Washington's interpretation of events in Indochina, domestic and geopolitical realities also underpinned this conformity. Domestically, Prime Minister Sato had, very early in his career as prime minister, pinned his political fortunes on gaining the return of Okinawa, while a nuclear-armed China also helped to ensure that Japan's position on Vietnam was in alignment with Washington. As one Japanese author observed at the time, 'Japan, as a military partner of the US in Asia, never officially hesitated to help the American war effort' (Sodei, 1975, p. 314).

As early as 1964 Japan seemed to be in agreement with American planners on the risks that would result if Vietnam fell to communism. In a meeting between the Director General of the Japanese Defense Agency, Fukuda Tokuyasu, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, the former indicated that if South Vietnam fell to the communists it would be like a 'chessman on a board falling over' with the surrounding nations soon succumbing to communism, adding that this would create 'pressures' for Japan not only from the political left but could also adversely affect nearby states such as South Korea (FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, June 30, 1964, p. 19). Following the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964, both Sato and Foreign Minister Shiina Etsusaburo assured the public that the United States was only acting in self-defence. In fact, Sato's hawkish pro-American stance on Vietnam was evident from the first few weeks he took office in December 1964. In his first meeting with the American ambassador Edwin Reischauer, he stated that the United States should 'remain firm and not pull out' of Vietnam, although he also cautioned that 'a direct attack on North Vietnam or communist China would be a great mistake' (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation between Reischauer and Sato, Box 2375, December 29, 1964).

Moreover, during his first visit to Washington, Sato told President Johnson that 'neither an advance nor withdrawal was desirable . . . . as it would provoke a "falling domino" situation' adding that to address the 'crux of the problem' the United States needed to maintain patience and perseverance in order to establish 'a stable South Vietnamese leadership' (FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, January 12, 1965, pp. 77–78). Applying specific pressure, Johnson remarked that 'it would be helpful if Japan could show the flag' and reminded Sato that 'If Japan gets in trouble we would send planes and bombs to defend her. We are now in trouble in Vietnam and ask how Japan can help us' (FRUS, Memorandum of Conversation, January 12, 1965, p. 72). In what would become a standard fall-back position by Sato when pressured to contribute substantially more toward American efforts in Vietnam, he promised to send non-military aid (i.e. financial aid and medical teams), asserting that Japan could only assist within the confines of its constitutional constraints.

Periodically, however, Japan's leadership also feared that an escalation of the conflict could provoke China into openly entering the war and

that Japan itself could become entangled. Following an escalation of the bombing by the United States in February 1965, Sato expressed both moral support and also concern over China to President Johnson in a personal message. Clearly, fearing that the conflict in Vietnam could consume the entire region and directly involve Japan he wrote that:

> The course of events in Vietnam will influence the peace of the whole of Southeast Asia to an extremely important degree. From this point of view, the Government of Japan supports the efforts of the Government of the United States to safeguard the independence of the freedom of South Vietnam. At the same time it is of the opinion that a continued expansion of the present state of hostilities must be avoided (Digital National Security Archive, Message to President Lyndon B. Johnson from Prime Minister Eisaku Sato, April 10, 1965).

Therefore, while the United States saw China from a distinctive *realpolitik* Cold War perspective, Japan tended to view its neighbor in a more nuanced light, seeing the potential for the outbreak of a 'hot war' between China and the United States (over Vietnam) as a major threat to its national interests. Japan had long claimed that it understood China better than the United States due to cultural similarities and a shared history, with Yoshida Shigeru being the most well-known proponent of this view. Yoshida posited that communism was irreconcilable with Chinese culture and that the American hard-line approach of containing China was unlikely to achieve its objectives. Unfortunately, for Japan, the American-led policy of containment denied Japan access to China's economic potential as a market and a source of resources. Sato, being heavily influenced by this statesman, arguably held similar beliefs that sooner or later China would discard this incompatible ideology. Nonetheless, Japan subordinated its China policy to American goals following the Chinese Communist victory in 1949 and the Sino-Soviet alliance of 1950, in return for protection under the US nuclear umbrella. However, as the Sino-Soviet alliance began to unravel, 'many Japanese leaders became increasingly eager to cast aside the straightjacket that Washington had imposed on their China policy' (Oksenberg, 1994, p. 102). There were indications, therefore, that much earlier hopes for diplomatic rapprochement with China existed in Tokyo

than in Washington, which was undoubtedly a desire driven by Japan's quest for 'economic security'.

Tokyo and Washington thus clearly had different perceptions of the 'China threat'. This was to such an extent that American officials at times expressed open dissatisfaction and clearly hoped that Tokyo would develop a 'more responsible attitude . . . . towards the threat posed by the Chinese communists' and as a result assume greater 'responsibilities commensurate with its stake in regional security and stability' (FRUS, Memorandum from Secretary of State Rusk to President Johnson, September 4, 1967). These differences were brought out into the open in January 1972 during Sato's final meeting as prime minister with Nixon and shortly following Nixon's surprise announcement that he would visit Beijing in February. In this meeting, Sato explicitly stated that concerning China 'Japan's view is quite different' and added that 'Japan must view the PRC as the representative of China', while he also indicated normalizing relations with Beijing outweighed any importance Japan had previously attached to relations with Taiwan (Memorandum for the President's File, Nixon–Sato Talks, January 6, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials: Sato–Nixon Summit Meetings; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 8).

At one level, these frank comments perhaps hint at Sato's pique and sense of betrayal at not being informed of Washington's planned rapprochement with China. Yet at another level they also showed the magnitude of China's importance in Japan's regional considerations, while also hinting that Tokyo had long held doubts over the policy of containing China. Unsurprisingly, following Nixon's visit to China, Japan lost no time in restoring diplomatic ties with Beijing, taking place just 3 months after the inauguration of the Tanaka administration in September 1972. This rapid restoration of Sino-Japanese relations at the very least demonstrated Tokyo's ongoing belief in the utility of partitioning the two spheres of economics and politics in its external relations (*seikei bunri*) with a clear emphasis on the former.

Nevertheless, like the tensions in the bilateral trading partnership during this period, over the course of the Vietnam War Japan did not permit differences in perceptions of China to adversely affect its security relationship with the United States nor its overriding political objective of obtaining the return of Okinawa. Notably, however, as the above letter from Sato suggests, Japan periodically reminded the United States over

the folly of drawing China directly into this already protracted and bloody conflict.

Accordingly, as American bombing increased in intensity and scope from 1965 the Japanese people, as well as its leadership, began to show growing signs of alarm over the distinct possibility that China could enter the conflict and directly challenge the United States in Indochina rather than fighting through its North Vietnamese proxy. Reischauer noted that Sato's attitude toward the Vietnam War had suddenly become 'cautiously negative' (US State Department Archives, US Embassy Tokyo to Bundy, Box 2383, June 15, 1965). Clearly seeking reassurance by the American ambassador, Sato confided to Reischauer in close discussions that when he was electioneering he had publicly reassured the public that Vietnam was far away and there was no danger that Japan would get involved. Sato's nervousness began to worry Reischauer to such an extent that he soon sent a seven page personal memorandum to Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy expressing his unease. In this correspondence he warned that American actions in Vietnam could produce far reaching and serious side-effects in respect to American relations with Japan, grimly predicting a serious political shift to the left (even within the ruling Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) itself). He further cautioned that high level of anti-American sentiment caused by a 'rapid boiling up of the Ryukyu [Okinawa] problem both in Japan and Okinawa' could seriously risk ongoing American access to bases in Okinawa (Digital National Security Archive, Memorandum from Reischauer to Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy, June 24, 1965).

At the same time, the media, public perception and the opposition parties simultaneously began to express their disapproval of US actions in Vietnam and Japan's support of US military and strategic policy in Indochina, thus ratcheting up significant pressure on Sato. The Democratic Socialist Party of Japan (DSP) was so incensed that a party delegation personally called on Reischauer urging that the United States be 'magnanimous' and temporarily cease bombing as the 'stronger party in the quarrel' in order for Hanoi to demonstrate an interest in talks (US State Department Archives, Incoming Telegram from Reischauer to State Department, Box 2377, April 27, 1965).

Widespread public anger surfaced after 1965 due to a number of mishaps and the realization that Japan was supporting US military policies in Vietnam. A combination of the general public realizing that

Okinawa-based American B-52 bomber aircraft were involved in sorties over Vietnam (in response to the Tet Offensive), the explosion of a fuel-laden B-52 on the runway at the main Okinawa airfield at Kadena, the explosion at Shinjuku station in Tokyo of a railway car carrying jet fuel for US planes, as well as radioactive traces found in Sasebo harbor following a visit of the nuclear-powered American submarine USS Swordfish was all incidents that incited vocal anti-American sentiment and criticism of Sato. Another almost comical event which caused a public furor was a photo of a Japanese National Defense College instructor in an American B-57 before he took-off alongside the American pilot for a bombing mission from Da Nang (US State Department Archives, September 13, 1965). The photograph somehow made front page news in Japan creating embarrassment at the Defense Agency as well as with the US officials. Consistent pin-prick events such as these incidents would turn out to bedevil Sato's efforts to quell media criticism and placate the Japanese public's anger over the Vietnam War and Japan's role in assisting the US prosecute it.

In contrast, many in Washington saw this emotional public outcry as nothing short of collective ingratitude and a failure to comprehend the situation in a realistic light. A clearly annoyed Dean Rusk wrote to Reischauer in early 1968 complaining that: 'It is almost more than the flesh and spirit can bear to have Japan whining about Okinawa while we are losing several hundred killed each month on behalf of our common security in the Pacific . . . . I feel strongly that we must turn around this intolerable Japanese attitude' (FRUS, Telegram from the Department of State (Rusk) to the US Embassy in Japan, February 16, 1968, pp. 263–64). Reischauer ruefully replied that although Sato supported the US position there was a growing gulf between the Japanese public and government's views on Vietnam and that Sato 'has very much hitched his wagon to our star', adding that 'a failure in Vietnam would destroy him politically' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, Box 2249, February 23, 1968).

Even in the early stages of the conflict Reischauer was concerned over the potential damage that the American prosecution of the war could have on United States–Japan relations. He noted in a long telegram to Bundy in May 1965 that: 'Not since the crisis over the US–Japan security treaty has any issue so seriously affected the climate of Japanese-American relations as the bombing of North Vietnam' (FRUS,

Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State, May 19, 1965, p. 86). Reischauer explained that the biggest fear in Japan is that they will become involved in the conflict if it escalates, while he also felt that the Japanese have a 'natural sympathy' for the 'underdogs' (the North Vietnamese) because 'they are racially, culturally and geographically closer to the Japanese' and that they associate the US military's activities in Vietnam with those of Japan's in China during the Pacific War (FRUS, Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State, May 19, 1965, p. 88). He adroitly summed up Japan's official position as such: 'while doubtful of the course we have taken, are ready to support us verbally as committed allies' (FRUS, Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State, May 19, 1965, p. 88).

Nonetheless, we can see some irritation beginning to creep into the rhetoric of US officials as significant and tangible measures of assistance in Vietnam are conspicuously absent. Despite Reischauer's best efforts to enlist Sato's cooperation to address the 'need for expanded economic assistance to Vietnam to build up [the] economy and care for refugees' the ambassador dourly noted that Sato's response was 'basically evasive' (FRUS, Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State, September 4, 1965, pp. 124–26). The consistent argument used by Reischauer and proceeding ambassadors from 1965 that 'preventing [the] victory of communists in Southeast Asia was as much in Japan's interests as [the] US' was an argument that neither struck fear nor persuaded Japanese officials to offer greater material aid to US efforts in Vietnam (FRUS, Telegram from the Embassy in Japan to the Department of State, September 4, 1965, pp. 124–26).

Clearly, unhappy with Japan's unwillingness to get more involved, in late 1965 Reischauer lamented that 'we have been disappointed by [the] fact that [the] position of Japan as a whole over [the] past six months has been characterized by [a] desire to remain detached from [the] situation in Vietnam' rather than 'thwarting' communist domination in Southeast Asia (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo (Reischauer) to US Department of State, Box 2383 September 14, 1965). Reischauer essentially wanted Japan to publicly link the war in Vietnam to Japan's own interests in a communist-free Southeast Asia and to use the conflict as a catalyst for more 'long-range' cooperation on defense with the United States and aid to Southeast Asia (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo (Reischauer)

to US Department of State, Box 2383, September 14, 1965). These twin goals were to become consistent talking points for US officials in high-level talks with the Japanese as a means to coax more material support for their efforts in Vietnam and secure greater financial cooperation for non-communist Southeast Asia.

3 Japan attempts mediation

Possibly as an attempt to deflect public criticism of its support for American policies in Vietnam, or stemming from a genuine fear that the conflict was in fact escalating at a dangerous rate, Japan embarked on a number of low-profile attempts to facilitate mediation between the primary disputants in the Vietnam War. Armed with the bare minimum of acquiescence from Washington and viewing Moscow as the key to fostering a more conciliatory tone in Hanoi, Japan undertook a number of attempts to enlist the assistance of Russian officials.

In April of 1965, Sato sent a letter to the Soviet Premier, Alexey Kosygin, via his Minister for Agriculture (Akagi) who was visiting Moscow to ascertain whether the Soviet Union was willing to mediate in Vietnam (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation, Nakagawa-Berger talks, Box 2383, July 29, 1965). Although the offer was declined by Moscow it indicated that low-risk third party approaches were at least being considered by Japan as a means to reduce tensions in Vietnam.

As 1965 was drawing to a close, the Japanese foreign minister, Shiina Etsusaburo, made an interesting public comment indicating Japan's willingness to facilitate talks when by frankly suggesting that Japan should actively explore opportunities for resolving this conflict through discussions with the key nations involved, including the Soviet Union (Asahi Janaru, 1972). Similarly, when Miki Takeo, as the minister for MITI visited Europe in July 1965 he publicly suggested that Japan 'play a more active part to end the conflict' and alluded to another approach to Moscow in stating that 'Japan might cooperate with "neutralist" and some communist nations to further the peace process' (Digital National Security Archive, Memorandum from the US State Department Director of Intelligence and Research, July 30, 1965).

This public rhetoric by Shiina and Miki was in reasonably close alignment with the views of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs'

(hereafter MOFA) Bureau of Asian Affairs. Internal memorandums by this bureau noted that the conflict was a threat to Japan, and as such Japan needed to 'make an internationalist contribution as a free and democratic nation to the free world and Asia', meaning that it should not simply sit on the sidelines but attempt to open a 'diplomatic route' to Hanoi (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20060919, July 3, 1965). These diplomats took the view that Japan should be willing to 'bring Hanoi and Washington together for talks' as well as to consider the UN as a body to facilitate a negotiated settlement to the conflict (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20060919, July 2–3, 1965). It took almost another half-year for these plans to be proposed to the Americans by Sato in his official capacity as prime minister.

During Vice President Hubert Humphrey's visit to Tokyo in December 1965, Sato informed him of his plan for helping bring about a negotiated settlement to the Vietnam conflict, a stratagem which was basically hinged solely on coaxing the Soviet Union to assist in starting negotiations between officials in Hanoi and Washington. As Sato described to the Vice President, he wanted Shiina to carefully 'explain' to the Russians that the United States genuinely desired peace in Vietnam, and to further this process Japan would enlist the assistance of the Russians to persuade Hanoi to enter into negotiations with American officials (US State Department Archives, December 29, 1965).

Although it barely received lukewarm support from American officials, Sato soon sent Shiina to Moscow and the LDP vice-president Kawashima Shojiro to Egypt and the United Arab Republic (UAR) to muster diplomatic support for cajoling Hanoi into cooperating in talks with the US (Digital National Security Archive, Memorandum of Conversation between W. Averell Harriman and Eisaku Sato, January 7, 1966). In accordance with Sato's initiative, Shiina visited Moscow from January 16 to 22, 1966, where unfortunately, Foreign Minister Gromyko took a 'very tough and unrelenting attitude' toward the Vietnam situation in flatly announcing that 'the USSR was not in a position to mediate' (FRUS, Telegram from Vice President Humphrey to President Johnson, December 31, 1965, p. 135). The letter Shiina personally delivered from Sato to Premier Kosygin expressing the hope that the Soviet leaders would at least consider the Vietnam problem was also ignored (US State Department Archives, Japanese Prime Minister's Letter to Soviet Premier, Box 2379, February 25, 1966). At face value, the chances

of enlisting Soviet assistance was a long shot from the beginning due to the heated territorial dispute Japan still has with Moscow and the absence of a peace treaty. Clearly, with no apparent gains accruable to Russia combined with a frosty bilateral relationship, it appeared rather naïve at best to have expected an affirmative response to this request. As for Kawashima, his efforts also came to naught, with Egypt's Nasser simply informing him that the time was not right for mediation (the UAR ostensibly also expressed little interest).

Nevertheless, Sato appeared to have a back-up plan of sorts. On January 25, 1966 Sato announced that he was planning to send the elderly French-speaking diplomat Yokoyama Masayuki to a number of countries to develop support for a peace conference on Vietnam. Yokoyama's mission was to 'discover and exploit possibilities for a peaceful settlement of Vietnam' while closely cooperating with the United States to 'maintain free and independent countries in a peaceful Southeast Asia' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, Box 2377, February 17, 1966). The media reported that Yokoyama's overall goal was to 'make contact with Hanoi' through the North Vietnamese embassy in Paris with the help of the resident Japanese Ambassador and French officials. Following which he was to visit Poland, the UAR, Pakistan, India, and Thailand, while he publicly expressed the hope that he would be allowed to travel to Hanoi to assist in 'engineering' peace talks between Hanoi and Washington (*Asahi Shinbun*, February 4, 1966). Yokoyama departed for Paris on February 18 while US diplomats in Tokyo unsympathetically viewed this exercise as merely for domestic consumption so as to 'appease Japanese elements who feel the Government of Japan should play a more active role in bringing the Vietnamese conflict to [the] conference table' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Paris to Secretary of State, Box 2379, February 7, 1966). Therefore, seeing it as largely harmless and ineffective, American officials expressed no strong objections to this well-publicized exercise in Japanese peace brokering.

On examination, Yokoyama's mission was extremely vague and open-ended in nature. With no time limit, he was given the twin tasks of making contact with Hanoi, in either Paris or somewhere in Southeast Asia, and attempting to persuade the leaders he met in the various countries to press Hanoi into talks with Washington. In other words,

after Moscow's refusal to help, Japan was now casting its net wider. Unfortunately, for Yokoyama, Hanoi's representatives did not avail themselves to meeting with him; a result he assumed was due to pressure from Beijing. Considering Japan's close ties to the United States and its official support for American operations in Vietnam, it is difficult to imagine how Japan could have played a major role as an honest broker in bringing the warring parties together, thus adding some credence to US suspicions that these diplomatic efforts were simply aimed at appeasing the Japanese public.

Notwithstanding Japan's 'credibility deficit' as a potential mediator and the failure of previous efforts, officials at MOFA still clearly saw a need to 'do something'. In February 1966, extended meetings at MOFA between senior diplomatic officials from Malaysia, South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Hong Kong, Washington, and the Philippines, including the Director of China Affairs and the head of the Southeast Asian Affairs desk, gathered in Tokyo to discuss what Japan could do to address the Vietnam problem. This gathering of MOFA officials reached broad agreement that 'Japan's attitude should be to start work towards an international initiative to bring Washington and Hanoi together for talks with the view to reach a negotiated settlement' (MOFA Joho Kokai Shitsu, Document No. 2006-01105, February 22, 1966). Although no specific details were entered into, Japan's role in this proposal was to essentially act as a 'go-between' in facilitating the two warring parties to 'exchange opinions without misunderstanding' (MOFA Joho Kokai Shitsu, Document No. 2006-01105, February 22, 1966).

The well-publicized Shiina, Kawashima, and Yokoyama missions no doubt demonstrated to the domestic electorate that Japan's leaders were at least trying to bring the parties to the negotiating table, and that some blame could also be apportioned to Hanoi for the intractability of the situation. These diplomatic efforts therefore, without producing any tangible results, at least accorded some breathing space to Sato to more explicitly support American objectives in Vietnam. Subsequently, Ambassador Reischauer began to notice that the LDP was cooperating more effectively in relation to defense issues and the prosecution of the war in Vietnam. He noted that Sato and other senior LDP members were demonstrating a more 'forthright approach' in defense matters not only concerning the Vietnam War but also in respect to extending the security treaty in 1970, despite attacks by the opposition parties and

from the press (Digital National Security Archive, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo (Reischauer) to Secretary of State, February 14, 1966).

With Sato aware that Washington was not explicitly opposed to low-risk Japanese attempts at fostering mediation between the warring parties, he again attempted opening up a direct line of communication with Hanoi, again viewing Moscow as the key to achieving this aim. On June 2, 1967, Kawashima Shojiro (the well-known behind the scenes 'fixer' in Japanese politics) spent 7 days in Moscow as a 'special envoy' of the Japanese Prime Minister. During this time, he conferred with Premier Kosygin and at this meeting gave the Soviet leader a personal letter from Sato urging the leader to assist in bringing peace to Vietnam. Kosygin reiterated the standard Soviet position, however, that he was unable to do anything, and besides he saw Japan as too closely tied to the United States to be even involved in a possible mediation process (Airgram A-1628 from US Embassy Tokyo to Department of State, June 6, 1967; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 7–8).

One possible reason for MOFA occasionally floating an idea aimed at assisting in mediation was that they feared that Japan would be 'left behind' and thus made redundant once peace talks gained momentum. Japan's representative to the moribund Geneva Accords framework (Aoki Morio) was one such diplomat who prompted some discussion in Tokyo over his 'blue print' to ensure that Japan would not be sidelined during future peace talks on Indochina. Aoki proposed that Japan harness its substantial commercial sector to increase commercial relations with South Vietnam, which would in turn create a diplomatic opening for Tokyo to speak directly to officials in Saigon whereby they could be coaxed into negotiations with Hanoi (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 196802-1369-10, March 18, 1968). Aoki also suggested that if Japan was able to develop 'a steady track record of assisting in the peace negotiations' this would later assist it with realizing (commercial) opportunities relating to post-war reconstruction (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 196802-1369-10, March 18, 1968). At the very least, MOFA can be seen as floating low-risk ideas as to how to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table at regular intervals, although these plans rarely reached senior-decision-makers, nor were they fleshed out in sufficient detail.

Reflecting MOFA's stance, the last major unilateral diplomatic effort aimed at facilitating mediation occurred under foreign minister Miki Takeo, who was generally viewed as 'standing behind the US

position and hoping [peace] negotiations come through' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, Box 2244, July 31, 1968). In this plan he sent Nakasone Yasuhiro (as the Minister for Transport) to Moscow to attempt once more to enlist Russian support to speed up negotiations between Washington and Hanoi that had stalled in Paris. Yet again, Premier Alexey Kosygin bluntly refused and instead pointed out that Japan was now in a 'good position to ask the US to take 'the necessary steps' with respect to the bombing' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, Box 2244, October 30, 1968). Undoubtedly causing some embarrassment to Nakasone, the Russian Premier then went on to chastise him by declaring that he could not understand Japan's contradictory stance which was on the one hand 'crying for peace' while on the other 'Japanese commercial companies are profiting from the war and permitting US submarines to use Japanese ports' (US State Department Archives, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, Box 2244, October 30, 1968).

4 The Okinawa issue

The year 1967 proved to be the year where the politics of Okinawa's reversion and Japan's policies toward the Vietnam conflict began to clearly overlap. The problem centered on balancing Okinawa's reversion while not compromising or diminishing US strategic-military objectives in the region that relied on these islands. Okinawa was seen by defense planners in Washington as 'the core of the US defense system in Asia, [and] as a shield for the defense of Taiwan, South Korea, South Vietnam, Japan and Southeast Asia' (The Far Eastern Economic Review, March 27, 1969). Sato, however, had 'staked his political life' on the early reversion of Okinawa since becoming prime minister (The Far Eastern Economic Review, March 27, 1969, p. 628). Sato's private secretary, Kusada Minoru, claims in his personal diary that Sato told McNamara that the Japanese were 'unable to tolerate another country controlling Okinawa' and as a result 'thinking and talking about Okinawa and Vietnam' thus became a necessity (Kusada, 2001, p. 760). As a result of the political imperative, Sato had attached to the reversion of Okinawa, by 1967 a perceptible shift took place in Japan's diplomatic position, causing it to explicitly align more closely with Washington's

views on Vietnam. The subsequent effects were twofold: first, further attempts at mediation were shelved as the Okinawa issue clearly became the government's top priority; and secondly, Sato became under increasing pressure from Washington to provide increasing moral and material support to American efforts in Indochina.

Not surprisingly, moral support of American policies soon became more pronounced and explicit. Kishi Nobusuke (Sato's brother and former prime minister) and Miki Takeo both visited Washington to reassure US officials that Japan was in agreement with its Vietnam policies, with Kishi candidly stating that Japan 'understood [the] need for military actions' (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation between Kishi and Rusk, Box 2249, March 23, 1967). Miki, for his part, '"expressed appreciation for US efforts and sacrifices to establish peace and stability" and added that Japan wished to "do whatever she can" in order to cooperate with South Vietnam' (Digital National Security Archive, Miki's Statement on International Affairs, Sixth Meeting of the Joint United States-Japan Committee on Trade and Economic Affairs, Washington, September 13–15, 1967). In discussions with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Miki was even more supportive by asserting that the 'Japanese Government fully realized the sacrifice the US was making in Vietnam' and that Japan 'fully understood and supported the US position of preventing the infiltration of communism by force in Vietnam' (Digital National Security Archive, Memorandum of Conversation between McNamara and Miki, September 15, 1967). Remarkably, Miki also expressed 'sympathy' for the US efforts in Vietnam based on Japan's own 'problems' it had encountered when attempting to deal with the guerrilla resistance in China while it was under Japanese colonial rule (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation between Miki and Rusk, Box 2249, September 14, 1967).

Before arriving in Washington in November 1967, Sato undertook an extensive tour of Southeast Asia, with his most politically important visit being to Saigon.[1] Although the US Embassy in Saigon was informed

1 In late September 1967, Sato Eisaku visited Burma, Malaysia, Thailand, and Laos, and a follow-up trip was made in mid-October to Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand, Philippines, and South Vietnam (the Saigon visit was cut short by Yoshida Shigeru's death).

that Sato would not be discussing any new proposals aimed at facilitating peace talks, Sato did in fact confidentially discuss this issue in Saigon, albeit without any concrete details (Telegram 9074 from US Embassy in Saigon to Secretary of State Rusk, October 21, 1967; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 4, pp. 195–97). Interestingly, Sato also appeared willing to play the 'Asia card' in Saigon, as well as keep the possibility of a negotiated settlement at least a remote possibility. Surprisingly, he also stated that it was necessary to solve the Vietnam problem without the great powers, such as the USSR, United States, and China, because the Vietnam conflict was essentially an 'Asian problem' (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20061010 04-389-1, October 21, 1967). Highlighting the need to talk directly with North Vietnamese officials, he stated that 'Japan needs to find someone to talk to Hanoi . . . . we must open a channel of communication' (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20061010 04-389-1, October 21, 1967). While reiterating Japan's mediatory efforts thus far to achieve this aim, Sato added that this diplomacy must be secret and that based on his experience Moscow or France would be the most suitable 'diplomatic route' to Hanoi, although, he ruefully added that Japan had tried to open a channel of communication in Paris and Cambodia before with Hanoi, yet with no success (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20061010 04-389-1, October 21, 1967). In meetings with Saigon's leaders he also offered Tokyo or Kyoto as possible summit venues should peace talks take place.

Notwithstanding Sato's remarks about how Tokyo might be able to assist bringing the warring factions to the negotiating table, his trip to Saigon was significant in that it satisfied policy-makers in Washington that he was showing explicit public support for the Saigon government and by extension US policies in Vietnam (i.e. 'showing the flag'). In addition to being a major Asian power, the fact that it was the only trip to Saigon by a head of state that did not have military troops in Vietnam gave the US-backed Saigon regime a further degree of legitimacy.

While Sato was demonstrating his Asian credentials and statesmanlike behavior throughout Southeast Asia, he had sent his English-speaking confidante and Kyoto academic, Wakaizumi Kei, to Washington to reaffirm that senior US officials knew that Okinawa was a crucial issue for

Japan and to generally ensure that Sato's visit would proceed smoothly.[2] As Sato's personal envoy he alluded that the security alliance could be placed in jeopardy if Okinawa remained under American control, telling the President's Special Assistant Walt Rostow that they needed 'to strike a balance between the immediate and obvious strategic importance of Okinawa to the United States and the long-run advantage to the US of the Japanese-US alliance' (US State Department Archives, White House Memorandum of Conversation between Rostow and Wakaizumi, Box 2244, October 27, 1967). Rather persuasively he linked Okinawa's return to greater levels of Japanese cooperation, suggesting to US officials that returning Okinawa may actually motivate Japan to be involved in greater burden sharing. He firmly stated that 'a good case could be made for early revision' and that the United States 'should move towards an early reversion agreement, counting on the willingness of Japan to assume a more 'reasonable role' in its security arrangements with the United States and in support of Asian security' (US State Department Archives, White House Memorandum of Conversation between Rostow and Wakaizumi, Box 2244, October 27, 1967). Rostow, in responding, put forward the US position by stating that they required Japan to do two things: (i) to publicly state that the defense of South Vietnam was critical to the security of Asia and by extension Japan itself (a long-sought after objective); and (ii) given the financial pressures the US economy was under 'Japan could be enormously helpful by enlarging its assistance to Vietnam' through the soft loan window of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (US State Department Archives, White House Memorandum of Conversation between Rostow and Wakaizumi, Box 2244, October 27, 1967).

Wakaizumi's visit permitted both the Japanese and American sides to make their respective positions crystal clear. On the Japanese side, they linked the issue of the overall durability of the United States–Japan security alliance with the Okinawa issue through obliquely suggesting that a failure to return this territory could rupture bilateral relations

2 In a personal interview with Professor T.J. Pempel on November 24, 2007, he noted that Wakaizumi Kei was an 'American handler'. Such 'handlers' typically had excellent networks with US leaders, spoke English well, had earned a US degree, and were close to top political leaders in Japan. Their job was to plant the hints, generally create a cordial climate, and make suggestions that would make later negotiations between top American and Japanese officials proceed more smoothly.

(although Wakaizumi qualified this by noting that this was an 'un-provable theory'). He also assured officials that reversion would not reduce the functionality of US bases in Okinawa. The Americans expressed the desire for Japan to assume more 'burden sharing' in the political and economic spheres, while demonstrating 'a greater commitment to securing the interests of the free world' and providing 'continued support and responsible action on Vietnam' (FRUS, Memorandum from the Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Read) to the President's Special Assistant (Rostow), October 13, 1967, pp. 211–13). It was mutually assumed that if Sato was to agree with the basic tenets of the US position on Vietnam, progress would automatically follow on the reversion of Okinawa issue.

Reflecting Wakaizumi's earlier discussions, when Sato met President Johnson on the morning of November 15, 1967, the president called on Sato to provide more economic assistance to South Vietnam and the Southeast Asian region as a whole through its position in the ADB. Johnson made it quite clear that the Americans had the expectation that Japan needed to 'do more'. Following the Sato-Johnson talks, the joint communiqué highlighted Japan's support for US bombing in Vietnam, while they jointly acknowledged the strategic importance of Okinawa to both countries with both leaders pledging that 'the two governments should keep under joint and continuous review the status of the Ryukyu Islands' (The World and Japan). Clearly being mindful of its importance in regional security and to the war in Indochina, the United States was proceeding cautiously on the issue of returning Okinawa to Japanese control, ostensibly waiting to see how much more cooperation (mainly along financial lines) Japan was willing to offer in support of American strategic objectives in Vietnam and Southeast Asia.

From 1967 the goal of attaining the return of Okinawa became the primary objective of Sato's policy-making, thus resulting in a perceptible shift toward closer alignment with the United States vis-à-vis Vietnam. The *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that Sato's trip to Washington had 'brought about a significant change, more or less compelling him to take a position much closer to that of Washington', adding that Sato's support for American bombing was proof 'that Japan is now firmly and definitely sided with the US in escalating the war' (December 7, 1967, p. 443).

5 Japan and the Vietnam War during the Nixon administration: 1969–73

President Johnson's famous March 31, 1968 speech indicated to the world that the United States was now considering direct discussions with Hanoi, while he also used this opportunity to abruptly announce he would not seek re-election. This sudden announcement was widely seen as an admission of policy failure in Vietnam, thus helping usher in the Nixon administration at the following election. However, this turn of events caught Sato unawares, causing him significant political difficulty at home. The US ambassador noted that Johnson's speech had 'pulled the rug out from Sato' and caused many politicians from both sides to advocate creating some distance with American policies on Vietnam. While some politicians, presciently as it turned out, feared that this 'policy reversal' was a harbinger for Washington abruptly changing its hitherto hard-line on communist China (Telegram 7186 from US Embassy Japan to Secretary of State, April 3, 1968; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 287–89).

In a personal meeting with the American Ambassador (Ural Alexis Johnson) at Sato's private residence in Kamakura, the prime minister appeared shaken over Johnson's volte-face. Pressing home this temporary strategic advantage, Ambassador Johnson decided to ratchet up the pressure on Sato to step up Japanese assistance for American efforts in Indochina by stating that 'Japan should now decide whether it wished to see the United States accept peace at any price in order to save face, even at the sacrifice of handing over the South Vietnamese to Hanoi', adding for extra emphasis that 'now is the time to speak out publicly in support of a policy of establishing an enduring peace' (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation between Sato and Johnson, Box 2249, April 7, 1968). Expressing agreement, Sato replied that a precipitous withdrawal from Vietnam would be 'fatal' as the US presence in Vietnam had stabilized the political situation in neighboring countries; he viewed an American withdrawal as precipitating their collapse like 'dominoes' all the way to Burma (US State Department Archives, Memorandum of Conversation between Sato and Johnson, Box 2249, April 7, 1968).

By the time the new Republican administration took office in January 1969, Sato had set his sights firmly on gaining the return of

Okinawa while his administration was now frequently and openly expressing full and unequivocal support for American policies in Vietnam and the ideology that underpinned them. Although describing this as a *quid pro quo* situation would be an overstatement, it was clear in Tokyo that Japanese cooperation on Vietnam would ensure the timely and smooth return of Okinawa to Tokyo's administrative control (Pempel, 2007).

In Sato's first speech to the Diet in 1969, the interrelated issues of Okinawa and Vietnam were emphasized reflecting his twin foreign policy priorities at the time. On the former, he stated that he was 'especially determined to make progress this year towards realizing reversion', expressing his intention to meet with Nixon 'to determine the date of return on the basis of frank discussion in the context of friendship and understanding' (Telegram 630 from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, January 27, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 19–23). On the Vietnam War, he said that the 'international community looked to Japan to play a role in aiding [the] rehabilitation of post-war Vietnam' and to support the economic development of Southeast Asia in order to contribute to regional peace and stability. Understandably, diplomatic efforts toward mediation had lost their urgency as MOFA officials instead focused on the idea that Japan could do much more in the form of post-conflict reconstruction and financial assistance.

In June of 1969, the new foreign minister, Aichi Kiichi, visited Washington to open formal talks on Okinawa and pave the way for Sato to visit Washington in November. Notably, this was 1 month after Kissinger's renowned National Security Council Memorandum 13 (NSCM 13) had been circulated at the highest levels, which explicitly stated that Nixon had decided to 'agree to reversion [of Okinawa] in 1972 provided there is mutual agreement in 1969 on the essential elements governing US military use [of Okinawa] . . . . particularly in respect to Korea, Taiwan and Vietnam' (National Security Decision Memorandum 13, 1969).

To reinforce the high priority Japan had attached to the reversion of Okinawa, one of the key messages that Aichi brought to Washington was that Japanese public opinion was becoming increasingly impatient over the Okinawa issue and that nuclear weapons being stored on these islands would be highly problematic for Tokyo. Reassuring US officials, Aichi also made it clear that Japan had no desire to alter the parameters

of the bilateral security treaty, only to regain administrative control over a nuclear-free Okinawa. Reaffirming the central Japanese demand, Aichi explicitly told Nixon that 'Japan strongly wished to resolve the Okinawa problem by 1972 within the context of the Security Treaty' (Memorandum of Conversation between Aichi and Nixon, June 2, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 5, pp. 267–76). Nixon responded that the United States desired 'a greater role for Japan economically, politically and militarily' in the region within the context of 'burden sharing' for shared strategic ends (Telegram 231 from Secretary of State Washington to US Embassy Bucharest, August 2, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 9, pp. 19–24). To further bolster Japan's negotiating position (just one month before Sato visited Washington), Aichi announced his formal support for the mutual security treaty and acknowledged the treaty's 'automatic continuation for a considerable length of time', thus quelling any concerns in Washington that Japan would modify the treaty at its formal revision date in 1970 (Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and Sato, November 19, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 4, pp. 231–41).

By the time Sato travelled to Washington to secure a concrete promise on Okinawa on November 19, 1969, Japan could not be criticized for any lack of effort in preparing for this visit and allaying any concerns the United States may have had over its reversion. Repeating similar lines that had been used with Aichi, Nixon attempted to coax Sato into agreeing to greater regional burden sharing, stating that Japan should 'assume a greater responsibility for defense'; while he also informed Sato that he thought 'The world would become healthier if Japan were to develop a significant military capability' (Memorandum of Conversation between Nixon and Sato, November 19, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 4, pp. 231–41). As in previous cases, when American pressure was applied to Japan to increase its military potential, Sato prevaricated by using the argument that Japan faced unique constitutional constraints, although he firmly added that Japan 'desired to devote its great economic power to playing a more constructive role [in the region]'.

If Nixon had been in any doubt over Japanese support for American policies in Vietnam, they must have soon been dispelled by the content of Sato's speech at Washington's National Press Club. He provided explicit public support for the way the United States was prosecuting the war

in stating that 'I express my deep respect for the sincere efforts being made by President Nixon and all those Americans concerned toward the realization of a peaceful and just settlement of the problems of Vietnam and Laos, and also for the sacrifices that the United States has made to assure the people of South Vietnam the opportunity to determine their own fate without outside interference' (US State Department Archives, Prime Minister Sato's National Press Club Speech, Washington DC, Box 2245, November 21, 1969). Reflecting the post-conflict reconstruction role that Japan was now focusing on, he also added that he 'believes Japan's role should be, naturally, to cooperate in the rehabilitation and development of the economy of the Indo-Chinese peninsular' (US State Department Archives, Prime Minister Sato's National Press Club Speech, Washington DC, Box 2245, November 21, 1969).

Although trade friction had been subjugated to more important matters such as Okinawa and Vietnam, by the late 1960s the bitter textiles dispute did at times impinge on Sato and Nixon's talks on Okinawa due to intense lobbying by industry groups on both sides – although Nixon probably faced greater pressure as he was being forced to meet a domestic political obligation to Southern politicians who had supported his presidential campaign (Wampler). Demonstrating how domestic political dynamics were shaping this bilateral trade dispute, Nixon framed his problem as being similar to the Okinawa problem facing Sato, although in private talks both leaders stated that they did not want to link the two issues and effectively refrained from doing so (Memorandum of Conversation (Nixon–Sato), November 20, 1969; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 4, pp. 247–49). In order to defuse the 'Textile Wrangle' as expeditiously as possible, Wakaizumi and Kissinger secretly met and discussed the problem, which led to a temporary respite that was unfortunately premised on the 'misunderstanding' that Sato would successfully challenge his own textile lobbyists and force them to agree to voluntary export restraints. This perception of a 'broken promise' by Washington officials led to some distrust of Sato in future high-level meetings (especially by Kissinger) until the issue was finally resolved in October 1971. Fortunately, for Japan, the textiles dispute did not impede progress in negotiations over Okinawa with both sides presumably viewing the larger security questions that were directly related to the twin issues of Okinawa and Vietnam as more crucial to resolve.

The careful groundwork by both sides in the lead-up to the Sato–Nixon November talks, not only in terms of expectations concerning Okinawa but also in dampening down tensions over bilateral trade issues, significantly reduced the chance that things would go awry. Meanwhile, Sato's public proclamations left no doubt in American minds that Japan was in firm support of American policies in Vietnam. Although short on specifics, Sato promised more regional aid to Southeast Asia and funds for the future economic reconstruction of Vietnam, while faithfully acknowledging that in respect to Asia 'a continuing United States presence was absolutely essential'. Adding a personal touch, Sato stated that he had 'admiration and respect for the President's courageous policy [in Vietnam]' (Telegram 20507 from US Delegation France to Security of State, December 2, 1971; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 5, pp. 70–71). To Sato's undoubted relief, Nixon on his part agreed to have Okinawa returned to Japan by 1972 without nuclear weapons. Sato returned to Tokyo in a triumphant mood, with his success in Washington significantly boosting his popularity at home. The 'Okinawa effect' was to such an extent that when parliamentary elections took place on December 27, 1969 he won an unprecedented fourth term and his party secured 300 of the 486 seats in the lower house of the Diet (Kim, 1973, p. 1028).

Sato's gamble had appeared to have paid off. He had achieved his campaign promise to gain the return of Okinawa, he had not damaged the bilateral relationship with the United States, he had defused the looming crisis over the 1970 extension of the United States–Japan security treaty, and he had silenced leftist opposition and media condemnation of his pro-American stance. These goals, however, were closely in line with his core character as a politician. Sato was considered to be deeply conservative, pro-American and a shrewd politician who was a hawkish proponent of the security treaty, while being avidly anti-communist. Although he was not known for his great foreign policy skills, he was described as someone who could manage 'intricate and complex party affairs' and who was a 'Machiavellian political operator [who] controlled his party and the government like a medieval court politician' (Far Eastern Economic Review, October 10, 1970).

By the early 1970s, Japan's economic relationship with Indochina was rapidly developing in scope and depth. By 1970 Japan accounted for around one third of South Vietnam's trade deficit due to the export of

fabrics, motor bicycles, machinery and electrical appliances. Moreover, in response to US demands to contribute more economic aid to South Vietnam, Japan's financial contributions rose abruptly to $42 million in 1971 ($16.8 million allocated to grants and $25.2 million in loans), which was financial aid earmarked for major infrastructure projects seen as the first stage toward larger future projects that would encompass all of Indochina once the hostilities had ceased (Nobori, 2007). Japan was clearly positioning itself in an advantageous position by which to profit from the expected post-war economic boom that reconstruction in Indochina promised. In October 1970, an official Japanese economic survey mission undertook a visit to South Vietnam (followed in mid-1971 by a visit by the *Keidanren*) where several sites for major potential development projects were assessed. For example, developing Cam Ranh Bay into a major integrated industrial port complex was seen as one major project once the war ended (The Far Eastern Economic Review, 1971, p. 67).

6 Japan's first official contact with North Vietnam

On November 30, 1971, the MOFA Southeast Asian division chief Miyake Wasuke visited Paris for informal secret talks with several North Vietnamese officials. In this meeting, he urged that in light of significant geopolitical shifts among the major powers in Asia, Hanoi should enter into negations for peace as soon as possible, while also raising the possibility of opening trade relations with Japan (Telegram from US embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, January 13, 1972; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 215–21). This was, therefore, a meeting that plainly demonstrated how Japan could readily blend venerable diplomatic desires to act as a mediator in an international conflict with practical economic imperatives. This meeting in Paris, reportedly initiated by North Vietnam, resulted in an opportunity to make a trip to Hanoi the following year with the purpose of cultivating a better trade relationship with North Vietnam. An additional advantage in meeting with these North Vietnamese officials was that it helped counter domestic criticism that Japan's stance on Vietnam was too biased toward Saigon. It was also well known that through establishing early trade relations with Hanoi this would give Japan improved leverage in the post-conflict reconstruction phase.

Despite reservations in Washington over the purpose and timing of the visit to Hanoi, Miyake and a language officer from the MOFA Southeast Asia Division made plans to secretly visit Hanoi in 1972 in order to discuss establishing a more official trading relationship. Although, economic opportunities were no doubt paramount, Japanese diplomatic officials also insisted that the impending visit could assist Japan 'establish a pipeline to Hanoi in order to make some contribution to bringing peace to Indochina' (Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to US Delegation France, January 17, 1972; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 251–53). Unlike Japan's earlier low key efforts aimed at facilitating mediation, officials in Washington were rather displeased this time at Tokyo's attempts to reach out to North Vietnam. Secretary of State William Rogers saw Japanese attempts to establish trade relations with Hanoi as a 'step in the wrong direction as it would send a negative message to the Saigon government' (Saigon officials were concerned that Japan might extend diplomatic recognition at their expense) (Memorandum for the President from Rogers, Subject: Japanese Relations with Hanoi, January 14, 1972; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 222–25). Also critical, the Under Secretary for Political Affairs (former Ambassador U. Alexis Johnson) told the Japanese ambassador in Washington that he 'personally regretted Tokyo's decision' while both Nixon and Kissinger expressed a firm preference for Tokyo to wait until Nixon had made his historical trip to China before officially making contact with Hanoi (Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, February 17, 1972; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 3, pp. 133–35).

Probably thinking that they may as well make the best of a bad situation, as the Miyake mission was going ahead regardless of their protestations, US officials asked MOFA to raise the issue of American POWs in Hanoi on their behalf, which had been a sticking point in the peace talks for some time. Upon his return however, Miyake told US Ambassador Armin Meyer that he had raised the POW issue on two occasions while in Hanoi but as it had clearly provoked a negative 'emotional response' he had refrained from pressing the issue any further (Memorandum for the President's File, Nixon–Sato Talks, January 6, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials: Sato–Nixon Summit Meetings; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 8).

Unsurprisingly, MOFA's low-key visit to Hanoi did not affect the overall progress of the peace talks as the Americans had feared. Nor did

it lead to Japan rushing to recognize the North as the legitimate government of Vietnam. However, it did open the way for North Vietnamese trade delegations to visit Tokyo and serious negotiations to proceed on establishing formal diplomatic relations (achieved on September 21, 1973, in Paris). With Japan not wanting to miss out on post-conflict reconstruction work and Hanoi eager for trade and much needed economic assistance, bilateral relations were established smoothly resulting in a rapid increase of two-way trade. The Miyake example illustrates two important points. First, under the guise of mediating in the Vietnam conflict, MOFA pursued explicit economic goals; and second, with Okinawa no longer a bargaining chip, the potential economic rewards for Japan in establishing an early commercial relationship with Hanoi outweighed the risk of vexing officials in Washington.

7 The final years of the War

Not surprisingly at Sato's final meeting with Nixon in January 1972 in San Clemente, California, the twin issues of Okinawa and China dominated the discussions. Nixon used this meeting to reassure Sato that his forthcoming trip to China would 'not be at the expense of the commitments the United States has to its friends and allies in the Pacific' (Memorandum for the President's File, Nixon–Sato Talks, January 6, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials: Sato–Nixon Summit Meetings; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 8). Nixon and Kissinger also made clear to Sato that although the door was now ajar on restoring ties with China, Japan should not attempt to race Washington to restoring ties with Beijing, as they feared the Chinese would play off the allies against each other (Wampler, 2006).

Concerning Okinawa, Sato 'expressed his deep appreciation' for Nixon's efforts in ensuring a smooth reversion, while the president took the usual line in pressing Japan to play 'an increasing economic role in Asia, particularly Southeast Asia', which resulted in Sato announcing that Japan would provide $140 million for the non-communist countries of South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia (Memorandum for the President's File, Nixon–Sato Talks, January 6, 1972, Nixon Presidential Materials: Sato–Nixon Summit Meetings; Ishii and Gabe, 2001, vol. 8). Significantly, Japan demonstrated its allegiance to American policy on Vietnam by providing financial aid to Saigon even in the final months

before it fell, agreeing to provide $30 million in January 1975. By this time Japan's economy was undergoing rapid expansion and it was investing heavily in non-communist Southeast Asian nations as a strategy that not only earned it a degree of kudos in Washington, but also fitted in with its overarching trade policies aimed at expanding markets and securing raw materials. Reaching out to Hanoi to extend trade relations fitted within this overall strategy and can be viewed within the context of Japan's long-held policy of *seikei bunri* or separating politics from business. This frequently paradoxical separation can be best seen in the final months of the conflict when the new foreign minister, Ohira Masayoshi, described the Christmas 1972 bombings of North Vietnam as simply 'one process towards a peaceful resolution' while approximately a half year later he explicitly supported expanded diplomatic contact with Hanoi (Havens, p. 231; MOFA Joho Kokai Shitsu, Document No. 03-710-1, August 21, 1973). Accordingly, MOFA had few qualms about establishing diplomatic relations with communist North Vietnam. In February 1973, at the Southeast Asian Ambassadors' Conference, the attending representatives widely agreed that recognizing North Vietnam would not be problematic for Japan due to its good relations across a range of Southeast Asian countries (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 03-710-1, February 26, 1973).

Japan's bilateral relationships in Southeast Asia centered on a commercial relationship underpinned by reparations, aid, trade, and investment – a strategy that fell under the policy of 'economic diplomacy'. Accordingly, Japan portrayed its $28 million in aid to North Vietnam in early 1975 (a grant package to fund purchases of Japanese manufactures) as an 'investment' under its 'long-term plan for Indochina' that would 'ultimately be useful to Japan' (Digital National Security Archive, Telegram from US Embassy Tokyo to Secretary of State, March 28, 1975). Kissinger astutely summarized Japan's stance in the final days before Saigon fell in a memorandum to President Gerald Ford observing that 'Japan has not appeared so alarmed by the current Indochina crisis as many other Asian nations. Japan believes it can accommodate a North Vietnam-dominated Indochina in a way that will allow it to pursue its economic and commercial interests in that area' (Digital National Security Archive, Meeting with the Japanese Foreign Minister Kiichi Miyazawa, April 12, 1975). Notably, after hostilities had ceased in Vietnam, alongside France and the Nordic countries, Japan

was one of the largest aid givers to unified Vietnam, building on the foundations that had been tentatively built in 1972.

8 Conclusion

This examination of Japan's diplomatic and political responses to the Vietnam War not only sheds further light on the multilayered United States–Japan bilateral relationship, it importantly also implies that Japan is not simply a 'reactive state' responding to external (*gaiatsu*) pressure from Washington vis-à-vis global developments. In this case, while Japan could hardly ignore demands from Washington, it provided assistance well within it capabilities and domestic constraints with the expectation that it would receive considerable advantages in line with its national interests. Japan, therefore, demonstrated a high degree of rational and strategic planning and adept diplomatic maneuvering during this Southeast Asian conflict, thus discrediting the simplistic claim that Japan was simply an American pawn. Notably, in this case study Prime Minister Sato Eisaku was one of the central architects of Japan's astute policy of providing diplomatic and political support for American objectives in Indochina in return for gaining Okinawa's return (Kiuchi interview, 2007).

A combination of a strong political desire to secure Okinawa's reversion to Japanese administrative control and a deep-seated contempt for communism led Sato and his senior ministers to offer political and diplomatic support to Washington's military and strategic objectives in Vietnam. Sato fully cooperated with, and even publicly defended, the US right to use its military bases in Japan to prosecute the war in Vietnam, while a number of prominent conservative lawmakers forthrightly stressed in public and private statements support for the US military offensive. Notably, early diplomatic efforts by Japan to facilitate a negotiated settlement to the conflict were pursued in a manner acceptable to the United States, that is, they were low-profile and lacked any serious diplomatic or political resolve. In any event, as the Okinawa reversion issue took centre stage in Japanese policy-making from 1967 onwards, Japan's diplomatic efforts to mediate in the conflict perceptibly tapered off as Japan openly allied itself with American policies. This can be seen by Sato's comments in November 1967 explicitly stating that Japan is 'on the same page with the US on Vietnam [and] there is basically no

difference in our thinking on Vietnam' (MOFA Diplomatic Archives, Document No. 20060919 02-1369-2, November 1967). One Japanese journalist wryly commented: 'Japanese foreign policy vehicle runs, as it were, on a track laid down by the US' (The Far Eastern Economic Review, May 28, 1970).

Japan's public support at elite level as an Asian ally was no doubt useful to Washington in terms of public relations. However, Japan did not only provide moral support. Although military support was out of the question due to Japan's peace constitution, it provided consistent financial support to South Vietnam (averaging around $2 million per year from 1968 to 1972), as well as bringing several hundred South Vietnamese, Cambodians, and Laotians to Japan for study and training (St John, 1995). While strategically, the US air base in Okinawa was a useful forward staging post for B-52 bombing missions over North Vietnam.

Due to the unpopularity of the war, at home Sato was treading a delicate internal–external political balancing act in supporting American objectives in Indochina. Sato gambled that by pursuing the reversion of Okinawa, on the one hand, this would allow him to pursue a policy of explicitly supporting US policies in Vietnam on the other. Instinctively, he also knew that American cooperation over Okinawa was contingent upon Japanese cooperation on Vietnam. In Sato's *realpolitik* calculations, therefore, a direct link existed between the two issues (Kan, 2005 p. 11; Kiuchi interview, 2007). As Sato explained to the South Vietnamese Foreign Minister on June 12, 1969, during a trip to Tokyo, 'the Vietnam problem is a major political problem because it affects the Okinawa problem' (MOFA Archives, Document No. 02-1369-1-1, June 12, 1969).

In short, the substantial and sustained support and cooperation provided to Washington for its prosecution of the Vietnam War was to be expected, especially when strident nationalist forces at home were also loudly calling for Okinawa's return and the security treaty demanded at least a degree of moral support from Tokyo. Constitutionally forbidden to provide direct military assistance, however, Japan did provide significant moral support to the United States, with Sato's 1969 visit to Saigon being demonstrable evidence of this. Moreover, sustained large-scale financial assistance to Saigon and acquiescence on Tokyo's part for the Okinawa bases to be directly used for military objectives in Vietnam can also be viewed as explicit support.

Sato's strategy was a clear success. In addition to defusing nationalist pressures for the return of Okinawa, Sato also preserved the vital security relationship with the United States. In addition, in attempting to stabilize the region through large-scale Japanese aid and investment in line with US objectives of thwarting communism, this policy set the stage for a significant increase in Japan's political and economic influence in Southeast Asia following the US withdrawal from Vietnam. Japan's positive and pro-American response to the Vietnam War therefore, despite being unpopular at home, clearly was in Japan's long-term national interest. In fact, it can be seen as one of those rare cases where a relatively low-risk gamble produced disproportionately high returns.

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