History, according to the conventional wisdom, rarely if ever repeats itself. However, in the case of Okinawa and its significance in the wider U.S.–Japan post-1945 relationship, perhaps the most striking feature has been the recurrence of common themes and familiar points of tension in a complex interplay between national governments and among politicians, bureaucrats, and public opinions within both Japan and the United States. In September 1995 the rape of a twelve-year-old Okinawan schoolgirl by three U.S. Marines suddenly and shockingly provoked a crisis in relations between Washington and Tokyo. Virtually instantaneously, the event cast into relief a long-standing and festering issue that has periodically strained political and security ties in a partnership famously characterized by U.S. politicians (most notably former senator and ambassador to Japan Mike Mansfield) as America’s “most important bilateral relationship bar none.”

Since the early years of the Cold War, Japan had been a vital outpost in America’s strategic forward deployment in the western Pacific. The rise to power of the Chinese communists in 1949 and the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950 had quickly impressed on U.S. policymakers, civilian and uniformed officials alike, the critical importance of main-
taining a credible military presence on the edge of the Asian continent. Japan, given its geographical position, its past record of economic growth and prosperity, and its valuable human capital, was the natural location for the stationing of considerable numbers of American military personnel, drawn from all four branches of the U.S. armed services—army, air force, navy, and marines. Within Japan, Okinawa acquired a particular significance to U.S. military planners, largely again because of geography. Relatively close to the Asian mainland but also situated near strategically important U.S. allies such as Taiwan and the vital shipping routes of southeast Asia, Okinawa was identified early on as the keystone in the arch of America’s Pacific basing strategy. As early as 1948, George Kennan, the head of America’s Policy Planning Staff, had identified the island as vital to America’s long-term security interests in the region—a point of view that remained essentially unchallenged throughout the Cold War. The offshore island crises over Taiwan in the 1950s and most notably America’s deepening involvement in the Vietnam conflict in the 1960s ensured that Okinawa would remain critically important throughout the postwar period.

After 1991, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the ending of the Cold War, it might have been thought that the island territories that had been under U.S. control since the end of World War II (see below) would diminish in importance for U.S. military planners. Yet new strategic priorities, together with traditional threats to regional stability, continued to justify a large-scale U.S. military presence in Okinawa. North Korea remained an unpredictable and dangerous “rogue state,” China continued to build up its military capabilities in a fashion judged by some as potentially threatening, and high-profile territorial as well as energy and resource-related disputes in the region all necessitated a continuing U.S. military presence in East Asia in conjunction with America’s main and indispensable local partner, Japan. There are currently some forty-seven thousand U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan, twenty-eight thousand of whom are concentrated in Okinawa. The presence of such a large number of foreign troops in a densely populated country and the attendant need for the physical infrastructure and resources linked to the American bases have inevitably generated tensions with local communities. In Okinawa, the issue is as much one of fairness (as well as disagreement between central and local government) as it is a debate over conflicting post–Cold War strategic priorities. For many Okinawans, the particularly heavy burden shouldered by the territories in hosting U.S. forces reflects a general pattern of neglect if not conscious
discrimination imposed on Okinawa by the central government in Tokyo. Throughout their history of association and incorporation in the Japanese nation, dating from the mid-nineteenth century, Okinawans have had an ambivalent relationship with the rest of Japan. After 1945, cultural and linguistic differences and the bitter memory of arguably disproportionate suffering experienced by Okinawans in the closing days of the Pacific War, when the territory and its civilian population bore the brunt of U.S. marine attacks and close-quarter fighting, have caused many local residents to feel like second-class citizens, distanced psychologically and economically, as well as geographically, from other Japanese. Following the rape incident of 1995, this sense of grievance and discrimination expressed itself in the form of demands for the closure of American bases and irritation with the central government in Tokyo for requiring Okinawa to host such a large proportion of the U.S. military presence. For the coalition governments headed by Murayama Tomiichi and his successor, Hashimoto Ryūtarō, these pressures proved particularly difficult to handle—balancing the strategic and political demands of the alliance with the United States while also accommodating and diffusing substantial local criticisms.

Such leadership challenges were not new where Okinawa was concerned. A similar set of pressures had emerged in the mid- and late 1960s for the Liberal Democratic government of Satō Eisaku. Ostensibly the earlier crisis was more explicitly a clash between national governments, revolving around contentious issues of national sovereignty. Ever since Japan had formally regained its independence in 1951, the United States had exercised administrative authority over Okinawa and the Bonin (or Ogasawara) Islands (the latter a smaller collection of rocky islets to Japan’s southeast that included Iwó Jima, site of some of the bitterest fighting at the end of the Pacific War). These Article 3 territories, as they were sometimes described (a reference to the clause in the San Francisco Peace Treaty that assigned administrative control to the United States), were a key component of America’s East Asian security policy. Yet given their historic association with Japan and in light of pressure for their return from leading Japanese conservative politicians—most notably Prime Minister Yoshida Shigeru (arguably post-war Japan’s most important political figure and the founding father of Japan’s modern diplomacy and political economy)—both Washington and Tokyo accepted in 1951 that “residual sovereignty” over the territories would remain with Japan. This formula was, in effect, a temporizing and face-saving device, allowing the United States to pursue its
strategic agenda while avoiding undue strains to the fledgling and fragile developing alliance partnership with Japan.

Periodically during the postwar period, American leaders sought to reconcile these two at times conflicting sets of objectives. During the 1950s, Republican president Dwight Eisenhower, together with his astute secretary of state, John Foster Dulles, attempted to minimize local discontent and forestall the emergence of a grassroots Japanese and Okinawan campaign for full territorial reversion. Disputes over compensation for the forcible appropriation of land by the U.S. authorities, limited political independence for Okinawan residents, and insufficient local economic autonomy all conspired to strain relations between the Okinawans and their U.S. administrative superiors, most of whom were drawn from a military background. Surprisingly, such tensions were contained without destabilizing overall U.S.–Japan relations. In part, this was because Japan’s leading politicians, conscious of the important security protection afforded Japan by the U.S. bases, at times were willing to backpedal on demands for full-scale and immediate reversion. The importance of America’s nuclear guarantee, for example, was privately acknowledged by leading Japanese conservative politicians, so much so that when, between 1957 and 1960, the administration of Kishi Nobusuke renegotiated the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty of 1951, the Japanese authorities intentionally chose to exempt the Okinawan territories from the provisions of the revised treaty. It was tacitly understood that via this omission, the U.S. government would be freed from the conventions of joint consultation under the new treaty that would have generated pressures for an acknowledgment of the possible presence of U.S. nuclear weapons in the Article 3 territories.¹

Part of the explanation for the containment of revisionist pressures also lay in the use of economic incentives to woo the support of local Okinawans. Financial support from Washington was one way of buying off the opposition, as was the use of a relatively energetic program of promoting the emigration of Japanese from Okinawa to Central and South America during the 1950s. Moreover, where possible, the Eisenhower administration compromised over territorial issues, sanctioning the return of Amami Island (the northernmost of the Article 3 territories to the southwest of Japan) to Japan in 1953 and also exploring constructively the possibility of consolidating the Okinawan bases as a means of reducing the size of the U.S. military “footprint” in the Ryūkyū Islands, an extended chain of islands to Japan’s southwest, including Okinawa (the largest in the chain) and, at its furthest extent, close to Tai-
wan. Eisenhower, it should be noted, as a former military commander, had a keen understanding of the disruption and local irritation inevitably generated by the presence of foreign troops even among formally friendly Allied powers, and he sought during both his administrations to minimize these tensions without undermining America’s larger global strategic priorities. Such efforts were, however, invariably stopgap measures, managing but not resolving the underlying point of tension.

From 1961, under the administration of John Kennedy, Eisenhower’s successor, the Okinawa issue remained largely static. While strategic issues remained important, the focus of the bilateral relationship shifted increasingly onto economic matters, partly a reflection of the priorities of the Democratic administration in Washington, partly a response to the deliberate attempt by the new Liberal Democratic government of Ikeda Hayato to emphasize economic growth rather than the more contentious issues of rearmament, foreign policy, and constitutional reform that had proven particularly divisive domestically during the 1950s. It was only in the mid- to late 1960s that the first serious efforts to resolve the Okinawa question emerged, beginning with Satō’s bid to succeed Ikeda as leader of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and ultimately as prime minister. Satō surprised both public and elite-level Japanese opinion by arguing vigorously for the return of Okinawa—a sharp departure from the low-profile diplomacy of his predecessor. He followed this demand in 1965, shortly after becoming prime minister, with a dramatic announcement in Naha, Okinawa’s capital, that without reversion Japan’s “postwar period would not be over”—a reference to the incomplete nature of the territorial settlement that had marked the end of the Allied occupation and the arguably qualified nature of Japanese national sovereignty. Satō’s initiative, perhaps more than anything, created the impetus for a serious effort by both the U.S. and Japanese governments to reach a mutually satisfactory and conclusive territorial settlement. It proved to be a difficult and time-consuming process, spanning two administrations in the United States—those of Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon—and representing, in the judgment of U. Alexis Johnson, the American ambassador to Japan for much of this period, the most important issue in bilateral relations between 1966 and 1969. Formal reversion occurred in 1972, but the key agreement that committed both governments to guaranteeing the return of the territories was signed by Nixon and Satō in 1969. It is mainly this period during the 1960s that the late Wakaizumi Kei, formerly a professor of international relations at Kyoto Industrial University, addresses in this book. A deeply
personal memoir, the work documents Wakaizumi’s unusual if not unique role as a covert go-between, negotiator, and Satō’s personal representative in talks between the American and Japanese governments.

The background to Wakaizumi’s involvement in these important negotiations is detailed below, but first perhaps it is worth considering the factors that make his account particularly valuable. To begin with, the record he presents here reveals striking and relatively overlooked continuities between the present and past crises over Okinawa. Wakaizumi reveals repeatedly in his account the enormous amount of emotional capital invested by Prime Minister Satō in securing reversion—a point that resonates with the energetic commitment by Prime Minister Hashimoto in 1996 to resolve the controversy over U.S. base rights in Okinawa, particularly the vexed question of how best to relocate the U.S. Marine heliport facilities of Futenma in the middle of Okinawa.2 In involving themselves in the Okinawa issue, both Satō and Hashimoto were motivated (if we take Japanese accounts at face value) by a sincere desire, for emotional as much as political and tactical reasons, to settle the territorial issue. Both leaders, in their own distinctive ways, evinced a deep-seated and highly personalized commitment to grappling with the Okinawa problem in a manner that is often overlooked by Western audiences and commentators inclined to stress the image of a relatively faceless Japanese leadership motivated by the narrow pursuit of national economic self-interest.

Wakaizumi’s account also illustrates the importance of personal continuities and the legacy of past leaders in shaping the Okinawa debate. For much of the postwar period, and certainly between 1955 and 1993, Japanese politics was dominated by a ruling LDP that had succeeded electorally by persuasively selling itself to Japanese voters as the party of economic competence and high growth as well as the guarantor and arbiter of the demands of Japan’s more powerful interest groups—particularly rural rice farmers, corporate clients (especially in the construction industry), and owners of small and medium-sized retail outlets. Japan flourished, according to some political scientists, under a “one-party dominant” regime that adapted creatively, albeit gradually, to new domestic and international challenges, while also avoiding contentious ideological issues that tended to limit the appeal of the more doctrinaire opposition parties, such as the socialist and communist parties. In such a stable (although not static) political environment it is understandable why there should have been distinct policy continuities across the political generations. Wakaizumi’s behind-the-scenes account
gives us an insight into some of these ties between the past and present, highlighting, for example, the critical role played by former prime minister Yoshida Shigeru, not only in serving as a political mentor to Satō, but also in encouraging him to seek a resolution of the Okinawa problem. In parallel fashion, Hashimoto evidently looked to Satō as an example and inspiration in attempting to tackle the problem over U.S. bases in the mid-1990s.3

Continuity, however, does not imply coherence. Despite the existence of strong personal ties, these did not necessarily translate into a systematic or ordered decision-making process. Satō’s use of Wakai-zumi as his personal emissary in the Okinawa talks encouraged a very ad hoc, at times confused if not contradictory, set of negotiations. Some of this is hardly surprising, particularly after 1968, when the Republicans recaptured the White House. Legions of Nixon scholars (not to mention former officials), have described in minute detail the pattern of back-channel diplomacy practiced by Nixon and Henry Kissinger (the president’s national security adviser and later his secretary of state)—a process in which the White House intentionally and systematically undercut professional diplomats and officials within the State Department.4 Wakaizumi’s account corroborates this picture of bureaucratic infighting and secrecy on the American side and also vividly reveals a similar if not more pronounced pattern within the Japanese government. The Gaimushō, Japan’s Foreign Ministry, was routinely excluded from key moments in the Okinawa talks, and Satō deliberately, in part at Wakaizumi’s urging, chose not to inform his career diplomats, including his foreign minister, of Wakaizumi’s vital negotiating role. Here again, the present-day situation echoes this theme of bureaucratic rivalry and unconventional diplomacy. In the case, for example, of negotiations between the Hashimoto and Clinton administrations in 1996, the Japanese prime minister’s office turned periodically to personal advisers and was not averse to using Japanese Defense Agency (JDA) officials to sidestep the country’s more conservative diplomats.5

At a time when government by “spin doctors” and news management via unattributed leaking has become a commonplace feature of modern democracies, we should, perhaps, not be surprised by politicians’ attempts to control events and the policy-making process through limiting access to information and undercutting internal bureaucratic rivals. However, in the case of Japan under Satō, the character and degree of what some might characterize as self-interested manipulation and what
others, less charitably, might describe as blatant deception was arguably more troubling. It is in this respect that Wakaizumi’s account is perhaps most startling and explosive. Most notably, Wakaizumi’s memoir reveals a striking discrepancy between the government’s publicly stated position on nuclear weapons and its private diplomacy with the United States, in particular its willingness to accept that Washington would have the freedom to reintroduce nuclear weapons into the Article 3 territories following reversion.

Publicly, successive postwar Japanese administrations had explicitly and unambiguously rejected the possibility of Japan’s either developing its own nuclear capability or formally relying on the nuclear deterrent capabilities of its American partner. The basis for this decision is well known and hardly surprising. For the country that had suffered the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to embrace the nuclear option was clearly politically unthinkable, and both conservative and opposition politicians soon accepted that nuclear weapons were not only impractical in policy terms, given Japan’s size and the risk of provoking a first strike from a hostile nuclear power, but also represented an option that was too sensitive even to be broached at the level of political debate. Satō himself famously underlined this position by announcing in December 1967 in the Japanese Diet (the country’s national assembly) his three “nonnuclear principles,” committing the country to neither manufacture, possess, nor allow the transit of nuclear weapons through Japanese territory. It was the apparently categorical character of this commitment that makes Satō’s subsequent understanding with the Nixon administration so shocking. As Wakaizumi reveals, the prime minister secretly agreed with Nixon and Kissinger that as a quid pro quo for the U.S. willingness to return the Okinawan territories, Japan would effectively accept Washington’s right to reintroduce nuclear weapons in the event of a crisis—an agreement that was cemented by the secret exchange of a jointly signed note between the leaders of the two governments that, it was agreed, would be binding on subsequent administrations.

In a limited sense, Wakaizumi’s revelation is not altogether surprising. In 1981, Edwin Reischauer, former U.S. ambassador to Japan and eminent Japan scholar, had inadvertently revealed in an interview that the Japanese had implicitly recognized the right of U.S. ships carrying nuclear weapons to enter Japanese waters. For a number of years, security analysts and political commentators had assumed that some sort of understanding along these lines would have been needed to make the U.S.–Japan security relationship effective and credible. Yet there had
been little by way of concrete evidence to confirm the existence of such an understanding. Wakaizumi’s account, published first in Japanese in 1994, was the first instance of a reliable and involved participant presenting documentary evidence to support the contentious claim that Japan’s senior political leadership had deliberately and unambiguously reneged on the country’s nuclear principles. Since then there has been renewed interest in the nuclear issue and the disclosure of additional information highlighting instances in which Japan’s leadership has been willing to depart privately from its antinuclear position.

In April 2000, Fuwa Tetsuo, the leader of the Japan Communist Party publicized recently declassified U.S. documents suggesting that the Kishi government in 1960, in agreeing to the new U.S.–Japan Mutual Security Treaty, had accepted that U.S. nuclear weapons might be introduced into Japan. Similarly, independent researchers working in the U.S. National Archives in Washington, D.C., have recently uncovered documentary evidence indicating that as early as 1965, Satō, in private conversations with Ambassador Reischauer, had indicated his “common sense” belief that Japan “should have nuclear weapons.”

My own research into the U.S.–Japan security relationship in the 1950s has also revealed a willingness by senior LDP politicians deliberately to mislead Japanese public opinion on the nuclear question. Foreign Minister Shigemitsu Mamoru, for example, in 1956, despite publicly stating in the Diet that Japan had no agreement with the United States allowing American nuclear weapons to be stationed in Japan, was quite happy in a written exchange to reassure the U.S. ambassador at the time, John Allison, that the two countries had a covert understanding that would allow nuclear weapons to be present on Japanese soil.

Unsurprisingly, the official Japanese response to these revelations has been to deny the existence of such secret understandings. In certain instances Japanese government representatives have even gone as far as to request that the U.S. authorities reclassify documents revealing such covert undertakings (efforts that serve only to add weight to the claim that such arrangements were in fact genuine and binding on the two governments). The motives for seeking to keep a lid on such revelations are open to speculation. The nuclear issue remains sensitive among public opinion in Japan. Moreover, as Japan develops a more proactive regional security policy in East Asia, the government in Tokyo has powerful reasons for avoiding acting in a way that might antagonize some of its more sensitive neighbors, especially mainland China, which remains particularly concerned about the risk of a nuclearization of Japan’s
defense policy. Given this basic position, the relatively lukewarm official reception to the publication of Wakaizumi’s memoir in Japan is in keeping with the bureaucracy’s consistently tight-lipped stance of denial where nuclear issues are concerned. By contrast, the Japanese media devoted considerable attention to Wakaizumi’s memoir when it was first published and have continued to follow related events closely.

It was partly in recognition of the unwillingness of the official community in Japan to acknowledge such secret understandings that Wakaizumi himself was eager to see his work translated into English and made accessible to a wider audience. Visiting him in 1996 in his home in Fukui prefecture as he battled the final stages of cancer, I was struck by his personal commitment to communicating his story—not merely as a means of vindicating his own actions, but more importantly in order to provide an accurate historical record of these significant efforts. Wakaizumi devoted the best part of his life to the study of history and international relations, and it is easy to appreciate, therefore, why he should have felt the need to confront the past frankly and honestly. It would be fair to say that there is an intensity to Wakaizumi’s account that might strike some Western readers as excessive or unusual. Yet such a tone is not uncommon among memoir writers and is often found among Japanese authors, for whom a willingness to express sentiment and above all sincerity is often regarded as a virtue rather than a liability.

The reflective tone of his writing also hints at the personal dilemma Wakaizumi confronted in revealing his role in the talks and, by extension, another aspect of the Japanese cultural context that deserves mention. The ties binding many of the key Japanese actors in the events Wakaizumi describes—together with the related stress on mutual obligation and in particular personal trust—should not be underestimated. Wakaizumi was well aware that in telling his story, he was at one level breaking his earlier commitment (to Satō in particular) not to reveal his role in these talks and, of course, in the highly controversial deal over nuclear weapons. Yet he also recognized his wider obligation to posterity and the need to provide a full account of the past. It is precisely this sort of tension that explains the relative dearth of revealing historical memoirs by former policymakers and political figures in postwar Japan. Too often the commitment to maintaining past confidences and an extended sense of collective cabinet and extra-cabinet responsibility prevent former officials from discussing the details of key past events. In this regard, the importance of Wakaizumi’s account is easy to grasp. The
author provides the reader with a rare, personalized insight into the complicated world of Japanese politics and policy making without in the process sacrificing the objectivity and honesty of the professional historian. Wakaizumi is careful, for example, to cite extensively, where possible, from the accounts of his contemporaries also associated with the Okinawa issue in order to corroborate aspects of his own description and analysis. Wakaizumi also benefited from having access to significant portions of Satō’s extensive and at times revealing diary entries (thanks to the generosity of Hiroko, the prime minister’s widow), and these add further insight and immediacy to the memoir.

The importance of Wakaizumi’s memoir derives not merely from the author’s desire to set the record straight. It also is a consequence of the author’s extensive personal friendships and acquaintances on both sides of the U.S.–Japan relationship. Indeed, it was his network of contacts among senior and middle-level officials in Washington that in part explains why Wakaizumi was so readily used by the Satō government to further the administration’s objectives. As part of his academic training, Wakaizumi had spent a considerable period of time outside Japan. In the late 1950s he had studied at the University of London, and in 1960, while in his early thirties, he had spent about one year at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C.—a noted and well-respected graduate institute specializing in foreign policy. His time in the U.S. capital appears to have given Wakaizumi valuable and rare opportunities to meet a broad range of influential policymakers, both past and present, including figures who were later to feature heavily in the Okinawa drama. Dean Acheson, secretary of state under President Harry Truman; Paul Nitze, assistant secretary of defense during the Kennedy administration; Senate Democratic leader Mike Mansfield; Walter Lippmann, the distinguished columnist on foreign affairs; and Robert McNamara, defense secretary under both Kennedy and Johnson—all are individuals whom Wakaizumi recollects having met during his time at SAIS. Most important of all, perhaps, was Wakaizumi’s contact with Walt W. Rostow, formerly a distinguished economics professor from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and after 1966 Lyndon Johnson’s national security adviser. Just how a Japanese researcher was able to develop such an unusual set of influential friends and acquaintances is not immediately clear and is not explained in any detail in the memoir. The process certainly, one imagines, would have required a considerable degree of self-confidence and public relations chutzpah on the part of a relatively young academic.
What is clear, however, is that Wakaizumi was adept at maintaining these personal ties following his return to Japan.\(^\text{11}\)

The connection with Rostow ultimately provided the key that unlocked the door to Wakaizumi’s involvement in the Okinawa issue. In July of 1967, he was approached by Fukuda Takeo, secretary general of the LDP and a leading player in the Japanese government. The Satō government was interested in trying to make headway on the Okinawa issue and evidently saw Wakaizumi’s connections as an opportunity to sound out and gauge the mood in Washington. Wakaizumi at this point was not directly associated with the Okinawa question. In fact, his principal area of research was arms control and security issues more broadly defined—most notably the question of how best Japan should respond to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT), first proposed by the United States and Soviet Union in 1967. His expertise in arms control issues had already provided Wakaizumi with an opportunity in 1966 to brief the prime minister on the steps that Japan might take in response to the new treaty. Satō, dubbed “quick eared” by the Japanese media, had a reputation for cautious, incremental decision making and a well-developed instinct to consult extensively from a broad selection of official and nonofficial views. On the basis of this earlier association and his American network, Wakaizumi gradually became involved in an ad hoc and piecemeal process that was (and arguably still is) typical of policy making in Japan.

Little had been achieved on the Okinawa question since Satō’s dramatic 1965 Naha statement calling for reversion. A joint communiqué agreed to by Johnson and Satō during their first summit meeting in Washington in 1965 had acknowledged, in a very anodyne, nonbinding fashion, that territorial reversion was a mutual long-term goal but would be considered only once the regional and global security situation allowed such a step. However, two years later, individuals on the Japanese side, looking ahead to a planned second visit to Washington by Satō in November 1967, were beginning to argue that there was room for substantive progress on this issue. Although the Japanese Foreign Ministry cautioned against expecting a dramatic turnaround, private advisers to the prime minister, particularly members of a semiformal Council of Advisers on the Okinawa Problem (Okinawa Mondai Kondankai), felt that the mood in Washington was becoming more flexible and accommodating where the territorial issue was concerned. This sense turned out to be well founded. In June 1966, a small group of U.S. policymakers had established (far removed from the glare of media atten-
tion) a Ryūkyūs Islands Working Group. Led by Richard Sneider, country director for Japan within the State Department, and Morton Halperin, a young and energetic deputy assistant secretary of state in the Defense Department’s Office of International Security Affairs, the group had begun to push for a reexamination of the Okinawa question. Based on their familiarity of conditions in Japan and a close reading of the political mood, members of the group argued that there was a risk that failure to make tangible progress on the territorial question would impose damaging strains on the overall U.S.–Japan relationship. Ultimately the group produced a written assessment, which, although intended for the president, never got further than the secretary of state, Dean Rusk. Broadly speaking, the report made three recommendations:

1. The U.S. ambassador to Japan and the U.S. Democratic administration should issue a report every six months on the pressures for Okinawa reversion;
2. Measures, albeit provisional, should be taken allowing the inhabitants of Okinawa to increase their powers of self-government; and
3. Within five years, Okinawa, by whatever means possible, should be returned to Japan. Failure to do this might risk the abrogation of the Security Treaty or the forced closure of American bases.

Although these recommendations were not immediately translated into new policy options, the important development, rightly grasped by observers in Japan, was that the mood in Washington was shifting. Equally important from the perspective of both Wakaizumi and Satō was the familiar issue of personal connections. Wakaizumi knew both Sneider and Halperin, and once again the young professor’s extensive set of relationships helped create the foundation for a diplomatic breakthrough.12

In September 1967, Wakaizumi, at Fukuda’s prompting, traveled to Washington in an informal capacity to scout out U.S. official opinion on the Okinawa question, meeting, in particular, with Halperin and Rostow. In November, he followed up with a second trip, but this time in a formal capacity, taking with him the prime minister’s written accreditation. During this second, more important visit, he was able not only to talk directly with Rostow to ascertain the practical obstacles to reversion, but also to relay the results of these preliminary discussions directly to the prime minister, who arrived in Washington on November 13 for summit talks with the Americans.

There were a number of major difficulties blocking an agreement on
Okinawa. Within the United States a coalition of powerful domestic interests stood in the way of progress. America’s Joint Chiefs of Staff rolled out a familiar line in arguing that the security situation was too precarious to justify returning the Article 3 territories to Japan. Within Congress there were forceful voices claiming that the heavy toll in U.S. lives in the battle of Iwo Jima militated against any compromise with Tokyo, while some political critics claimed that Japan was a passive if not unsupportive partner of America in the Vietnam conflict, profiting from the procurement orders linked to the war but refusing to openly back the U.S. military campaign. Moreover, within the White House, there were powerful and understandable worries that Japan had failed to lay out in any substantive terms what it might do to support its main security partner in the event of a crisis. To defense planners, Japan’s security policy remained frustratingly ambiguous, and there were practical questions relating to a postreversion Okinawa that remained to be resolved. What guarantee, for example, would there be that American B-52 bombers, a critical component in the U.S. campaign against North Vietnam, would be able to operate unrestricted following reversion? Also, what terms and conditions would govern the likely storage of nuclear weapons (essential to America’s global deterrent strategy) once Okinawa was back in Japanese hands?

Obstacles on the U.S. side were paralleled by difficulties within Japan. In particular, the prime minister was at odds with his foreign minister, Miki Takeo. Satō suspected that Miki was placing his own political ambitions ahead of the larger national interest and, in an effort to secure a speedy agreement with the Americans, was too willing to compromise on the territorial question. Prior to the November summit in Washington, Satō committed himself to persuading the Johnson administration to specify in the anticipated summit communiqué a commitment to accept that a date for reversion would be agreed by both countries within a period of two to three years. Formally, the prime minister was unsuccessful in his bid, and the final communiqué included no reference to a specific time span, referring merely to Satō’s desire for agreement between the two governments on a date for reversion “within a few years.”

In other regards the November summit was considered a success by both sides. The two governments agreed that the Bonin Islands—Article 3 territories but not part of the Okinawa archipelago—would be returned to Japan, a decision that was finally implemented in June 1968. Moreover, Satō established a good working relationship with
Johnson, and officials on both sides privately acknowledged that the two-to-three-year goal concerning Okinawa was a desirable objective. Success here reflected the Japanese side’s willingness to provide a series of quid pro quos, indicating that it was serious about addressing the various reservations of its American partner. Satō used his visit to make an important address to Washington’s National Press Club in which he robustly backed the U.S. campaign in Vietnam while also demonstrating a willingness to provide financial assistance to Asia, either via the Asian Development Bank or in support for vulnerable governments in Indonesia and South Vietnam. The prime minister also, in his discussions with the president and his advisers, made clear that he was willing to look more directly at the question of how best to clarify Japan’s security responsibilities.

The ability of the two administrations to move forward during the summit can, in no small measure, be attributed to Wakaizumi’s role in seeking from the Americans some indication of their minimum conditions for progress. As a result of extensive discussions with Rostow, Wakaizumi was able directly to brief Satō, shaping in the process not only the substance of the prime minister’s National Press Club speech, but also enabling him to anticipate the issues to which Johnson was likely to be most receptive during the official summit meetings. Back-channel, informal diplomacy was, in effect, substantially helping to improve bilateral dialogue and the formal negotiating process. However, despite this progress, negotiations on Okinawa stalled during 1968. In particular, Lyndon Johnson’s personal and political commitment to waging the war in Vietnam took a heavy toll on the American president, exposing him to fierce domestic criticism and distracting him from matters not directly related to either the war or his domestic “Great Society” program of social reform. The territorial issue was, as a consequence, a temporary casualty of the political upheaval in Washington—a point dramatically highlighted by Johnson’s surprise public announcement in March 1968 that he would not be a candidate in the forthcoming November presidential contest. The diplomatic tremors associated with Johnson’s decision extended as far as Tokyo, where Satō faced opposition demands for his resignation largely on grounds of the prime minister’s association with America’s allegedly discredited Vietnam policies.

Satō successfully dismissed calls for his resignation but did little, where reversion was concerned, to bolster either his own political position or the country’s overall negotiating stance. Vague public statements
by the prime minister hinting at the need for compromise on the nuclear issue or suggesting that agreement on reversion might be secured rapidly (perhaps in less than two or three years) encouraged a head of steam to build up among both media and domestic public opinion in favor of a quick return of the territories. Moreover, reversion, in popular opinion, was to be on terms favorable to Japan—namely, “nuclear free and paralleling conditions within the Japanese homeland” (kaku nuki hondo nami). In other words, any agreement would need to be consistent with Japan’s principled opposition to nuclear weapons, and the terms applied to U.S. bases in the postreversion Article 3 territories would have to match those applied to U.S. forces elsewhere in Japan. Such conditions were bound to create new difficulties for Japanese and American negotiators, and it would take a change of administration in Washington and the return to power of the Republicans under Richard Nixon before the Okinawa talks could begin to get back on track.

It is at this point in the background to the territorial talks that one can most usefully turn to Wakaizumi’s account. Early involvement with the territorial issue during the closing years of the Johnson administration had ensured that Wakaizumi would remain an important participant in the unfolding diplomatic drama. However, as the bilateral talks became more focused on reaching a concrete settlement, the pressure and strains imposed on the main participants also increased. Wakaizumi was not insulated from such pressures. If anything, the need for him (in the interests of secrecy) to act largely in isolation, without informing either friends or family of his involvement, made his task especially difficult. Readers of the memoir invariably are likely to be struck by a spirit of self-sacrifice and commitment to a national ideal that cynics might label as overly conservative or too self-consciously patriotic. Ultimately, Wakaizumi needs to be judged in terms of his own account. What does not seem open to doubt is that the memoir represents an illuminating, absorbing, and at times even moving description of a unique form of personal diplomacy. In some respects, it stands (however subjective the original analysis) as a valuable primary record in its own right.

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