

# Revealing "Secret U.S.-Japan Nuclear Understandings": A solemn obligation of Japan's new government 「密約」は明かされるのか——新政権の重い責任 松元剛

Matsumoto Tsuyoshi

## Revealing "Secret U.S.-Japan Nuclear Understandings": A solemn obligation of Japan's new government

Matsumoto Tsuyoshi

Translation and Commentary by Steve Rabson

The Democratic Party's decisive victory in the August 30, 2009 Lower House election brings a change in Japan's government. With the Liberal Democratic Party leaving power, momentum is building to illuminate the darkness surrounding secret understandings concluded between the Japanese and U.S. governments. Previous governments in Japan have persistently feigned ignorance of two secret understandings from the 1960s permitting the U.S. to bring nuclear weapons into Okinawa after reversion. Former Prime Minister Aso Taro insisted recently that "no such understandings exist."<sup>1</sup>

Continuing to lie for forty years about these secret understandings, which are the source for maintaining the excessive burden of bases in Okinawa, is a "government crime." There has been no relief for hardships imposed by the bases because the Japanese government has followed a foreign policy of subordination to the U.S., turning its back on Okinawa's residents. Now comes the chance of a lifetime to break the spell of deception. The Democratic Party leading the new government has a solemn obligation to fulfill its promise to investigate and to make public these secret

understandings to ensure that history is accurately transmitted to future generations. Acknowledging them and restoring the right of information to our citizens will repair a crippling legacy in Japan's postwar democracy, and become a mirror that reflects its maturing. We cannot permit worries over U.S. displeasure to prevent their disclosure.<sup>2</sup> . . .

In his haste to sign a reversion agreement [forty years ago], Prime Minister Sato Eisaku acceded to U.S. demands that Japan pay a large sum of money [\$20 million for land and facilities used by the American military, which the U.S. was supposed to pay], and that, instead of banning nuclear weapons from Okinawa, the U.S. be allowed to bring them in during an emergency. After retiring as Prime Minister, Sato often claimed, as one of his major achievements, to have faithfully preserved the "Three Non-Nuclear Principles: No possession. No production. No introduction" as a national policy for Japan, the only country to be victimized by nuclear weapons. For this, he was praised worldwide, and awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1974. Noting his acceptance of the secret nuclear understanding, a book published in 2001 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Nobel Prize fiercely criticized the choice of Sato as "the worst mistake in the Nobel's history."<sup>3</sup>



### Sato and Nixon

The Japanese government's "tissue of lies" has now become its "coat of shame." It is only natural that a democratic nation espousing pacifist ideals should return this Nobel Peace Prize tainted with vanity. Japan is a country in which political custom inhibits criticism of deceased politicians' accomplishments, but continuing to honor this "great achievement," by which its citizens were deceived, only spreads the stain.

#### Translator's notes and commentary:

1. In Washington on November 22, 1969, Prime Minister Sato Eisaku and President Richard Nixon signed the Okinawa Reversion Agreement (*Okinawa Henkan Kyotei*), specifying that reversion would occur in 1972. On his return to Japan, Sato announced that

Okinawa would revert to Japan "without nuclear weapons" (*kaku-nuki*) and with U.S. military bases reduced to "the same level as on the mainland" (*hondo-nami*).

The emptiness of Sato's words were soon revealed, however, when he was questioned in the Diet about the agreement's specifics. Even if its vague wordings about nuclear weapons could be interpreted to mean that none would be present on the day of reversion, then set for May 15, 1972, nothing in it prevented their reintroduction later. Henry Kissinger, then Nixon's National Security Advisor, confirmed in his subsequent writings that the omission had been intentional and that Sato had agreed to the vague wordings on nuclear weapons. Furthermore, far from reducing U.S. bases to "mainland levels," the agreement permitted their permanent maintenance under the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty. To this day, 75% of the American military presence in all of Japan remains in Okinawa's 0.6 % of the nation's land area. (See Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years*, New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1979, pp. 327-330 and 1483.)

On June 30, 2009, *The Japan Times* cited the Kyodo News Service for an article under the headline "Ex-bureaucrat details secret U.S. nuke pact."

Vice foreign ministers had a "secret duty" to inform their foreign ministers of the clandestine Tokyo-Washington accord that has covered the handling of nuclear arms in Japan since 1960, a former vice foreign minister said Monday. Ryohei Murata unveiled the details about the secret pact during a telephone interview in which he agreed to give up his anonymity in speaking about the accord, on which Kyodo News reported in late May.

Holding the ministry's top bureaucratic post from 1987 to 1989, Murata, 79, is one of four former vice ministers cited in the May 31 report that said the accord has been controlled by top Foreign Ministry officials and only a handful of prime ministers and foreign ministers were told of it. He also indicated his readiness to disclose the truth about the pact if summoned by the Diet, although he said, "I maintain positive feelings about the Foreign Ministry . . . so I would like to decline" to testify if not compelled to do so.

The Lower House Foreign Affairs Committee is considering summoning witnesses concerning the secret deal, the existence of which has been denied by the government although revealed by U.S. diplomatic documents declassified in the late 1990s. Under the deal, which the two countries agreed on when revising the Japan-U.S. security treaty in 1960, Tokyo would tacitly approve the stopover of U.S. military aircraft or vessels carrying nuclear arms. . . . Murata agreed to reveal himself as one of the sources after the Fukuoka-based *Nishinippon Shimbun* and other media on Sunday started attributing reports about the pact to him.

In a March 18 interview with Kyodo in the city of Kyoto, Murata, on condition of anonymity, elaborated on how the secret was passed along to successive vice foreign ministers. Revealing that a document recording the pact exists within the Foreign Ministry, Murata said, "I heard from my

predecessor at the time (I became) vice minister that (an unpublicized) understanding exists between Japan and the United States concerning nuclear weapons, and turned it over to the next vice minister. "It was a great secret. The Japanese government has been lying to its people," Murata said.

2. In January 2010, Foreign Minister Okada Katsuya is expected to make public documents of the understandings that are available in Japan, at least some of which are thought to have been destroyed. U.S. government documents declassified in the late 1990s and available in the National Archives confirm the existence of bilateral understandings from the 1960s that allowed U.S. ships and planes to carry nuclear weapons in transit through Japan contrary to the LDP-led government's repeated claims that it was honoring the nation's "Three Non-Nuclear Principles." The understandings also permitted the U.S. to use its bases in Japan without restrictions during a military contingency on the Korean peninsula.

3. Others have bestowed this honor on Henry Kissinger, awarded the prize in 1973, the year before Sato. Some have called for revocation of Kissinger's Nobel. (See [www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1966.html](http://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h1966.html) -)

*Matsumoto Tsuyoshi is a journalist with the Ryukyu Shimpo.*

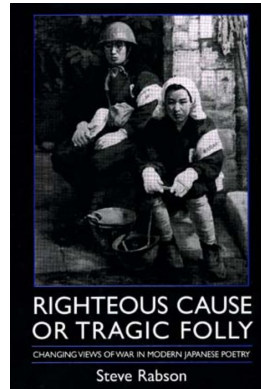
*Steve Rabson is professor emeritus of East Asian Studies, Brown University, a Japan Focus associate, the author of [Righteous Cause or Tragic Folly: Changing Views of War in Modern Japanese Poetry](#), and a translator of Okinawan literature. See also *Southern Exposure: Modern Japanese Literature from Okinawa*.*

*This article was published in Sekai in*

November, 2009.

Recommended citation: Matsumoto Tsuyoshi,  
"Revealing 'Secret U.S.-Japan Nuclear

Understandings': A solemn obligation of Japan's  
new government," *The Asia-Pacific Journal*,  
51-3-09, December 21, 2009.



Click on the cover to order.