

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

~~SECRET~~/NODIS/XGDS

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: President Nixon
Former Prime Minister Eisaku Sato
Dr. Henry A. Kissinger, Assistant to the
President for National Security Affairs
Maj. Gen. Brent Scowcroft, Deputy Assistant
to the President for National Security Affairs

DATE AND TIME: January 31, 1973
3:05 - 4:00 p.m.

PLACE: The Oval Office

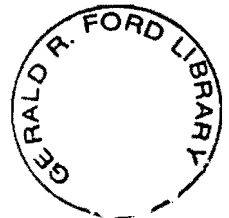
Sato: Many thoughts are in my mind, but all are of my gratitude to you. First, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude for the return of Okinawa and for your sending Vice President Agnew to the ceremony.

Although it was not in the original schedule, we said banzai to the Emperor and Japan. We should have said it also for the President and the United States, and I convey my apologies. I have been Prime Minister for years and I don't make that kind of mistake.

Some may criticize the return of the islands, but in my mind it was the decision of the century.

My gratitude is deepened further by knowledge not only of the fighting during World War II, but that Commodore Perry used to stop at Naha, so it has historic significance.

The President: This was a watershed achievement, signifying that the old days are gone.



DECLASSIFIED
E.O. 12958, Sec. 3.5
NSC Memo, 11/24/98, State Dept. Guidelines
By WX, NARA, Date 1/10/00

CLASSIFIED BY Henry A. Kissinger
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Sato: Perhaps Americans do not know that Perry had to go through Naha.

President: I didn't.

Sato: I am relieved.

I have just visited Columbia, where I told them what I have just told you.

President: This was a meeting of the Japan-American Society.

Sato: Yes. It was a dinner at Japan House. It was built on land contributed by Mr. Rockefeller. Mrs. Rockefeller told me they have children on both sides, Republican and Democrat.

In the second place, the fact that you have brought peace in Vietnam is an occurrence of great size. It was not easy to achieve. Had the announcement been a few days earlier, President Johnson would have lived to know it.

[Dr. Kissinger enters the meeting.]

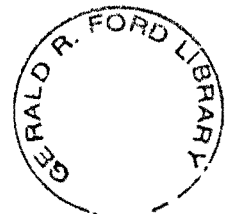
President: [Explained to Secretary Kissinger that Sato spoke of Okinawa reversion, Commodore Perry, and Vietnam, and that President Johnson, had he lived, would have known.]

Mr. Prime Minister, you should know that President Johnson did know. I told him on the 2nd of January that talks were going to begin. On January 15, when Henry returned to Paris, I had Henry call and tell him there was a breakthrough and we had halted the bombing. Two days later we sent him some papers of the agreements, so he knew before he died.

Sato: So he died in peace.

President: Yes.

Kissinger: In fact, his widow put out a statement he was so appreciative that he had been told, he was drafting a statement of support.



Sato: We are relieved that he knew.

President: Dr. Kissinger says the Vietnamese drive a harder bargain than the Japanese.

Sato: I recall that we suggested to Dr. Kissinger that since we had routes to North Vietnam, might we ask to help? You said no, and I detected your resolve.

In retrospect, had we made an approach, North Vietnam may have thought they had a friend. Bombing was the final stroke which brought peace.

President: The problem which many friends in the world did not recognize was that it was essential for the US to end the war in an honorable way. Many in this country thought that when I came into office that I, as a political act, would let South Vietnam down the drain, and blame Kennedy and Johnson, who started it. I was sure that what we call peace elements in Japan, France, Australia, who were so quick to criticize when we were trying to bring them back to the conference table and they said peace at any price, would have welcomed such a move on my part in 1969.

On the other side, more far-sighted leaders -- like Prime Minister Sato -- have seen that how the US stood by a small ally would show how the US could be relied upon by a great ally, like Japan.

Sato: It was a difficult situation. There was no declaration of war. It was a very complicated, difficult situation and the final situation you have brought about we admire very highly.

There was a considerable number of people engaged in peace activities -- Jane Fonda -- but you couldn't stop the war.

President: The people who had the greatest stake in the outcome were our allies in the world. If our allies saw we were undependable to a small ally, big allies would lose confidence in us. That is why it was essential that we show that strength and dependability.

Also it was very important for potential adversaries -- particularly great powers who are geographically closer to Japan than we -- to know that we will stand by our allies and stand by our commitments. Only that is how we avoid war. Not that we must be belligerent, but to say we won't do this or that encourages aggression. It is important

that we and our allies stand together so that potential enemies are not under the mistaken impression, misapprehension, that we will not react.

Sato: In addition to bombing, due to your actions with the USSR and China, they were not in a position to take action. Japan was divided. There is no consensus within the Japanese people; they support varying points of view.

It is difficult to obtain consensus within Japan. We are working on it. Tanaka, on his return from the PRC, said he would keep security relations with the US and carry out the Fourth Defense Plan. If given time, Tanaka will carry out the best for Japan. I speak as if Tanaka were a stranger, but he has inherited things which are partly my responsibility.

Needless to say, President Johnson's death was very sad to me. I feel very fortunate to be able to talk with you and dance with you at the Inauguration Ball. I am grateful for your kind reference to me from the stage.

President: The relationship between me and Prime Minister Sato has been the basis for furthering new relationships between Japan and the United States. I think it is very important that Mr. Sato continue to exert his influence in the party and the country because he understands the necessity of a close relationship between Japan and the United States.

We must realize that elements of the left in all nations are the same in attitude toward a system of alliances around the world, of which Japan is a part. They oppose because they seek changes which even they have not analyzed adequately,

They are the same wherever they are. Not just the Communists, but some socialists -- the left in general -- think that the way to peace is to disarm, disband alliances. A nice dream, if there weren't other nations with other ideas. My way to peace -- and Mr. Sato's, I know -- is that we stay strong, not bullying, not attempting aggression, but strength is the best guarantee of peace. Strength not only militarily, but through the alliances we have. That is why the alliance between us is so good for peace in Asia.



If the US were to become weak, or if "peace at any price" in either country were to prevail, the danger of war would be greatly increased.

Sato: What is most important for us is to strengthen even more the ties between Japan and the U.S. I agree with you, Mr. President.

President: On a personal basis, I want to say that you and your brother Kishi have always been so kind to me, out of office, and that these personal bonds have played a significant role in the new relationship which began at Okinawa and will continue.

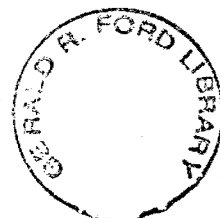
Sato: Four former Prime Ministers are still alive in Japan, but two are not very strong. Kishi and I are still strong. Maybe I should be diffident in saying we will make a contribution, and I am sure Mr. Tanaka will. On my return I will encourage him to strengthen the bonds between us.

I have not sent congratulations on your birthday. According to the Japanese zodiac, you are at the age where your life is renewed.

President: Tonight we will have an informal dinner of good friends. I am honored to have you in the White House again and whenever you come to the country.

Sato: I am visiting the US with two former ministers, the chief Cabinet Minister and the Minister in charge of Okinawa affairs. I would like to introduce them and have pictures taken.

[The Ministers were brought in for pictures and farewell.]



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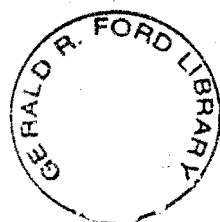
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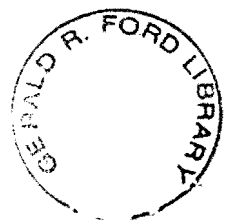


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that I, a political act, let SRE down down,
& blame Kennedy & Johnson, who started it.
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Need to say, Johnson death was ~~my~~ sad
to me. Full every promise to be able to talk
w/ you & dance w/ you at Irving hall.
Grateful for kind reference to me from stage

P Relationship bet us & S has been basis for
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Think it is very important that Sato continue
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Tanaka will. ~~Over my return~~ I will ~~try~~
encourage him to strengthen bonds bet us,
but not emerge as your worthy successor.
Job zero, you are at age your life is
renewed.

P. Tonight we will have informal dinner of great
friends. He used to travel here in Wt again
& whenever he comes to country.

S. Visiting w/ 2 former ministers, chief cabinet
minister & minister in charge of Okinawa
affairs. Would like to instruct them & have
picture taken

A. weight them in for
picture & present

