

Authority NNO 969057  
By TJ NARA Date 4/12/77

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
WASHINGTON

*Defense Dept.  
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May 26, 1972  
*5/26/72*

Dear Mel:

In Secretary Rogers' absence I am answering your letter of May 9 on the subject of homeporting in Japan.

We have previously informed members of your staff that we are prepared, if you so desire, to proceed immediately to inform the Japanese about plans to base the two combat stores ships in Sasebo. We feel that this could be treated as a non-sensitive and routine matter which would not require high level attention.

I can also assure you that the Department of State fully appreciates the operational requirements and morale factors which have led to the Navy's proposal to homeport a number of attack carriers overseas. Indeed, we believe that it would be highly desirable to station an attack carrier in the East Asian area. We are also mindful, however, of the vital need to ensure that all of our military services continue to enjoy maximum unrestricted use of our bases in Japan at a time when the political position of our security-minded friends in Japan has been weakened and tension over defense-related

*DEF 15 Japan-75*

The Honorable  
Melvin R. Laird,  
Secretary of Defense.

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issues there is running high. In this atmosphere, to homeport a carrier in Japan would raise substantial legal and political problems which could threaten sensitive basing and transit arrangements of great benefit which we have had with the Japanese for many years. Therefore, before seeking the views of our Embassy in Tokyo regarding an approach to the Japanese Government, we need to be absolutely certain of our ground with respect to some of these potential difficulties and the manner in which we would propose to handle them.

Insofar as facilities ashore are concerned, we need detailed information on the specifics of the proposal to determine whether and to what degree the carrier deployment would affect past agreements we have reached with the Japanese regarding the use of facilities and areas provided to the Navy by Japan. At a meeting at the staff level on May 19, our people provided yours with a series of questions on these subjects, and I understand that the replies will be available shortly.

The aspect of greatest risk to our overall interests, however, involves the question of prior consultation under the Mutual Security Treaty, especially regarding nuclear weapons. As you know, we have long felt it in our interest to avoid formal prior consultation under the treaty and the Japanese Government, anxious to avoid responsibility for our actions, has agreed. However, in view of the debate over prior consultation which the return of Okinawa and the transfer of certain aircraft units to Vietnam has aroused, it is highly likely that even if we decided formal prior consultation was not required, the Japanese Government would sooner or later be compelled by a vigorous public debate over the carrier deployment to ask for it, and we would be in no position to refuse to agree.

The Japanese Government, the opposition parties, and the media all believe or suspect that our attack carriers have nuclear weapons on board, and we believe even those who support our present arrangements on nuclear weapons would make a distinction between

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periodic port visits and a homeporting arrangement, as well as between nuclear weapons designed to defend a ship against attack and those used offensively. In any event, public inquiry would center on whether the carrier had nuclear weapons on board and whether the Japanese Government had violated its own policy of not permitting the introduction of nuclear weapons into Japan. This debate could jeopardize the frequent regular access to Japanese ports of our combatant surface ships and nuclear powered submarines. We must count these possible losses most carefully against the potential gains involved in proposing homeporting an attack carrier.

These questions need additional consideration before any decision is made to move ahead with a formal approach to the Japanese Government, and I would appreciate having your views regarding them. Since the risks to Navy and other service interests do appear very grave, we would want to have the Navy's views on possible alternative homeporting arrangements elsewhere in East Asia where sensitivity to the nuclear issue may be somewhat less than in Japan, such as at Manila Bay, where appropriate family housing would presumably be available in the Manila area. We would also wish to have your assessment of the possible utility of homeporting in Japan a carrier without nuclear weapons aboard.

Let me assure you that we are approaching this question sympathetically and with a desire to find a satisfactory solution to our Pacific carrier requirements. However, the potential foreign policy difficulties with this project make it incumbent upon all of us to explore in depth all related problems and reasonable alternative courses of action.

Sincerely,

  
Acting Secretary

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PM = Mr. Pickering  
PM/ISO - Mr. Stoddart  
PM/AE - Mr. Handy

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