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THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20301

17 JUN 1972

Honorable William P. Rogers
Secretary of State
Washington, D. C. 20520

Dear Bill:

I am responding to the reply of Under Secretary Johnson dated 26 May, to my proposals concerning the extended deployment of an aircraft carrier to Yokosuka and two combat stores ships to Sasebo. I appreciate the willingness of the Department of State to proceed with the Sasebo portion and the fact that State shares our view that it would be highly desirable to homeport an attack carrier in East Asian waters. Our proposal to couple the two requirements was based on the need to avoid giving the impression of piecemealing our requests to the Government of Japan. However, we defer to your judgment that we should separate the proposals and inform the Japanese now about plans to base the two combat stores ships at Sasebo. Our staffs can get together on the details for implementing this portion of the proposal.

I feel that the assessment of potential problems associated with the carrier contained in Alex's letter does not give adequate recognition to the many positive factors involved, and thus paints too pessimistic a picture. I accept your staff's opinion that the matter may involve sensitive political implications for the Government of Japan. Accordingly, I will defer to your judgment and that of the American Embassy in Tokyo on how best to approach the Government of Japan. I believe that the matter can be handled without stimulating public or political controversy concerning fundamental aspects of our mutual security arrangements.

Your Department's concern over the carrier appears to focus on the belief that prior consultation should be avoided, and that public debate over the possibility of nuclear weapons aboard our ships might jeopardize U.S.-Japan security arrangements. Concerning the former, I concur that it is in our interest to avoid formal prior consultation since we do not view this to be a major change in the deployment into Japan of US armed forces. Nor do I believe that stationing a carrier in Japan will necessarily raise the issue of prior consultation, particularly since the GOJ specifically requested that our homeporting of six destroyers be treated as a matter of notification rather than prior consultation.

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SUBJECT TO GENERAL DECLASSIFICATION
SCHEDULE OF EXECUTIVE ORDER 11652
AUTOMATICALLY DOWNGRADED AT TWO
YEAR INTERVALS
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Another factor that supports this belief is the routine nature of our visits and repair calls at Yokosuka during the past 20 years. The extended deployment will relate primarily to the presence of dependents in the area rather than a substantial change in the overall pattern of aircraft carriers in port in Yokosuka. In any case, it would appear that the recommended approach would provide the GOJ an opportunity to raise -- and resolve -- the matter of prior consultation in private if so desired. We might as well face up to this issue now since it is a fundamental factor in shaping our future relations with Japan in the area of military security.

Concerning the matter of nuclear weapons, I believe that responsible and thinking Japanese, both within and outside the government, accept the probability that at least some of our ships may carry nuclear weapons, but that it is not in their best interest to belabor the issue with the one ally that is underwriting their security. Under the Nixon Doctrine, one of our major responsibilities is to provide a nuclear shield and credible deterrent posture in the Far East. Japan certainly realizes its need for our nuclear umbrella, as well as our necessity to provide nuclear equipped and trained forces to maintain it.

In his letter, Alex requests an assessment of the possibility of homeporting in Japan a carrier without nuclear weapons aboard. We have examined this alternative carefully, but feel that it is neither militarily practical nor legally necessary.

To deny the nuclear mission to a Japan-based carrier would substantially degrade its military utility and create difficult operational problems for the remaining nuclear-capable forces in the theater. Such a degradation would be neither in the US nor the Japanese interest. Moreover, from the worldwide US perspective, a precedent set by acquiescing in Japanese pressure on this matter could lead to similar demands by other countries all around the globe -- a development which might ultimately threaten the viability of a significant portion of our sea-borne nuclear deterrent. Furthermore, unless we were prepared to reverse our long-standing "neither confirm nor deny" policy, there would be no way for us to take advantage of the fact that the homeported carrier in fact carried no nuclear weapons.

On the legal side, the record of our negotiations with the Japanese Government on the matter is quite clear. When Ambassador Reischauer discussed the subject with Foreign Minister Ohira in April 1963, Ohira confirmed the Ambassador's understanding that the prior consultation clause does not apply to the case of nuclear weapons on board vessels in Japanese waters or ports. No Japanese Government since then has challenged this interpretation.

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In response to questions concerning carrier homeporting submitted by State representatives at the staff level meeting on May 19, my staff provided replies on May 26. The Navy staff is continuing to develop more detailed information on such matters as pros and cons of alternative locations for CVA/CVW, use of Atsugi versus Yokota, Yokosuka/Yokohama housing, and other subjects of State concern. This information will be forwarded to you as soon as staffing is completed.

On balance, I believe that we must be forceful in not permitting U.S.-Japan relationships to evolve to the point where U.S. actions are unduly inhibited. U.S. forces in Japan are there to give substance to the treaty, and the fundamental facts of Asian security must be faced by the Government of Japan. I believe therefore that we should proceed with our carrier proposal by initiating private discussions with the GOJ. We can then base subsequent USG decisions as to how best to proceed in the matter on the Japanese response.

Sincerely,