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BACKGROUND PAPER

SUBJECT: .c.Okinawa

BACKGROUND:

✘ US base issues are a subject of considerable local concern in Okinawa, where 20% of the main island is taken by US facilities. Okinawans complain that 20 years after reversion and 47 years after the Battle of Okinawa, there has been little progress to reduce military installations. The end of the Cold War has exacerbated this feeling, and the people expect a peace dividend in the form of reduced U.s. military presence.

✘ In response, US commanders have made remarkable efforts to reduce training and disciplinary incidents. Progress under the Facilities Adjustment Program, which adjudicates land use issues, has been steady, and problems in that process are largely the result of Japanese domestic politics.

✘ Nevertheless, the GOJ, otherwise supportive of the presence of US forces in Japan, is on the defensive in Okinawa, and US commanders are often caught in the middle.

✘ Since the beginning of the year, attention has been focused on Okinawa and its attendant land issues by the approach of the 20th anniversary of the reversion of Okinawa to GOJ control on May 15th. Foreign Minister Michio Watanabe made a point of raising the issue with SecDef during a January visit. During his trip to Tokyo last month as the President's representative at the reversion ceremonies, Vice President Quayle delivered a modest package of returned land parcels, curtailed training, and a declaration of intent to resolve outstanding land issues.

✘ The presence of US forces in Japan is secure for the foreseeable future. However, political controversy over US bases in Okinawa, if not addressed in a creative way, could have negative implications for our ability to maintain a significant, long term presence in Japan. Distilled from the review of options in the previous five months are several points:

✘ Continued long term presence in Okinawa is essential to the Regional Defense Strategy in the Pacific.

✘ New approaches are required to solve some of the Okinawans' concerns while preserving essential capabilities and facilities there.

✘ The ball belongs in the GOJ's court. The US side does not receive credit for its forthcoming response to local concerns.

Recent LDP electoral successes in Okinawa have dealt those who espouse confrontation a heavy loss, and may enable a return to the LDP's characteristic low-key approach to issues. We should be able to address military land and training issues in a more cooperative atmosphere than recently possible. But the GOJ and LDP will no doubt continue to press us to make steady progress on base issues.

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TALKING POINTS

✓ Access to facilities on Okinawa and long term presence of US forces is essential to the success of the Regional Defense Strategy and forward presence in the Pacific.

✓ We are determined to reduce friction in Okinawa over military land and training issues in order to preserve long term access. A key element in doing that is the development by the US of a long term base consolidation plan for all US facilities on the island.

✓ We look forward to progress in the Facilities Adjustment Panel in order to resolve longstanding issues.

✓ Enhanced GOJ in-kind support will enable flexible solutions to training requirements for US forces in Okinawa.

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