

The Relationship between the United Nations Command and Japan: 1950 to 2018

Michael MacArthur Bosack
International University of Japan

Abstract

The United Nations Command is the multinational headquarters that led the allied forces in the Korean War. The command's Military Armistice Commission supervises the Armistice Agreement. While the United Nations Command and its activities are common knowledge in the Republic of Korea, the command's long-standing organization and functions in Japan are less well known. This relationship began in 1950 and is codified in the 1954 United Nations-Japan Status of Forces Agreement. The command's rear area headquarters, the aptly named United Nations Command-Rear Headquarters, has managed this relationship since 1957. After decades of few changes, the United Nations Command and its Sending States broadened traditional roles and missions from Japan beginning in the early 2000s. This led to expanded activities within the legal framework and security mandate governing the United Nations Command's relationship with Japan, strengthening Japan's ties with the command's member states, and supporting the "maximum pressure" campaign against North Korea. This paper examines the relationship between the United Nations Command and Japan, beginning with the institutions and interests underpinning the relationship. Next, it describes the Status of Forces Agreement and how the relationship functions. The paper concludes with a discussion of relevant policy issues, limitations to greater cooperation, and opportunities for expanded roles within the framework of the relationship.

Keywords: Japan, North Korea, South Korea, United States, United Nations, Security Council, Sending States, United States Forces Japan, United Nations Command, United Nations Command-Rear Headquarters

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Introduction

The United Nations Command (UNC) is a central feature of the security paradigm vis-à-vis North Korea. The UN Security Council authorized the command to enable UN-member states to provide military and humanitarian assistance to the Republic of Korea. During and after the Korean War, the UNC was responsible for marshalling forces from UN member states and directing combat operations of forces from the U.S., ROK, and 16 UN members known as the “Sending States.”¹ The UNC is currently responsible for maintaining the Armistice Agreement. While the command’s mission and composition has changed since its establishment in 1950, one country has played a crucial rear area support role in the UNC’s mission despite never having formal membership: Japan.

For many years, the relationship between the UNC and Japan was arcane. The UNC’s relationship with Japan was a seldom discussed subset of the U.S.-Japan alliance. The relative obscurity of the UNC-Japan relationship belies its importance. Japan’s strategic position near the Korean Peninsula, as well as its ready support to UN forces, was critical to military operations during the Korean War. For decades since, Japan has maintained its arrangements with the UNC to support the Sending States in the event of renewed conflict with North Korea. In recent years, the UNC has found new life in expanded UN resolution-based mission sets such as sanctions monitoring. The command has also provided a crucial stepping stone for Japan to increase its military cooperation with other countries, including Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (U.K.).

Despite its importance, there is a dearth of public scholarship on the relationship between the UNC and Japan and its interlocutor, the United Nations Command-Rear (UNC-Rear). The absence of such material leads to misunderstandings of the function, structure, history, and utility of UNC-Japan ties. This paper seeks to address this shortfall and clarify misunderstandings by examining the relationship between the UNC and Japan using a historical approach. The paper begins with a brief overview on origins of the UNC. It then offers a chronological review of the evolution of the UNC-Japan relationship focused on underlying institutions and interests. Next, the paper highlights specific details related to the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)² and how the relationship functions. It concludes with a discussion of relevant policy issues, limitations, and opportunities within the UNC-Japan relationship.

Origins of United Nations Command

The UNC is a multinational military organization formed to respond to North Korean aggression. Through a series of resolutions following the North Korean attack on South Korea on June 25, 1950, the UN Security Council called for member states to respond militarily in repelling the attack and formed a unified command under U.S. leadership.³ This command included “Sending States” that fought under UN auspices against North Korea—and Communist China following its entry in the war—until reaching stalemate. When the shooting stopped, the UNC remained a core institution of the Armistice Agreement, both in overseeing the maintenance of armistice conditions and providing a postured multinational force for deterrence.

The UNC’s primary mission was on the Korean Peninsula. Japan served as the critical command and control location and rear area base of operations during the war, enabling the Sending States to flow forces to Korea. The UNC Headquarters was collocated with the Far East Command (FECOM) in Tokyo. Forces operated from, and flowed through, bases across Japan. Although the UNC **Headquarters** moved to the Korean Peninsula in the late 1950s, there was a continued requirement for rear area functions. The aptly named rear area headquarters, UN Command-Rear (UNC-Rear) is responsible for these functions.

The UNC-Japan Relationship Over the Years

The evolution of the UNC-Japan relationship is predicated on institutions and interests among three players: the UNC, the Government of Japan, and the Sending States. Since UN **Security** Council resolutions form the original legal basis for the relationship, UNC interests have necessarily driven initiatives over time. However, as providers of the forces to carry out those initiatives, the Sending State interests must align with the UNC’s priorities. All the while, as the host for UN forces, the Japanese government serves as an advocate or veto player for any potential initiative. An institutional framework for coordinating those interests and activities facilitates interaction among the parties. Although robust during the Korean War, the relationship was static for decades until it was revitalized in the early 2000s.

In the early years, the UNC and Japan shared a common interest in restoring peace and stability to the Korean Peninsula. To that end, the Japan-based UNC Headquarters managed the war effort while the militaries of the United States (U.S.), Republic of Korea (ROK) and

Sending States executed military operations.⁴ At the time, Japan had the added incentive to provide strong support to UN forces. Although some Japanese politicians viewed the Korea conflict as less important than regaining its sovereignty and rebuilding its economy, when the General Headquarters⁵ began directing increases in Japanese defense capabilities and requesting Japanese support to UN forces, it presented the fledgling postwar Japanese government an opportunity.⁶ Supporting the first-ever UN-mandated military operation proved an attractive option for highlighting Japan's status as a responsible actor, so the country readily provided support in myriad ways.⁷ First, it was home to the UNC Headquarters and FECOM, the command and control centers for the broader war effort. Second, the country provided a staging area for troops flowing to the Korean Peninsula, a rear support base for logistics and medical functions, and airfields for executing UN air operations in the Korean Theater. Third, Japan provided logistics support to UN forces based in, or transiting through, Japan. Finally, the Japanese Maritime Safety Agency deployed minesweepers and other vessels to support the war effort directly, though it did so under independent orders from the U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet and outside of the direct UNC command and control structure.⁸

Indeed, Japan postured itself well and regained its sovereignty, though that change generated additional considerations for the legal basis of Japan's support to UNC. Under the occupation, the allies had authorities that no longer existed once Japan became a sovereign state. To ensure continuity in the relationship, a separate instrument governing the provision of logistics support and legal status for UN forces in Japan was necessary.

That instrument came in the form of an Exchange-of-Notes between U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida. Accomplished on the sidelines of the San Francisco meeting on September 8, 1951—where the U.S. and Japan signed their bilateral Treaty of Peace—the Acheson-Yoshida Exchange-of-Notes affirmed Japan's commitment to maintaining rights and obligations for UN forces in Japan in line with the U.S.-Japan bilateral agreements signed the same day.⁹

When the Korean War ended in stalemate, new decisions were necessary for what would come of UNC presence in Japan. In 1953, the UNC Headquarters moved about 45 kilometers from its location in downtown Tokyo to Camp Zama in Kanagawa Prefecture. The move was

a logical one: the U.S. Army was the executive agent for the UNC and Camp Zama was the largest army garrison in the Kanto Plain. At the same time, the UNC and the Japanese government entered into negotiations for a Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA). The negotiated SOFA was largely the same as the 1951 U.S.-Japan “Administrative Agreement”¹⁰ in terms of rights and obligations for forces transiting or based in Japan, though some unique requirements were levied upon UN forces given on the multinational nature of the agreement and the absence of a governing alliance treaty for the non-American forces. On February 19, 1954, seven Sending States signed the UNC-Government of Japan SOFA (UNC-GOJ SOFA); four others acceded to the agreement shortly thereafter.

Changes to the United Nations Command

In 1957, the UNC-Japan relationship experienced its first major institutional change. The security and political situation in Korea had stabilized enough to support the move of UNC headquarters to Seoul. In accordance with the UNC-GOJ SOFA, the UNC had to maintain a presence in Japan to keep the agreement valid. To fulfill this obligation, the UNC activated a rear area headquarters: United Nations Command-Rear (UNC-Rear). The UNC and the Japanese government agreed that five bases to be designated for use by UN forces, though that number would change over time. At the same time, FECOM was deactivated and the Headquarters U.S. Forces, Japan (USFJ) was simultaneously activated at the Fuchu Air Station. The separation of UNC-Rear and USFJ Headquarters was based on organizational structure rather than function: the U.S. Army was the executive agent for UNC-Rear; a U.S. Air Force lieutenant general commanded USFJ. The split of the two commands influenced the character of the UNC-Rear Headquarters. The organization focused more on maintaining the UNC-GOJ SOFA than coordinating with the Government of Japan. The latter mission is the principal function of USFJ.

After the move, issues related to the UNC-Japan relationship remained a secondary consideration in major geopolitical events, including the U.S.-Chinese rapprochement, the fall of the Soviet Union, and the September 11 attacks that led to the Global War on Terror. Although several administrations contemplated reducing forces on the Korean Peninsula and restructuring command elements, North Korea represented enough of a threat to the U.S. to keep its armistice institutions intact, including UNC-Rear and the UN-Japan SOFA.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Japanese government

was interested in maintaining at least status quo deterrence against a North Korea that routinely engaged in provocative behavior, including abducting Japanese nationals¹² and developing nuclear and missile capabilities that directly threatened Japan.¹³ For the Japanese government, its alliance with the U.S. was the key feature of its security. The UNC and its rear area support network remained a passive consideration; a subset of the broader alliance framework.¹⁴ With Washington and Tokyo focused on preserving the status quo for a multinational deterrent in Northeast Asia, there was neither the impetus to dissolve nor expand the UNC architecture in Japan.

During this period, significant changes occurred within the U.S.-ROK security relationship that affected the UNC. U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) was created in 1957 as a subordinate unified command within the U.S. Pacific Command. On November 7, 1978, the Combined Forces Command (CFC) was established and assumed responsibility for the defense of the ROK from the UNC.¹⁵ Concurrently, the ROK Government transferred Operational Control (OPCON) of South Korean forces to the CFC.¹⁶ This was a remarkable change for the UNC, which had over 930,000 servicemen and women at the time the Armistice Agreement was signed. At this time, only five Sending States retained accredited liaison groups in Korea; seven retained accredited liaison groups in Japan.¹⁷

Lacking a dedicated staff, the UNC fulfilled its duties through the UNC Military Armistice Commission (UNCMAC), which had been established by the Armistice Agreement to “supervise the implementation of this Armistice Agreement and to settle through negotiations any violations of this Armistice Agreement.”¹⁸ Other UNC-affiliated entities included the UNCMAC Secretariat, the UNC Honor Guard, the Sending State Liaison Group, the UNC Security Battalion, as well as the Japan-based UNC-Rear Headquarters.

Over the next three decades, successive UNC Commanders appointed officers from the CFC and USFK staffs to specific positions within the UNC Staff. The largest increase occurred in 2004, when 128 members of the CFC and USFK staffs—including 49 ROK military and civil servants—were assigned additional duties within the UNC.¹⁹ At the same time, the UNC opened 16 positions in the UNCMAC Secretariat for the Sending States and the ROK.²⁰

Changes to the UNC-Rear Headquarters

As the UNC sought to strengthen its staff capability and increase international participation, it opened a window for institutional change in

UNC-Rear. The USFJ Headquarters had been at Yokota Air Base for nearly 30 years, having moved when Fuchu Air Station closed in 1976. In 2006, the American and Japanese governments decided to make Yokota a joint operating base with the Japan Self-Defense Force, accompanied by a Bilateral Joint Operations Coordination Center (BJOCC).²¹ Through these initiatives, Yokota Air Base became the center of U.S.-Japan alliance coordination in the time of crisis or contingency.

The timing of this was especially auspicious, given strengthening ties between UNC and USFJ headquarters.²² The commander of UNC-Rear, Colonel Floyd Driver, saw an opportunity to maximize his headquarters' effectiveness in response to a Korean crisis.²³ He petitioned USFJ and UNC leadership to move the UNC-Rear headquarters to Yokota in order to collocate it with USFJ.²⁴ Adding to this impetus was the fact that the principal representative for the UN-Japan "Joint Board" is not a member of UNC, but the USFJ Deputy Commander. USFJ Commander Lieutenant General Bruce "Orville" Wright affirmed the decision with UNC Commander, General B.B. Bell, and Camp Zama's commander, Major General Elbert (Nick) Perkins, to gain consensus on the decision and to transfer administrative burden from the Department of the Army to the Department of the Air Force. By October 2007, UNC-Rear's move to its present home was complete.²⁵

There was one last change required before the transition to its current institutional state. The Commander of the UNC-Rear Headquarters was still a U.S. Army colonel. Even if the UNC and the Japanese government wanted to expand their relationship, Sending State support would be necessary. Recognizing a need to "internationalize" the UNC, U.S. Army General Walter L. "Skip" Sharp, Commander, UNC, sought greater participation from the Sending States beyond the billets within the UNCMAC Secretariat. General Sharp wanted to integrate the Sending States into the operational UNC chain-of-command. As such, he decided that "the conditions were right" for a Sending State officer to take command of the UNC-Rear Headquarters.²⁶ In 2009, General Sharp sent a letter to Air Chief Marshal Angus Houston, Chief of the Australian Defence Force (ADF), requesting Australian support for this proposal. The Australian Government concurred and agreed to provide a colonel-level officer to command UNC-Rear Headquarters. Group Captain Tony McCormack assumed command on February 8, 2010, the first non-American to lead UNC-Rear Headquarters.²⁷

The arrival of the Australian commander ushered in a new era in the UNC-Japan relationship. The UNC-Rear Headquarters was no longer just a subset of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Rather, the presence of a non-American commander signaled change to the Japanese government and gave greater weight to Sending State interests within the command's decision-making process. Group Captain McCormack later said this of the organizational change: "[M]y predecessor had done an excellent job in getting the unit bedded down at Yokota. The staff were keen, energetic and efficient for their size. What was lacking was the focus on strengthening relationships with all of UNC-R[ear]'s partners...they already existed but were not designed around how UNC-R would operate in a time of crisis."²⁸ To that end, UNC-Rear Headquarters focused on fostering stronger ties with the Tokyo-based liaison group, USFJ, and the Japanese government.²⁹

The Great East Japan Earthquake reinforced the decades of effort to sustain the UNC-Rear Headquarters' operational readiness and the more recent effort to invigorate coordination relationships in Japan. The March 11, 2011 earthquake caused a tsunami that led to a nuclear accident in northeastern Japan. Several of the Sending States responded following the "triple disaster." The Australian government dispatched three Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) C-17 cargo aircraft, an Urban Search and Rescue Team, and specialized equipment for cooling nuclear reactors. The Royal Thai Air Force sent two C-130s. The New Zealand government deployed its own Urban Search and Rescue team to support disaster relief efforts. In this situation, the UN-Japan SOFA did not apply; separate diplomatic clearances were needed. Regardless, arriving forces were familiar with the bases in Japan. The relationships that UNC-Rear Headquarters had with the U.S. military, the UNC liaison group, and the Japanese government enabled the UNC-Rear Headquarters to serve as the de facto "Multinational Coordination Center (MNCC)" to facilitate successful missions across the board.³⁰ This event showcased the operational importance of the UNC-Japan relationship and spurred additional innovation in ways to use it.

All of this coincided with renewing Sending State interest in the region. As noted, the Sending States were offered additional positions in the UNCMAC Secretariat. This push continued with the 2011 Forces Initiative, in which the Canadian Armed Forces assigned three officers to the UNC Headquarters staff and one officer to the UNC Rear Headquarters.³¹ At the same time, individual Sending States sought to

build bilateral security ties with Japan. In particular, Australia, France, and the United Kingdom, explicitly publicized their desire for increased security cooperation with the Japanese government.³² Although none of the countries initially sought to use the UN-Japan SOFA as a stepping stone to strengthening those bonds, all parties would eventually realize that the existing UNC-Japan relationship offered the legal framework and security mandate to underwrite their broader security initiatives.

With new priorities in the UNC-Rear Headquarters and renewed interest among Sending States, the last requirement was getting the Japanese government interested in advancing of the relationship beyond status quo. Although the UNC-Rear Headquarters commander does not require Japanese government approval for UN missions conducted within the scope of the SOFA, uncoordinated changes to established precedents—namely, the frequency and type of usage of SOFA privileges—could have led to protest from the Japanese government, or worse, calls to renegotiate or abrogate the SOFA.

The newly strengthened relationships between the UNC-Rear Headquarters, USFJ's Joint Committee Secretary (J03), and the USFJ Government Relations Branch (J54) were important to gaining support from the Japanese government. The Joint Committee Secretary is responsible for managing the U.S.-side of the Joint Committee, the organization charged with adjudicating U.S.-Japan SOFA matters. The composition and membership is nearly identical to the UN-Japan Joint Board, though the Joint Committee is bilateral (U.S. and Japan) organization. While the Joint Committee has met over a 1000 times, the UN-Japan Joint Board has convened only three.³³ Over time, the Joint Committee became a *de facto* avenue for UNC advocacy, and the relationship between the Joint Committee Secretary and UNC-Rear Headquarters Commander (who also serves as the Joint Board Secretary) was essential for dissemination of information and coordination of interests.

While the relationship with the Joint Committee Secretary was important for formal coordination, the relationship with the J5 Plans and Policy Directorate and its Government Relations Branch (J54) was essential for informal policy formation and coordination. Like the UNC-Rear Headquarters, the USFJ Government Relations Branch is a small, four member organization that plays an outsize role in intergovernmental coordination, maintaining counterparts throughout Japan's governmental ministries, the Tokyo-based attaché network, the UNC, USFK, the U.S.

Indo-Pacific Command (the successor to the U.S. Pacific Command), the Joint Staff, State Department, and the Office of the Secretary of Defense. Members from the USFJ J54 would occasionally attend meetings with the UNC-Rear Headquarters and the Tokyo Liaison Group, as well as support the formulation of policy and coordination strategies. The Government Relations Branch's combined knowledge and experience working with the Japanese government, as well as its extensive network of contacts, helped shape "win-win" scenarios for the UNC and Japanese government officials.

Meanwhile, on the Japanese side, there were three forces supporting a more robust relationship with the UNC: first, Japan's desire to advance individual security relationships with countries that happened to be signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA; second, the "maximum pressure" campaign in response to North Korean provocations; and third, the newly created National Security Secretariat.

After regaining the premiership in December 2012, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe used his resurgent popularity to advance several security issues. He published Japan's first-ever National Security Strategy in December 2013. One of the core tasks the strategy was strengthening security partnerships beyond the traditional U.S.-Japan alliance; Japan looked to develop relationships with Australia, South Korea, and the ASEAN nations, among others.³⁴ The Abe government set about negotiating new instruments of alignment with those countries, including Acquisitions and Cross-Servicing Agreements and Visiting Forces Agreements.³⁵ Although the government did not realize it in 2013, the UN-Japan SOFA would offer a stepping stone to greater cooperation that proved necessary due to unexpected North Korean provocations.

Not long after the Abe government announced its security strategy, North Korea increased its missile and nuclear activity. During 2013, there were only six missile launches; the next three years saw 19, 15, and 24, respectively.³⁶ Pyongyang also conducted nuclear tests in January and September 2016. By early 2017, the Japanese government adopted its own "maximum pressure" campaign³⁷ in conjunction with American efforts to isolate North Korea and disrupt access to resources that supported continued provocative behavior. For Japan, support from the international community, especially UNC Sending States, was necessary. The organization in charge of the maximum pressure campaign and garnering international support was also the newest in Prime Minister Abe's foreign affairs and defense apparatus.

Among its other defense agenda items, the Abe administration created the National Security Council (NSC) to bring greater policy-coordination and decision-making power to the Prime Minister's office. Entrusted with carrying out the NSC's responsibilities was the National Security Secretariat (NSS), a small organization launched in January 2014 comprised of 75 defense, foreign affairs, coast guard, and police officials seconded from their ministries or agencies.³⁸ The NSS served as the institution for advocating Japan's interests to expand security partnerships and coordinating the maximum pressure campaign.

In some ways by coincidence and others by design, NSS officials became well-acquainted with UNC and the potential "win-win" opportunities it presented. Soon after the creation of the NSS, the Cabinet Councillor responsible for North Korea³⁹ (a seconded official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA)) reached out to his counterpart, the Director of the USFJ J5⁴⁰, who helped arrange a tour of the UNC Headquarters and related facilities in Korea. The USFJ J54 continued the practice, ensuring that all new NSS officials received a thorough introduction to the UNC organization on the Korean Peninsula. It was through these interactions that the Japanese government's interest in UNC's institutions and missions became evident, and the opportunity emerged to secure Japan's support for expanding the UNC-Japan relationship.

In April 2017, after 57 North Korean missile launches and two nuclear tests in the previous three years, the USFJ J54 hosted a group of officials from across the Japanese government for a briefing by UNC-Rear Commander, Group Captain Mick Jansen. The participants included officials from the National Security Secretariat, Cabinet Secretariat, MOFA, Ministry of Defense, and the Japan Joint Staff. The purpose of that meeting: explain the role of the UNC-Japan relationship and propose new initiatives for cooperation between the UNC and the Japanese government.⁴¹ The result was positive, leading to active and tacit Japanese support for increased UNC activity in Japan as depicted in Table 1:

Table 1: UN Sending State Ship and Aircraft Visits to UN-Designated Bases in Japan, 2000 to 2018

Year	Ships	Aircraft		Personnel
		<i>Landings</i>	<i>Overflight</i>	
2000	8	8	5	2327
2001	2	1	0	614
2002	7	1	0	1629
2003	0	9	2	509
2004	8	7	0	1925
2005	7	6	0	2410
2006	6	8	0	2025
2007	12	14	0	4250
2008	8	8	0	2340
2009	3	9	0	794
2010	4	4	0	976
2011	1	4	0	297
2012	3	9	0	714
2013	5	8	0	2584
2014	1	10	4	555
2015	3	11	4	1616
2016	1	15	7	882
2017	15	20	4	2057
2018	14	38	10	4370

Source: United Nations Command-Rear

Ongoing Initiatives

With a solid institutional foundation and common interest among the UNC, Japan, and the Sending States, the UNC-Rear Headquarters has shepherded levels of UN forces activity in Japan not seen since the 1950s. In addition to the normal familiarization visits and orientation tours, new activities included observation of UNC command post and field training exercises.⁴² The command also began initiatives to expand participation in U.S.-Japan bilateral exercises and incorporate Japanese observers and/or participants in UNC-led exercises.⁴³ It has also underwritten bilateral security cooperation between Japan and individual Sending States.

While exercises are important, the UNC-Rear Headquarters has also been crucial in supporting real-world operations since early 2017. One such use of the UN-Japan SOFA for a real-world scenario was to support the return of a detainee. In July 2017, the Canadian government negotiated the release of Lim Hyeon-soo, a pastor who had been detained in North Korea for nearly two years. To get him home, the Canadian government flew him from Pyongyang to the UN-designated base at Yokota en route to North America.⁴⁴ Canada was able to exercise this option due to its membership in the UNC.

The UNC-Japan SOFA has also been used to support the enforcement of new UN Security Council resolutions; i.e., sanctions monitoring. With the escalation of North Korean provocations from 2014 to 2018, the UN Security Council issued five new sanctions regimes on top of the four already in place.⁴⁵ The Sending States opted to increase their sanctions monitoring activities, and the UN-designated bases in Japan became a staging point for several of those operations. Since 2017, the U.K. has sent three vessels—*HMS Sutherland*, *HMS Albion*, and *HMS Argyll*—to support sanctions monitoring activities. All made port calls at Yokosuka and/or Sasebo Naval Bases during their floats.⁴⁶ Australia, New Zealand, and Canada deployed reconnaissance aircraft to Kadena Air Base for the purpose of conducting sanctions monitoring missions.⁴⁷

Although renewed diplomatic efforts have slowed some activity related to North Korea, the conditions are still set for continued advancement of UNC initiatives with Japan. While not specifically naming the UNC, Japan's 2018 National Defense Program Guidelines called for increased security cooperation with Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, the U.K., and the U.S., signaling its intent to continue these on-going efforts.⁴⁸ While limitations on integration of the Japan Self-Defense Forces exist, the foundation is set for continuing this new era of the UNC-Japan relationship.

The UN-Japan Status of Forces Agreement

The 1954 UN-Japan Status of Forces Agreement provides the legal basis for UN forces transiting through or operating from Japan. It includes negotiated rights and obligations, while serving as an instrument of alignment for Japan and the other signatories vis-à-vis the North Korean threat. In plain terms, the SOFA is the document that showcases Japan's willingness to side with UN forces against North Korea and provides the legal framework for how it will support the UNC.

There were seven signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA when the agreement came into force in 1954: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the Philippines, South Africa, the U.K., and the U.S. Italy, France, Thailand, and Turkey acceded to the SOFA shortly after the original signing ceremony. Over time, South Africa and Italy became non-active members of UNC; when they did, their UN-Japan SOFA privileges lapsed.⁴⁹ The nine active SOFA signatories⁵⁰ are Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand, Turkey, the U.K., and the U.S.⁵¹

As with any international agreement, there are both rights and obligations, and UN forces must adhere to five major requirements in order to maintain their SOFA privileges.

First, the UNC must maintain a presence in Japan. The UNC-Rear Headquarters fulfills this requirement. If no UNC element physically remains in Japan, the legal basis goes away, and UNC-Rear Headquarters has 90 days to withdraw from the country entirely.

Second, the UNC presence in Japan must be multinational; at least one of its assigned personnel must be a non-American from one of the other signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA. For many years, the “Force Representative” billet fulfilled this requirement; it was the only multinational position within the UNC Rear Headquarters. As noted, the RAAF provided an officer to command the UNC-Rear headquarters in 2010, so two billets are now multinational.

Third, the U.S. and Japanese governments must mutually designate U.S. administered bases for co-utilization by the UNC. At the time the SOFA was negotiated, the Japan Self-Defense Forces did not exist. The Japanese government had no desire to designate civilian airports and seaports for UNC military use. As a result, the governments fulfilled this requirement by agreeing to a list of dual-flagged U.S. bases to host Sending State forces.

Fourth, the UNC designated bases must fly the UN flag. Thus, all UN-designated bases in Japan fly three flags: the American flag, the Japanese flag, and the UN flag.

Fifth, the UNC-Rear Headquarters must exercise the use of those bases for Sending State forces. The SOFA does not mandate the type or scale of usage, meaning aircraft, vessels, or personnel visits are sufficient for meeting those requirements.

The Joint Board

The UN-Japan SOFA mandated the creation of a “Joint Board,” which is an intergovernmental committee intended to negotiate and adjudicate any matters pertaining to the UN-Japan SOFA. Figure 1 depicts the organization of the Joint Board:

Figure 1: The United Nations Command-Japan Joint Board

UNC	Japan
Principal Representative: Deputy Commander, USFJ	Principal Representative: Director-General, North American Affairs Bureau, MOFA Delegated to: Deputy Director-General North American Affairs Bureau, MOFA
Secretary: Commander, UNC-Rear	Secretary: Director, SOFA Division, MOFA
Deputy Representatives: Political Minister-Counselor, U.S. Embassy, Tokyo UN Force Representatives from UNC Liaison Groups	Deputy Representatives: Director, Japan-U.S. Treaty Division, MOFA Members of the Japanese Government as required by functional area

Source: Created by author from multiple sources.

The Joint Board has only met three times: once to convene the board and twice to designate UN bases in Japan. Most matters related to UNC have been handled within the bilateral U.S.-Japan Joint Committee. The Joint Committee and Joint Board are nearly identical organizations: both are mandated by SOFAs and chaired by the same principal representatives. However, instead of meeting three times, the Joint Committee has convened over 1000 times (nearly every two weeks). As such, the UNC-Rear Headquarters and Japanese government officials have, at times, requested the Joint Committee handle UN-Japan SOFA issues on the sidelines of its regular meetings; e.g. the temporary designation of Naval Air Facility Atsugi as a UN base in 2001.

United Nations Command-Rear Bases

In order to operate the headquarters and execute UNC functions in Japan, the UN-Japan SOFA provides bases for use by UN forces. There are currently seven UN-designated bases in Japan. There were nine when the UNC Rear Headquarters was established in 1957 and the bases designated for use by the UN have changed over time. Table 2 shows past and current UN-designated bases.

Table 2: United Nations-designated Bases in Japan⁵²

Base	From	To	Primary Function(s)	Remarks
Camp Zama	Oct 1957	—	HQ RSOI	Former UNC and UNC-Rear HQ location (1953-2007)
Fuchu Air Station	Oct 1957	Feb 1976	Airfield	Base closed.
Sasebo Naval Base	Oct 1957	—	Port; Maintenance	
Tachikawa Air Base	July 1957	Sep 1977	Airfield	Base closed.
Yokosuka Naval Base	July 1957	—	Port; Maintenance	
Camp Drake/Asaka	June 1958	Sep 1977	RSOI	Transferred to Japan Ground Self Defense Force
Kishine Barracks	April 1959	Aug 1972	RSOI; Hospital	Base closed.
Yokota Air Base	Oct 1969	—	Airfield	Current UNC HQ location (2007-present)
MCAS Futenma	May 1972	—	Airfield	Designated after Okinawa Reversion
Kadena Air Base	May 1972	—	Airfield	Designated after Okinawa Reversion
Naval Base White Beach	May 1972	—	Port; logistics	Designated after Okinawa Reversion
NAF Atsugi	Oct 2001	July 2002	Airfield	Temporary replacement while Yokota Airbase was undergoing airfield maintenance

Source: Created by the author from multiple sources.

Since the establishment of the UNC-Rear Headquarters, two base realignment initiatives have affected UN-designated bases: the Kanto Plain Consolidation and the Okinawa Reversion. The Kanto Plain Consolidation was an initiative in the early seventies to close the majority of U.S. military bases in Tokyo and nearby prefectures. In 1970, the U.S. military began unilaterally seeking ways to reduce the costs of its bases in those areas.⁵³ Given the relative stability of the security environment and redundancy of capabilities—there were three air bases within 20 kilometers of one another—the U.S. sought to reduce the number of personnel in the area and consolidate remaining units on fewer bases. At the same time, the Japanese government looked to capitalize on the highly valuable land in the Tokyo metropolitan and surrounding areas. As a result, the two governments negotiated the full or partial return of six major facilities, including three that were UN designated bases.⁵⁴

The Kanto Plain Consolidation had two major effects on the UNC: first, it created a requirement to seek UN-designated bases elsewhere in Japan to make up for the facilities it would lose. Second, the consolidation of American bases meant less room for non-U.S. forces. While UNC-Rear Headquarters does not require additional “Maximum-on-Ground” (MOG) capacity in peacetime, it would be critical in contingency as U.S. forces transit through Japan and leave little room for Sending States units.

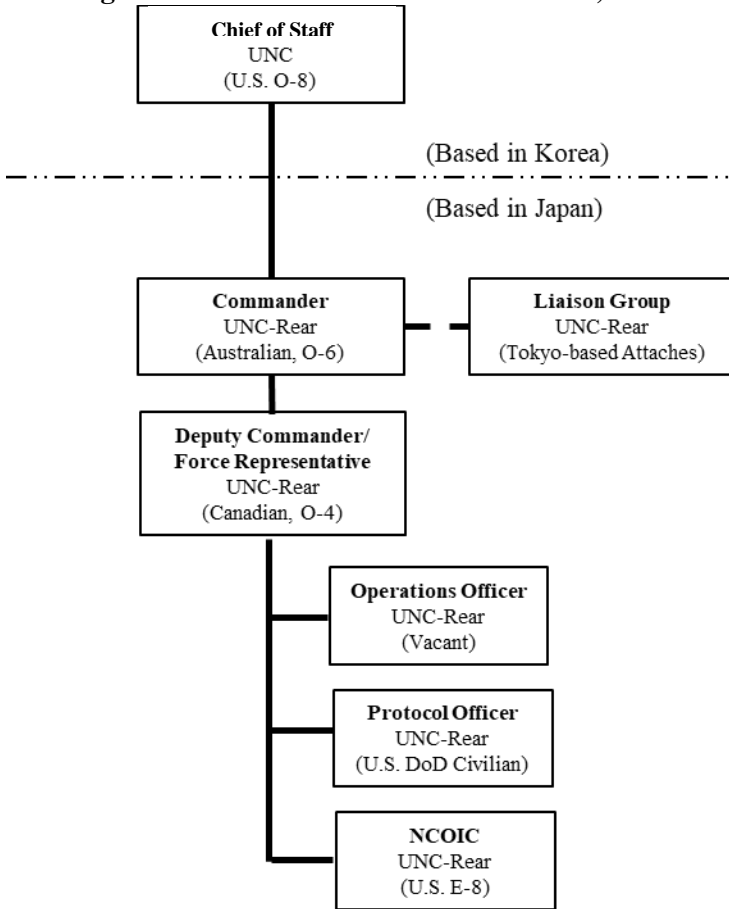
Around the same time, the UNC was on the verge of losing many other bases. Beginning in 1969, Washington and Tokyo began the process of negotiating the return of the Ryukyu Islands to Japanese sovereignty. When the Allied Occupation ended in 1952, Okinawa and its surrounding islands remained an American protectorate. As territory under American administration, the UNC had ready access to any military facility in Okinawa. Accordingly, part of the reversion negotiations focused on ensuring that some of those facilities would be retained for UN use under the UN-Japan SOFA. Thus, on May 15, 1972, Okinawa reverted to Japanese sovereignty, and three bases on the island—Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, Kadena Air Base, and the White Beach Naval Facility—raised UN flags for the first time.

UNC-Rear Headquarters: Structure, Function, and Tasks

The UNC-Rear Headquarters has always been a small organization. There were only four formal position requirements within the headquarters for the majority the command’s existence. However, the UNC-Rear

Headquarters would expand in the event of a conflict on the Korean Peninsula. Figure 2 depicts the current structure of the command:

Figure 2: United Nations Command-Rear, 2019



Source: Created by the author from multiple sources.⁵⁵

The UNC-Rear Headquarters reports directly to the major general who serves as the Chief of Staff, UNC Headquarters. Communication between UNC-Rear and UNC is routine, though it has increased with the incorporation of secure video telecommunications (SVTC) allowing attendance in regular meetings and participation in an increasingly active UNC agenda.

The UNC-Rear Headquarters is commanded by a colonel (or an equivalent level officer) who is principally responsible for coordinating UN operations in Japan and maintaining the UN-Japan SOFA. The commander concurrently serves as the Secretary to the Joint Board. Among other tasks, the commander is the approval authority for UN missions in Japanese territory and is responsible for notifying the Government of Japan when Sending State forces intend to exercise their SOFA privileges.

The Force Representative/Deputy Commander is second-in-command of the UNC-Rear Headquarters and acts in lieu of the commander. Aside from the requirement that the Force Representative be from one of the Sending States, there is no specification as to number or rank of personnel filling this billet. Since 1957, five signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA have filled the billet with personnel ranging from a British Flight Lieutenant to a Turkish Major to an entire Royal Thai Air Force detachment of 30 personnel and three aircraft.⁵⁶ Given the breadth of rank and experience among the various Force Representatives, commanders have tailored specific responsibilities to the individual or individuals serving at UNC-Rear Headquarters. Those duties included, but were not limited to, coordinating with liaison group personnel; representing the UNC-Rear Headquarters at official functions; supporting the development of UNC operational plans; participating in UNC-led exercises; and facilitating the UNC-Rear Headquarters' wartime mission. In recent years, the Canadian Government has offered consistency in the position by providing a single Major (O-4) to fill the role, so the Force Representative gained the additional title of Deputy Commander.

There are two administrative billets within the UNC-Rear Headquarters: a protocol officer and a Non-Commissioned Officer-in-Charge (NCOIC) position. The protocol officer, which used to be a U.S. Army enlisted billet and is now Department of Defense civilian, is responsible for supporting distinguished visitors, coordinating ceremonies and tours, and liaising with other organizations. The NCOIC is a "jack-of-all-trades" position, responsible for handling everything from liaison with base infrastructure support to managing budget and travel to overseeing facility and property management. Both the protocol officer and NCOIC handle other tasks assigned by the Commander or Force Representative.

Finally, the UNC-Rear Headquarters maintains one reserve billet and a plan for headquarters expansion in the event of a contingency on the Korean Peninsula. The command established this billet to support the

additional work during exercises and contingencies. The position is billed for a Captain (O-3) or equivalent officer from one of the Sending States. Separately, the expansion plan calls for an additional 38 personnel to staff the UNC-Rear Headquarters in the event of a major contingency.⁵⁷ Those personnel would occupy the billets typically associated with headquarters staff, ranging from U-1 (Personnel) to U-6 (Communications).

Aside from the headquarters positions, there is a formal liaison group with representatives from all signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA. Membership to the group requires accreditation, accomplished by formal Ambassadorial request to the Commander of UNC-Rear Headquarters. In practice, this typically results in a group comprised of defense attachés from the Sending States' embassies in Tokyo. UNC-Rear Headquarters officials have routine contact with the liaison group, especially when the Sending States intend to send military forces to or through Japanese territory. Whereas normal circumstances would require an attaché-coordinated diplomatic clearance, under the SOFA, the UNC-Rear Headquarters is responsible for informing the Japanese government and ensuring that any personnel and equipment adhere to SOFA provisions.

Given the small size of the organization, the scope of its functions was narrow. Foremost, the UNC-Rear Headquarters' primary function is to maintain and exercise the UN-Japan SOFA. Maintaining and executing the SOFA falls under two categories: Armistice and contingency. Armistice refers to the steady-state conditions on the Korean Peninsula. Contingency occurs when the Armistice is violated or abrogated and military operations—whether for combat missions or non-combatant evacuations—become necessary.

Armistice Support

During the Armistice, the UNC-Rear Headquarters focuses on meeting the requirements outlined in the UN-Japan SOFA. The headquarters ensures it has sufficient organizational representation and liaises with Sending State militaries to exercise of SOFA privileges annually. This involves the following five tasks:

First, UNC-Rear Headquarters personnel coordinate with U.S. and Japanese Government agencies, including the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Headquarters, U.S. Forces, Japan, and the Sending State Liaison Group. Actions within the scope of the SOFA requires frequent coordination among UNC forces, Japanese government officials, and the U.S. military.

Second, the UNC-Rear Headquarters coordinates ship and aircraft visits for familiarization visits or to support operations. Familiarization visits enable UN forces to gain first-hand experience with ports and airfields in Japan. UNC-Rear Headquarters personnel and the UNC Liaison Groups work with operational units and the Japanese government to coordinate the movement of UN forces through and around Japan. The UNC-Rear Headquarters commander is the approval authority for any UN-flagged operation within the territory of Japan.

Third, the UNC-Rear Headquarters advocates for the command and conducts orientation tours. These tours are designed for officials in operational- and policy-level positions and highlight the significance of the UNC-Japan relationship. These orientations are especially important for senior Korean officials. Conducted quarterly, these tours highlight the significance of Japanese support in the event of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula. The UNC-Rear Headquarters annually escorts Tokyo-based Sending State liaison officers to the ROK to explain the operations and logistics chain between UN-bases in Japan and UNC facilities in South Korea.

Fourth, UNC-Rear Headquarters personnel participate in key UNC exercises. Since the UNC-Rear Headquarters does not have assigned forces, it provides notional input and supports the White Cell to shape exercise participants' expectations on the type of support available from UN-bases in Japan.⁵⁸

Finally, the UNC-Rear Headquarters coordinates Distinguished Visitor engagements with the Japanese government, supports ceremonies, and manages day-to-day office functions.

Contingency Support

During crisis or contingencies, the UNC-Rear Headquarters' functions expand significantly as the command is responsible for managing UNC operations throughout Japan. The UNC has developed three categories of UN forces involved in those operations:

- 1) UN forces that will stay temporarily in Japan as part of the Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration process for deployment to Korea. Examples include ground combat and combat support units.
- 2) UN forces that will be based in Japan and move to and from the Korean Theater of Operations. Examples include

- air transport units and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets.
- 3) UN forces that stay in Japan. These include logistics, medical, and maintenance units.

To support these operations, the UNC-Rear Headquarters is responsible for granting entry approval for ships, aircraft, and units. Headquarters personnel liaise with Japan's MOFA to meet SOFA obligations. They coordinate with U.S. bases to ensure there is available space for staging or beddown of UN forces. The UNC-Rear Headquarters will expand to serve as the Multinational Coordination Center (MNCC) in Japan, while working with Sending State embassy staffs to support non-combatant evacuation operations. Finally, the UNC-Rear Headquarters assists the Sending States that are *not* signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA to receive the diplomatic clearances needed to conduct UNC operations from Japan.

Japanese Government: UNC Structures, Functions, and Tasks

For most of the existence of the UNC-Japan relationship, the Japanese government treated UNC matters as a subset of the U.S.-Japan alliance. There was not much reason to do otherwise; the original Exchange-of-Notes underpinning the UN-Japan relationship was between American Secretary of State Dean Acheson and Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida; the UN-Japan SOFA ensured that all UN bases would be U.S.-administered bases; the UNC is an American-led command, as was UNC-Rear Headquarters for 53 years; and the principal representative on the Joint Board is the Deputy Commander of U.S. Forces, Japan.

As such, the organizations principally responsible for managing the UN-Japan relationship did not intersect with those that normally dealt with individual Sending States. Instead, the primary interlocutors for managing the UN-Japan SOFA were, and are, in MOFA's North American Affairs Bureau, specifically the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division and the SOFA Division. Although responsibilities seem split between the two divisions, they overlap in many areas and the divisions actually share an office on the sixth floor of the MOFA building. The Treaty Division Director, SOFA Division Director, and a "Senior Japan-U.S. Alliance Coordinator" serve as the *de facto* 'one-two-three' for MOFA's day-to-day alliance management responsibilities with the U.S. and the UNC-Rear Headquarters, as required.

With about 15 personnel,⁵⁹ the SOFA division is about four-to-five times larger than the entire UNC-Rear Headquarters. However, the division's responsibilities focus on managing SOFA matters for the 103,000 American defense personnel and their dependents present in Japan under the bilateral U.S.-Japan SOFA. These responsibilities include:

- 1) Working with relevant Japanese ministries and agencies on SOFA-related concerns. These include jurisdictional matters, frequency management, and utilities issues, among others.
- 2) Negotiating and implementing force realignment initiatives, including politically contentious items like those related to the bases in Okinawa. This also includes negotiating the designation of new UN bases.
- 3) Preparing, conducting, and recording U.S.-Japan Joint Committee and UN-Japan Joint Board meetings. Although the UN-Japan Joint Board has only met three times, the Joint Committee has met well over 1000 times, as it convenes nearly every two weeks.
- 4) Generating ministerial responses for Diet testimony. If a member of parliament, opposition or ruling party, raises a question pertaining to the U.S.-Japan or UN-Japan SOFAs, SOFA division research and draft appropriate responses for cabinet ministers.⁶⁰
- 5) Liaising with base-hosting populations to explain changes in conditions. Although the Ministry of Defense's Bureau of Local Cooperation and regional defense bureaus are the primary liaisons for base-hosting communities, whenever a matter pertaining to the SOFA arises, a member of MOFA's SOFA division typically accompanies defense officials to provide explanations to local political officials and community groups.⁶¹

This list is by no means exhaustive. The relatively small cadre of MOFA SOFA Division personnel are often over-stretched. With the massive amount of issues related to the U.S.-Japan SOFA, it requires strong political impetus to generate bureaucratic momentum for *UNC*-Japan initiatives.

Another factor is the frequent turnover of civil services personnel. The Japanese government's personnel system typically mandates that bureaucrats change positions about every two years. In some ways, this degrades continuity, especially when UN-Japan SOFA issues arise infrequently. This system also makes addressing long-term UNC-Japan initiatives difficult. Frequent changes in personnel necessitates educating new arrivals on the issues and building the relationship between the UNC-Rear Headquarters staff and MOFA SOFA personnel. However, this system occasionally works to the benefit of the UNC if members familiar with the UNC-Japan relationship move to other influential government offices or return to positions of leadership within MOFA.⁶² In those cases, the UNC can advance progress on initiatives important to the command if the UNC-Rear Headquarters knows to leverage those relationships.

Because UN forces operate from U.S. bases, there was no requirement for Japanese Self-Defense Forces to liaise and coordinate with the UNC-Rear Headquarters. With no functional requirements, the relationship remained static until recently. With a push to use the UNC-Rear Headquarters as a bridge between U.S.-Japan exercises and U.S.-Korea exercises, the Japan Joint Staff (namely, the J3 Operations directorate and J5 Plans and Policy directorate) has a need to maintain functional relationships with UNC-Rear Headquarters. However, it often does this through existing relationships with USFJ.

Another major change in the Japanese government's handling of the UNC-Japan relationship came with the advent of the National Security Secretariat. Comprised of approximately 75 staff members seconded from MOFA, the Ministry of Defense, the National Police Agency, Japan Coast Guard, and others, the NSS is now the principal policy coordination authority for foreign affairs and defense.⁶³ The establishment of the NSS created a situation in which the Japanese interlocutors involved in the UNC-Japan relationship were no longer just comprised of individuals who saw UNC as a subset of the U.S.-Japan alliance. Rather, the NSS staffers had broader responsibilities, including responding to North Korean provocations, supporting UN sanctions enforcement, and advancing Japan's security partnerships with countries other than the U.S. These countries include South Korea and signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA, such as Australia, Canada, France, and the U.K. While MOFA continues to be the primary interlocutor for the UNC-Japan relationship, the NSS staff serve as interagency coordinators to advance mutually beneficial security initiatives.

Limits on Japanese Integration

Aside from the well-documented historical tensions between Japan and South Korea, there are practical and political reasons why Japan has not sought formal integration with the UNC at any point in its six-decade relationship with the command. During the Korean War, Japan spent two years during the fighting as an occupied nation. After regaining its sovereignty, the government would wait another two years before establishing the Self Defense Force (SDF). Since 1954, the constitution served as the primary obstacle to a closer military relationship with the UNC.

Article IX of Japan's constitution is known as the anti-war clause and prevents the SDF from integrating in any sort of foreign military command and control structure.⁶⁴ The constitutional limitation is known in Japanese as *ittaika*. The word literally means "to integrate" or "to become one." In the context of the constitution, it refers to a stipulation where the SDF is prohibited from joining any command structure where a partner military maintains different rules on "use of force;" i.e., the employment of military capabilities in combat. It is why Japan can participate in CTF-151 anti-piracy missions,⁶⁵ but cannot provide a single Foreign Exchange Officer to Indo-Pacific Command.⁶⁶ It explains why Japan has necessarily kept its relationship to the UNC as one of a support capacity with no aim to gain formal membership in the command itself.

Japanese Political Sentiment

Japanese domestic politics remain an important consideration for the UNC-Japan relationship. As discussed, the UNC operated in relative obscurity as a subset of the U.S.-Japan alliance for much of its existence. Key members of the Japanese government were aware of UNC-Rear Headquarters,⁶⁷ but those officials preferred to minimize public discourse on the command and its accompanying SOFA rather than invite political scrutiny. Given the limited use of UN bases and other constraints on UN operations during the Armistice—e.g., requirements to notify the Japanese government and operate from U.S. bases—there are few practical issues to deliberate.

Over time, the small size of the UNC-Rear Headquarters, the absence of major incidents and accidents, and the smooth management of UN activities in Japan have mitigated politicization of the headquarters and the UN-Japan SOFA. Since the establishment of the UNC-Rear Headquarters,

it has only been brought up nine times in the Japanese Diet; “UNC,” which includes the forces on the Korean Peninsula, has been brought up 31 times; and “UN Forces in Japan” has been brought up only 13 times. Comparatively, in that same time period, “Headquarters USFJ” has been brought up 327 times, and “US Forces in Japan” have been mentioned 4002 times.⁶⁸

However, there are two legacy issues that may lead to the negative politicization of UN Forces in Japan. First, the Japanese government renegotiated the U.S.-Japan “Administrative Agreement” (the predecessor to the Status of Forces Agreement), but no such renegotiations occurred for the UN-Japan SOFA. The argument could be made that the remnants of the 1951 “Unequal Treaty” still exist; i.e., UN forces have the right to station its armed forces in Japan with no formal obligation to defend Japan. Second, UN forces and UN-designated facilities contribute to the “base hosting burden.” Certain Japanese interest groups and politicians routinely call for *futan keigen* [burden reduction], advocating for limits on military operations, return of land used by the armed forces, and fewer incidents and accidents. Thus, the Japanese government is cautious about increased UNC operations in and from Japan, the addition of signatories to the UN-Japan SOFA, or anything else that could be perceived as increasing the “burden” on the Japanese population. This could have negative political impact on the administration or threaten the long-term sustainability of the UNC-Japan relationship. Given these circumstances, the Japanese government will quietly support ongoing initiatives without directly drawing attention to the long-standing UNC-Japan relationship.⁶⁹

The Prior Consultation Issue

One issue relevant to public discourse on the relationship between the UNC and Japan is that of prior consultation. Tokyo, fearing the possibility of being entrapped in conflict as a result of U.S. operations from Japan, sought to include a consultation requirement when negotiating the second iteration of its postwar alliance treaty with the Washington. In addition to Article IV⁷⁰ of the 1960 U.S.-Japan Treaty of Mutual Security and Cooperation, the two governments clarified the requirement via an Exchange of Notes:

Major changes in the deployment into Japan of United States armed forces, major changes in their equipment, and the use of facilities and areas in Japan as bases for

military combat operations to be undertaken from Japan other than those conducted under Article V of the said Treaty.⁷¹

In short, prior consultation is the requirement for the U.S. to consult with the Japanese government before taking military actions from Japan that may affect Japanese security.

Certainly, prior consultation is an important consideration in intra-alliance decision-making, and it played a significant role in the early history of the UNC-Japan relationship. There were two agreements known as the “Kishi (or Korean) minute” and the “Korea clause.” The former came in 1960 as a concession from the government of Nobusuke Kishi, asserting that the U.S. military had the administration’s tacit agreement to launch immediate military action from Japan in the event of a North Korean armed attack. The latter was part of the November 1969 joint communique that, based on verbal affirmation, noted that if the U.S. military was required to respond to either Taiwan or North Korean crises, the Japanese government would say “yes” in response to U.S. prior consultation. Based on those 60s-era Japanese concessions that would have presumably allowed U.S. forces to launch military operations from UN-designated bases without prior consultation, the argument exists that preservation of this legal loophole was a key point in establishment and maintenance of the UNC-Rear Headquarters.⁷²

While evidence suggests that prior consultation was a notable consideration in the legal status of UN bases in the 60s and early 70s,⁷³ there are three counterpoints to the claims that it has underwritten long-term sustainment of the UNC-Japan relationship. First, the UN-Japan SOFA is an agreement about the legal status of military forces and the provision of logistics support, not an alliance treaty. The UNC-Rear Headquarters is responsible for managing SOFA issues, not intergovernmental issues related to fears of entrapment and abandonment. Second, the UNC does not maintain forces in Japan; in other words, it would be incapable of violating a prior consultation agreement even if it applied. The only forces that could potentially violate a prior consultation agreement are U.S. forces, which, by legal agreement, operate under the Mutual Security Treaty and bilateral U.S.-Japan SOFA, not UN authority or the UN-Japan SOFA. Third, the Kishi Minute is limited in its applicability. The minute states that prior consultation would not be required in the event of an armed attack situation and gives no such

concession for military action absent that. Based on that language, a preemptive strike or any other military action absent a declared North Korean armed attack would fall outside of the scope of the Japanese government concession. Fourth, the argument that UNC-Rear Headquarters continues to be a front for preserving a loophole in prior consultation is Korea-centric and ignores forty years of alliance evolution. It presupposes that the assertions of administrations in the sixties still represent policy positions of governments today. In fact, during a parliamentary committee meeting on July 5, 2014, Prime Minister Abe addressed this issue, stating that Okinawa-based Marines, which includes the UN-designated Marine Corps Air Station Futenma, will not be permitted to deploy to support a Korean contingency without prior consultation with the Japanese government.⁷⁴ While that testimony does not necessarily indicate the formal negotiated position of the two governments, it at least signals that, regardless of the sixties-era Kishi Minute and “Korea clause,” the current Japanese government expects to be consulted before any major military actions from Japanese territory.

In sum, the UNC-Japan relationship is unrelated to the separate requirement for prior consultation under the U.S.-Japan bilateral security treaty. U.S. forces will still need to consult the Japanese government prior to taking any action that might endanger the Japanese population, regardless of the status of UNC forces in Japan.

Conclusion

The UNC is the multinational headquarters that led the allied forces in the Korean War. Sixteen UN member states sent combat forces and five provided humanitarian assistance to the UNC. Japan—both as an occupied country and sovereign nation—was a critical contributor to the UNC, albeit outside the command’s formal structure. When fighting ended in a stalemate, the UNC’s mission and structure shifted to deterring North Korea and supervising the Armistice Agreement. Japan’s role changed as well, shifting from active support of operations on the Korean Peninsula to passive maintenance of a rear area hub that can be employed rapidly and effectively in the case of resumed conflict in Korea.

When UNC Headquarters moved to Seoul in 1957, the newly formed UNC-Rear Headquarters took over management of the SOFA and relationships with relevant governmental offices. For many years, the headquarters focused on maintaining the status quo. However, changes in interests and institutions within the UNC, the Japanese government, and

the Sending States ushered in new opportunities for expanded activities under the aegis of the UNC-Japan relationship.

The early 2000s witnessed substantial change in the interests and institutions underlying the UNC-Japan relationship. The collocation of the UNC-Rear Headquarters and USFJ Headquarters, as well as the appointment of an Australian commander at the UNC-Rear Headquarters, set the foundation for active coordination of UN forces activities in Japan. The Japanese government desired to expand security partnerships with several of the Sending States and execute a maximum pressure campaign against North Korea. A new National Security Secretariat that exercised interagency policy-coordination authority provided the means and momentum to employ the UNC-Japan framework to pursue these objectives.

These initiatives notwithstanding, there are still limitations on what Japan can do in support of the UNC. Political tensions between South Korea and Japan aside, the inability of the Japan Self Defense Force to integrate into command and control structures with foreign militaries will continue to keep Japan outside of formal membership with UNC. Further, domestic politics continues to be a consideration, and the government must balance the long-term viability of the UNC-Japan relationship and its associated SOFA with near-term initiatives that, although mutually beneficial, could lead to protest.

Despite these potential obstacles to progress, the UNC has expanded its activities in Japan to levels not seen since the 1950s. The use of the SOFA for sanctions monitoring missions and exercise participation showcases progress under the framework of the long-standing UNC-Japan relationship, while continuing to provide the institutional foundation for other initiatives. The relative obscurity of the UNC-Japan relationship belies its importance. There has been, and will continue to be, a critical connection between Japan and the preservation of stability of Northeast Asia in the face of a North Korean threat.

Notes:

¹ The first formal usage of the term “Sending State” was in the United Nations-Japan Status of Forces Agreement, but it is now the common term of reference for nations which have committed forces to UN Command.

² A Status of Forces Agreement, or SOFA, is an agreement which covers the legal provisions for a foreign military or militaries operating within another sovereign territory. Provisions include but are not limited to taxation, basing, entry and exit procedures, criminal jurisdiction, and host nation support.

³ UN Security Council Resolutions 82 (passed 25 June 1950), 83 (27 June 1950), and 84 (7 July 1950).

⁴ Neither the ROK nor the U.S. are considered Sending States: the former received forces and latter established the unified command. Shawn P. Creamer, “The United Nations Command and the Sending States,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Volume XXI, Number 2 (Fall/Winter 2017), p. 64.

⁵ The Supreme Commander of the Allied powers was the military government for occupied Japan. Within Japan, the position was generally referred to as General Headquarters. In addition to serving as SCAP, General MacArthur was the Commander-in-Chief (CINC) FECOM. In June 1950, FECOM consisted of the General Headquarters (GHQ) staff, the Military Government of the Ryukyu Islands, a geographical component (Philippines) and Army, Naval, and Air Force components. Creamer, p. 60.

⁶ Kijeong Nam, “The Reality of Military Base and the Evolution of Pacifism: Japan’s Korea War and Peace,” *The Review of Korean Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (December 2014), 20.

⁷ On 8 July 1950, just a day after the passage of UNSCR 84, General Douglas MacArthur (Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers-Pacific) sent a letter to Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida requesting the buildup of the National Police Reserve. A few months later, on 8 October 1950, a memorandum from the Commander of Naval Forces Far East was submitted to Japan’s Ministry of Transport (the parent organization of the Maritime Safety Agency) to assemble minesweepers, a guinea pig, and other Maritime Safety Agency vessels in the port of Moji (Kyūshū). In reply, Shigeru Yoshida sent a letter to General MacArthur offering Japan’s full support to the war effort, which not only supported Japan’s negotiating position in the peace treaty talks but provided a major economic boost through domestic procurements for the war effort, so much so that Shigeru Yoshida (in)famously called the Korean War a “gift from the gods.”

⁸ In total, the Japan Maritime Safety Agency deployed forty-four minesweepers, seven patrol boats, and two guinea pigs.

⁹ “Exchange of Notes Signed at San Francisco,” conclusion date: September 8, 1951, *USARJ PAM 550-1: United States-Japan Treaties, Agreements, and Other Documents*, 10 September 1984: 21.

¹⁰ The Administrative Agreement was the predecessor to the 1960 Status of Forces Agreement.

¹¹ In carrying out the Nixon Doctrine which demanded greater defense contributions from America’s allies, the Nixon administration debated drawing down forces in Korea and dissolving UN Command. The Carter administration also signaled an intent to withdraw

U.S. forces from Korea. Neither administration carried out their original policy intentions.

¹² There are seventeen confirmed abductees, but missing persons cases along Japan's western coast suggest the actual number is much higher; "Headquarters for the Abduction Issue," *Government of Japan*, accessed December 10, 2018, <https://www.rachi.go.jp/en/index.html>.

¹³ The 1993-94 North Korean Nuclear Crisis coincided with the most sweeping changes to Japanese defense capabilities and posture since the creation of the Self-Defense Force. The Japanese government issued its second-ever National Defense Program Guidelines, adopted new Guidelines for U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation with heavy focus on a North Korean crisis, and pursued ballistic missile defense technology that put it on the leading edge of those capabilities. Importantly, none of those changes focused on the UNC-Japan relationship, which was still seen as a subset of the broader U.S.-Japan alliance.

¹⁴ There is a noticeable absence of discourse on the subject of UNC in Japanese sources. Rather, most archival records, especially in the sixties and seventies, point to the issue of the role of UN bases vis-à-vis the *prior consultation* requirement (see section in this paper entitled, "The Prior Consultation Issue").

¹⁵ USFK Homepage, Combined Forces Command Tab, <http://www.usfk.mil/About/Combined-Forces-Command/> (accessed April 16, 2018).

¹⁶ Shawn P. Creamer, *Answering the Korea Question: U.S. Government Policy toward the Unified Command and the Korea Armistice Agreement*, Civilian Research Project (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, March 24, 2017), 18 and 72-74; LtCol Mel T. S. Han and Maj Dong Hyun Yoon CFC Historical Branch, *Headquarters ROK / US Combined Forces Command Historical Summary, November 7, 1978 – December 31, 1979*, (Yongsan Garrison, ROK: Command Historian Office), pp. 1-2.

¹⁷ Creamer, pp. 69-70.

¹⁸ Korean Armistice Agreement, Article II, Paragraph 19.

¹⁹ Creamer, p. 73.

²⁰ Creamer, p. 74.

²¹ "United States-Japan Roadmap for Realignment," *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, May 1, 2006, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/scc/doc0605.html>.

²² At the time, UNC Commander General B.B. Bell and Lieutenant General Bruce "Orville" Wright conducted weekly phone calls and frequently had staff exchanges for coordination on operational plans and other activities; Author interview with Lt Gen (retired) Wright, December 18, 2018.

²³ Colonel Driver had four objectives for moving UNC-Rear headquarters to Yokota Air Base: one, enabling UNC-Rear to serve as a conduit for Korean and Japanese military-to-military engagement; two, fostering closer engagement with the USFJ staff for purposes of exercise support; three, presenting solidarity between UNC and USFJ senior headquarters in Japan; and four, posturing for contingency response in the event of renewed crisis on the Korean Peninsula; Colonel (retired) Floyd Driver, Former Commander, United Nations Command-Rear, email exchange with author, January 9, 2018.

²⁴ At the time, UNC-Rear's primary relationship with USFJ was through the J5 Plans and Policy Directorate.

²⁵ USFJ Deputy Commander Major General J.F. Flock, “Memorandum to Joint Board Representative (Japan),” letter to Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Tokyo, Japan, October 11, 2007.

²⁶ UNC Commander General Walter L. Sharp letter to Australian Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston, Yongsan, Republic of Korea, undated.

²⁷ Australian Chief of the Defence Force Air Chief Marshall Angus Houston response letter to UNC Commander General Walter L. Sharp, Canberra, Australia, October 29, 2009.

²⁸ Air Commodore (retired) Tony McCormack, Former Commander, United Nations Command-Rear, email exchange with author, January 4, 2018.

²⁹ In the past, the liaison group traveled to Camp Zama and Yokota for engagements with UNC-Rear. UNC-Rear changed the policy to increase UNC-Rear engagement at the Sending States embassies and Japanese government offices in Tokyo.

³⁰ Tony McCormack, “Air Power in Disaster Relief: The Role of the Royal Australian Air Force in Australia’s Response to the 2011 Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami,” *Royal Australian Air Force Air Power Development Centre*, July 31, 2014, 7.

³¹ Creamer, p. 74.

³² Australia had formally indicated its desire for increased security cooperation with Japan in its 2007 “Joint Declaration” (“Japan-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation,” <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/australia/joint0703.html>) and subsequent ministerial-level meetings; the 2016 UK-Japan Foreign and Defense ministerial meeting (“2+2”) produced a joint statement calling for the two countries to “explore possible cooperation between Japan, the UK and other regional partners, including through joint exercises” (“Second Japan-UK Foreign and Defence Ministerial Meeting Joint Statement,” https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/gb/page4e_000368.html); the French and Japanese governments initiated 2+2 meetings in 2014, with subsequent ministerial-level foreign affairs and defense meetings in 2015 and 2017, each producing a statement calling for steadily increasing, formalized security cooperation.

³³ As of December 2016, the Joint Committee had convened 1030 times.

³⁴ “National Security Strategy,” *Cabinet Secretariat of Japan*, December 17, 2013, 23.

³⁵ This is a variant of a Status of Forces Agreement, or SOFA.

³⁶ “The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database,” *Nuclear Threat Initiative*, accessed 5 December 2018, <https://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>.

³⁷ Known as “*saidaien no atsuryoku*” in Japanese, Japan’s maximum pressure campaign came in conjunction with the newly minted Trump Administration’s North Korea strategy.

³⁸ Michael Bosack, “Japan’s National Security Secretariat, Four Years On,” *Tokyo Review*, 8 February 2018, <http://www.tokyoreview.net/2018/02/japans-national-security-secretariat-four-years/>.

³⁹ This position also covers China and Russia.

⁴⁰ The USFJ J5 Director is billeted to an Army 0-6 (Colonel) Foreign Area Officer (FAO). The particular J5 supporting the Japanese NSS visit to UNC facilities in Korea was Colonel Mark Hague, a long-time FAO in the Indo-Pacific region with extensive knowledge of both the government of Japan and the importance of the Japan’s role vis-à-vis any Korean contingency.

⁴¹ Email correspondence between USFJ J54 and Japan Joint Staff J5, Subject: “Invitation for UNC-R & USFJ Orientation,” March 24, 2017.

⁴² Exercise participation in 2017 included embedded Sending State officers in the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force and in UNC-Rear headquarters.

⁴³ Given the political tensions that exist between Japan and South Korea, UNC headquarters and Japan Joint Staff saw UNC’s participation in mostly bilateral U.S.-ROK exercises like ULCHI FREEDOM GUARDIAN and bilateral U.S.-Japan exercises like KEEN EDGE as a stepping stone for greater multinational inclusion.

⁴⁴ “Canadian pastor freed by North Korea 'has been flown to Japan,’” *The Guardian*, 10 August 2017,

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/10/canadian-pastor-hyeon-soo-lim-freed-north-korea-flown-japan>.

⁴⁵ “SECURITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ESTABLISHED PURSUANT TO RESOLUTION 1718 (2006): Resolutions,” *UN Security Council*, accessed December 12, 2018, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/resolutions>.

⁴⁶ “British amphibious assault ship arrives in Tokyo,” *Reuters*, August 3, 2018, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-japan-britain-defence/british-amphibious-assault-ship-lands-marines-in-tokyo-idUKKBN1KO02P>; “HMS Sutherland arrives in Japan in effort to curb North Korea's evasion of sanctions,” *The Telegraph*, April 12, 2018, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/12/hms-sutherland-arrives-japan-effort-curb-north-koreas-evasion/>.

⁴⁷ “Monitoring and surveillance activities by partner countries against illicit maritime activities including ship-to-ship transfers with North Korean flagged vessels prohibited by UNSCRs,” *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, November 6, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002210.html.

⁴⁸ “*Heisei sanjū ichi nendo ikō ni kakaru bōueikeikaku no taikō ni tsuite* [“National Defense Program Guidelines”],” *Ministry of Defense of Japan*, December 18, 2018, 14-15.

⁴⁹ UN Command reinstated South Africa as a sending state in 2010 and Italy in 2018, but both countries would have to be reaffirmed by both UNC and the government of Japan as an active party to the SOFA to enjoy the rights granted under the agreement.

⁵⁰ It is possible for additional countries to become party to the UN-Japan SOFA. A state first needs to be a member of the Sending States in Korea. Once an official Sending State, its government must submit a request to UNC-Rear headquarters to become a signatory to the SOFA, the most direct route being through its embassy in Japan. The UNC-Rear Commander would then forward the request to the Deputy Commander of U.S. Forces, Japan and the UNC Commander in Korea to gain their approval. If it is supported, the UN-Japan Joint Board convenes to approve or deny the request. Any new signatories would then have to meet the requirements as outlined in the SOFA to maintain their legal privileges.

⁵¹ The United States is also a signatory to the bilateral U.S.-Japan SOFA which takes precedence over the UN-Japan SOFA.

⁵² Not listed in this table is Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni. Although the base served as a refueling location for the Thai Air Detachment at Tachikawa Air Base from July 1971 to July 1977, it never had formal UN designation.

⁵³ The service spearheading this initiative was the U.S. Air Force; John G. McKay Jr., “Report No. 5692, THE KANTO PLAIN CONSOLIDATION PLAN: A Case Study of Military Cost Reduction,” *Air War College*, Maxwell Air Force Base, April 1975, 3.

⁵⁴ Takashi Koyama, “‘*Kantō Keikaku no naritachi ni tsuite*’ [About the Origins of the ‘Kantō Plan’],” *National Institute for Defense Studies*, March 2008, 2.

⁵⁵ The author compiled organizational charts from UNC-Rear briefings dated 2000, 2004, 2014, and 2017.

⁵⁶ The following indicates the historical Force Representatives by sending state and years served: Thailand (1957 to 1976); United Kingdom (1976 to 1978); Philippines (1978 to 2002); United Kingdom (2003 to 2005); Australia (2006); United Kingdom (2006 to 2007); Thailand (2008); Australia (2009); Turkey (2009 to 2011); Canada (2011 to present).

⁵⁷ Compiled from UNC-Rear information pamphlets and briefings dated 2000, 2004, 2014, 2017, and 2018.

⁵⁸ An Exercise White Cell is the group charged with managing the actual exercise. There are many White Cell tasks, but overall, the group is responsible for shaping the exercise scenario for players to ensure that all exercise objectives are met as realistically as possible.

⁵⁹ At least one of those personnel is seconded from the Ministry of Finance to handle fiscal issues related to the SOFA. While the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty Division has at least one seconded Self-Defense Force officer, there are no defense personnel in the SOFA Division.

⁶⁰ Known as “*tōben*,” the government treats responses that cabinet ministers offer in Diet plenary sessions or committee meetings as de facto policy unless retracted in future testimony. As such, bureaucrats are charged with providing cabinet ministers drafted responses not just to protect the ministers from embarrassment, but to preserve ministry initiatives and interests.

⁶¹ One example of this related to UNC came when UNC-Rear moved from Camp Zama to Yokota Air Base. Despite the move only consisting of four personnel, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs published formal justification via press release and website, as well as providing explanations directly to local communities. For the MOFA publication, see “Relocation of the United Nations Command (Rear) from Camp Zama to Yokota Air Base,” October 26, 2007,

https://www.mofa.go.jp/announce/announce/2007/10/1176845_836.html; for the local community publication, see “*Chōsen-Kokurengun-Kōhōshireibu no Kyanpu Zama kara Yokota hikōjo he no isetsu nit suite* (“Regarding the move of UNC-Rear from Camp Zama to Yokota Air Base”),” *Hamura City*, November 10, 2010, <http://www.city.hamura.tokyo.jp/0000000086.html>.

⁶² A prominent example of this is Takehiro Funakoshi, who served as the director of the Japan-U.S. Treaty Division before eventually becoming the first NSS Cabinet Counsellor for North Korean, Chinese, and Russian affairs in 2013. He is currently serving as the Deputy Director General of the North American Affairs Bureau, meaning he is both the authority in charge of the Japan-US Security Treaty and SOFA Divisions and the (delegated) Principal Japanese representative on the UN-Japan Joint Board.

⁶³ Adam P. Liff, “Japan’s National Security Council: Policy Coordination and Political Power,” *Japanese Studies* (2018), 10.

⁶⁴ Article IX: “Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.”

⁶⁵ Japan has committed two destroyers and two P-3 aircraft to CTF-151, which includes military personnel from the United States, Canada, Pakistan, Singapore, Denmark, France, the Netherlands, and Australia, among others. Japan commanded CTF-151 from May to August 2015, March to June 2017, and March to June 2018.

⁶⁶ In 2016, U.S. Pacific Command offered to incorporate a Japanese Foreign Exchange Officer (FEO) within its J5 office, which the Japan Self-Defense Force turned down based on constitutional limitations. The FEO position differs from a Liaison Officer (LNO) in that a FEO works within the command and control structure of a foreign military organization, while an LNO may be embedded with that same organization but is only legally obligated to follow orders from his/her home military command.

⁶⁷ Called the *Chōsen Kokuren-gun kōhō-shireibu* in Japanese.

⁶⁸ Data on Diet testimonies gathered from the Japanese government’s *Kokkai kaigi-roku kensaku shisutemu* (“National Diet Committee Search System”). Searches were conducted for both the House of Councillors and House of Representatives from June 1957 to November 2018.

⁶⁹ For example, in the MOFA press release regarding the dispatch of Australian, Canadian, New Zealand, and other states’ militaries for UNSCR sanctions enforcement, there is neither mention of the use of the UN-Japan SOFA or the role of United Nations Command, nor links to other MOFA pages detailing the UNC-Japan relationship; “Multinational efforts against illicit maritime activities including ship-to-ship transfers with North Korean-flagged vessels prohibited by UNSCRs, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, September 23, 2018, https://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002168.html.

⁷⁰ Article IV states: “The Parties will consult together from time to time regarding the implementation of this Treaty, and, at the request of either Party, whenever the security of Japan or international peace and security in the Far East is threatened.”

⁷¹ “EXCHANGE OF NOTES INCORPORATING AGREED CONSULTATION FORMULA,” Washington, D.C., conclusion date: January 19, 1960; Article V details the obligation for defense of Japan.

⁷² Dong-jun Lee, “From the Secret ‘Korean Minute’ to the Open ‘Korea Clause’: The United States and Japan and the Security of the Republic of Korea,” *Asian Perspective*, 36 (2012), 137; Selig Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 164-165.

⁷³ For example, in declassified NSC minutes signed by National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger, a condition for the Nixon administration’s push to dissolve UNC was the necessity to seek “an explicit agreement from the Japanese Government which would extend the secret 1961 Kishi Minute to the U.S.-Japan Mutual Security Treaty following termination of the UNC”; “National Security Decision Memorandum 251,” *National Security Council*, March 29, 1974.

⁷⁴ “*Dai 186 kai kokkai, Yosan iinkai dai 1 go* [Number 186 Diet Session, Budget Committee Number 1 Session],” *House of Councillors*, July 15, 2014, <http://kokkai.ndl.go.jp/SENTAKU/sangiin/186/0014/18607150014001a.html>.