

Northeast Asia: U.S. killed Japan '71 plan for Senkaku Islands weather station

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Japan canceled a plan to set up a weather station on the Senkaku Islands in 1971, apparently under U.S. pressure as the two sides negotiated the 1972 return of Okinawa to Japan, declassified U.S. diplomatic documents show.

When the United States returned the China-claimed islets to Japan along with Okinawa, it wanted to avoid taking a position on the sovereignty issue, the documents indicate.

According to a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo to Washington dated Jan. 11, 1971, Japan notified the U.S. of a plan to build a weather station in the Senkakus with a view toward future use as an oil exploration base.

In response, Secretary of State William Rogers told the U.S. Embassy to “raise (the) matter” and point out that the project was “undesirable and should be postponed until after reversion,” documents dated later that month show, adding the U.S. position was to avoid a “needless increase in tension in the area,” as the project “would be interpreted by both (Taiwan and China) as raising stakes in quarrel.”

U.S. Ambassador to Japan Armin Meyer also expressed worries that Japan was trying to further confirm its sovereignty over the islets with the backing of the United States, the documents show.

Late that January, the U.S. urged Bunroku Yoshino, head of the Foreign Ministry’s old American Bureau, to postpone the project.

Yoshino replied that “his efforts to hold off (the project) would be made easier if (Washington) could find (a) way to include mention of (the) Senkakus” in the bilateral agreement on Okinawa’s reversion, they read.

In late March that year, the State Department instructed the U.S. Embassy to follow Yoshino’s suggestion in the minutes to be attached to the agreement. As a result, the two countries agreed to write down in the minutes the longitudes and latitudes of the area for reversion, thus indirectly including the Senkaku islets.

In a cable dated April 5 that year, Secretary of State Rogers said the U.S. was successful in persuading Japan to give up construction of the proposed weather station.

Tokyo and Washington concluded the agreement of Okinawa’s reversion that June.

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