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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

IMPACT OF 'OKURU MARU INCIDENT
ON U.S.-JAPANESE RELATIONS

Note to the Secretary

The Director of Special Projects has submitted for the information of the Commission the attached communication from the American Ambassador in Tokyo.

Unclassified
March 1980
BY: [illegible]
2-28-74

ROY B. SNAPP

Secretary

SPECIAL REVIEW	Reviewers	Date
FINAL DETERMINATION	[Signature]	8/6/80
UNCL	[Signature]	8/7/80

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

May 20, 1954

FROM: Tokyo
TO: Secretary of State
SUBJECT: FUKURYU MARU

1. The end of the 1954 Pacific nuclear tests gives us an opportunity for first assessment of the import of the FUKURYU MARU incident for US-Japan relations. Full implications may not be known for years, but certain conclusions of critical import to US policies are now possible.

2. The conclusions are unpleasant, some even ominous. However, espionage or provocation by the vessel or crew do not seem to be in the picture. No intelligence available to our agencies has yet provided a basis for initial US suspicions. Disturbing policy implications flow, however, from Japanese official response and national reactions to the incident. Severe deficiencies in security, administrative discipline, emotional stability, and cooperativeness have been exposed. Even though we understand the extraordinary emotional strain this incident imposed on Japan, we will have to take into account these weaknesses.

3. The emotionalism attending the incident here was the product of the worst possible combination of factors: Japan with its World War II atomic legacy; high seas fishing areas, over which Japanese nerves already rubbed raw by closures of traditional open fishing zones on the part of Japanese neighbors and by seizures of innocent fishing vessels by Red China, USSR, and ROK; fish itself, which as the main item of Japanese diet brought the incident home to every family and at the height of the tuna season, thus affecting both food supply and dollar exports; and the time of the accident where a variety of other factors worsened a thoroughly bad situation.

(a) The incident corresponded with the passage of the first postwar appropriation for atomic energy research in Japan; every ministry and agency was asserting

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its claims to these funds and to designation as Japan's chosen atomic instrument. Custody of the ship and patients immediately became the object of intense bureaucratic jockeying.

(b) The incident coincided with a mounting government crisis and growing Cabinet fatigue. The fifth Yoshida Cabinet was being harried in the Diet, shaken by scandals and pro-operators probes, and threatened by gathering revolts inside the Liberal Party and by Conservative merger maneuvers outside its control. It was compelled to concentrate its depleted energies on its own survival while working through a difficult legislative calendar. To make matters worse, bureaucratic dissatisfaction was brewing at national level because of government and party deficiencies and at local level because of the Cabinet's attempts to recentralize administration. The press was using all this to whip up its continuing campaign against a government which appeared all but tottering.

(c) The incident coincided with heightening tension in the Far East; twin issues of Korea and Indo China, toward which Geneva seemed to the Japanese to hold scant promise, created a specter of a new and larger war not unrelated to the Pacific tests in Japanese minds. If it came, most Japanese could not see how they could escape involvement, probably atomic involvement, and the prospect horrified them. At the same time curious ambivalence in Japanese character asserted itself. Destinies of the Far East were about to be decided in Korea, in Indo China, and at Geneva, and Japan was excluded from negotiating councils. Japan craved an occasion to assert its position and remind the world of its importance.

4. This was the psychological and political background for the FUKURYU MARU incident. When new pressures of Japan's exposure to "ashes of death" were added, the government and people cracked. A period of uncontrolled masochism ensued, as the nation aided by an unscrupulous press, seemed to revel in fancied martyrdoms, and US-Japanese cooperation broke down. For a time, on the FUKURYU MARU incident, the Government in Japan ceased to govern.

5. The breakdown was triggered by a small group of Japanese scientists and doctors, many of whom were fuzzy-minded leftists, pacifists, neutralists. Nearly all seemed animated by resentments arising from the occupation with its ban on Japanese atomic research; by hostility toward ABCC and its SCAP-founded correspondents, the National Institute of Health; by a sense of outrage over purges in the medical and scientific field. All of them had vistas of nation-wide publicity at home and world-wide scientific prominence as exclusive proprietors of the world's first hydrogen bomb patients.

6. For the first few days doctors and scientists held the field, with uncontrolled statements and releases made more lurid by

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a sensationalist press. Then Communist and pacifist and neutralist agitation and propaganda apparatus moved into the situation that was made to order for them to (a) alienate Japan from the US; (b) derive nuclear intelligence; (c) pose as champions of Asian racialism; (d) attempt delay or have suspended the 1954 thermonuclear tests. Press treatment of their charges and complaints turned from mere sensationalism to an avalanche of abuse against the US. American doctors were vilified; US offers of assistance were portrayed as attempts to conceal evidence or minimize injury to Japan; Embassy expressions of regret over the incident were denounced as either belated or insufficiently decisive. National responses to the combined exertions of Communists, scientists, and press irresponsibility was immediate and overpowering. The most senior levels of the Government under incessant prodding from the Embassy at first attempted half-heartedly to gain control of the situation. They persevered for about three weeks; they were routed.

The record of their attempts disclosed the following:

(A) Lack of domestic security framework: Access to the FUKURYU MARU itself was not restricted until March 18, five days after return to port. As late as March 27 reporters and photographers were freely allowed aboard. Samples of fall-out ash were removed, officially, from the vessel, but no inventories of these samples were taken and no control maintained. Unknown quantities were removed unofficially by various visitors, analyses of ash constituents were widely published in all newspapers. Access to patients was uncontrolled until removal to Tokyo March 28, and has since been partially restricted for medical reasons but without any security screening of visitors. Invariable Government reply to Embassy representations has been to claim that due to occupation reforms, no laws exist restricting publication of scientific data or permitting the screening of scientific personnel. The claim is, of course, legalistic and immaterial in the emergency situation.

(B) Lack of control over bureaucracy: Inability of the Cabinet to enforce discipline inside the administrative organization has characterized the entire period. The Government was unable to compel or persuade civil servants to actions they opposed; direct orders from Prime Minister to Cabinet and from Ministers to staff were flouted; formal commitments to US were ignored. Government suffered and accepted a series of humiliating retreats. Over the opposition of Welfare and Education Ministries bureaucrats, government was unable to comply with successive Embassy requests; (i) to turn the FUKURYU MARU over to the US Navy for decontamination; or (ii) to sell it to the US; (iii) to purchase it from the owner and sink it. The ship will be retained for research. Regarding the patients, the Government is not only unable to provide access for examination by US physicians, but appointments made at Cabinet level for them to visit patients were refused by bureaucrats in charge. Regarding inspection of reported cases of additional radioactive fish and vessels, the Government was unable to carry out arrangements confirmed by the Foreign Office for access by US experts because of "failure

of coordination between the Ministries concerned." Critical point is not the display of insubordination itself but Government's acceptance of it and its failure to take disciplinary action against the offenders.

(C) The lack of information apparatus: The Government was not only unable to control or coordinate press statements by bureaucrats and government doctors or to restrain slanderous attacks on the US but it was also unable to have its own statements and corrections published. Formal assurances of centralization of all press statements in official committee have been and are being repeatedly breached. The Government's disavowal of the bureaucrats' tendentious April 21 statement went unreported, as did subsequent press conference by the Minister of Welfare using US materials to attempt to quiet public hysteria regarding nuclear contaminations. We cannot help but feel that the Government was less than strenuous in these instances, for we know of no previous case in which the press has successfully imposed complete black-out of Government statements.

(D) The extent of national atomic vulnerability: These crowded industrialized islands have long been recognized as perhaps the world's most susceptible nuclear targets, and not less so because of direct World War II experience. What must now be recognized is the depth of Japanese fear of nuclear weapons, their conviction of doom in the event of war, and, as a consequence of their readiness to panic and their intense gullibility in nuclear matters. Throughout the past eight weeks, no report of long-range air or sea contamination, no story of food or water pollution, no theory of genetic deterioration seemed too wild for acceptance. To unlimited targets of opportunity in Japan, to total lack of civilian defense organization must now be added this dangerous psychological vulnerability of Japanese to weapons and devices of nuclear technology. If the Communists understand this latter element, and there is no reason to believe it has escaped their attention, the consequences for our military planning with respect to Japan could be extremely grave. In the event of war or an imminent threat, if Communists astutely manage and carefully prepare a psychological-military operation involving threat of nuclear weapons against Japan, this might well on the basis of the present record produce a national stampede that would sweep over any Japanese Government that attempted to halt it. In this process our own bases could be isolated and even made untenable.

(E) Strength of neutralism and isolationism: Finally, the record of the period has revealed that certain national traits have not been extinguished in postwar Japan: A feverish sense of pride and sovereignty, willingness to sacrifice long-term advantages for short-term gains, and tendency to go it alone. The shrillness and baselessness of attacks on US good will and "sincerity" throughout the entire period are indicative of sentiment to disengage from the US. ~~We should not underestimate the force of this sentiment in its relations to our efforts to establish a system of collective action in the Far East.~~ It greatly strengthens the neutralists' appeal.

8. For the present, assessment of the lasting damage done by the incident must be incomplete. The position of neutralists,

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pacifists, feminists, and professional anti-Americans while by no means dominant has been strengthened. Doubts regarding the wisdom and feasibility of Japanese rearmament in a nuclear age have increased. It may be coincident but NSA enlistment rates are reported sharply down throughout the country. Elements, in both Conservative and Socialist circles, working for some kind of accommodation with Red China have increased their activities, and government quarters cannot be unmindful of this. Furthermore, press has begun to call on the government to exact guarantees from the US that Japan will never be used as a base for launching atomic war against Asian neighbors. A senior Foreign Office official in answer to questions from an Independent member told the D^{is} Committee May 12 that the US could bring nuclear weapons into Japan without informing the Japanese Government and acknowledged that "since there is no mutual security system there is fear we will not be consulted when atomic and hydrogen bombs are used." This agitation may well continue and expand, and it will strengthen the latent desire for early revision of the security treaty including some form of nuclear understanding. Beyond this point much will depend on how quickly and satisfactorily we can settle specific issues in the FUKURYU MARU case. Here the nub of the problem is settlement claims; on this we still await Japanese response to our compensation formula. With compensation settlement and the end of the 1954 series much of sensationalism surrounding the incident should disappear. It will be to Japanese interest to close out or explain away administrative deficiencies and national vulnerabilities the incident has illuminated. It is probable that short of imminent threat of war in the Far East, point of our greatest dependence on Japan, we shall not again be shown so sharply a lack of Japanese domestic security, absence of effective control over bureaucratic apparatus, paralysis of government in the information field, and a desire to pull free of the US and other foreigners. Strength of Japanese neutralism and isolationism may more often be evident.

9: Remedies for these weaknesses must be sought in development of stronger, tougher-minded Japanese Government and in recovery of the people from a postwar psychosis. But a regime fortified with increasingly centralized security and information controls, indispensable as such a development is on present evidence, would not of itself be enough. It is highly questionable whether a stronger Japanese Government had it existed in March 1954 would have produced different national response to the FUKURYU MARU. Panic might have been more controlled; hysteria might have been more managed and purposeful. We might more quickly have arrived at the present dead center where the government seems to be letting the matter ride. The specific actions it could now take, if it desired to bring the incident to a speedy close, would be to provide us with complete clinical reports regarding the patients, to submit a lump-sum compensation estimate, to control utterances of at least the senior personnel. Failure to take any of these steps is at this date probably attributable more to lack of willingness than to lack of capability. And this reluctance in turn would seem to derive from a desire to extract some advantage from uncontrolled panic of March and April in terms of stronger bargaining position regarding Japan's role in the Far East collective action system or revision of

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the security treaty. Also, the government is not unmindful of political advantages demonstrating independence from the US.

10. In these matters whether we deal with strong or weak government in Japan, we are involved in the heart of the problem of Japan's national survival in the nuclear age. Neutralism in Japan will vary in direct proportion to the conclusion Japanese leaders reach as to whether relationship with the US can provide, more than any other course of Japanese action, defense and security in a period when both US and USSR possess thermonuclear weapons. The ultimate significance of the FUKURYU MARU incident will thus be first whether we can devise a defense strategy for Japan's security in the light of enormous new complications that 1954 thermonuclear test series has established and then whether we can persuade a much stronger Japanese Government that our planning has solved the problem to the extent it can be solved.

11. Many of the conclusions above are patently serious. This, of course, does not of itself mean we should draw in our lines but rather that certain realities with which we have to live are now more apparent. I look forward to discussing this further when I am in Washington.

ALLISON