

The “Second” Textile Dispute  
between Japan and the United States (1969-1971) (2):  
The One Thousand Days  
of Diplomatic Complications and Estrangement

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This is the second and concluding segment of the article. At a November 1969 summit meeting in Washington, D.C. Prime Minister Eisaku Sato promised President Richard M. Nixon to limit Japan’s exports of chemical fiber products. Furthermore, the Prime Minister gave the President a strong impression that the former would be able to settle the matter by the end of that year. The promise seems to have been made out of Sato’s appreciation for Nixon’s decision to return Okinawa to Japan. When Sato couldn’t fulfill his promise, prolonged, off-and-on negotiations went on, and in the meantime the bilateral relations were exacerbated.

In October 1970 the Japanese Prime Minister made another promise to the US President to resolve the issue by the time of the US elections in November that year. Sato failed again.

The new development in March 1971 truly infuriated Nixon. The Japanese Federation of Textiles suddenly announced unilateral restrictions of textiles. However, the fact that the proposed restrictions were not a kind that the President wanted and that the Federation acted with the understanding (through lobbyists) with the powerful chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Wilbur Mills of Arkansas, whom Nixon considered to be a potential rival in the coming 1972 presidential election. Nixon flatly rejected the Federation’s declaration. He was reported to have uttered the words, “Japs’ betrayal.”

In the summer of 1971 the Japanese were shaken by the two successive “Nikuson Shokku.” In the fall an annual bilateral cabinet-level meeting was held in Washington,

D.C. Prior to the official meeting, the Japanese Foreign and MITI Ministers were given an ultimatum — the “October 15” deadline — by the top US negotiator. This strategy had been decided by the President and his inner circle at Camp David on July 15.

Faced with a threat of US unilateral action, the Japanese negotiators subsequently succumbed to the threat. On that very date a memorandum of understanding was initialed in Tokyo, thus, ending the one-thousand-day turmoil, for which primarily Sato should be held responsible. (The formal signing of an agreement took place in Washington, D.C. in January 1971.)