



Afternoon Alert - Monday, December 19, 2016

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HEADLINES

Noon news

All networks led with reports that the U.S. military has informed the GOJ of its plan to resume the flight operations of the Osprey at 2 p.m. today, only six days after the emergency landing incident. Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga was quoted as saying at a press briefing today: "It is rational and also understandable that the flight operations except for refueling exercises will be resumed this afternoon." All networks said local opposition is growing in Okinawa, quoting Okinawa Governor Onaga as telling reporters this morning: "You can't work with the government. Japan is not a nation governed by the rule of law."

SECURITY

U.S. military resumes Osprey flights

NHK reported this afternoon that the U.S. military resumed flight operations of the Osprey this afternoon, showing an Osprey taking off from Futenma Air Base at around 2 p.m. The network said that in the absence of an explanation of the cause of the accident, local opposition to the resumption of the Osprey flights is expected to grow, quoting Governor Onaga as telling reporters this morning that the resumption is "outrageous."

GOJ desperate to convene NTA reversion ceremony as planned

Saturday's Ryukyu Shimpo took up Parliamentary Vice Defense Minister Wakamiya's visit to Okinawa on Friday for offering an explanation on the Abe administration's response to the Osprey mishap, noting that instead of being apologetic in meeting with local government officials, Wakamiya was busy trying to persuade them to attend the ceremony to be held on Dec. 22 marking the return

of the Northern Training Area. According to the daily, Wakamiya spent only seven minutes observing the accident site in Nago City, with prefectural government officials displeased with his apparent preoccupation throughout his Okinawa trip with making arrangements for the reversion event so as to prevent Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga from "losing face" because the top government official has stressed Tokyo's strong commitment to realizing the reversion of the training area by the end of this year.

- [Crash may affect SDF's deployment](#) (The Japan News)
- [Editorial: Osprey accidents show need to protect Okinawans from danger](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Editorial: U.S. military must make all-out effort to prevent repeat of Osprey accidents](#) (The Japan News)
- [Japan decides to punish 3 MSDF officers over helicopter choice](#) (Jiji Press)

INTERNATIONAL

[Government spokesman comments on China's "theft" of U.S. drone](#)

Nikkei reported on press remarks this morning by Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga concerning China's seizure of a U.S. military underwater drone in international waters. The top government spokesman said: "It is a bilateral matter between the U.S. and China. We hope for an early resolution of the case.... It is necessary for the Chinese to offer the international community a clear-cut explanation on the matter, including the international legal justification [for seizing the device]."

[President Obama sends letter to Hiroshima hibakusha](#)

NHK reported this afternoon that Akiko Matsumoto, a female hibakusha in Hiroshima, received a letter from President Obama on Dec. 13 in response to her letter addressed to the President and sent to the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo earlier this year. The network said the woman sent the letter to welcome the President's visit to Japan in May enclosed with a book of poems about the cruelty of nuclear weapons by American poet Arthur Binard who lives in Hiroshima. The network said Matsumoto showed the letter to Binard today. According to the network, the President wrote that "so long as more people take the time to understand the past and embrace compassion, I am confident a brighter, more peaceful future lies ahead." Matsumoto told the network: "I was so happy that he wrote me back....[President Obama] hopes to eliminate nuclear weapons, just like we do."

- [The bromance of Shinzo and Vladimir](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Putin claims return of islets' sovereignty unwritten in 1956 pact: Abe](#) (The Mainichi)

- [Japan, EU to seek free trade agreement in 2017: EU negotiator](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Japan, S. Korea swap intelligence on N. Korea threats for 1st time](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Sovereignty issue still dogs Japan-Russia island row](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Rough road to Japan-Russia progress on Northern Territories](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Japanese companies respond to Tokyo's call for Russian deals](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Tokyo leans on state lender to fund Russia cooperation](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Ex-Russian ambassador says Japan has withdrawn from economic sanctions against Russia](#) (Asahi)
- [Gist of Abe-Putin press conference in Tokyo](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Gist of Japan-Russia economic cooperation agreements](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Security cooperation with Russia would definitely be a plus for Japan, Abe](#) (Sankei)
- [Abe admits inability to meet former Northern Territories islanders' expectations](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Comments by Abe, Putin at Japan-Russia Business Dialogue](#) (Yomiuri)
- [Japan pledges 300 bil. yen economic package at Abe-Putin summit](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Compromise with Russia carries risks for Japan](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [Editorial: Abe-Putin talks disappoint with no progress on territorial dispute](#) (The Mainichi)
- [Editorial: Abe-Putin talks a step toward resolving territorial issue/Build trust via joint economic activities](#) (The Japan News)
- [Japan-Russia summit meeting aimed at rattling Japan-U.S. relationship](#) (Mainichi)
- [Abe's focus shifts back to US after Putin visit](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)

- [Japan, France eye ministerial talks on security issues in early Jan.](#) (Kyodo News)

POLITICS

- [Prime minister's schedule on Dec. 18](#) (Nikkei)
- [Prime minister's schedule on Dec. 17](#) (Nikkei)
- [Prime minister's schedule on Dec. 16](#) (Nikkei)

ECONOMY

- [Highly skilled foreigners to get permanent Japan residency in one year](#) (Jiji Press)
- [Japan's FY 2017 budget to reach record 97.45 tril. yen](#) (Kyodo News)
- [Toyota, Qualcomm join consortium on self-driving tech](#) (Nikkei Asian Review)
- [EPA with EU to liberalize trade to same level as TPP and beyond for pork and cheese](#) (Japan Agricultural News)
- [Editorial: Reconsider casino legislation in light of serious repercussions](#) (The Japan News)
- [Editorial: Japan must address host of concerns before it bets on casinos](#) (The Asahi Shimbun)

OPINION POLLS

Poll shows 54% welcome agreement on joint economic activities

TV Asahi reported at noon on the results of its opinion poll conducted over the weekend, which found that 54% of respondents welcomed the agreement to begin talks on joint economic activities on the Northern Islands, while 30% expressed opposition. When asked how the territorial issue should be resolved, 37% said all four islands should be returned, down 6 points from last month, while 33% said two islands - Habomai and Shikotan - should be returned, up 4 points. However, 81% said the territorial issue will not be resolved under the Abe administration. Only 9% said it will be resolved. Meanwhile, public support for the Abe cabinet rose 1.6 points to 51.6%, and nonsupport rose 0.3 points to 31%.

Fuji TV also reported on the results of its weekend survey, which showed that 63.9% of respondents welcomed the Japan-Russia summit in Yamaguchi, while 30.7% did not. 77.3% expressed support for the joint economic activities on the Northern Territories, while 16.5% were against it. On the agreement, 5% said it is advantageous for Japan, while 66.4% said it is advantageous for Russia. 22.3% said it is advantageous for both nations. Only 26.5% said progress will be made on the territorial issue, while 69% said otherwise. On PM Abe's planned visit to Pearl Harbor, 88.2% welcomed it, while 8.3% did not. 67.5% said it is appropriate that PM Abe will not offer an apology at Pearl Harbor, while 23.7% thought otherwise. 47.9% welcomed the approval of the TPP by the Diet, while 41% expressed opposition.

- [60% are in favor of joint economic activities in Northern Territories, Mainichi poll](#) (Mainichi)
- [69% opposed to allowing casinos in Japan, Kyodo News poll](#) (Tokyo Shimbun)

TV PROGRAMS

[**Leading lawmakers discuss Abe-Putin summit, U.S.-Japan ties under Trump presidency**](#)

Sunday's NHK "Nichiyo Toron" debate program featured a live discussion among top officials of the ruling and opposition parties on Japanese diplomacy. LDP Vice President Komura and Komeito Chief Representative Yamaguchi defended Prime Minister Abe's performance in the recent summit meetings with Russia President Putin by saying that the premier was successful in establishing a "new approach" toward forging a bilateral peace treaty. On the other hand, Democratic Party Acting President Hosono and Japanese Communist Party Chairman Shii criticized Abe for failing to deliver a breakthrough in the Northern Territories dispute.

On relations with the U.S. under the incoming Trump administration, the ruling officials expressed confidence in persuading the President-elect to reverse his position on the TPP because in their view the U.S. would benefit greatly from the terms and conditions set in the free trade accord. They said Tokyo would not accept a request possibly to be made by Washington for a bilateral free trade accord. As for the recent Osprey accident in Okinawa, all the participants urged the GOJ to press the U.S. military not to resume Osprey flights until the cause of the mishap was identified and proper measures were taken to prevent a recurrence. JCP leader Shii called for SOFA revision since it has apparently stood in the way of the Japanese investigation into what he called the crash of the tilt-rotor plane. Japan Innovation Party Co-Leader Katayama urged the Abe administration to capitalize on President-elect Trump's call for a review of security relations with U.S. allies so as to start discussions on SOFA revision and U.S. bases in Okinawa and elsewhere in Japan.

[**Northern Territories talks**](#)

Sunday evening's "NHK Special" reported on Japan's territorial dispute with Russia over the Northern Territories, which is dubbed "the last postwar settlement," showing the GOJ's struggle working with a "difficult" negotiating partner on a "difficult" topic. The program looked closely into a total of five summit meetings held between PM Abe and President Putin this year.

During the first meeting in May, the program said Abe used a diplomatic card by proposing a "new approach" aimed at improving bilateral ties first through discussing visa-free visits to the islands by former residents and joint economic activities there before moving on to the territorial talks. The program said Putin responded positively to Japan's proposal, as it matched his grand plan to rebuild the economy in the Far East. The program reported that the new proposal alarmed many within the GOJ, especially MOFA, which has been prioritizing the return of the islands, but PM Abe moved forward with the plan, and tapped METI Minister Seko to also serve as Minister for Economic Cooperation with Russia in order to demonstrate Japan's seriousness. The program said Russia was extremely enthusiastic about the economic cooperation with Japan. The program said, however, that although PM Abe, during the summit in November, proposed concluding a peace treaty before his and Putin's term expire, Russia deployed new missiles in two of the disputed islands only three days after the summit. A Russian security expert said: "Unless it is legally guaranteed that U.S. military facilities will not be built in the Northern Territories, it is unlikely that President Putin will accept handing over the islands."

The program said although the two leaders eventually agreed to begin talks on the joint economic activities under a "special framework," and expressed a "sincere commitment" to resolving the territorial dispute, former residents expressed disappointment over the fact that the territorial talks did not make any major progress. PM Abe was quoted as telling the network after the latest summit: "Former residents, as their time is running out, were of course hopeful that the issue of the return of the islands would be resolved at the summit in Nagato. Although I was not able to respond to their expectations, I was able to make the first important step toward resolving the issue of the return of the islands and concluding a peace treaty. Japan must resolve the issue; no other nation will do that for us. This also involves Japan's national interest. President Putin and I, who are the leaders today, have to make the decision."