IPURPOSE ESSAY · OCTOBER 2026

The Second Signature

A letter to Japan from the house next door

In December 2023 the United States military told Tokyo that the PFAS in Okinawa's water was strongly presumed to come from its bases. The Japanese government removed the sentence. What that one deletion says about who holds the pen, written by a Canadian who lives beside the same neighbour.

4
requests by Okinawa to test the water on the bases, 2016 to 2021. All refused.

1
private US admission that the bases were the source, December 2023.

33
months before the public heard about it, through a newspaper, in September 2026.

WRITTEN BY

Jesse James

Victoria, British Columbia · Intelligence with intent.

In December 2023 the United States military put three words on paper about the drinking water in Okinawa. Strongly presumed source. The bases. By the time Tokyo told the public what Washington had said, the words were gone.

I want to walk you through how that happened, because I think it explains more about your country than any speech about the constitution ever has. And I think it explains mine.

Start with the water. For years the firefighting foam used on American runways has been leaking a family of chemicals called PFAS into the ground around Kadena Air Base and Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. They don't break down. They show up in wells, in rivers, in springs that people in Ginowan still treat as sacred. Okinawa Prefecture wanted to walk onto the bases and take a sample. It asked four times between June 2016 and December 2021. Two requests for Kadena, one for Futenma, one for Camp Hansen.

Four times, no.

TEN YEARS, ONE WATER SAMPLE



Sources: Okinawa Prefecture PFAS filings; Ministry of Defense notice, 19 Dec 2025; Okinawa Times and Kyodo, 8 Sep 2026.

In December 2025 the Ministry of Defense explained the refusals. The American side had listed its reasons. There was no shared standard to judge the samples by. There was no data proving the bases were the source. The prefecture's sampling points had no geographic coordinates. And nobody had explained the historical and cultural value of the springs.

Read that list as a Canadian and you smile a little, because you recognize the genre. It's the letter you get from an insurance company.

Then on September 8, 2026 the Okinawa Times printed what had been sitting underneath that list for two years. In December 2023, the paper reported, US Forces Japan had already told the Japanese government that both bases were the source, and had said it did not object to that being made public. Kyodo confirmed the mechanics the same day through a government official. The American draft said the contamination was "strongly presumed to originate from the bases." That sentence was deleted "after wording coordination between the two governments."

Wording coordination. Two governments. One of them was yours.

WHAT LEFT THE DOCUMENT

US draft, Dec 2023	基地に由来すると強く推測される "strongly presumed to originate from the bases"
After "wording coordination"	基地に由来すると~~強く推測される~~
Public line, Dec 2025 to now	因果関係について確たることを申し上げることは困難 "difficult to say anything definite about a causal relationship"

The deletion is confirmed by Kyodo through a government official. That the US cleared publication rests on the Okinawa Times' unnamed sources; US Forces Japan has neither confirmed nor denied it.

Asked about it that afternoon, Chief Cabinet Secretary Kihara said he would refrain from answering on the details of exchanges with the American side, "owing partly to our relationship with the US side." He did not deny the report. In October the head of the Okinawa Defense Bureau told a citizens' group he could not answer questions "on the premise that the US military admitted it." The last written position I can find from the Ministry of Defense is that a causal link is difficult to establish.

> *Washington wrote the admission. Tokyo wrote the redaction.*

That's the sentence I'd like you to sit with, and before you decide I have no business saying it, let me tell you where I'm sitting.

I'm Canadian. Our constitution was an act of the British Parliament. For 115 years we could not amend our own founding document without asking London, and we didn't fix that until 1982. Until 1949 our highest court was a committee in London. The air defence of my country has been commanded by an American general since 1957; a Canadian gets the deputy's chair, every time, by design. Through the first months of 2025 the president of the United States kept calling my country the fifty-first state, and my government answered with retaliatory tariffs and a new prime minister, which is to say we got angry and then went back to the table.

My mother's family has worn this country's uniform for a hundred years. I'm not writing to you from above. I'm writing from the house next door, and our locks were installed by the same contractor.

TWO HOUSES, ONE CONTRACTOR

	CANADA	JAPAN
Founding document written by	The Parliament at Westminster, 1867	GHQ Government Section, Tokyo, February 1946
Could change it without a foreign hand from	1982	Never amended. Not once in 79 years.
Who commands the sky	NORAD. An American general, a Canadian deputy, since 1957	Yokota airspace. US-controlled tiers from about 2,450 m to 7,000 m over the capital region
Foreign troops governed by	NORAD Agreement, 1958	1960 Security Treaty and SOFA; Joint Committee minutes sealed since 23 June 1960

So I know the argument you're about to make, because we make it too.

It goes like this. Japan was never a victim. Yoshida Shigeru took the pacifist clause the Americans wrote and turned it into a shield against the Americans. When Dulles arrived in 1951 demanding a real army, Yoshida pointed at Article 9 and the state of the economy and sent him home with a police reserve. Japan put the money it didn't spend on a nuclear-age military into Toyota and Sony and became the second-largest economy on earth.

Article X of the 1960 treaty lets either side walk away on one year's notice. The criminal jurisdiction in the Status of Forces Agreement is the same NATO formula Germany has. The Philippines used Japan's SOFA as its benchmark when it demanded a better deal in 1965.

I've read that argument carefully and I think most of it is true.

That's exactly what makes the deleted phrase so strange.

A country that got the better of the Americans for seventy years should have no trouble repeating something the Americans had already said. The only thing an admission on the water would have cost Japan is a sentence the Japanese government did not want to say out loud. Nobody in Washington was asking for the silence. By the Okinawa Times' account, Washington had said it didn't mind the noise.

Which brings me to the thing I actually came here to say.

In February 1946 a few dozen Americans in the Dai-Ichi Building wrote the constitution of Japan in about a week. When they delivered it, General Whitney stepped into the garden and remarked that he was enjoying the atomic sunshine. Everyone knows that story. It's the first signature, and it's the one every argument about Japanese sovereignty fixates on. I think it's the wrong one to watch.

A document written by someone else only governs you once. After that, somebody has to keep agreeing to it. Every year. In writing.

Call it the second signature.

THE FIRST SIGNATURE

FEBRUARY 1946 · ONCE

A foreign hand writes the founding text. It happens one time, it is visible to everyone, and it is the thing every sovereignty debate argues about.

THE SECOND SIGNATURE

SINCE 23 JUNE 1960 · EVERY YEAR

A domestic hand keeps agreeing to the terms. It happens in committee minutes, wording coordination and ministerial non-answers, and almost no one argues about it.

On June 23, 1960 the Japan-US Joint Committee held its first meeting, and in the minutes of that meeting the two sides agreed that the committee's minutes would be official documents of both governments and would not be published without mutual consent. That rule is sixty-six years old. It still governs.

Here is the part the vassal-state theorists in your own country rarely say plainly. When a Japanese transparency group asked to see that one sentence, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refused. Not the Pentagon. Kasumigaseki. The group had to sue, and it turned out the government had already filed the sentence as evidence in another case. The ministry then explained that it had withheld the sentence because the Americans had asked it to, by email and by phone, and then declined to release the emails because the Americans had not consented to that either.

That is a Japanese ministry defending a 1960 rule against Japanese citizens, on behalf of a foreign government that was not in the room.

> *That's the second signature. The American hand wrote it once. A Japanese hand renews it.*

THE RULE, IN ITS OWN WORDS

合同委員会の公式な議事録は両政府に関する正式な文書と見なされ、双方の合意がない限り公表されない。

"The official minutes of the Joint Committee are regarded as official documents of both governments and will not be published without the consent of both sides." First meeting of the Japan-US Joint Committee, 23 June 1960. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs released this sentence only after the NPO Information Clearinghouse Japan sued for it.

If you want to know what the second signature could do when someone actually holds the pen, look at Korea, because it's the same army and the same committee.

On July 5, 2012 American military police detained a Korean civilian outside Osan Air Base. There was an uproar. In 2013 the US-ROK Joint Committee agreed that American forces would no longer run solo patrols off base, and would exercise no law enforcement against anyone other than their own personnel. No treaty was reopened. A committee changed how it operated, and the line of sovereignty moved.

On November 22, 2025 American military police on a solo patrol near Gate 2 Street outside Kadena body-slammed and handcuffed a man named Kareem El, a former Marine captain with no military status in Japan. On video, an MP was asked whether he could detain Japanese people who refused to show identification. He said yes. By then the solo patrols had run 33 times and produced more than a hundred arrests.

On December 8 your foreign minister, Motegi Toshimitsu, was asked in the Diet whether American MPs may detain Japanese nationals. He would not say. He recited the definition from the Joint Committee's agreed minutes. On December 26 the committee issued one of its rare public statements. US law enforcement, it said, is not permitted to detain people without SOFA status outside the facilities, apart from limited exceptions. In the same statement it announced that the solo patrols could resume by the end of the month. They were still paused in the spring while the assault was investigated. The Americans say they are coming back.

SAME ARMY, SAME COMMITTEE

KOREA

OSAN AIR BASE · 5 JUL 2012

US military police detain a Korean civilian off base. Public anger follows.

US-ROK JOINT COMMITTEE · 2013

No more solo off-base patrols. No law enforcement against anyone who is not US personnel. No treaty reopened.

JAPAN

KADENA GATE 2 STREET · 22 NOV 2025

US military police on a solo patrol body-slam and handcuff a US civilian. An MP says on video he can detain Japanese who refuse to show ID.

JAPAN-US JOINT COMMITTEE · 26 DEC 2025

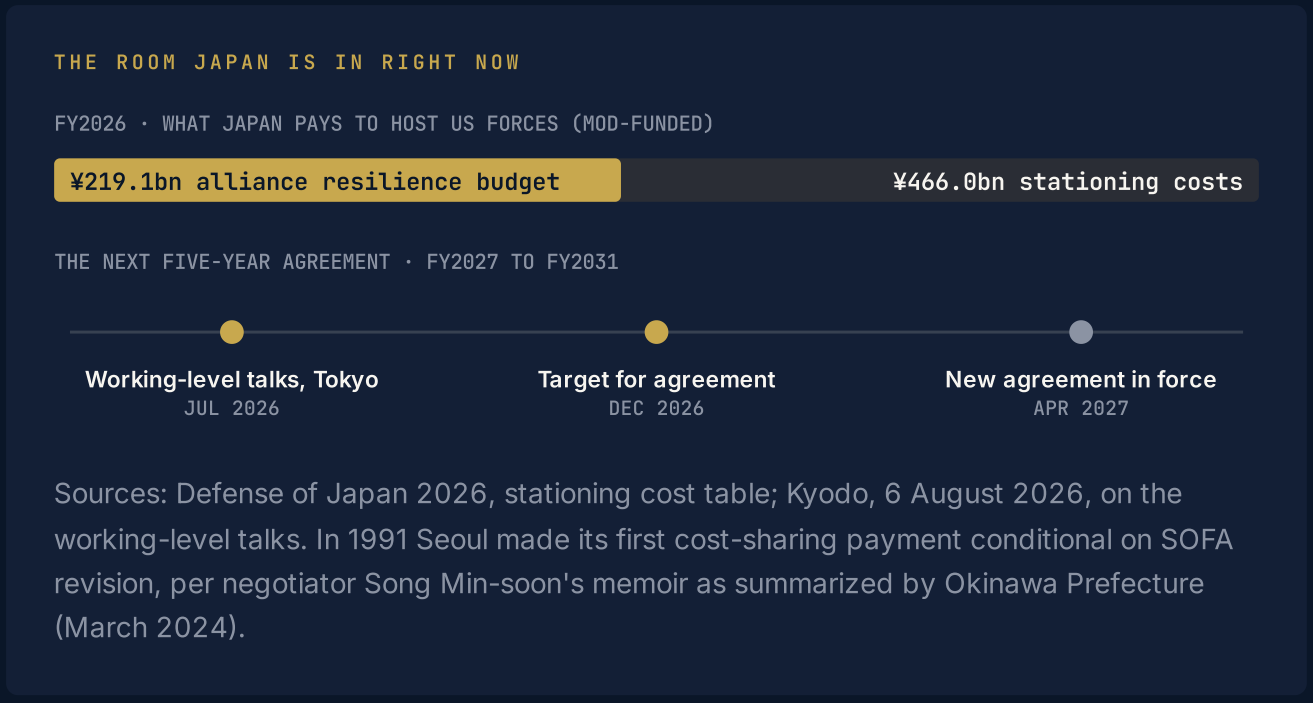
Detention of non-SOFA persons "not permitted," with limited exceptions. Solo patrols cleared to resume.

Seoul used the committee to take American police off its streets. Tokyo used it to put them back on the schedule.

Same army. Same mechanism. Different hand on the pen.

And Korea learned something else in 1991 that Japan has never tried. When Washington asked Seoul to start paying for the cost of American troops, the Korean negotiators refused to sign the cheque until the Status of Forces Agreement was revised. According to the negotiator's own memoir, which Okinawa Prefecture's researchers summarized in their 2024 study of seven countries' agreements, the SOFA was revised and Korea paid about half of what the Americans had asked.

Japan is in that exact room right now. The next five-year host-nation support agreement, covering 2027 to 2031, went to working-level talks in Tokyo this July, with a target of year-end. This year's "alliance resilience budget" is ¥219.1 billion, inside ¥466 billion in stationing costs. The American ask is for more. Nobody on the Japanese side has put the water on the table.



I am not asking you to tear up a treaty. I live next door to the same neighbour and I'm not tearing up mine.

I am asking you to notice where the pen is.

Article X has been sitting in the treaty since 1960 and no one has to touch it. The second signature is the one that matters, and it is renewed by people with Japanese passports, in Japanese ministries, in your own language, every time a phrase is coordinated out of a document or a minister refrains from answering out of consideration for the relationship.

On June 12, 2026 Okinawa Prefecture filed its fifth request to test the water on the bases. This one covers all three sites. It cites the Environment Ministry's new PFAS guidance. It lists the coordinates of every sampling point. It explains, for the benefit of the Americans, why the springs are sacred. Every reason on the 2025 refusal letter has been answered. Five days after the scoop, Okinawa elected a new governor backed by the LDP, 423,124 votes to 276,060.

THE FIFTH REQUEST ANSWERS EVERY STATED REASON

REASON GIVEN FOR REFUSAL, DEC 2025	IN THE 12 JUNE 2026 FILING
No environmental standard both sides can use	Cites the Environment Ministry's June 2026 PFOS/PFOA guidance
No data showing the bases are the source	The US itself said so in December 2023, per Okinawa Times and Kyodo
Sampling points lacked coordinates	Coordinates listed for every point
No account of the springs' cultural value	The sacred status of the Futenma-area springs explained

No US response to the fifth application had been reported as of 22 October 2026.

So the file is on a desk in Tokyo, waiting for a hand.

> *It took the Americans about a week to write the first signature in 1946. They haven't needed to hold the pen since. We keep handing it back.*

The judgments in this essay are my own. Every fact in it is sourced on the following page. Where a claim rests on anonymous reporting, the text says so.

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14 NHK and Nikkei, 13 Sep 2026, Okinawa gubernatorial election result (Kojya 423,124; Tamaki 276,060).

15 Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States, 1960, Article X; Agreement under Article VI (SOFA), 1960.

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17 Whitney's "atomic sunshine" remark of 13 Feb 1946 is recorded in Japanese accounts of the GHQ draft's delivery, including notes attributed to Shirasu Jirō.