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OKINAWA

Liberating Washington's East Asian Military Colony

by Doug Bandow

Executive Summary

U.S. military bases on Okinawa, home to some 27,000 service personnel and nearly as many family members, occupy one-fifth of the island. Although being stationed in an attractive western Pacific locale may be pleasant for U.S. soldiers, the pervasive American military presence harms most Okinawans. Barbed-wire-topped fences line major roads and cut across towns; prime commercial sites and beaches are unavailable for civilian use; accidents, crowding, and crime are constant annoyances; live-fire military exercises and aircraft flights disrupt what would otherwise be a peaceful environment. Okinawan demands for a reduction in the number and size of U.S. bases have been growing, especially since the election of Masahide Ota as governor in 1990.

The pervasive U.S. presence, made possible by America's conquest of the island during World War II, is a relic of the Cold War. The end of the Cold War and the transformation of the strategic environment of East Asia have eliminated the need to deploy the Third Marine Expeditionary Force and other military units stationed on the island--as well as elsewhere in Japan. Proposals for new missions--such as providing support for humanitarian interventions--are merely pretexts to preserve bases that have outlived their usefulness.

After more than half a century of U.S. occupation, the majority of Okinawans want the American troops to start going home. It is time for Washington to oblige by phasing out its troop presence, not only in Okinawa but in the rest of Japan as well, as recently recommended by former Japanese prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa.

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Introduction

After conquering Okinawa in one of the bloodiest battles of World War II, the United States turned the island into a garrison state. Even today, more than a half century after the end of that conflict, Okinawa hosts some 27,000 American soldiers, 24,000 dependents, and 40 U.S. military installations. The Marines account for roughly 60 percent of the forces and most of the facilities. Futenma Air Station, Kadena Air Base, Camp Hansen, Camp Schwab, Henoko Ordnance Ammunition Depot, Torii Communication Station, and two score other facilities dot the island, occupying 43,400 acres of land. The bases are surrounded by seemingly endless fences adorned with signs barring entry by Japanese citizens.

U.S. facilities occupy 20 percent of the island and an even larger portion of Okinawa's heavily populated central region. In fact, the American military controls more than 40 percent of the land area of six communities: 82.8 percent of Kadena town, 59.8 percent of Kin town, 56.4 percent of Chatan town, 51.5 percent of Ginoza village, 46.9 percent of Yomitan village, and 41.5 percent of Higashi village. Roads, homes, schools, and businesses abut bases sporting golf courses, tennis courts, and plenty of green open space as well as land dedicated to overtly military uses. Moreover, the United States controls 29 sea zones and 15 air zones; two of the three airports are run by the United States.

It is not just the extraordinary outrages--the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old school girl, for instance, and the other "111 rapes, 23 murders, 357 robberies, and 2,479 burglaries" committed by U.S. military personnel since 1972, according to Governor Masahide Ota--that bother Okinawans.[1] It is also the daily accidents, noise, congestion, and crowding. As the island's official petition, submitted to the U.S. government in April 1997, observes,

> Okinawa is beset by many other serious problems arising from the heavy concentration of U.S. facilities: (1) chronic aircraft noise plagues residents near the bases, (2) live firing exercises destroy the natural environment, (3) leakage of oil from base facilities cause soil and water pollution, and (4) military aircraft accidents occur from time to time. As a result, these problems disrupt the daily lives of the prefectural residents and instill great fear in them.[2]

That is a situation Americans would be unwilling to tolerate in their own country. But through it all the Okinawans remain extraordinarily friendly to Americans. Most soldiers try to be good neighbors and many participate in the community, through charities, sports competitions, and cultural events. But even a lot of tree planting, to which Col. Gary Anderson, commander of Camp Hansen, the largest Marine Corps facility on the island, proudly points, offers only minor compensation.[3] After all, Okinawans can plant their own trees. However friendly and pleasant the U.S. soldiers and their families may be, most island residents would prefer to have the land back for themselves and their families.

Washington should give it back. That requires redeploying the Third Marine Expeditionary Force (3rd MEF), preferably to Guam or Hawaii, or demobilizing the unit. Of course, some analysts view Okinawa as an internal Japanese problem. Tokyo could, if it wished, offer alternative facilities in mainland Japan. Japanese leaders will not do so, however, because there is no public support for increasing the U.S. military burden there.

In any case, America's unique relationship to Okinawa--as occupying power that imposed the bases on a defeated and powerless people--gives the United States a special responsibility to address Okinawan desires. Moreover, reshuffling forces around Japan would not address the deeper issue: why is a continued U.S. forward military presence needed? Since the primary justification for America's forward deployments, the Cold War, has disappeared, so should the deployments. That means phasing out the U.S. military guarantee to Japan and withdrawing U.S. forces--most of which are based on Okinawa.

Historical Background

Americans who do not understand the grievances of the Okinawan people should visit the Cornerstone of Peace, a monument modeled after the Vietnam Memorial. The latter, 58,000 names inscribed on a black granite wall, haunts Washington. But as painful as the Vietnam War was for America, this nation has generally been lucky in war. Rarely has the U.S. homeland been ravaged. Not so other nations, like Japan. The Cornerstone of Peace contains the names of the nearly 237,000 people--Japanese, American, British, Korean, and Taiwanese--killed in the World War II battle for the island. Okinawans rightly feel they were pawns cynically sacrificed in that battle.

Okinawa has long had a difficult relationship with Japan. Only in 1879 were the Ryukyu islands, long independent and then under indirect Japanese control, formally absorbed by the Japanese empire.[4] But the Okinawans retained a distinctive culture and did not fit well into increasingly militarized Japan. In particular, they were considered insufficiently patriotic and loyal to the emperor.

Scars from World War II

Unfortunately, their pacifist tendencies did not insulate them from the ravages of World War II. As the tide turned against Tokyo, the Japanese military took over the island, drafting civilians to construct airfields, staff hospitals, and serve the military. But Okinawans were still distrusted; scores were executed as alleged spies. And the military did not bother to evacuate civilians before the U.S. assault. Observes Ota, a student conscript during the battle, the Japanese commanders dragged "not only their line soldiers but also the unfortunate civilians into the war."[5] The brutal battle, highlighted by the "typhoon of [U.S.] fire from ships, planes and howitzers," as one Japanese soldier put it, lasted nearly three months.[6] The consequences for Okinawa were catastrophic: more than 220,000 Japanese died, as many civilians as soldiers, and the fight essentially destroyed the island.

The scars remain. Older Okinawans still bristle over their treatment by the dying Japanese empire. Even today Okinawans treat American servicemen with greater respect than they do members of Japan's Self-Defense Force. (Some say with surprising forcefulness that they would not allow the SDF to take over any relinquished American military facilities.)

To commemorate Okinawa's sacrifice in World War II, the prefectural government erected the Cornerstone of Peace in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the battle. Ota's unique inspiration was the inclusion of the name of everyone, including 14,005 Americans, who died in the battle.

Washington's Postwar Military Colony

After the war, the island became a dumping ground for 15,000 U.S. troops who were at what some called "the logistical end of the line."[7] Although Tokyo and Washington signed a peace treaty in 1952, the United

States retained control of Okinawa, leaving Japan with only "residual sovereignty."[8] Okinawans even needed documents from the U.S. Civil Administration, which ruled the Ryukyus, to visit Japan. The U.S. high commissioner frequently removed elected officials with whom he disagreed.

During the Korean War the United States began expanding its military operations, seizing land at bayonet point from farmers to make airfields. (That is why a much larger portion of U.S.-occupied land in Okinawa than on the mainland is owned by private citizens rather than the government.) Many Japanese farmers displaced by the United States were encouraged to emigrate to, of all places, Bolivia, where they were essentially dumped in the jungle.[9] Washington acted like an arrogant colonial power. Ken Miki, editor of the Ryukyu Shimpo newspaper, contends that "for the U.S., Okinawa was like a gift. The U.S. won World War II and got Okinawa, like the spoils of war."[10] Unfortunately, America indeed treated Okinawa like spoils of war.

Okinawans did not like being transferred from one overlord to another. Observes Ota, "Discontented with the U.S. military occupation, and the suppression of human rights and infringement of the right of property that accompanied it, the Okinawan people struggled for many years for reversion to Japan."[11] Only in 1972, 27 years after the conclusion of World War II, did Japan regain control of the Ryukyus. However, complains Ota, "today, a quarter of a century after the reversion, the condition of Okinawa has hardly changed."[12] Just 15 percent of the land once occupied by the U.S. military in Okinawa has been returned, compared to 60 percent of the property once used on the Japanese mainland.

Mounting Tensions

Okinawans have grown tired of paying such a disproportionate share of the social cost of America's deployments. Even before Washington returned Okinawa to Japan, islanders demonstrated in favor of eliminating the U.S. presence. Sociologist Kozy Amemiya interviewed one Okinawan who explained, "The Americans may have been nice as individuals, but politically they would immediately label us as 'reds' if we participated in demonstrations."[13] Washington has never recognized such protests as legitimate. Even today Anderson blames popular support for land reversion on leftist newspapers that inflame anti-U.S. sentiments.[14]

Governor Ota's Campaign against the Bases

It was patriotism, not communism, that caused Okinawans to elect in 1990 a distinguished university professor and author, Masahide Ota, on a platform of getting the bases--all of them--off of the island. He was, of course, realistic enough to recognize that it would not happen at once. His government's "Base Return Action Program" proposes the return of 9 bases by 2001, another 14 by 2010, and the final 17 by 2015.[15]

He has pushed his program with remarkable tenacity. To help educate Americans about the issue, Ota made his seventh visit to the United States in mid-May. As he proudly explains, "Since taking office in 1990, I have devoted myself completely to the resolution of U.S. base problems in our prefecture. The history of Okinawa has been one of suffering caused by the burden of military bases, and this situation must be changed. As we move toward the 21st century, military bases must be gradually removed from Okinawa so that our younger generation can live with hope on a peaceful island."[16]

The Weight of the Social Burden

Ota's efforts have been backed by the municipalities that suffer most from the U.S. presence. Townships like Kadena and Kin distribute English-language brochures describing the burden of U.S. bases on their people. Kin's publication places on its cover a picture of Marines relaxing on Kin Blue Beach, which is controlled by the United States. The brochure observes that "the townspeople are being forced to live in the limited left-over areas and they've been living back to back with the accidents and incidents caused by the base."[17] U.S. firing exercises have also denuded hills of vegetation and caused erosion of the red soil, which runs into the ocean.

Officials of Kadena particularly worry about the lack of living space for young people, many of whom now move away. "Only the elderly now remain," says one city staffer; the "number of kids [is] decreasing."[18] Ginowan's representatives take visitors up on a hill overlooking Futenma Air Station and point to how it crowds the city. "It causes a big impact on life," one of them stated. The facility creates "fear of crashes and prevents development of the city."[19]

Even communities with a smaller base presence suffer. U.S. facilities cover 15 percent of the area of Urasoe,

the smallest city on the island, but Camp Kinser has prevented expansion of Highway 58, the island's main north-south traffic artery. Although the U.S. military has promised to yield some neighboring land for expansion of the road, the base hampers access to the city's new convention center. Municipal officials hope to win for civilians the right to use military roads running through the facilities, and ultimately to regain control of other land to construct new roads.[20]

False Hopes at the End of the Cold War

The end of the Cold War raised Okinawans' hopes that the suffocating U.S. military presence would at least be reduced. After all, the great global military struggle seemed to be over. Ota explains that after the end of the Cold War "my people expected the re-alignment and reduction of the bases in Okinawa to make progress, if belatedly."[21] However, nothing changed. Then, in 1995, the Defense Department published United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region, which concluded that America's deployments--all of them, including those in Okinawa--remained as important as ever.[22]

The Pentagon's announcement that Washington intended to retain its existing force and base structure essentially forever, explains Ota, caused Okinawans to fear that Japan and the United States "might redefine the Mutual Defense Treaty and readjust the use of the American bases in Japan from more globalized perspectives. From all this, my people feared that the functions of the bases in Okinawa might be reinforced and perpetuated through the 21st century."[23]

The Rape Incident and Its Aftermath

Washington's resistance to change bothered Okinawans, and the 1995 rape of a school girl galvanized public opinion. Although the Marine Corps commander apologized by letter, he refused to meet with Ota, commenting that "these things" are "the price of global stability."[24] (Admiral Richard Macke, the Pacific commander, observed that the rapists "could have had" a prostitute for the price they paid to rent their car.)[25] Such callousness encouraged the growth of passionate anti-base activism.

Although many landowners now rely on U.S. rental payments and therefore favor retention of the bases, about 100 of them who choose patriotism over economic interest

are members of the Council to Protect Owners' Rights and Property on Military Bases. Starting in 1982 some of them began subdividing their land as a means of protest. There are now about 3,000 so-called one-tsubo (about 40-square-feet) landowners, people who have gained title to obstruct U.S. control by refusing to extend the leases on their land. The movement began on Okinawa but has expanded to the mainland as residents have sought to demonstrate their solidarity with Okinawans. One of the activists is Moriteru Arasaki, a noted author and university professor at Okinawa University. The organization he represents, the One-tsubo Landlords Campaign, wants to eliminate all of the bases. They want their land returned because their desire is to "use the land productively and for our lives."[26]

The main challenge has been the central government's willingness to force owners to extend their leases. Curiously, the U.S. armed forces enjoy a higher legal position than does the Japanese Self-Defense Force, which must rely on voluntary contracts. But the administration of Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto went to court to force the prefectural government to provide the relevant signature in the de facto expropriation of private land for the U.S. facilities. Not only landowners but other Okinawans have protested the stifling U.S. military occupation. In 1995, 85,000 Okinawans turned out in one major demonstration. The following year 89 percent of Okinawans casting ballots voted in favor of reducing the American military presence.[27] Nevertheless, Tokyo and Washington issued a joint declaration in April 1997, supplemented by another accord a year later, affirming the continued presence of U.S. military forces.

If Tokyo and Washington do not come up with meaningful relief, Okinawan anger is likely only to rise. Ota worries that some residents may resort to violence. Choko Takayama, deputy mayor of Naha city, argues, "If the U.S. wants to keep its forces in the region long-term, it needs to take action, like folding Futenma Air Station into Kadena Air Base."[28]

Collusion between Tokyo and Washington

An important cause of Okinawans' frustration is the fact that their pleas are ignored in Tokyo as well as in Washington. Unfortunately, the American base presence in Okinawa provides no cause for complaint by Tokyo. Three-quarters of U.S. facilities are now concentrated on 0.6 percent of Japan's land area, which also happens to be the

most distant and poorest prefecture. Japan as a whole enjoys the benefits of being defended by America (a multi-billion-dollar financial savings to Japanese taxpayers) while Okinawa bears the burden. The two countries have, consciously or not, colluded against the island.

In the aftermath of the 1995 rape incident, the American and Japanese governments did feel sufficient pressure to create the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO), which developed 28 separate initiatives to ease the burden of America's military presence.[29] But the most important measure, land reversion (in theory, Washington agreed to return 21 percent of the property under its control), will result in only modest changes even if it is implemented. Worse, most of the measure remains stalled because of the difficulty of finding alternative facilities. The reality is that no one in mainland Japan wants more American bases there.[30]

Ota complains: "Most of the Diet members have little concern for the people of Okinawa. They would never accept military bases in their hometowns."[31] Okinawa sends only 8 people to a Diet of more than 500 members. Many Okinawans believe former prime minister Hashimoto hoped he could wish away the problem by simply rearranging the bases on the island. For instance, his government proposed replacing Futenma--over the next five to seven years--with a floating heliport off the city of Nago.

The Heliport Nonsolution

In an attempt to influence Nago city residents in last December's referendum on the project, Hashimoto offered substantial economic aid and promised lucrative construction contracts; building firms flew employees back home to vote. The government put out a fancy professional propaganda brochure in favor of the proposal, and Okinawan-born members of the Self-Defense Agency went door to door to promote the plan. Hashimoto simultaneously threatened to end $150 million in aid to Okinawa and warned that "nothing will change," that is, Futenma will not close, if voters say no.[32] Professor Kimiko Miyagi of Meio University calls that an "attempt at blackmail."[33] The city also attempted to obscure the issue by offering four instead of two choices. The measure raised a host of issues, including environmental concerns. Citizen activists waged a fierce campaign against the heliport, even producing an inexpensive parody of the government's brochure.

Despite Tokyo's strongest efforts, 53.8 percent of voters rejected the proposal, most of them unequivocally; 37.9 percent supported the initiative only because they believed the economic benefits would be substantial. Just 8.3 percent backed the project without qualification. Although satisfied by the result, Miyagi complains, "The saddest part of the referendum is that the government succeeded in splitting the city. People feel stress over the referendum itself, not just the results."[34]

Nago's mayor nevertheless announced his support for the proposal--because of the central government's promises of substantial economic aid--and then effectively fell on his sword by resigning. He was succeeded by a candidate who offered ambiguous backing for the base but vowed to abide by Governor Ota's decision.[35] Then Ota, whose approval is necessary for the use of Okinawan waters, announced that he would not approve the heliport, greatly angering Hashimoto. Ota explained, "We must respect the will of the people because it is the fundamental rule of democracy."[36] Says editor Ken Miki, "Hashimoto thought Okinawa would accept [the heliport] proposal." The prime minister had "great expectations, but the result was the opposite, so he was really disappointed."[37] The central government hasn't given up, observes one Ota staffer, but the project seems stalled.

Indeed, some outside observers warn Tokyo against attempting to impose this or any other strategy without local consent. Columnist Frank Ching contends, "If Tokyo decides on strong-arm tactics and rides roughshod over the Okinawans again, the resulting outcry may put in jeopardy not just the heliport but all U.S. bases on Okinawa."[38]

But even Ota's agreement would not necessarily make the plan feasible. According to the General Accounting Office, the United States and Japan face "(1) significant costs to acquire and maintain the facility; (2) major technological challenges, as no sea-based facility of the type and scale envisioned has ever been built; and (3) operational complications because the sea-based facility envisioned would be insufficient to support all U.S. operating requirements and maintain maximum safety margins."[39] U.S. military commanders privately doubt it will ever be built.[40]

Threadbare Justifications for Keeping the Bases

In any case, SACO does not reach the more fundamental issue: why should the United States continue to dominate

island life by stationing a marine expeditionary force and other units on Okinawa? The U.S. and Japanese governments do not like being asked that question. In fact, the Marine Corps seems to blame the Okinawans whenever the issue comes up. As part of an official briefing, one officer complained to me, "Because of Governor Ota's recent media assaults, the Marine Corps has found itself justifying the importance of basing Marines on Okinawa."[41]

The Tyranny of Status Quo Thinking

In fact, both nations' defense establishments have been busy for years concocting new justifications for old deployments. The most notorious is the United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region. The report's conclusion was simple: whatever has been must always be. Every American military deployment, installation, and treaty is needed now more than ever before. Yet that is an obviously unsatisfactory response. The Cold War is over, Japan faces no credible threats, and South Korea--where U.S. forces on Okinawa would be sent in a crisis--is capable of defending itself. Indeed, despite the April U.S.-Japan agreement to expand bilateral military cooperation, so complacent is Tokyo that it is cutting its already modest defense budget in 1998. Japan is also reducing troop levels and weapons procurement.[42] And Japanese political analysts warn that the fall of the Hashimoto government in July may cause Tokyo to renege on even the modest promises it made a few months ago.[43]

The end of the Cold War should logically have led to the end of America's Cold War deployments. Says Miki, "Before 1989, the U.S. said that due to the threat of the Soviet Union and China the U.S. must stay. Since 1989 it has emphasized the Korean issue. If Korea reunifies, what reason will the U.S. give next" for keeping everything as it has been since World War II?[44]

That is a good question, one Okinawans now regularly ask of Washington. Even the Marines admit, "Not a day goes by when we are not asked the question . . . 'With the end of the Cold War, why does the United States continue to base such a large number of military here on Okinawa?'"[45] The services, naturally, have an answer--in fact, many of them. The military graciously gives tours of their facilities even to skeptics of the U.S. presence. The Air Force and Marine Corps conduct formal briefings to justify their presence on Okinawa.

The Air Force defends its installations, most notably Kadena Air Base, primarily by citing the potential for conflict in Korea and elsewhere in East Asia. Okinawa is the "keystone of the Pacific," explained one senior Air Force officer.[46] That U.S. troops need to be close to potential conflicts is only part of the justification; another concern is "presence is influence."[47] Nevertheless, my briefer acknowledged that continued changes in the regional threat environment would warrant reconsideration of the U.S. military presence: "it is only logical to assume that major strategic changes would result in similar changes in deployments."[48] He seemed to recognize that a diminishing threat of war, especially on the Korean peninsula, would automatically reduce the need for bases in Okinawa.

The Marine Corps Digs In

Not so the Marine Corps, which accounts for the bulk of U.S. facilities on the island. The Cold War may be over, but the Marines see no diminution of the need for a forward U.S. presence. Hegemonic communism may have disappeared, but--surprise, surprise!--the American bases on Okinawa are needed now more than ever. "Simply put," explain the Marines, "we are here to defend Japan!"[49] From whom? The answer does not seem to matter. Say the Marines, "We, the U.S. and specifically, the U.S. Marine Corps are OBLIGATED, by law and a sense of friendship to be here."[50]

It is an astonishing assertion that the 1952 treaty, signed at the height of the Cold War, while the Korean War raged, requires the United States to keep its military presence unchanged 46 years later. From whom do the Marines have a special obligation to protect Japan?

The Soviet Union may be gone, but, the Marines say, there are China and North Korea. Such desperate threat procurement is not compelling. China has so far been assertive rather than aggressive in East Asia. Its military buildup has thus far been measured, as Beijing trades quantity for quality. Moreover, Japan, with the world's second largest economy, is capable of maintaining a military with significant defensive potential that could deter future Chinese aggression.[51]

North Korea is an even more pitiful replacement for the threat posed by the Soviet Union. The country is bankrupt and starving; it has lost all of its important allies, including China, which now has closer economic

relations with the South. South Korea, with twice the population and 24 times the economic output of the North, should be fully able to defend itself. Pyongyang poses no credible threat to Japan. Washington should be phasing out its commitment to South Korea, which would eliminate the most obvious contingency for the Marines on Okinawa.[52]

Instead, Secretary of Defense William Cohen says that "as far as Japan and Okinawa is concerned, we intend to remain with the same essential presence there that we currently have," even if the two Koreas reunite.[53] That is assuming the Japanese leaders allow Washington to stay. Senior Marine Corps officers worry that "if Korea reunifies they will kick the U.S. out" of the island.[54] Former prime minister Hashimoto refused to commit himself, saying only that his government would discuss "troop levels in accordance with changes in situations" in the region.[55] But Governor Ota rightly worries about apparent U.S. plans for a permanent occupation of the island: "It will be a grave matter if Mr. Cohen means that U.S. bases in Okinawa will be fixed as they are. I cannot help but wonder about our status as a sovereign nation if there is no reduction in U.S. troop levels even after the threat of North Korea is eliminated."[56]

In addition to invoking the specter of a Chinese or North Korean menace, Marine Corps briefers also offer a chart describing "critical oil shipping lanes."[57] But no naval force is threatening to close those lanes or has the capability to do so. Moreover, it is not clear what the Marines could do if someone made such an attempt. Presumably naval and air forces would have to deal with that problem. And those are sea-lanes to Japan, not America. Japan could easily develop the capability to protect those lanes with enhanced naval and air forces.

The argument that Washington should continue to defend Japan is especially bizarre since the Hashimoto government intended to cut military outlays and newly elected Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi is even more likely to do so. And while 69 percent of Japanese told the Daily Yomiuri in November 1997 that North Korea could pose a military threat to Japan, only 4 percent favored joining the United States in combatting the North.[58] If Tokyo doesn't perceive its interests to be threatened, and if Japanese citizens do not believe that their nation should defend its security interests, the United States should not spend billions of dollars to protect Japan.

Further, the argument that it is cheaper to station U.S. forces in Japan, because of host-nation support, than

on American territory is simply incorrect. The Congressional Research Service reports that "only a relatively small part of the Japanese contribution directly offsets U.S. military operating costs. Moreover, when similar military units are compared, it does not appear cheaper to base forces in Japan than in Europe or in the continental United States."[59] Basing some units on Guam or Hawaii might be somewhat more expensive, but not dramatically so.

More fundamentally, reliance on the host-nation support argument reinforces what former Marine Corps officer Robert Hamilton calls "a widespread belief in Japan that its partial financing of the U.S. military in Japan does in fact constitute an alliance."[60] A real alliance depends on shared interest and effort, unlike the unbalanced "mutual" defense treaty between Tokyo and Washington. We should send American soldiers abroad only if doing so advances U.S. interests, not because a foreign country is willing to pay to be protected.

Marine briefers rightly worry that East Asia today has no cooperative defense system analogous to NATO. But America's dominant role makes such a system unlikely to evolve. Necessity is a powerful inducement; today, countries need not unite to deal with regional security problems. Indeed, America's attempt to smother any independent action by its allies, particularly Japan, ensures that they will never develop a collaborative system that could respond to regional threats. As Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute points out, U.S. security guarantees enable governments in the region "to adopt apathetic policies and engage in domestic political posturing rather than forge ties of mutually beneficial military cooperation."[61]

Marine Presence Is Strategically Irrelevant

Should Washington find itself at war with China (or another aggressive power in East Asia), the Air Force and Navy would do the heavy lifting. The half-strength 3rd MEF would have no meaningful role to perform. Washington's participation in another ground war on the Asian mainland is almost inconceivable, leaving the 3rd MEF no useful function. Moreover, a sizable American presence on Okinawa, especially if it were directed against China, would turn Japan into a military target--something likely to make Tokyo hesitate to support Washington, just as Japan lacked enthusiasm for U.S. saber rattling over Taiwan in early 1996.

Is there any other reason to keep the Marines on Okinawa? The Marines, not surprisingly, respond yes. National animosities, territorial disputes, ethnic tensions, and poverty still bedevil the region. Among the potential dangers the Marine Corps points to are trade imbalances, bank failures, and currency devaluations. Stability could be at risk, with potential chaos in Indonesia, enmity between India and Pakistan, and so on. And air and naval power is not enough, argued one Marine Corps officer, as "stability is often provided by simple combat power in the region. You don't get much stability with air or naval power. You can't occupy territory."[62]

So what? If one wanted to catalog conflicts in which the United States should not intervene, and certainly not with ground forces, the examples cited by the Marines would be at the top of the list. What if the successor regime to Indonesia's corrupt Suharto dictatorship totters? Let it go. What if Filipino and Chinese ships exchange shots over the Spratly Islands? Stay out of it. What if Japan and South Korea engage in more bitter sparring over the Tokdu, or Takeshima, Islands? Tell both countries to grow up and settle their differences like mature democracies. What if India and Pakistan move toward war over Kashmir? Stay as far away from the conflict as possible. There is no need for Washington to treat every problem in the world as its own.

Grasping at Straws: Noncombat Missions

Next, the Marines point to new, non-war-fighting tasks. They state, "Our missions span the operation continuum from disaster relief and humanitarian assistance through non-combat evacuation and peacekeeping."[63] Some of those tasks are of dubious benefit--especially American involvement in UN peacekeeping or nation building.[64] Others may diminish the Marine Corps' ability to carry out its most important task (humanitarian operations, for example, tend to degrade war-fighting capabilities). Even those tasks with value--rescuing American civilians from an imploding country, for instance--do not warrant the cost, to both the United States and Okinawa, of the existing force and base structure.

The American presence on the island during the Cold War could at least be defended as serving a serious end: the defense of East Asia against a hegemonic totalitarian threat. Being ready to help Japan in the event of another Kobe-magnitude earthquake, which the Marines point to as an example of a worthwhile noncombat mission, or to

extract American businessmen who have voluntarily ventured into nations with volatile political environments, is far less important.

Moreover, such tasks have little to do with Okinawa. Observes Miki, "When we go to the U.S., people say, 'we are trying to protect you, why do you complain?'[65] But today the 3rd MEF has virtually nothing to do with defending the Okinawans. It is one thing to impose U.S. military installations on a reluctant population when Washington is actually protecting those people. It is quite another to perpetuate that burden to advance purely American interests. (Without embarrassment, the Marine Corps says that "hosting the U.S. Marine Corps [in Okinawa] is by no accident."[66] That is true--Washington simply placed the bases where it desired in an occupied province of a defeated nation.)

Finally, the Marines cite the financial benefits received by Okinawa. Indeed, they have produced a slick brochure touting the money that the Marine Corps infuses into the community, including more than $4.5 million that "local Okinawa moving companies will earn" moving servicemen and their families from Okinawan to base housing.[67] (The Air Force has generated cheaper advertising for its community service and environmental activities.)[68] Although some islanders obviously do benefit, more of them suffer from the loss of alternative economic opportunities. The number of Okinawans employed on the bases has fallen from 40,000 to 8,200 since 1972; the share of the prefectural product generated from the military bases has dropped from 16 percent to 5 percent over the same period.

There seems little doubt that Okinawans, who enjoy a per capita income just 70 percent of that of other Japanese, could put the portion of their island now occupied by U.S. facilities to better use. Koji Taira, a professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, calls the 20 percent (base share of island land area) minus the 5 percent (base share of island economy) a 15 percent "deadweight loss."[69] But even that number, he argues, understates the true social and environmental costs borne by the residents of Okinawa because of the American bases.

> The 15 percent loss does not include the pressure on land rents in the rest of Okinawa due to the withdrawal of 20 percent of the area from civilian use; inconveniences to civil air transportation due to restrictions on the use of air space; closures of port facilities and waters to

> civilian shipping, fishing, or recreational activities because of naval and other military requirements; deadly effects of toxic wastes of the bases seeping into the soil or running off into the sea; deafening noises of bombers, fighters, and helicopters which physically damage young school children and disrupt their learning processes; accidents in the air and on the roads caused by U.S. military aircraft and vehicles; destruction of nature by live-ammunition artillery exercises, which also deny civilian access to highways in the exercise areas; crimes committed by off-duty service personnel against civilians and their properties; and on, almost ad infinitum.[70]

In any case, economic benefits for Okinawa offer no reason for the United States to station troops there. A false patriotism has long been the last refuge of the scoundrel seeking to justify economic privileges. Now salaries and rental payments seem to be the last refuge of the scoundrel seeking to justify outdated military commitments.

Of course, the ultimate decisionmakers are the politicians, not the military officers. Gen. Frank Libutti, commander of the 3rd MEF, recently told the Daily Yomiuri newspaper, "Any further reductions of forces on Okinawa would hurt our ability to provide peace, stability and prosperity to the entire Asia-Pacific region."[71] He is right in the sense that if the U.S. and Japanese governments expect the Marines to police all of East Asia, then the Marines need to be stationed close by, and the most obvious location is Okinawa. But with the end of the Cold War, there is no reason to expect the Marines to play such a role. And many Okinawans understand that the root of Washington's military presence is the belief that Washington should run the world. Moriteru Arasaki expresses the hope that "the American people will try to change U.S. government policy."[72]

Executing a Graceful Withdrawal

With the end of the Cold War, the world, including East Asia, has changed. Observes former Japanese prime minister Morihiro Hosokawa, "Today the international environment has changed dramatically in East Asia," a development that he believes warrants the phasing out of the U.S. military presence in Japan.[73] The threats have diminished--the Soviet Union is no more, North Korea is crum-

bling, China has become a major economic partner of the United States and other countries. Moreover, the abilities of America's Cold War era allies have increased. Japan is the second-ranking economic power on earth, South Korea is far stronger than its northern antagonist, and most of the other East Asian states have made dramatic economic progress--not withstanding the recent financial turmoil.

Yet Washington and Tokyo want to preserve U.S. bases on Okinawa with little more than cosmetic changes. Indeed, the U.S. military fusses about how diminishing threats have increased the pressure to withdraw. "Unfortunately, past East Asian security initiatives have already reduced the number of U.S. military in Asia," complains the Marine Corps. And "the most likely scenario" of Korean unification would be--horrors!--"the removal of all U.S. forces."[74] Policymakers in Washington and Tokyo seem unable or unwilling to understand how dramatically the world has changed over the last decade. As analyst Arthur Zich puts it, "The bases are there simply because they have always been there."[75]

An Alternative to U.S. Hegemony

Instead of being meddler of first resort, the United States should act as balancer of last resort, intervening only if a hegemonic threat develops that allied states are incapable of containing. For that purpose, port access is more important than having ground forces on station. And, given the economic growth and political development of states throughout the region, disengagement would not leave Washington's friends militarily naked and helpless. Indeed, America's original deployments were not intended to be permanent. The Mutual Defense Treaty between the United States and South Korea, for example, explicitly envisioned replacement of the bilateral alliance with "a more comprehensive and effective system of regional security in the Pacific Area."[76] The United States should work to turn those words into reality.

Washington should start by adjusting its military commitments throughout East Asia. The hegemonic threat posed by the Soviet Union appeared to tightly link the security of America with that of such allies as Japan and South Korea. But today, observes Edward Olsen of the Naval Postgraduate School, "That linkage has completely dissipated. America's current alliances with other countries are intended totally to deter attacks <u>on them</u> or to fight <u>their</u> wars should deterrence fail."[77] During the Cold War,

at least, Washington's alliances were theoretically built on mutual interest. Today the benefits run almost solely in the direction of the allies. Thus, jettisoning treaties and deployments that commit Washington to fight on behalf of allies would increase America's security by reducing the likelihood of entangling this country in war.

Transforming America's role in that way would allow the United States to phase out its forces in Japan, while maintaining military cooperation--joint naval exercises, shared intelligence gathering, and base access rights in an emergency. Hosokawa points out that even after the return of the naval bases of Sasebo and Yokosuka, the United States "should still be able to use Japanese parts and maintain its sea power in the western Pacific."[78] (South Korea's overwhelming comparative advantages over North Korea would likewise allow disengagement from the Korean peninsula, which would further reduce any justification for stationing American forces in Japan.) Some units should be demobilized as the security guarantees they undergird are reduced; others could be redeployed back to Hawaii or Guam. Such a mid-Pacific presence would allow the United States to intervene in serious crises if necessary.[79]

At the same time, America should encourage greater regional cooperation where its security interests may be impinged, particularly in maintaining open sea-lanes,[80] and continue to play an active role in nonconfrontational areas--cultural, economic, diplomatic, and political relationships. However, while the United States should mediate, encourage, facilitate, and observe, it should not see itself as the residual problem solver and enforcer for East Asia.

The "Destabilization" Scare Tactic

Would an American military withdrawal nevertheless unsettle countries in East Asia? Yes, but not as much as it would have 10 or more years ago. Not only has the threat environment changed dramatically, but the affected states are more able to care for themselves. There is "a growing confidence among the nations of Asia," says William Clark.[81] Indeed, they have had to begin contemplating life without American troops. It may have taken a volcano to force the issue, but Washington finally relinquished its bases in the Philippines. And everyone concerned--America, the Philippines, and East Asia as a whole--survived the experience unscathed.[82] Concern was undoubtedly greater 20 years ago when President Carter

proposed withdrawing U.S. ground forces from South Korea, but even then, in a palpably more dangerous time, our allies ultimately accepted the decision with some equanimity.[83]

Could unforeseen circumstances arise? Of course, and then Washington should act as a distant balancer, cooperating with friendly states if necessary to protect important interests that would otherwise go undefended. But the daisy chain necessary to connect most local and regional complications to vital U.S. interests is a long one. And the daisy chain no longer leads back to a ruthless global hegemonic threat. China, Russia, North Korea, and that all-purpose bogeyman "instability" just aren't adequate substitutes. As Gertrude Stein said of Oakland, "There is no there there."

The price of having won World War II should not be a commitment to forever patrol East Asia, guarding nations that prefer to devote their resources to economic development rather than military protection and avoid dealing with emotions still raw from past Japanese aggression. The Cold War may have left the United States little option except to have a significant military presence in East Asia, but Washington won its struggle against the Soviet-led communist threat nearly a decade ago. The American people should not be expected to surrender more dollars and risk more lives to police East Asia for as long as Washington's allies consider that convenient.

Conclusion

It is time for Washington and Tokyo to treat the Okinawans justly. Nothing can excuse the past treatment of the island, but both governments can now adapt to the future. The issue is primarily Japan's responsibility, since Tokyo could, any time it wished, tell America to go home. But justice for the Okinawans is also a U.S. obligation, since Washington knowingly imposed the bases on an unwilling population. "The American people don't know such a small island has such a large presence," concedes Miki.[84] But American policymakers do.

Okinawans have proved to be incredibly patient people. For a half century they have borne the brunt of U.S. force deployments in Japan. Although that burden might have been necessary during the Cold War, the world has changed. It is time to adjust American force levels and deployments accordingly. "Up till now, Okinawa's history has been

other-determined," complains Governor Ota.[85] It is time to allow Okinawans to take control of their own destiny.

Notes

1. See A Message from Okinawa on Bases, Peace, and Culture (Naha, Japan: Okinawa Prefectural Government, undated), pp. 8-9, 12-13.

2. Okinawa Prefectural Government, "Reduction and Realignment of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa," submitted to the U.S. government, April 1997, p. 1. Photocopy in author's possession.

3. Gary Anderson, "Good Neighbors in Okinawa," Washington Times, March 17, 1998, p. A21.

4. A fine history of the islands is George Kerr, Okinawa: The History of an Island People (Rutland, Vt.: Charles E. Tuttle, 1958).

5. Quoted in George Feifer, Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), p. 506.

6. Quoted in ibid., pp. 376-77.

7. Quoted in Chalmers Johnson, "Go-Banken-Sama, Go Home!" Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, July-August 1996, p. 24.

8. Ibid.

9. The disgraceful story is told in Kozy Amemiya, "The Bolivian Connection: U.S. Bases and Okinawan Emigration," Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper no. 25, October 1996.

10. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

11. Masahide Ota, "Why Can't We Reduce the U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa?" Paper presented to the Japan Policy Research Institute Conference on Security and Stability in East Asia, June 1997, p. 2.

12. Quoted in "Governor Ota at the Supreme Court of Japan," Ryukyuanist, no. 35 (Winter 1996-97): 6.

13. Quoted in Amemiya, p. 3.

14. Anderson, "Good Neighbors in Okinawa."

15. Okinawa Prefectural Government, "Base Return Action Program (proposal)," January 1996, p. 3.

16. Ota, "Why Can't We Reduce the U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa?" p. 1.

17. Kin Township (Okinawa Prefecture, Japan), "Kin Township and the Base," undated, p. 1.

18. Conversation in Kadena, Okinawa, March 26, 1998.

19. Conversation in Ginowan, Okinawa, March 26, 1998.

20. Conversation in Urasoe, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

21. Quoted in "Governor Ota at the Supreme Court of Japan," p. 5.

22. U.S. Department of Defense, United States Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region (Washington: U.S. Department of Defense, February 1995).

23. Quoted in "Governor Ota at the Supreme Court of Japan," p. 5.

24. Quoted in Arthur Zich, "Okinawa, Seoul: Are the Bases Needed?" Impact 21, March 1997, p. 12.

25. Quoted in Mike Millard, "Okinawa, Then and Now," Japan Policy Research Institute Occasional Paper no. 11, February 1998, p. 2.

26. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 27, 1998.

27. The referendum grew out of frustration over the rape, and itself became a contentious political issue. See Robert Eldridge, "The 1996 Okinawa Referendum on U.S. Base Reductions," Asian Survey 37, no. 10 (October 1997): 879-904.

28. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 27, 1998.

29. Special Action Committee on Okinawa, "The SACO Final Report," December 2, 1996. Photocopy in author's possession.

30. A mid-1997 poll found that 72 percent of mainland residents supported a reduction in U.S. bases on Okinawa; 15 percent desired an immediate withdrawal. "72 Percent

of Japanese Seek US Base Cut in Okinawa: Poll," Agence France Presse, May 12, 1997, p. 1. However, few of them would volunteer to have their communities host the U.S. troops.

31. Ota, "Why Can't We Reduce the U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa?" p. 6.

32. Conversation with Kimiko Miyagi, Nago, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid.

35. He also turned out to be a one-tsubo landowner.

36. Masahide Ota, "Governor Ota's Announcement on the Offshore Heliport," Okinawa Prefectural Government, undated, p. 3. Photocopy in author's possession.

37. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

38. Frank Ching, "Okinawa Vexes Japan and U.S.," Far Eastern Economic Review, February 5, 1998, p. 30.

39. General Accounting Office, "Overseas Presence: Issues Involved in Reducing the Impact of the U.S. Military Presence on Okinawa," GAO/NSIAD-98-66, March 1998, p. 5.

40. Conversations with U.S. military personnel, March 24-28, 1998. Other officers raise the astonishing objection that the Japanese, having paid for the facility, might have the temerity to ask to use it. Barbara Opall, "U.S. Military Doubts Okinawa Base Option," Defense News, September 23-29, 1996, p. 40. The present system, in contrast, preserves Japanese docility.

41. "Marines on Okinawa: 'Sharing the Burden,'" Briefing presented on March 26, 1998. Photocopy in author's possession.

42. Naoaki Usui, "Japan's Parliament Is Likely to Accept '98 Defense Budget," Defense News, January 26-February 1, 1998, p. 24.

43. Naoaki Usui, "Japan May Ease U.S. Link," Defense News, July 20-26, 1998, p. 4.

44. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

45. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 2.

46. Oral briefing at Kadena Air Base, March 26, 1998. The air wing also hands out an eight-page brochure defending its role. Public Affairs Office, 18th Air Wing, "Keystone of the Pacific," December 1997.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 8.

50. Ibid., p. 9. Emphasis in original.

51. See, for example, Doug Bandow, Tripwire: Korea and U.S. Foreign Policy in a Changed World (Washington: Cato Institute, 1996), pp. 153-60.

52. For a detailed analysis of U.S.-Korean security relations, see Bandow, Tripwire; and Doug Bandow, "Free Rider: South Korea's Dual Dependence on America," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 308, May 19, 1998.

53. Quoted in "Anger As Pentagon Chief Kicks Off Visit," South China Morning Post, April 8, 1997.

54. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 7.

55. Quoted in "Anger As Pentagon Chief Kicks Off Visit."

56. Quoted in ibid.

57. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 4.

58. Cited in "U.S.-Japan Defense Contradictions and the Nago Plebiscite," Japan Policy Research Institute Critique, January 1998, p. 1.

59. Stephen Dagget, "Defense Burdensharing: Is Japan's Host Nation Support a Model for Other Allies?" Congressional Research Service, Report for Congress 94-414 F, June 24, 1994, p. 2. See also Ted Galen Carpenter, "Paternalism and Dependence: The U.S.-Japanese Security Relationship," Cato Institute Policy Analysis no. 244, November 1, 1995, pp. 3-4.

60. Robert Hamilton, "An Idea That Just Won't Float," Marine Corps Gazette, February 1997, pp. 42-43.

61. Carpenter, pp. 18-19.

62. Oral briefing at Camp Butler, Okinawa, March 26, 1998.

63. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 10.

64. See, for example, Doug Bandow, "UN Military Missions as a Snare for America," in Delusions of Grandeur: The United Nations and Global Intervention, ed. Ted Galen Carpenter (Washington: Cato Institute, 1997), pp. 63-78.

65. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

66. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 9.

67. Third Marine Expeditionary Force, "Economic Impact: U.S. Marine Corps on Okinawa," undated, p. 4.

68. For instance, the 18th Wing Public Affairs Office at Kadena Air Base has published brochures titled "Good Stewards of the Environment" (May 14, 1997) and "Being Good Neighbors" (December 1997).

69. Koji Taira, "The Okinawan Charade: The United States, Japan and Okinawa: Conflict and Compromise, 1995-96," Japan Policy Research Institute Working Paper no. 28, January 1997, p. 2.

70. Ibid.

71. Quoted in "U.S.: Okinawa Troop Cutbacks Would Hurt," Daily Yomiuri, March 18, 1998.

72. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 27, 1998.

73. Morihiro Hosokawa, "Time for US forces to Bow Out of Japan," South China Morning Post, June 26, 1998.

74. "Marines on Okinawa," p. 7. This seems to be a widely shared fear. The U.S.-Japan 21st Century Committee explained that "the risk" of Korean reunification "is not that the United States will keep too many forces, but that it may reduce its forces too much at a time when it is necessary to work out with other nations a stable structure of peace." U.S.-Japan 21st Century Committee, "Third Plenary Conference," December 15, 1997, p. 13. Yet the most important factor in creating a stable structure of peace would be the collapse of North Korea; how retaining small numbers of unneeded ground units in Japan and Korea would improve the construction of such a system is hard to fathom.

75. Zich, p. 10.

76. Ministry of National Defense, Defense White Paper: 1991-1992 (Seoul: Republic of Korea, 1992), p. 323.

77. Edward Olsen, "Are Allies Necessary?" Chronicles, October 1995, p. 43. Olsen's emphasis.

78. One strategy for doing so is provided by Carpenter, pp. 23-25.

79. James Kelly, President of Pacific Forum/CSIS, worries about the "tyranny of distance," and therefore advocates forward military deployments. James Kelly, "U.S. Security Policy in East Asia: Fighting Erosion and Finding a New Balance," Washington Quarterly 18, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 31. However, terminating security guarantees that implicitly rely on ground forces, like the 3rd MEF, ameliorates the problem. American air power could arrive quickly and fleets could remain on patrol. Moreover, some ground units could also be deployed relatively speedily in an emergency. Selig Harrison, The Widening Gulf: Asian Nationalism and American Policy (New York: Free Press, 1978), pp. 376-78.

80. This danger has obviously greatly receded with the collapse of the USSR. For a discussion of the Cold War era threat, see Michael Leifer, "The Security of Sea-Lanes in South-East Asia," in Security in East Asia, ed. Robert O'Neill (New York: St. Martin's, 1984), pp. 166-74.

81. William Clark, "Bilateral Security Arrangements in a Regional Perspective: Time for New Thinking May Be Short," in US-Korean Relations at a Time of Change (Seoul: Research Institute for National Unification, 1994), p. 85.

82. Marine Corps Col. Gary Anderson says, "Our withdrawal from the Philippines was a profoundly disturbing event for regional leaders, even though the issue was a dispute over the cost of the bases rather than a manifestation of the lack of U.S. interest. Those leaders knew that another major U.S. withdrawal from the western Pacific would be potentially disastrous to regional stability." Gary Anderson, "Why Okinawa Still Needs American Troops," Washington Times, November 2, 1995, p. A17. However, the very fact that there was no serious impact on regional stability despite such fears demonstrates that there is a lot more to East Asian stability than American bases and soldiers.

83. Franklin Weinstein and Fuji Kamiya, eds., The Security of Korea: U.S. and Japanese Perspectives in the 1980s (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1980), pp. 86-88.

84. Conversation in Naha, Okinawa, March 25, 1998.

85. Quoted in "Governor Ota at the Supreme Court of Japan," p. 7.