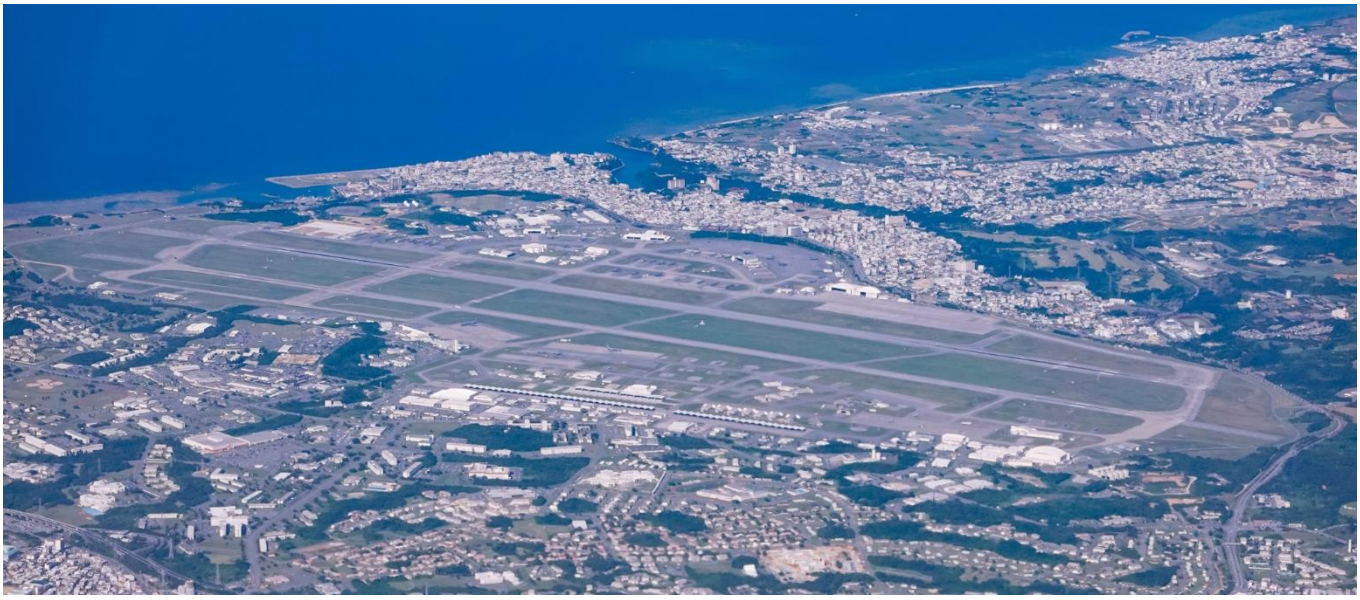
Japan-U.S. alliance and the base issue: Beyond the "dichotomy" of the 50th anniversary of the return of Okinawa



Kadena Air Base in Okinawa Prefecture

The Japan-U.S. alliance is founded on the notion of "bases in exchange for security" and Japan's base issue is a domestic problem. However, the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is ambiguous on the question of where the burden of the alliance's costs lies, making Okinawa's base problem difficult to resolve solely from the standpoint of a domestic dichotomy.

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of Okinawa's reversion to Japanese administration. In this landmark year, Japan will hold House of Councillors elections, mayoral elections, local government elections in 7 cities and 11 towns and villages, and 30 municipal assembly elections. The major point of contention in the elections is likely to be the issue of relocating the Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (Futenma air base) to Henoko. In the face-off between the All Okinawa group, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and Komeito, an attempt is finally being made to incorporate U.S. military base issues in Okinawa into the framework of domestic politics. In order to ensure that the 50th anniversary year of Okinawa's reversion to Japanese administration is not used to exploit division between Okinawa and mainland Japan, we need to be aware that our political understanding of the bases may have been trivialized due to the dichotomization of mainland Japan and Okinawa or the "domestication" of military base issues. Below I aim to provide a clearer understanding of the situation by summarizing the issues surrounding Okinawa's base problem, with a focus on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty which laid the foundation for the presence of the bases.

"Buying security with bases"

Japan hosts U.S. military bases in exchange for the provision of U.S. security. This arrangement has formed the fundamental framework of Japan-U.S. security since 1960 (although the Japanese government maintains that the U.S. military presence in Japan does not provide bases but rather provides benefits by defending Japan in the Far East).

It is important to keep in mind that until now, many Japanese believed that accepting the bases was a necessary price to pay in order to keep the Japan-U.S. security arrangement in place.

"Bases in exchange for security" is a widespread practice in the international community emerging after World War II. Like Japan, countries that formed alliances with the U.S. after the war despite having an asymmetrical power relationship with the U.S. have "bought security with bases." Small and medium-sized countries such as Denmark, Portugal, and Iceland were chosen as founding members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because of the high "value" associated with the bases they were able to provide. The U.S. had no expectations of a mutual defense relationship with those countries; they were only required to provide military bases. What the U.S. (notably the military) desired were bases and unrestricted rights of use.

Consequently, during the Cold War, the issue that arose among the host countries was who in those countries would bear the cost of their alliance with the U.S.—specifically, the cost of providing bases. Costs include incidents and accidents, noise, environmental degradation, as well as the risk of becoming involved in wars due to the association with the U.S. military. These costs were referred to as "base pollution" and were a frequent political issue in host countries.

The matter was complicated by the fact that the alliance (such as the U.S. defense commitment and extended deterrence) benefited equally regions that did not host bases. This meant the regions that did not host bases became free riders, reaping the benefits of the alliance while the regions that did host bases bore the ongoing costs unilaterally. This is one aspect of the disparity that exists between Okinawa and mainland Japan, notably in regions with no bases.

Japan's unique "domestication of military base issues"

Up to this point, it would appear that Japan faces the same issue as that faced by other countries hosting U.S. military bases. However, from this point on, the way Japan's situation differs from that of other countries will be apparent. In the case of other countries, it was determined from the outset who would bear the cost. This is due to the fact that the military base agreements concluded between the U.S. and other countries specify the bases and zones that the U.S. military is permitted to use. Once the agreement is concluded, therefore, the question of who will bear the cost of the alliance (or the legitimacy of a particular municipality accepting the base) does not become a major domestic issue. The sole issue is that of compensation and U.S. military operational procedures.

This is not the case in Japan. The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, the founding treaty for the bases, merely stipulates that U.S. forces may utilize Japanese facilities and zones. This supports the government's position that the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty is not a "base provision treaty," obscuring who is responsible for meeting the costs associated with the alliance, at least in legal terms. Article 2, paragraph 1 (Status of Forces Agreement) of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty states that all local governments are potential base providers (again, in other countries, the location of the base is predetermined from the start and any changes necessitate modification of the agreement itself). This is referred to as the "bases anywhere formula" under which domestic politics rather than treaties decide which municipalities will accept bases.

This is the primary reason why military base issues in Japan are stipulated to be a matter of domestic politics rather than a matter of national security as is the case in other countries. The "bases anywhere formula," heavily criticized by opposition parties following World War II, underpins the so-called "take back the bases" controversy—the movement to take back bases from Okinawa to the mainland—that has been growing in recent years. The domestication of military base issues in Japan is built in to the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty itself.

1968: a watershed

Military base issues in Japan were therefore entirely predictable. Below, I present some military base issues that occurred in 1968 and had a significant and lasting impact on the nature of military base issues in Okinawa.

The numerous anti-base protest movements that rocked postwar Japan (such as the Sunagawa Struggle, the Uchinada Incident, and the Girard incident) were briefly quelled by the 1957 withdrawal of the United States Forces Japan and the United States Marine Corps (USMC). However, the domestic anti-base protest movement regained steam from the late 1960s when Japanese bases played a greater role during the Vietnam War. On January 19, 1968, the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise* carrying nuclear weapons-capable aircraft entered Sasebo harbor (Nagasaki Prefecture), and the Sanpa Zengakuren (the Three Main Sects of National Federation of Students' Self-government Associations) clashed with police forces attempting to subdue the protesters. On May 2, radiation readings in the seas around the nuclear-powered submarine USS *Swordfish*, which regularly entered Sasebo harbor, were found to be ten times higher than normal. These events sparked heated debate in the National Assembly, prompting anti-nuclear reformists to take action.

At the time, 75 percent of wounded U.S. soldiers from the Vietnam War were being treated in Japan. The U.S. Army Hospital at Camp Oji in Tokyo's Kita Ward garnered criticism. The hospital was situated in a built-up residential area in close proximity to a middle school, a high school, and a university, drawing condemnation not only from reformist groups such as the then Socialist Party, the Japanese Communist Party, and labor unions of Kita Ward, but also from conservative ward councilors, neighborhood associations, Parent-Teacher Associations, and the Merchants Association.

The decisive event was the crash of a U.S. military plane on the Hakozaki Campus of Kyushu University in Fukuoka Prefecture. On June 2, 1968, an F-4 Phantom fighter aircraft took off from Itazuke Air Base (now Fukuoka Airport) and suffered engine failure, crashing into Kyushu University. Itazuke Air Base had long been regarded as a base that posed a high accident risk. Fortunately, no casualties ensued. However, the crash site was adjacent to a nuclear laboratory where cobalt-60 was being stored. It could so easily have been a catastrophe.

Relocation of military base issues to Okinawa

During this period, the automatic extension of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty (June 1970) was imminent, so the U.S. government was concerned about worsening military base issues on the Japanese mainland. The Japanese government also wished to avoid another campaign against the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The U.S. State Department and Department of Defense have each devised plans to reduce the number of U.S. military bases in Japan. The plans focused on bases in Fukuoka and Kanagawa Prefectures and Tokyo, where military base issues were escalating. The number of facilities were reduced (all air force facilities in the entire Kanto region were incorporated into Yokota Air Base in Fussa City, Tokyo). Additionally, the

Hinomaru (Japanese flag) was flown at the base (used jointly with the Self-Defense Forces). Essentially, the base was rendered "invisible."

Ultimately, however, the problem shifted to Okinawa. At the time, Okinawa was one of the destinations for U.S. troops to be relocated away from urban areas. It was regarded by U.S. policymakers as a "storage site" for bases that could no longer be situated on the mainland. The fighter plane unit at Yokota Air Base in Tokyo, for example, was relocated to Kadena Air Base. The State Department's choice of Kadena was partly motivated by a desire to avoid giving the impression of "abandoning Japan." Initially, the State Department had considered relocating the fighter plane unit to the U.S. mainland or an overseas location such as Guam. However, it was ultimately decided to relocate the unit to Okinawa, neither too far from nor too close to the Japanese mainland.

During the process of planning to reduce the number of U.S. military bases in Japan, it was decided to retain Okinawa's Futenma Air Base, at one time deemed unnecessary, as a potential future site for a U.S. base. This was to enable Futenma to serve as an alternative base when the Naval Air Facility Atsugi in Kanagawa Prefecture was returned to Japan. At the time, the Department of Defense was planning to withdraw the USMC stationed in Okinawa and was considering closing Futenma accordingly. The location of the Futenma Air Base was unknown for a period of time in the early 1960s following its transfer from the Air Force to the USMC. As of January 1969, only four helicopters were deployed. However, when Futenma Air Base became the home of Atsugi's helicopter unit, 80 helicopters were deployed there and it became a key installation for the Marine Aviation Force. Eventually, Futenma became a magnet for USMC operations, bringing additional installations and services to Okinawa. The 3rd Marine Division Headquarters moved to Camp Courtney (Uruma City, Okinawa) and the USMC 4th Marine Division moved to Camp Hansen (Nago City, Onna Village, Ginoza Village, Kin Town in Okinawa). The III Amphibious Corps Headquarters was located at Camp Courtney, and the 12th Marine Regiment moved into Camp Hauge (Okinawa and former Gushikawa cities). Camp Zukeran (Camp Foster in Okinawa City, Ginowan City, Chatan Town, and Kitanakagusuku Village) also became the base for the new USMC Base Headquarters. Machinato Service Area (Camp Kinser in Urasoe City) was transferred from the U.S. Army to USMC. The conditions and training environment for today's Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) were established at around the same time as the return of Okinawa to the mainland. Since then, the USMC has established an undeniable presence in Okinawa (currently, some 80 percent of U.S. military bases in Okinawa are USMC bases).

Bases as a network hub

Thus, a historical perspective reveals that Okinawa's military base issues today and the resolution of military base issues on the Japanese mainland are inextricably linked. This historical vantage point is critical in order to understand that Okinawa's military base issues affect Japan as a whole. However, unless we take our reasoning further, we will dwell solely on the unconscious harm inflicted by the mainland. While this is indeed an important perspective in the consideration of Okinawa's current military base issues, a focus on this perspective alone will perpetuate the dichotomous view of the issue of mainland Japan and Okinawa and the domestication of military base issues.

One issue that is masked by the domestication of military base issues is the concentration of U.S. military bases in Japan. Whether in terms of the number, scale, or asset value of the installations, or the number of deployed armed forces, U.S. military bases in Japan today are unparalleled anywhere in the world. According to 2018 data from the Department of Defense, U.S. military installations in Japan,

including warehouses, runways, housing, and communications antennae, numbered 7,112. (The Japanese Ministry of Defense lists 131 U.S. military installations and U.S. military zones in Japan; however, this is due to the agencies' differing definitions of installations.) This number is the highest in the world, surpassing South Korea and Germany in second place by over 1,000.

Six of the top ten installations in terms of scale are located in Japan. Kadena in Okinawa is in first place, followed by Yokosuka, Yokota, Iwakuni, and Misawa in third, fourth, sixth, and seventh places respectively. Camp Foster is in 8th place and Camp Kinser is in 11th place. Around 65 percent of the 11 largest installations are located in Japan. Large-scale U.S. bases are concentrated within the confines of Japan's small habitable territory, particularly in Okinawa.

Japan also outperforms the rest of the world in terms of asset value of bases. The asset value of Japan's bases is more than double that of the second-ranked country, Germany. This amount accounts for 47 percent of the total asset value in the top 15 countries. By base, eight of the top 15 are in Japan, specifically Kadena, US Fleet Activities Yokosuka, Misawa, Iwakuni, Yokota, Camp Foster, US Fleet and Industrial Supply Center Yokosuka, and Camp Kinser. Three are in Okinawa.

This extraordinarily high asset value must be understood as the result of co-investment by the United States and Japan. The so-called "Omoiyari Yosan (Cost Sharing budget for the US Forces stationed in Japan)" that Japan provides to the United States covers not only labor costs of Japanese employees working on U.S. bases and utilities at the bases, but also costs associated with the construction and maintenance of bases, including schools and recreational facilities. A base's asset value is linked directly to the "life" of the base. This is because bases with a high asset value are not only irreplaceable but they must also be utilized in a financially efficient manner and cannot be allowed to remain idle. Because of this, the functions allocated to bases are periodically renewed, prolonging their operational life. This high asset value is applauded by those who approve of the status quo of bases in Japan, including Okinawa, and condemned by those who disapprove, including those opposed to the "Omoiyari Yosan" arrangement.

A solution necessitates political thinking on a global scale

The foregoing, albeit just one example, demonstrates that issues such as these do not arise out of a conventional binary framework. We need to look at the U.S. overseas base network and how Japanese and Okinawan bases are positioned within broader U.S. policy on overseas bases, then question what advantage Japan can claim to have over the United States as a result of hosting its bases. Without insights into these issues, fresh solutions to break the impasse over Okinawa's military base issues—such as multilateral cooperation on base operations, never before considered by Japan—will not emerge. There are limits to what can be achieved by "domesticating" military base issues and relying exclusively on domestic political means to resolve them. Although not referred to in this article, instances of military base issues in other countries offer pointers to solutions.

Diachronic and synchronic perspectives on international politics are vital to address the military base issues that remain unresolved in Japan following World War II.

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