

FORUM REPORT 006

Basing Politics

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Politics Under the Pivot: Okinawa's Triangular Base Relations Revisited

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In his presentation on the politics of U.S. bases in Okinawa, Prof. Cooley explored three related themes: first, the similarities and differences between the Japanese case and other cases of basing relations or “base politics;” second, what Prof. Cooley refers to as Okinawa’s distinctive triangular basing politics that involve the U.S. military, the central government in Tokyo, and regional and local authorities on the island prefecture; third, a number of new trends related to the globalization of media and information flows that he believes will further complicate U.S. and Japanese efforts to complete the long-planned relocation of Futenma Marine Air Station to a new offshore facility on Cape Henoko. He

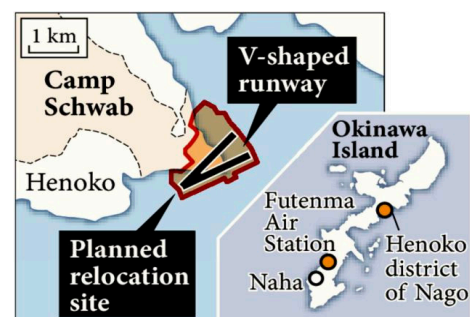
concludes that while the U.S.-Japan alliance is and remains strong, especially during the current U.S. rebalance or “pivot” to East Asia, the local politics surrounding the U.S. military presence in Okinawa will continue to provide a number of challenges to U.S. and Japanese defense planners.

Academic perspectives on the politics of overseas U.S. military bases can be broadly placed in three analytical categories. One group of scholars views basing relations simply as functions of broader alliance dynamics and external security challenges. This group does not consider domestic let alone local politics to be more than epiphenomenally interesting. A second group of scholars from a range of disciplines, of

U.S. military facilities on Okinawa



Site of Futenma relocation



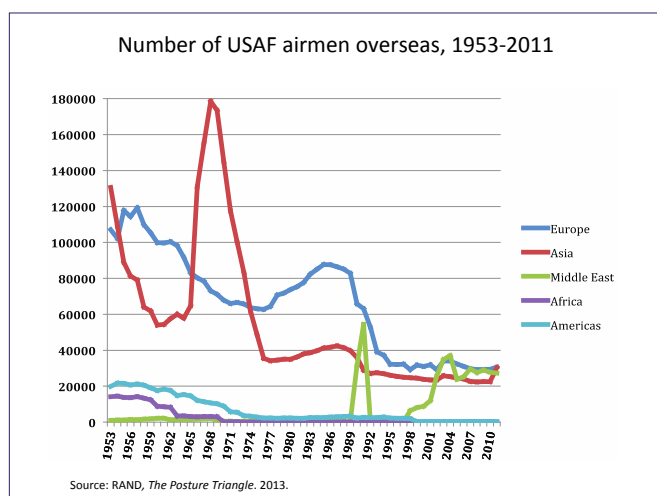
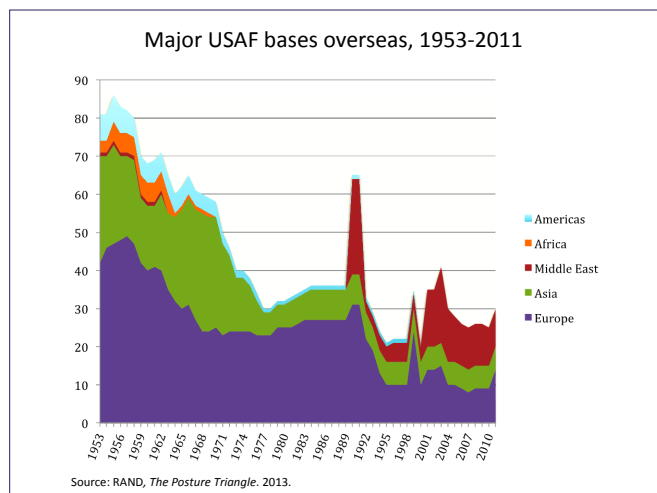
Source: Japan News, 26 Dec. 2013.



whom Chalmers Johnson is perhaps the most influential, views the U.S. basing network an element of an “American Empire.” In Prof. Cooley’s view, this school overestimates the degree of control that U.S. officials actually exert over basing relations in host countries. A third group, with which Prof. Cooley identifies, believes that it is impossible to understand basing politics without considering local and domestic political factors in host countries (Kent Calder and Andrew Yeo are also representative of this view). This is not to say that local and domestic politics explain everything about basing politics, but they are an important part of the equation.

Elements of each of these perspectives explain important facets of the basing issue in Japan. U.S. bases in Japan are the bedrock of the 1960 Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security (colloquially, the “U.S.-Japan security treaty”), which was clearly a response to a perceived external threat (communism in general, but the Soviet Union in particular). At the same time the U.S. administered Okinawa as a de facto colony from 1952 to 1972, during which time it expropriated a considerable amount of land. Prior to Okinawa’s reversion to Japan in 1972, the United States exercised colonial rule; after reversion, it has exercised a kind of post-colonial rule. But virtually every aspect of U.S. basing arrangements in Okinawa have been influenced to some extent by the complex interaction of local, prefectural, and national politics. Relations between the central government in Tokyo and the prefectural government in Naha are particularly significant. It is important for policymakers and researchers alike to appreciate that a unique set of political dynamics and relations inform the U.S. basing issue in Okinawa as opposed to in the rest of Japan. While Japanese public opinion towards the presence of U.S. bases has become more supportive over time, in Okinawa the issue remains politically sensitive and evokes a distinct history.

In terms of comparative analysis, the “base politics” issues that surround U.S. bases in Japan share both important similarities and differences with other cases. One striking feature



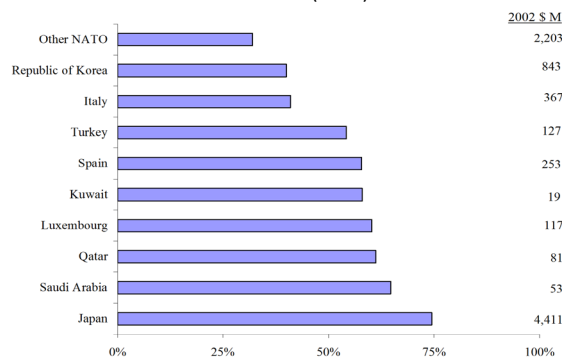
of U.S. bases in Japan is their national status. Unlike in Europe where bases are either designated as host country or, in the case of Italy or Turkey, NATO facilities, bases in Japan are actually U.S. facilities. This contrasts also with the new facilities being established in Australia and the Philippines as part of the rebalance. These are host-country bases, and the U.S. presence is merely rotational.

Japanese public opinion about U.S. bases

	Support	Oppose	Don't know
1950 (Sept.)	30%	38%	32%
1953 (June)	27%	48%	25%
1957 (Oct.)	18%	60%	22%
1958 (Feb.)	8%	58%	22%
1970 (Feb.)	17%	57%	26%
2011 (Sept.)	57%	34%	N/A

Source: Cooley 2008, Kimura 2013.

Share of U.S. overseas stationing costs paid by selected base hosts (2002)



Source: DOD, 2004 Statistical Compendium on Allied Contributions to the Common Defense, E-6

Another noteworthy aspect of U.S. bases in Japan is that they receive more host nation support than anywhere else—about \$2 billion per year under the terms of the 2011-2015 Host National Support agreement. These funds, which represent Tokyo's direct contribution to the costs of stationing U.S. forces, help to pay for local workers, leasing and maintenance, utilities, and construction projects on the bases. Japan's Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), while sometimes criticized as unfair by activists, is actually well in line with the NATO SOFA in crucial respects. They have comparable divisions of responsibilities, criminal jurisdiction arrangements, and dispute resolution procedures. The SOFA—and particularly its criminal jurisdiction arrangements—are more politically charged in Okinawa than anywhere else in Japan.

The triangular political relations are perhaps the most striking feature of U.S. bases in Okinawa. All basing arrangements involve relations between the sending country and host country, but in Okinawa the involvement of local and regional governments—the third leg of the triangle—is distinctive. To understand Okinawa's basing politics, we need to analyze relations between each of these legs of the triangle.

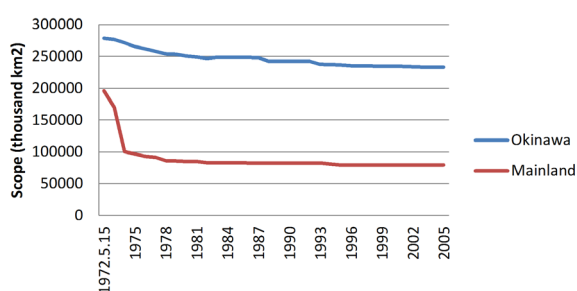
Relations between the government of Japan and the United States (leg one) focus upon formal issues of alliance management, such as formulating strategy, rationalizing force structure, agreeing on roles and missions, sharing costs, and, where appropriate, promoting interoperability. These constitute the “high politics” of formal diplomacy and security cooperation between the allies. Leg two of the triangle involves relations between Okinawan authorities and the U.S. military, or what we might refer to as local base politics. Typically, these challenges include managing community relations, implementing SOFA provisions, dealing with base-related incidents and crises, and managing local media relations, which tend to be negative. Finally, leg three is the intra-Japanese relationship between the central government in Tokyo and local authorities in Okinawa. Major issues here include base-related sympathy and compensation payments,

public works expenditures, fiscal transfers, local policies, and various historically and politically sensitive issues such as Okinawa's political status as a former U.S. territory, a current Japanese prefecture, and its representation and role in the Japanese state.

The political problems raised by U.S. bases are a mixture of historical grievances and concerns about base-related operations and how they impact the community. The general complaint, shared by many Okinawans, is that the island shoulders an unfair share of Japan's overall basing burden by hosting 74% of all U.S. facilities. Some bases are located in crowded communities and urban areas, with Futenma Marine Air Station, surrounded by Ginowan City, being the most obvious example. Okinawans are also concerned about noise pollution and environmental impact. Some NGOs, for example, have campaigned to raise awareness of how base construction might threaten Okinawa's dugong whales. Base-related accidents have also been historical concerns. When a Futenma-based cargo helicopter crashed on the grounds of Okinawa International University in 2004, for example, it evoked many residents' long-standing fear of accidents, while the investigation itself, during which U.S. military authorities cordoned off the site, was viewed by the local media as a violation of the island's sovereignty.

Another area of concern has been crimes committed by U.S. personnel. Here the saliency of the issue depends on which methodology we employ to count crime. For the prefecture, U.S. crimes are counted cumulatively. According to one 2011 press release, U.S. forces committed 5,733 crimes since reversion, including 567 serious crimes. The U.S. side, which over the last decade has made special efforts to strictly limit alcohol consumption and encourage good community relations, claims that crime rates in and around U.S. bases have declined and are now well below the average crime rates for the prefecture as a whole. In 2013, for example, the 47,000 status-forces visa holders on the island committed 32 total offenses, which is well below the average of 56 annual

Relative basing burden (U.S. exclusive use):
Okinawa vs. Japanese mainland



Source: Kimura 2013, p. 41.

U.S. military crimes in Okinawa

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Incidents and accidents										
Emergency landing	51	53	47	57	25	32	22	8	6	8
Wild land fire	12	11	7	9	8	20	18	14	8	8
Water pollution (oil leak, etc.)	8	3	8	4	2	4	6	11	5	8
Others	32	22	15	23	23	19	26	26	34	38
Total	103	89	77	93	58	75	72	59	53	62
Criminal cases										
Robbery	41	48	23	28	21	27	14	17	32	13
Violent crime	11	11	12	7	10	2	5	13	11	2
Felony	2	7	1	2	3	6	7	3	2	4
Others	27	46	23	29	23	28	44	17	26	23
Total	81	112	59	66	57	63	70	50	71	42
Traffic accidents										
Fatal accidents	133	116	181	179	182	181	165	179	187	176

Source: Statistics Bureau, Okinawa Prefectural Government.

crimes. Since 2006, U.S. officials claim, U.S. personnel, who constitute about 3 percent of the population, have committed 1.3-1.5 percent of all crimes.

Beyond these enduring basing politics issues, processes of globalization have further complicated these triangular relations. Developments in information technology have allowed Okinawa's anti-military and anti-base NGOs to network with counterparts overseas (for example, in Korea) to form a collective transnational movement opposed to U.S. military bases. These networks offer Okinawan NGOs a broader international platform to voice their concerns, but also provide a forum for activists to exchange ideas about media strategies and campaign tactics. Moreover, the globalization of media itself has offered new channels for these anti-basing campaigns, including social media and new international media outlets with a global reach (e.g., *Russia Today*, *Al Jazeera*, *CCTV*). Tellingly, the coalition opposing the Henoko relocation placed advertisements in prominent U.S. newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* and have recruited well known public figures and celebrities such as Oliver Stone. Finally, the growing economic and social networks within East Asia offer Okinawa an opportunity to market itself as a regional hub, rather than as a peripheral Japanese district. A new pro-independence party on the island currently enjoys limited public support, but its anti-base platform and evocation of Okinawan identity may increasingly appeal to some residents.

In conclusion, Prof. Cooley suggested that Okinawa's "base politics" are informed by a number of complex historical, cultural, domestic and international political factors. Although many policymakers have assumed that China's more aggressive stance towards territorial claims would rally Okinawan support for the U.S. military presence as it has elsewhere in Japan, the local response has been more complicated. Successfully managing base-related issues and relocations in the context of the U.S. rebalance will require nuanced understanding and deft public relations by U.S. and Japanese policymakers alike.



The Q&A session opened with a question on the influence of economic factors on Okinawan base politics. Suppose, counterfactually, that Okinawa were a rich, self-sustaining region, with no need for subsidies from Tokyo; would the situation be very different? Dr. Cooley thought that if Okinawa were less dependent on the central government it would indeed have more leverage. But some of the difficulties have been a function of mishandling rather than inequality. For example, with respect to the relocation of Futenma, the central government could have kept multiple sites in play until much later in the game, but instead it committed early to a single location, giving opponents more time to organize.

The second question addressed the transnational base movement. It is implausible that local anti-base activists could have engineered a high-profile global movement spontaneously, suggesting that leadership and support from foreign countries antagonistic to U.S. interests must have been crucial. Is there evidence for such support—in Central Asia, for example? Dr. Cooley responded there is certainly evidence of China paying people to make anti-base comments online. There is also evidence of Russia attempting to inflame anti-base sentiment in Kyrgyzstan. However, China and Russia are notoriously hostile to civil society in general and would be cautious about empowering transnational political networks. Probably the single most important factor in the development of transnational opposition to U.S. bases is technological change. Prior to the year 2000, opposition groups were essentially national. But communication technology and social media make it cheap and easy to coordinate on a transnational basis.

The third question concerned various ways in which Okinawa was unusual—for example, with respect to cleaning up closed base sites. Prof. Cooley responded that while there are no comparative studies, some of the most high-profile cases have been elsewhere, such as Holy Loch in Scotland. One thing that people do think unusual is the media environment, but it is not. While the local media in Okinawa have an agenda and pursue it intensely, this is also true in other countries. Another thing that people believe is distinctive about Okinawa is the level of compensation the central government pays local governments; but while transfers are high in absolute terms, it is difficult to know if they would be significantly lower if there were no U.S. bases, since Okinawa is an unusually poor region of the country. Probably the most distinctive features of base politics in Japan are historical, or historical legacies.

Next followed an exchange on the question of political sustainability. One participant suggested that an expanded security role for Japan would undermine the rationale for Okinawa's unusual burden as a base host. The unusual "national" nature of U.S. bases will also seem increasingly anachronistic and insulting, as will various other paternalistic or exceptional provisions of the SOFA. Prof. Cooley wondered whether the status quo would be more controversial than a "normalized" Japan with fewer constraints on its military. There was no consensus on the matter, but the participants all agreed that this is an important question that has not yet been posed or answered clearly in Japan but that warrants further discussion.

Next was a question about whether there were any unusual gender-oriented features of base politics in Okinawa. Prof. Cooley suggested that Kathy Moon's work on U.S. bases in Korea was a good starting point for such inquiries. In Korea, sexual relations off base have become much more globalized

than in the past and the “sexual service industry” now involves third-country nationals brought in on hospitality visas. In both Japan and Korea, the fundamental change that has taken place is that in the 1950s-1960s the bases were centres of commerce and modernization. Now that both Japan and Korea have themselves modernized and developed, the local communities have become more sensitive to the subject. In Korea, one response has been to push for having families on bases as a stabilizing factor.

Next was a question on changing U.S. perspectives. If allied countries seem to be communicating more about their arrangements, and if transnational anti-base groups are coordinating more closely, are American decision makers still handling base relationships on a case-by-case basis, or are they thinking more holistically? Prof. Cooley responded that things have not really changed in this regard. To some extent this has to do with how the U.S. military is organized;

bases fall under regional commands and there is little in the way of cross-fertilization or lessons learned. Negotiations are compartmentalized, and as a result each base relationship has distinctive characteristics. But network effects may eventually change this.

A final question inquired into whether domestic politics in the United States (e.g., between Democrats and Republicans, or between the White House and Congress) were perhaps another important factor to keep in mind when considering the politics of basing relationships. Is it possible that different stakeholders in the American political system might see basing politics differently, and might be more or less receptive to any particular concern? Prof. Cooley said yes, but argued that when it comes to engaging U.S. policymakers on basing relations in Okinawa and elsewhere, the important task is to demonstrate that there are political and operational costs to not getting things right.

A précis of Mr. Yoichi Kato's presentation, parts of which were off the record, is available as a Forum 006 Special Report at <http://www.suntory.com/sfnd/jgc/forum/006/>.

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