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## TRADITIONAL SECURITY AS A SOURCE OF NON-TRADITIONAL INSECURITIES – THE CASE OF OKINAWA

By Lina Gong

*Tensions over the US military bases in Okinawa are rooted in the conception of the state as the only referent of security, with national security being defined in military terms. Under this traditional view of security, human security threats arising from the presence of the bases were largely ignored, with the result that anger simmered among the local population, finally breaking out in the 1990s. This NTS Alert argues that the case of Okinawa illustrates the importance of moving away from viewing traditional security and non-traditional security as being mutually exclusive. Instead, the two should be regarded as mutually reinforcing; with traditional security laying the foundations for human security; and attention to non-traditional security issues perhaps allowing the population to understand and accommodate to the country's traditional security needs.*



A 2009 protest against the relocation of Futenma air station to Henoko.

Credit: thechrisdavis / flickr.

### Contents:

- Introduction
- Overview of the US bases in Okinawa
- Non-traditional security challenges arising from the US military presence
- Difficulties in addressing the issue of US military bases in Okinawa

### Introduction

Since the end of the Cold War, the US military presence in Japan has served as Japan's bulwark against foreign military threats. A key US ally in East Asia, Japan plays a significant role in facilitating US military deployment in the region, hosting 85 military facilities and 38,000 military personnel (US Forces, 2012). Much of this presence is in Okinawa: the prefecture occupies less than 1 per cent of Japan's land area, but hosts 25 per cent of the US military facilities and half of the US servicemen in Japan (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart, 2012).

Okinawa's disproportionate role in the US-Japan security alliance has been a source of

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tensions between the governments of the US and Japan and the local community. Okinawans have protested against a range of non-traditional security problems – environmental, health, social and economic – resulting from the military presence. Such controversies make the case of Okinawa an ideal one for examining the relationship between traditional security and non-traditional security challenges.

This NTS Alert proceeds on the premise that ensuring state security requires that a country focus on more than traditional security; it argues that security also means placing due emphasis on the well-being of a country's population. To that end, this NTS Alert details the diverse threats to human security that have arisen in Okinawa as a result of US military presence in the area, and examines the difficulties of addressing those insecurities given the geostrategic significance of Okinawa to the US-Japan security alliance.

[^ To the top](#)

## Overview of the US bases in Okinawa

Okinawa sits at the intersection of Northeast and Southeast Asia. This strategic location has made it a critical platform for the projection of US power in the Asia-Pacific and beyond. During the Cold War, while the US was engaged in wars in Korea and Vietnam, Okinawa served as a logistics base for the US. In recent years, it has played an essential role in the US war on terrorism. Troops and fighter aircraft were deployed to Afghanistan and Iraq from Okinawa (Hughes, 2004:107).

There are 37 US military facilities, 28 water areas for military training and operations, and 20 air force facilities in Okinawa (Nago City Council, 2012). Major US military facilities in the prefecture – including the controversial Futenma air station in Ginowan, and the Kadena air base located at the juncture of Kadena, Chatan and the city of Okinawa – are concentrated in the central part of Okinawa Island. Along with these facilities, there are 21,000 US military personnel, with the number swelling to 40,000 with dependants factored in.

Such a large presence has, as will be examined later, created various problems, and this has resulted in moves to scale down US presence in the prefecture. Based on a series of agreements between the US and Japan, the size of the US forces in Okinawa will be reduced to 10,900 (Suda, 2012), and the Futenma air station will be relocated from the densely populated Ginowan to the less crowded Henoko.

[^ To the top](#)

## Non-traditional security challenges arising from the US military presence

In early September this year, around 100,000 people in Ginowan rallied against the deployment of US Osprey military aircraft, amid safety concerns following a series of accidents involving the planes (Mass protest, 2012). This is only the latest example of protests against US bases, and an indication of rising resentment against the environmental threats, social issues and economic insecurity caused by US military presence in the area.

### Environmental threats

Pollution from military training and operations in Okinawa is a serious environmental and health threat. Live ammunition training in the jungles has caused forest fires, soil erosion and oil spills (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2003:8).

The appropriation of land for military facilities has also been controversial. As a condition for returning half of the US Marine Corps Jungle Warfare Training Centre to the local government, the US military was allocated land for the construction of six helipads in Takae (Mitchell, 2012). According to residents who were interviewed at a sit-in to protest against the construction, the project would lead to the deforestation of a large area inhabited by a precious bird species – the Yanbaru Kuina.<sup>1</sup>

Noise pollution is another key source of anger. Exposure



*Seen here are US fighter jets having training flights at Kadena Air Base. Within the span of half an hour, there were over 20 take-offs and landings, producing extremely loud noise.*

*Credit: Lina Gong.*

to loud aircraft noise causes sleep disorders, misbehaviour in preschool children, impairment of long-term memory and a high rate of low birth-weight infants (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 1999).

According to a recent survey by a local university, noise levels in schools near the Futenma air station are in excess of 100 decibels, far higher than the WHO (World Health Organization) recommended level of less than 55 decibels (Noise of 100dB, 2012). At the Futenma Second Primary School located right next to the base, teachers have to pause during take-offs and landings, shortening teaching hours considerably (Suda, 2012). Moreover, noise exposure affects concentration and long-term memory, and thus the children's education.

In 2011, residents around the Kadena air base filed a class action lawsuit over the aircraft noise, seeking compensation and a ban on night flights (Sumida, 2011). Interviews with a few residents revealed that the air base has agreed to compensate for the health consequences, but has rejected the demand to put a stop to night flights.<sup>2</sup>

### Social insecurities

Also triggering anti-base sentiments are the negative social effects associated with the bases. Between 1972 and 2010, US servicemen in Okinawa were involved in 5,705 crimes, 2,588 traffic accidents and 1,545 training accidents (Suda, 2012). The undisciplined behaviour of some soldiers had also aroused anger among Okinawans. A rape incident in 1995 led to massive protests demanding the withdrawal of US bases (Okinawa Prefectural Government, 2003:12).

There have also been safety-related concerns. In August 2004, a US helicopter crashed into the campus of Okinawa International University (US helicopter, 2004). The US sealed off the site and rejected the involvement of the local police force in the investigation, spurring further public anger (Dietz, 2010:190). This accident led to renewed calls for the removal of US bases from Okinawa.



*A view of the Futenma air station from Okinawa International University. A US helicopter crashed into the university campus in 2004, raising safety concerns.*

*Credit: Lina Gong.*

Prostitution associated with the military presence, and the related consequences, is another source of social insecurity. Prostitutes are exposed to high risk of sexually transmitted diseases, and to the danger of abuse by servicemen who suffer emotional breakdowns (Kirk and Francis, 2000:243). Children from such liaisons, and their mothers, are usually left behind when the US soldiers return to their country or are deployed elsewhere. Since the Battle of Okinawa in 1945, there have been thousands of such abandoned mixed-race children (Taira, 2003:274), and there is little government support available for them.

### Economic vulnerabilities

The Okinawa economy stands on three pillars: military base-related income, tourism and public-works projects (Okinawa economic, 2012). This reliance on base-related income has been a source of concern. However, such worries may have been overblown.

Okinawa's economy has witnessed a shift over the years. Base-related revenue accounted for 15.5 per cent of prefectural revenue in 1972 but dropped to 5.3 per cent in 2008. Meanwhile, the share taken by tourism rose markedly from 6.5 per cent to 10.9 per cent over the same period (Suda, 2012). This trend negates the argument that the Okinawan economy would collapse without the bases. Instead, the bases compress the space for local economic development. The bases take up 18.4 per cent of Okinawa's land area, restricting commercial activities such as fishing and civil flights.

While there has been a shift away from a base-centred economy, the Okinawa economic mix remains imbalanced. Manufacturing contributes only 4 per cent to the prefecture's gross domestic product (Okinawa economic, 2012) while base-related income and financial appropriations still account for a considerable share of the local economy. Measures are needed to further diversify revenue sources and improve the resilience of Okinawa's economy.

In the meantime, Okinawa remains the poorest prefecture in Japan, and its underdevelopment makes it susceptible to Tokyo's manipulation. The central government has used economic stimulus packages to induce Okinawa's cooperation on the issue of US bases (Hughes, 2004). For instance, in the 1998 gubernatorial election, Tokyo used subsidies to oust the anti-military base governor and help its favoured candidate win (Johnson, 2002). Under the fiscal year 2012 budget, Okinawa receives over USD3 billion for development (Okinawa gov., 2012); some speculate that this is linked to some extent to the US bases.<sup>3</sup>

## Difficulties in addressing the issue of US military bases in Okinawa

Given the non-traditional security threats discussed in the previous section, activist groups have, through protests, lobbying and negotiation, urged the governments of the US and Japan to address the people's concerns. Such activities have achieved some degree of success. For instance, when President Bill Clinton visited Okinawa in July 2000, he acknowledged that the Okinawan people have borne disproportionate responsibility for the endurance of the US-Japan alliance (Taira, 2003:281).

The wave of protests after the 1995 rape incident also led to local concerns being treated more seriously by the two governments, and to the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) being established. The committee's final report in 1996 proposed returning to Okinawa some of the land occupied by the US military (including the Futenma air station), transferring some troops out of Japan, adjusting training and operational procedures, and improving safety-related management (SACO, 1996). However, action on the implementation of these proposals has been disappointing. The agreement on relocation was reached in 2006 but little progress has been made. The key reason for this is Okinawa's strategic importance.

### Okinawa's strategic importance

With Japan relying on the US-Japan security alliance for its defence, and Okinawa's strategic importance to that alliance, there exists no incentive to substantially reduce the US military footprint in the region. Moreover, the re-escalation of the dispute between Japan and China over the Senkaku islands (or the Diaoyu islands, as it is known in China) has strengthened the significance of the alliance for Japan's national security. Also, with the US rebalancing towards Asia, the facilities in Japan have become more central to the US. The increased importance of the alliance to both sides indicates that the US military presence in Japan is not likely to be reduced substantially, at least not in the near future.

### Japan's domestic political dynamics

Standing against such strategic rationale for continued US military presence in Japan is the country's domestic political dynamics, in particular, public anger over the impacts of the US bases on local communities. Such public concern can, and has been, used as a convenient chip to garner voter support. For instance, during the 2009 elections, Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama presented the electorate with the hope that the Futenma air station might be relocated out of Okinawa or even outside Japan (Ikeo and Ogawa, 2010:378). After his election, however, he failed to deliver on this promise – this was one of the direct drivers for his resignation.

The relocation of US bases also dominated the 2010 Okinawa prefectural election. The incumbent governor, Hirokazu Nakaima, who had conditionally agreed to the relocation of Futenma to Henoko in his first term, was challenged by a staunch anti-base candidate. Nakaima was eventually re-elected, but only after adopting a stronger position against the relocation plan (Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart, 2012:9).

It could be seen, then, that government positions have been increasingly influenced by public opinion. While Okinawans who profit from base-related economic activities such as land leases and services prefer to have the bases stay, a majority, particularly those who are directly affected by the negative consequences of the bases, are strongly against their continued existence.<sup>4</sup> This, as has been seen, visibly shaped the position taken by the governor in the 2010 election. In the case of the plan to construct helipads in Takae, the sit-in protests have forced construction to come to a halt with only one of the six helipads finished.

## Way forward

This NTS Alert argues that, instead of viewing traditional security and non-traditional security as being mutually exclusive, the two should be regarded as being mutually reinforcing. On the one hand, state security lays the foundation for the realisation of human security as the state remains as the primary provider of security. On the other, without security from non-traditional threats, social instabilities could occur, which could in turn affect traditional security arrangements. As seen from the earlier discussion, the failure to address the non-traditional security challenges in Okinawa resulted in strong public aversion to the bases, which eventually led to the reduction of US troops in the area. In other words, it is vital that traditional security goals be balanced with non-traditional security concerns.

Japan, in pursuing traditional security priorities, should thus not neglect the non-traditional security threats faced by Okinawans. To ease tensions, and enhance understanding of the positions of the various stakeholders, greater dialogue is essential. In negotiations on the future of the bases, the local community should be sufficiently represented. The US bases would also need to be more transparent and accountable for the impacts of military activities on the host community. Progress has been made in these areas but in a very slow manner.

Okinawa is not unique in having traditional security priorities and non-traditional security concerns conflict with each other. In the Philippines, pollution at the Clark Air Base has been linked to 76 deaths and 144 people becoming ill (Tritten, 2010). Pollution levels at

most US bases in South Korea have been found to be 150 times higher than the levels specified under the country's environmental standards (Koo, 2011:105). Prostitution is also a common effect of military presence, as could be attested to by countries such as South Korea (Kirk and Francis, 2000:242). The experience of Okinawa suggests that these non-traditional security concerns need to be taken seriously, as such threats could generate local dissatisfaction which could in turn have an impact on national security.

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### Notes

1. Personal interview with Takae residents at a sit-in protest; Takae, Okinawa; August 2012.
2. Personal interview with local residents; Kadena, Okinawa; August 2012.
3. Personal interview with local residents; Nago, Okinawa; August 2012.
4. Personal interview with local residents; Nago, Okinawa; August 2012.

[^ To the top](#)

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[^ To the top](#)

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