

Time to Set Okinawa Free

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It's way past time for the U.S. to get out of Okinawa—and, for that matter, to take its Tokyo good buddies with it. Before Japanese warlords annexed the Ryuku islands in 1879, Okinawans enjoyed more freedom than they do today. Every liberty-loving American ought to be shouting: "Okinawa for the Okinawans!"

Right now, this Los Angeles-sized Pacific gem of 454-sq.-miles is Pentagon Tropical Paradise No. 1. It's a land of martinis-and-honey where our 25,000 military personnel and their 23,000 dependents can live in high-rise splendor with housing allowances approaching \$1,000 or more a month (plus cost-of-living perks), enjoy PX shopping as good as it gets, and tan on the exotic beaches as Kin Red and Kin Blue.

This comes at a price, though — paid for by U.S. taxpayers and 1.3 million long-suffering Okinawans. The Pentagon has studded their island paradise with airfields, barracks, artillery and bombing ranges, ammunition depots, toxic chemical, depleted uranium (and nuclear bomb) storage dumps — everything a demented mind could wish for to threaten modern civilization. These lethal chazzerei take up 20% of Okinawa's acreage, swindled from its hapless owners by Uncle Sam without benefit of cash payment the same way Joe Stalin collectivized Soviet Russia's farms.

What particularly galls the locals (85% of Okinawans polled want the Yanks o-u-t) is not just the presence of U.S. troops, mostly Marines, occupying their homeland, but the hundreds of ensuing rapes and sexual violations of their daughters, some as young as twelve. These have spurred vast anti-American demonstrations. The incidence of rape on Okinawa is twice that of the States and the *Dayton Daily News* reported the military has freed hundreds of U.S. sex offenders despite their court-martial convictions.

In March, 2008, Okinawans rallied in a baseball stadium to protest the latest child rape and, according to the Associated Press, "banners demanding the complete withdrawal of U.S. troops ringed the makeshift stage." The AP noted that "problems with base-related accidents, crowding and crime are endemic."

Okinawans can do little to stop this lawlessness: "When U.S. servicemen and their families commit crimes, they shall be detained by U.S. authorities until Japanese law enforcement agencies file complaints with the prosecutors' office," the Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement(SOFA) states — and by then the perps could be back in Hahira, Georgia.

Although the *New York Times* editorial page claimed "American military behavior in Japan has generally been good since the occupation in 1945," between 1972 and 1995 U.S. service personnel were implicated in 4,716 crimes. At one point up to a third of the Third Marine Division was infected with venereal disease, prompting author Chalmers Johnson in

“Blowback”(Henry Holt) to crack “one has to ask what the New York Times might consider bad behavior.” What’s more, Newsweek noted that when Okinawa poet Ben Takara surveyed girls at Futenma senior high, one-third to one-half of them said they had “scary experiences with U.S. soldiers on their way to school or back home.”

Approximately 75% of all U.S. forces in Japan (why, fellow taxpayers, do we keep any forces in Japan, why?) are concentrated on Okinawa, having less than one percent of Japan’s total land area, which “amounts to a permanent collusion of the United States and Japan against Okinawa,” Chalmers observes. The answer is found in Tim Weiner’s “Legacy of Ashes”(Anchor Books), who recalls Okinawa was “a crucial staging ground for the bombing of Vietnam and a storehouse of American nuclear weapons.” Weiner notes that when opposition politicians in 1968 “threatened to force the United States off the island” the CIA funneled big bucks into Japan to defeat them at the polls.

In short, Japan can conveniently dump the military burden of its U.S. defense pact on the backs of their captive Okinawans, with 14 military bases jammed onto its 70-mile-long expanse. (Japan itself has just eight U.S. bases.) This saddles Okinawa with the constant hullabaloo of jet warplane noise. (The Futenma base alone has 52,000 takeoffs and landings a year.)

Yoshida Kensei, former professor at Obirin University in Japan, and Asian Studies Lecturer Rumi Sakamoto of Auckland University, New Zealand, write that Okinawa is nothing more than a U.S. “military colony.” They want to rid the island of all “war cooperation” and reallocate its land to “agriculture, fisheries, and trade,” high tech, medicine and tourism. And they wouldn’t mind seeing Okinawans make some real cash by converting the U.S. bases into remunerative housing areas, commercial and industrial properties, and educational or research parks.

Author Johnson quotes editor Koji Taira of the Ryukyuanist as writing, “the incomes generated directly or indirectly by the bases are only 5 percent of the gross domestic product of Okinawa. This is far too small a contribution for an establishment sitting on 20 percent of Okinawa’s land...In effect, the U.S. and Japan are forcing on Okinawa’s economy a deadweight loss of 15 percent of its GDP every year.”

As Johnson concludes, “Okinawa is still essentially a military colony of the Pentagon’s, a huge safe house where Green Berets and the Defense Intelligence Agency, not to mention the air force and Marine Corps, can do things they would not dare do in the United States.”

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