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# AIR COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE

## STUDENT REPORT

OKINAWA: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

MAJOR FRANK L. KEBELMAN, USMC

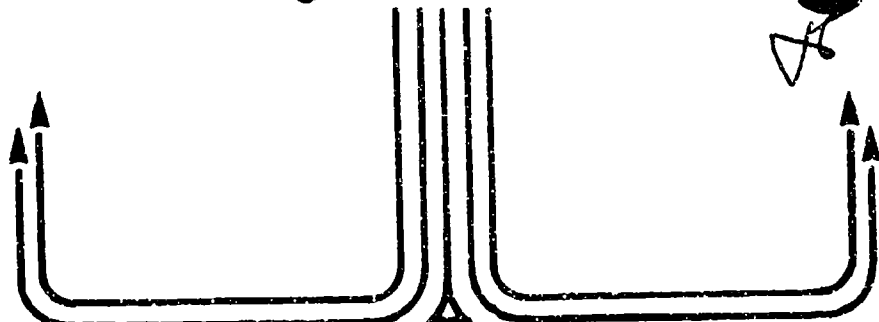
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**REPORT NUMBER** 87-1410

**TITLE** OKINAWA: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

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MAXWELL AFB, AL 36112**

## REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1a. REPORT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>		1b. RESTRICTIVE MARKINGS	
2a. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION AUTHORITY		3. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF REPORT <b>STATEMENT "A"</b> <b>Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.</b>	
2b. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE		5. MONITORING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S)	
4. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER(S) <b>87-1410</b>		7a. NAME OF MONITORING ORGANIZATION	
6a. NAME OF PERFORMING ORGANIZATION	5b. OFFICE SYMBOL <i>(If applicable)</i>	7b. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)	
6c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code) <b>ACSC/EDCC</b>		9. PROCUREMENT INSTRUMENT IDENTIFICATION NUMBER	
8a. NAME OF FUNDING/SPONSORING ORGANIZATION <b>MAXWELL AFB AL 36112-5542</b>	8b. OFFICE SYMBOL <i>(If applicable)</i>	10. SOURCE OF FUNDING NOS.	
9c. ADDRESS (City, State and ZIP Code)		PROGRAM ELEMENT NO.	PROJECT NO.
11. TITLE (Include Security Classification) <b>OKINAWA: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS</b>		TASK NO.	WORK UNIT NO.
12. PERSONAL AUTHOR(S) <b>Kebeiman, Frank L., Major, USMC</b>			
13a. TYPE OF REPORT	13b. TIME COVERED FROM _____ TO _____	14. DATE OF REPORT (Yr., Mo., Day) <b>1987 April</b>	15. PAGE COUNT <b>26</b>
16. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTATION			
17. COSATI CODES		18. SUBJECT TERMS (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)	
FIELD	GROUP	SUB. GR.	
19. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse if necessary and identify by block number)			
<p>→ American military personnel have been stationed on the island of Okinawa since 1945. This study analyzes Okinawa's strategic value in providing stability in East Asia. <del>If the study</del> examines US forces assigned to Okinawa, and reviews options for the future deployment of US forces. The study concludes the US should begin planning for a withdrawal of US forces from Okinawa by the 21st century. <i>Keywords: US military forces, Okinawa.</i></p>			
20. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY OF ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED/UNLIMITED <input type="checkbox"/> SAME AS RPT. <input type="checkbox"/> TIC USERS <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		21. ABSTRACT SECURITY CLASSIFICATION <b>UNCLASSIFIED</b>	
22a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE INDIVIDUAL <b>ACSC/EDCC MAXWELL AFB AL 36112-5542</b>		22b. TELEPHONE NUMBER <i>(Include Area Code)</i> <b>(205) 293-2483</b>	22c. OFFICE SYMBOL

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## PREFACE

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1. The purpose of this study is to acquaint the reader with the island of Okinawa. Located south of the main Japanese islands, Okinawa has played an important strategic role in recent East Asian history. The US has invested a significant amount of resources to support its forces deployed there. In the past, Okinawa has been a useful asset to promote US policies in the region. Today, East Asia is experiencing a period of unprecedented economic growth, and political stability. In view of these changes, should the US continue to assign its forces there? This study analyzes our military forces on Okinawa, and presents options and recommendations on which to develop a future US policy for the island.

2. The author would like to acknowledge the assistance of Major Robert Hawthorne, USAF, and Ms. Joan Hyatt, both of Air University, for their support and advice during the preparation of this study.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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REPORT NUMBER 87-1418

AUTHOR(S) MAJOR FRANK L. KEBELMAN, USMC

TITLE OKINAWA: A STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

I. Purpose: To evaluate the US requirement to maintain military forces on the island of Okinawa, Japan.

II. Problem: 40 years after the conclusion of World War II, the US continues to maintain a significant military presence in East Asia. A large portion of this force is located on Okinawa, Japan. Strategically situated in the Ryukyu Islands, Okinawa has served America well. During the 1950s, as "Cold War" tensions mounted, Okinawa was the ideal base from which the US could project force throughout the region. In the 1960s and 1970s, it served as a vital logistics staging area for our efforts in Southeast Asia. Today, East Asia has changed. With few exceptions, the region is politically stable and economically strong. Nevertheless, the US continues to spend millions of dollars each year to support this forward deployment of forces. Is this necessary?

III. Data: No region of the world has made greater progress since the conclusion of World War II. From the ashes of Hiroshima, Japan has risen to be one of the world's economic superpowers. The People's Republic of China (RPC), long considered to be a strong US opponent, is now opening an era of stability and exploration in free-market government. Issues relating to Hong Kong and Macao have been resolved peacefully. The Republic of the Philippines is beginning a new period of

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democratic reform. Indeed, with all this prosperity, the US and its Asian allies still face a significant challenge. The USSR now has a Pacific Fleet which is capable of power projection. Viet Nam has allowed the Soviets to utilize former US facilities in that country. North Korea remains an antagonist, and Viet Nam continues to threaten Southeast Asia. Vital lines of communication (LOCs) are vulnerable. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is growing, yet is not strong enough to stand alone. The cost of providing US forces to defend freedom in Asia is rising. With the threat in Central America increasing, the US must prepare for a conflict in this region. Yet, the US must also continue to support its partners around the world. It is time to examine our deployment of forces to ensure the US is prepared for the next conflict.

IV. Conclusions: Some US forces could be withdrawn from Okinawa. With proper training and preparation, Japanese military units can perform missions that US forces are now assigned. Given sufficient lead time, regional security will not be threatened, and the US will be better able to meet its commitments in defending the Americas in the 21st century.

V. Recommendations: The US should begin planning now for a withdrawal of its military forces from Okinawa.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Major Frank Kebelman joined the Marine Corps in 1972. Trained as a military engineer, he has spent the majority of his career in the Fleet Marine Force. He has served in a variety of battalion positions, and has been a company commander on four separate occasions. From 1977 to 1980, Major Kebelman served as the Officer-In-Charge of the Combined Explosive Ordnance Disposal Teams, Camp Pendleton, California. He has traveled extensively through Asia, and has spent four years of his career in Japan. He recently returned from an assignment on the staff at Camp S.D. Butler, Okinawa, Japan. He is a graduate of the Joint EOD School, N.O.S. Indian Head, Maryland, and the U.S. Army Advanced Engineer Officer's Course, Fort Belvoir, Virginia. He is a 1972 graduate of Stetson University, Deland, Florida, with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Geography.

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## Chapter One

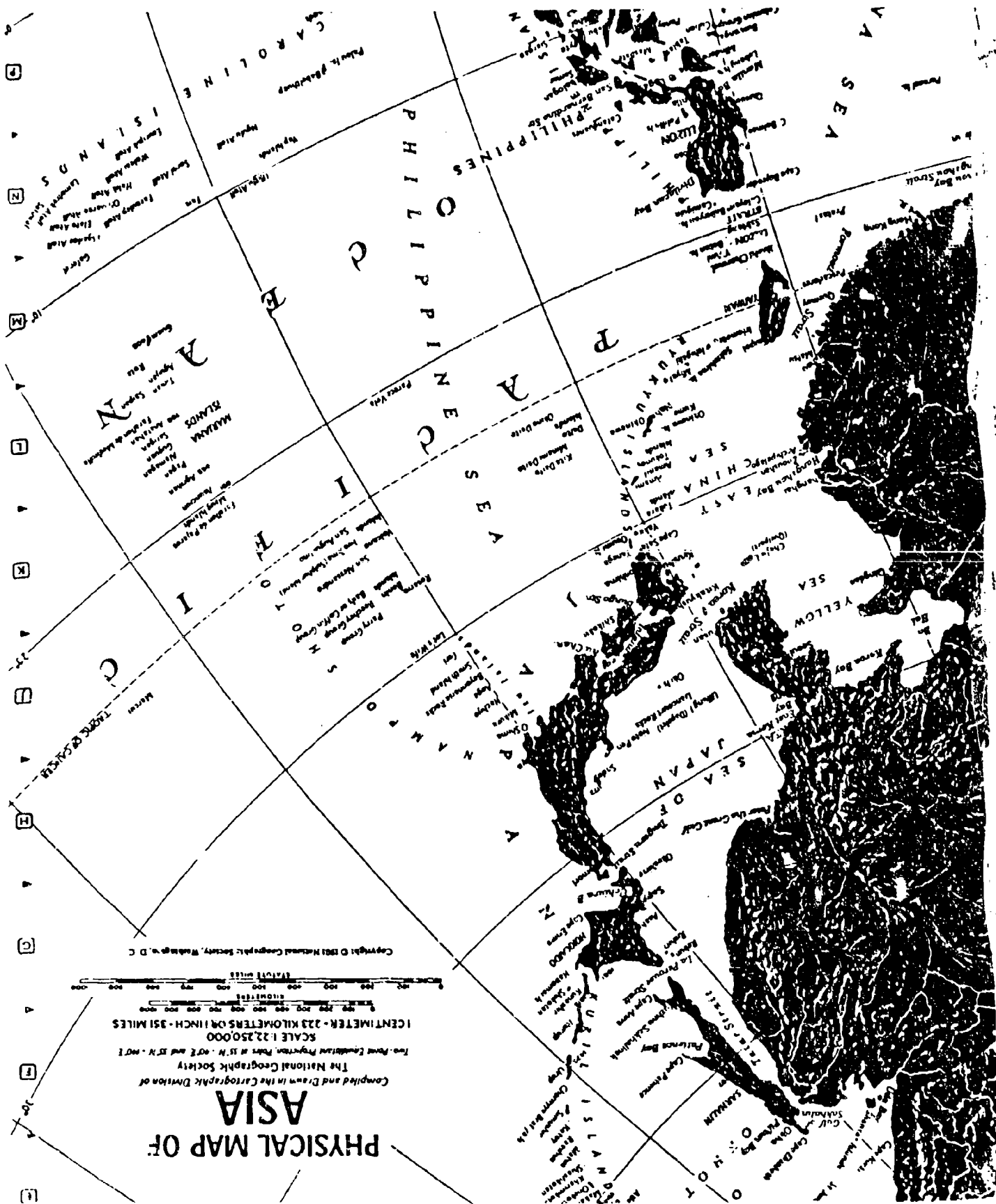
### INTRODUCTION

On 1 April 1945, US soldiers and marines invaded the island of Okinawa, beginning one of the bloodiest campaigns of World War II. Although most of the men who fought there had little knowledge about the island, there were few who did not grasp its strategic importance for the Allied cause. Quite simply, Okinawa was to be the starting point for the forthcoming invasion of the Japanese homeland. To ensure a successful invasion of Japan, it would first be necessary to secure a place to stage supplies, train the assault force, and launch the planes needed to crush the remainder of the Japanese Army. In August 1945, the atomic bomb forced Japan to surrender. The Allies never had to invade Honshu. By then, the invasion of Okinawa had been completed, and America had entered into a period of colonialism in Japan that has continued to the present.

Okinawa's strategic importance has grown over the last 40 years. Many perceive it as a central link in the defensive plan for the Western Pacific. The purpose of this paper is to examine Okinawa's strategic importance from a historical perspective, and, in light of current events, to analyze options we have regarding this island. Finally, recommendations will be presented which will aid in the formulation of an appropriate US policy for Okinawa in the early 21st century. Many similarities exist between Okinawa's strategic importance now and its value several hundred years ago.

Okinawa is the main island of the Ryukyu chain which runs south of Kyushu for seven hundred miles. The name Okinawa means "rope in the offing" (1:22), a curious title until we examine a map of the region and see these islands do appear to be knots on some giant imaginary rope (5:Fig 1). There are 120 islands which belong to this group, although not all of them are now inhabited (3:7). These islands have historically represented the southern flank for the main Japanese islands. Indeed, Iriomote, one of the most southerly of the islands, lies within sight of Taiwan. Thus, as a result of their geographic position, these islands have played a strong intermediary role between the ancient cultures of China and Japan.

Written references to these islands first appear in the early 7th century in both the Chinese and Japanese official histories (3:18). As Japan grew out of its infancy, it looked to the older Chinese culture for guidance and learning. Trade



# ASIA

## PHYSICAL MAP OF

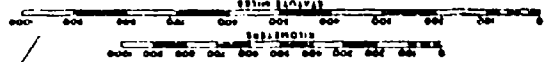
Compiled and Drawn in the Cartographic Division of

The National Geographic Society

Two Point Equal-Area Projection, Poles at 55°N - 40°E and 55°N - 100°E

SCALE 1:22,250,000

1 CENTIMETER = 223 KILOMETERS OR 1 INCH = 251 MILES



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FIGURE 1

flourished between the countries, and the Ryukyu Islands played a natural role in that process. Because of their close location to China, these islands were formally annexed by that government in 1372 (1:65). China contributed to naming the islands when their traders began calling them Liu Ch'iu, which the Okinawan people translated into Ryukyu. Japanese interest in these lonely barrier islands was economic in nature during the next 300 years, and it was not until 1609 that Japan became sufficiently interested to send an invasion force to take possession of Okinawa. Subsequent to this invasion, the Ryukyu Islands continued "under both Chinese and Japanese titular sovereignty" (4:15). In 1679, this awkward arrangement ended when Japan, then emerging as a modern power, formally annexed Okinawa, and made the islands a prefecture (4:16). Thereafter, the Ryukyu Islands remained a part of Japan, and were considered part of the homeland. In fact, Japanese legend says that Iheya Island, near Okinawa, is the birthplace of the Japanese people (6:44).

## Chapter Two

### HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

#### OKINAWA DURING THE MEIJI PERIOD

In the middle of the 19th century, Okinawan leaders still traveled to Peking for annual recognition of their positions as rulers of the islands. In 1866, China sent reciprocal envoys to Okinawa as part of this traditional exchange practice which had been performed for over 500 years (1:352). This was the last time this act occurred, because on 13 February 1867, the Crown Prince Mutsuhito succeeded his father as Emperor of Japan (1:352). This date marks the beginning of modern Japan. The new emperor chose the title of Meiji, which means "Era of Enlightened Government" (1:353). Never has a title been more appropriate. Under this ruler, Japan eagerly embraced the technology of America and Europe. Unfortunately, while most of Japan received the benefits of this economic revolution, "The Southwestern Islands" (3:7), as the Ryukyu Islands were then known, were becoming a problem for the politicians in Tokyo (1:353).

The problem centered around several boundary disputes Japan experienced soon after Commodore Perry's arrival in 1853 (3:9). Up to this time, Tokyo's benevolent style of government from afar was perfectly suited to Japan's national interest in the region. Okinawa was useful as a funnel for trade with China and other East Asian nations, and as a link in the homeland defensive perimeter. Formal control on Okinawa had been limited to a few figurehead officials and ceremonial troops whose main function was the annual tax collecting effort. However, European, Russian, Korean, and US interest was growing in the area, and several groups of islands Japan considered home territory were now vulnerable to foreign pressure. Among these were Formosa, the Ryukyu, Bonin, and Kurile groups, and Tsushima in the Sea of Japan (1:356). Tokyo realized that direct action was needed to protect these strategically important islands.

Japan took the military and political offensive to strengthen its position in each of the areas. On Okinawa, the last Ryukyu King, a member of the Sho Dynasty, was made a member of the Japanese peerage with the rank of Marquis. He was then removed from his position on Okinawa, granted a

stipend, and shipped off to Tokyo for the remainder of his life (4:50). After his abrupt departure, local political and military control was tightened, and Japanese culture began to dominate the lives of the Okinawan people (1:365-378). Although the last two decades of the 19th century were full of progress in the main Japanese islands, this growth was not seen on Okinawa. In fact, taxes were increased, voting rights were restricted, and all officials had to be appointed by the Tokyo government. As a result of these restrictions, many Okinawans began to migrate to other countries. Some found their way to the pineapple fields of Hawaii, beginning that island's Japanese influx (4:55).

#### OKINAWA IN THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

By the early years of the 20th century, Japan was competing well with the more developed nations. It had won a major war with Russia, occupied Korea, had large territories in China, and gained possession of Manchuria (9:6). The Japanese empire was at its height. While this expansion was taking place, Okinawa was still considered a backward place by most Japanese, and the inhabitants not quite the social equals of other Japanese. Full rights were not granted to Okinawans until the 1920s (4:56). Most of the people carried on subsistence fishing and farming that characterized Okinawan life for hundreds of years.

As Japan accelerated its conquest of East Asia in the later part of the 1930s, Okinawa's importance as a strategic outpost grew. While Okinawans had been serving in the Japanese military since 1907 (1:461), Tokyo realized the need to inculcate a new nationalistic spirit in the civilian populace. Many programs were forced on the citizens. Among these were the "Thought Police", "The National Spiritual Mobilization School", and the "National General Mobilization Law of 1938" (1:461-463). As expected, these programs were unpopular with the Okinawan people, and efforts had to be intensified in order to achieve the proper level of martial ardor. The government was finally successful because it began to concentrate this nationalistic campaign in the Okinawan schools. By the early 1940s, no citizens considered themselves more loyal to the emperor than did the Okinawans (26:1-3). It was unfortunate that Okinawa had little more than loyalty to contribute in preparing for the coming war.

#### OKINAWA IN WORLD WAR II

Kerr (1:463) describes Okinawa's dismal readiness for war as follows:

As matters stood on December 8, 1941, the islands had little to contribute to the war effort. There was

virtually no surplus in foodstuffs and no significant industry. There was a submarine base at Unten, but the harbors of Okinawa were unimportant for large craft, and the airfields were merely way-stations on the flight southward to Formosa and bases beyond.

If anything, this was an indictment of Tokyo's past policy of indifference. While Okinawa was still a backwater port at the beginning of the war, by 1944 it was the scene of frenzied activity (1:466-468).

In the early years of the war, there were only a few hundred troops in all of the Ryukyu Islands. In 1944, the 32nd Army was activated, and by the time America invaded on 1 April 1945, more than 100,000 defenders were in place. Many of these men were Okinawans who, after years of frustration, were about to be given the opportunity to serve their emperor (9:770-771). Throughout the ensuing weeks of the battle, both sides would suffer tremendous casualties. Estimates vary, but most historians generally agree that about 300,000 people lost their lives (7:54). When the fighting ended, one American officer (7:55) wrote:

From personal observation of a greater portion of the island, I would say that 90 percent of the private dwellings on the island were destroyed, and many of the remainder made at least temporarily uninhabitable. The whole population was torn from its roots, mixed up, and disorganized. Children were separated from their families and members of families were lost...The whole society as it had existed was for all practical purposes destroyed.

On that bitter note the war in the Pacific ended, and control of Okinawa passed to America. While many of the physical scars healed as time passed, the Okinawan people still carry emotional wounds that are evident today. The Okinawan attitude toward Japan is apparent in their recent heated debate over whether to allow the Japanese flag and Kimigayo national anthem to be used at school ceremonies (10:3). The attitudes shaped by World War II experience have had a significant impact on the history of the Ryukyu Islands since the "gaijins" (foreigners) arrived.

#### OKINAWA AS AN AMERICAN COLONY

Even before World War II ended, the US could see that in order to protect its interests around the world it would be necessary to secure bases on foreign soil. These bases would help maintain a democratic presence, and would allow the rapid projection of force against any future foes (7:60). When Okinawa was conquered, it immediately assumed an important strategic role for US presence in the Western Pacific. As the



communists gained control in China, and Russia expanded her influence to the Kurile Islands, Okinawa's geographic position made it a useful forward military outpost. When war started in Korea, Okinawa was used to store supplies, help in the intelligence gathering effort, and launch planes to support the ground forces against the Korean offensive.

The US chose to govern Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands with a military government. Although the US had been gathering information on the islands in preparation for the invasion, we were not ready to assume the responsibilities associated with rebuilding a shattered economy. Military construction was the chief priority, and help for the Okinawan people was limited to some relief and rehabilitation programs (4:62). In the early 1950s, the military government was replaced by the Government of the Ryukyu Islands (GRI), which was controlled by the US Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands (USCAR). As late as 1959, an Army general, Lieutenant General Paul Caraway, still filled the chief post (High Commissioner). It was not until 1962 that an American civil servant, Mr. Shannon McCune, was appointed to run the daily administration of the islands (4:63).

US military presence on Okinawa grew steadily through the 1950s, particularly after the end of the Korean War. In the early 1960s, as US interest turned to Southeast Asia, Okinawa became a major American staging area. All US military services were represented with bases, and the number of personnel stationed on Okinawa increased dramatically. While the US was spending a great amount of money on our military forces, spending for civilian programs lagged far behind. The Okinawan people began to lobby for change. Issues that had to be resolved included how to reimburse land owners whose land was being used for military bases, and what to do about the legal status of the islands (25:Ch 3). Local pressure to return the islands to Japanese control continued to mount, and on 15 May 1972, Okinawa reverted to Japanese control (4:16). America remained as a guest.

This brief overview of several hundred years of complex Okinawan history is necessary in order to properly grasp the essential nature of Okinawa's strategic worth. Originally an economic tool, the islands later gained value for their military importance. After years of debate over our administration of the Ryukyu Islands, and upon successful completion of the reversion process, we arrive at the present arrangement which allows the US to continue to use the islands for military purposes, while the Japanese have political sovereignty.

## Chapter Three

### PRESENT AMERICAN INVESTMENT

#### OVERVIEW

Today, Okinawa is one of America's most important overseas military basing areas. As US economic ties grow with Japan and other East Asian countries, our interests in the Pacific region must be protected. This is particularly important in light of the growing Soviet presence (21:43-44). Both the US and Japanese governments have recognized the need for continued American presence in Japanese waters. What has developed is a practical self-defense and security arrangement which lets the US maintain bases on Japanese soil, while encouraging increases in defense spending by the Japanese. Article 6 of the present Japan-US Security Treaty (19:85) summarizes this agreement in the following statement:

For the purpose of contributing to the security of Japan and the maintenance of international peace and security in the Far East, the United States of America is granted the use by its land, air, and naval forces of facilities and areas in Japan.

#### USCINCPACOM FORCES

The US forces responsible for the defense of the Pacific belong to the US Commander In Chief, Pacific Command (USCINCPACOM). From its headquarters in Hawaii, it is responsible for more than "fifty percent of the earth's surface" (24:276). The forces available are shown below:

##### ARMY

1 Infantry Division (Korea)  
1 Infantry Division (Hawaii)

##### MARINE CORPS

1 MAF (Calif)  
1 Brigade (Hawaii)  
Portions of 1 MAF (Japan)

##### AIR FORCE

1 Strategic Bomber Sqd  
11 Tactical Fighter Sqds  
5 Tactical Support Sqds

##### NAVY

6 Carriers with Air Wings  
89 Surface Combatants  
32 Amphibious Ships  
40 Attack Submarines  
12 Air Patrol Sqds.

The above figures were taken from Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger's report to Congress last year (24:276). An examination of the figures reveals how little military punch is available for contingency planning for future Pacific operations. The total comes to about "160,000 US combat forces on shore and afloat in the region" (2:6). This is the lowest US Pacific presence since 1945 (2:6). A good portion of these forces are either stationed on Okinawa, or operate regularly out of the waters adjacent to the Ryukyu Islands.

Currently, most of the military forces on Okinawa are either marines or airmen. The naval forces, while not large in numbers, are strategically important beyond their size. The US Army has some specialized units, and has recently increased its force strength. The Coast Guard is also represented, but may be planning to withdraw in the future. A specific look at each of these services will help to explain why they are stationed on Okinawa, and what types of missions they are assigned.

#### MARINE CORPS

The Marine Corps is the service with the biggest investment on Okinawa. It has more equipment, personnel, and facilities than any of the other services. There are about 25,000 marines assigned to the Third Marine Amphibious Force (III MAF), which is headquartered at Camp Courtney (15:35). Subordinate forces assigned to III MAF include the 3d Marine Division (3dMarDiv), 1st Marine Aircraft Wing (1stMAW), and the 3d Force Service Support Group (3dFSSG) (15:36). With the exception of the 1st MAW which has some of its squadrons stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni (near Hiroshima), all III MAF units call Okinawa their home port. Headquarters, Marine Corps Base Camp S.D. Butler is also located on Okinawa, and controls several thousand acres of land for training purposes (8:Fig 2).

Marine units of III MAF are stationed on Okinawa in order to provide an immediate capability to respond should US security interests be threatened anywhere in the Pacific. Okinawa was originally chosen primarily because it was available, and under US control during the tense days of the cold war era. In that period, communist threats were being encountered in many East Asian countries. Okinawa's advance location, and insulation from possible attack, made it an ideal logistics staging base. During the Viet Nam Conflict, it performed a similar function. Later, as that conflict ended, the US still required a place to garrison and train troops. Okinawa was the logical choice, even though by that time it had reverted to Japanese control (3:21).

# OKINAWA

off duty

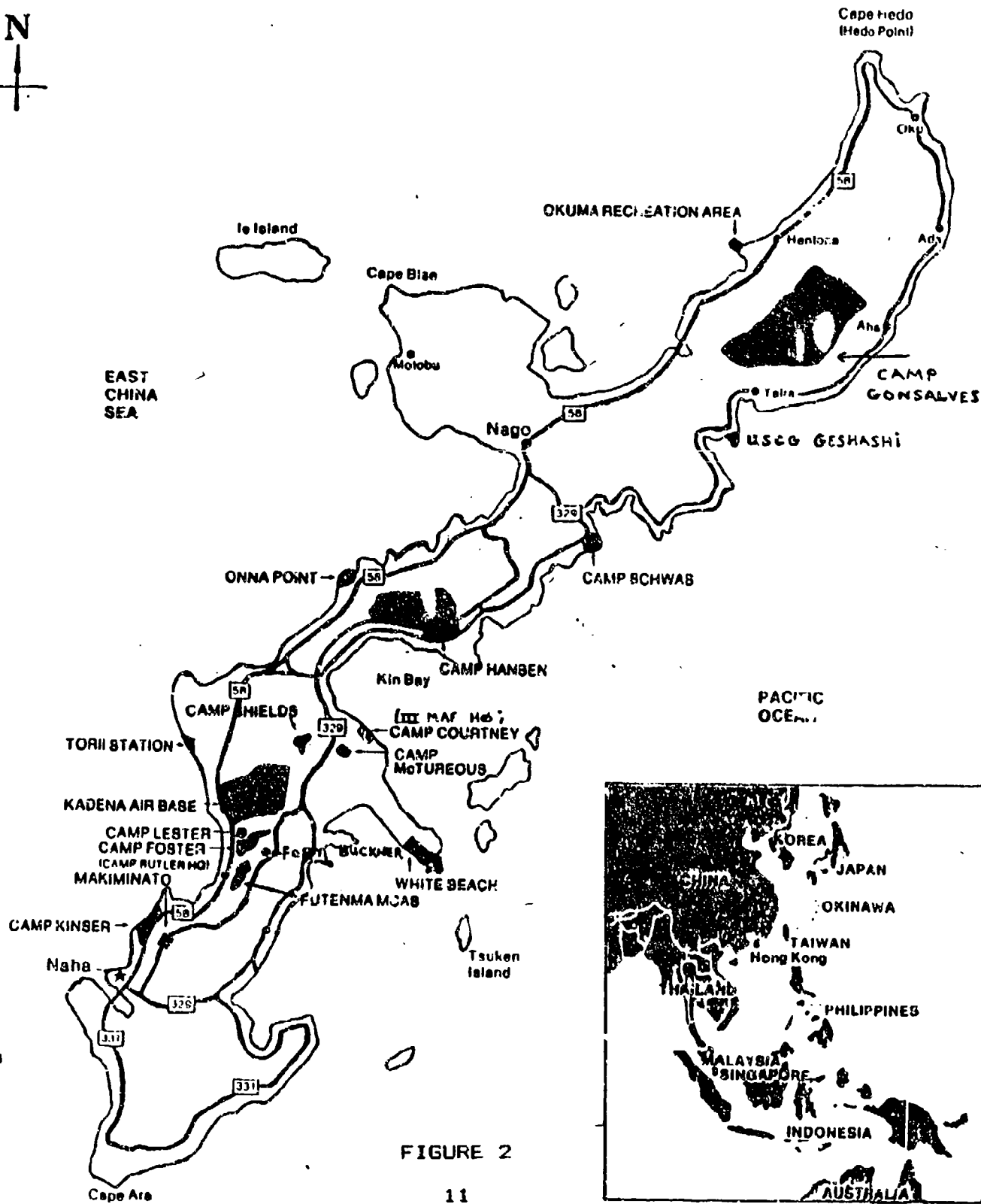


FIGURE 2

Although Okinawa is now Japanese territory, marines continue to occupy most of the same land they had before reversion. Unfortunately, local growth in population, and tremendous economic development, have placed a strain on the fine relationship that once existed between the Marine Corps and local governments (10:3). City officials, responding to the demands of concerned Okinawans, have had to ask the Marine Corps to restrict many of its training activities, particularly live fire artillery and close air support training. This has forced the marines to go off island to practice many of their combat skills. Presently, at least one third of the marines assigned to III MAF are deployed away from Okinawa at any given time (15:37-39). Most of these marines are assigned to composite Marine Air Ground Task Forces (MAGTF) of various sizes. Deploying to locations away from Okinawa serves two functions. First, it provides task organized, combat ready units, capable of delivering a direct presence throughout East Asia. Second, it removes these units to locations more suited to providing the ranges necessary for the marines to hone their combat techniques. Okinawa is not ideal for supporting the marine effort due to its current political restrictions.

#### NAVY

Working closely with Marine Corps is the Navy. The main naval command in East Asia is the 7th Fleet, which is headquartered in Yokosuka, Japan. The naval mission is quite similar to that of the marines in that it is "in the region ready to respond when necessary" (13:118). Again, it is a force capable of projecting power and supporting governments friendly to the US (13:118).

On Okinawa, the major naval forces operate out of the joint Japanese-US naval port facility at White Beach (8:Fig 2). Under the control of the Commander, Amphibious Group One/Amphibious Force Seventh Fleet (CTF-76), the navy exercises with marine units deployed on ship, and provides amphibious shipping necessary to support naval commitments in East Asia (15:39). The White Beach base maintains port support facilities to keep the ships resupplied.

The Navy also has several communications facilities on Okinawa. The Hanza and Awase sites provide vital communication links with deployed naval forces, and support the intelligence gathering activities for the US Pacific Fleet and Pacific Command. A Naval Mobile Construction Battalion (SeaBee) is located at Camp Shields. It provides construction expertise to the III MAF. Headquarters for the Combined Fleet Activities is the Naval Air Facility, Kadena, which operates on the west side of Kadena Air Base. Aviation support facilities are maintained to assist deploying naval aviation (including marine aviation) units operating from 7th Fleet carriers, or from stations such as NAS Atsugi and MCAS Iwakuni. NAF Kadena also is home for

the deployed P-3 antisubmarine warfare (ASW) squadron which provides a submarine surveillance capability for the East China, South China, and Philippine Seas. Carrying ASW sensors and munitions, this versatile aircraft has exceptional range and time on station capacity (13:121).

#### AIR FORCE

The other major American military force on Okinawa is Air Force's 313th Air Division. Located at Kadena Air Base (8:Fig 2), it is part of the 5th Air Force. The aviation units assigned to this command are a significant contributor to regional defense. In addition to providing logistics and personnel support, Kadena is the home of the 18th Tactical Fighter Wing (20:8). This unit has some 70 F-15 fighters, 18 RF-4C reconnaissance planes, and other support aircraft. Also located at Kadena is the 376th Strategic Wing (SAC) with KC-135 tankers, AWACS, and SR-71 reconnaissance planes (14:17). These aviation assets are responsible for monitoring the presence of Soviet forces operating in the region, and for responding to any crisis situation which might affect US interests. The tankers and AWACS planes are linked to SAC forces located elsewhere in the Pacific (14:17).

#### ARMY

The US Army also stations units on Okinawa. US Army Garrison Okinawa (USAGO) is the headquarters element for various logistics support functions subordinate to the US Army Japan located at Camp Zama near Tokyo. The major operational unit on Okinawa is the 1st Battalion, 1st Special Forces Group. This unit was recently transferred to Okinawa, and is stationed at Torii Station (8:Fig 2). This organization provides special operations forces (SOF) capability to US Forces Japan and PACOM. The Army was once the dominant force on the island, but in recent years they removed most of their active forces. In the early 1970s, the Army turned over control of many of its bases to the Marine Corps. In addition to Camp Kinser, the marines also inherited Camp Foster and the US Naval Hospital at Camp Lester. The Army did retain its major communications station at Fort Buckner. Operated by a signal battalion of US Army Information Systems Command (USAISCOM), this facility provides telephone service and satellite transmission and reception capabilities (20:41).

#### COAST GUARD

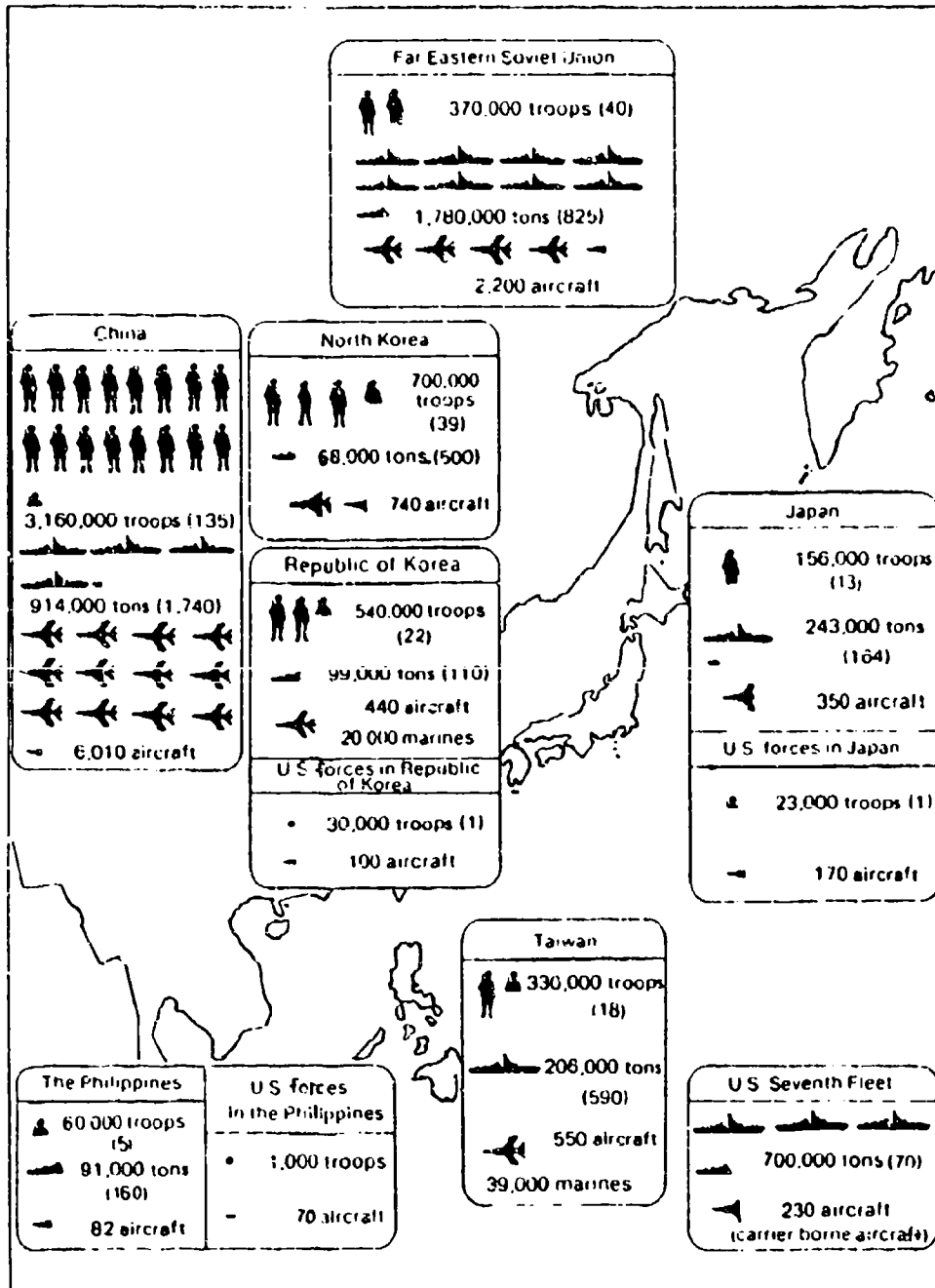
The Coast Guard is also represented on Okinawa. It provides a LORAN communications facility at Geshashi on the north-east coast of Okinawa. Other than this one activity, the Coast Guard has no presence on the island. As LORAN sites become

obsolete and are replaced by more sophisticated satellite communications, it is anticipated that this facility will no longer be needed (27:--).

#### SUMMATION OF CURRENT FORCES

These are the US forces which are now assigned to Okinawa. They are a tremendous resource, yet they face a growing threat from some communist countries. In view of the expansion of the Soviet Pacific Fleet in Vladivostok and Cam Ranh Bay, and the vulnerability of many US allies to interdiction of sea lines of communication (LOCs), it is obvious that US interests could be threatened in a variety of ways. The question which must be answered is are our forces on Okinawa strong enough to perform their missions? Also, must those forces be stationed on Okinawa in order to perform these tasks? Figure 3 shows the relative defense strengths of some of the key opponents that could prove to be a hostile force in future conflicts. Since most of our Asian allies are not strong enough militarily to confront a direct communist threat, it is important for the US to use its forces to provide a credible deterrent. "Japan remains a cornerstone of regional security by virtue of its strategic location, economic strength, and self-defense capability" (21:45). The US is pledged to defend Japan. How best to fulfill this pledge may now be the most important regional issue facing US strategists.

Diagram 1-4. Deployment State of Armed Forces in and Around Japan (Estimates)



- Notes:
1. Data available from "Military Balance 1984-85" (Figures for Japan show actual strength as of the end of fiscal 1984)
  2. The number of U.S. forces personnel stationed in various countries is the total of army personnel and marines
  3. Combat aircraft in the Far Eastern Soviet Union, China and those maintained by U.S. forces stationed in various countries include naval and marine aircraft
  4. Figures in the parentheses indicate the number of army divisions or vessels.

FIGURE 3



## Chapter Four

### OKINAWA'S STRATEGIC VALUE

President Ronald Reagan has called the 21st century the "Pacific Era" (16:1). Mr. Richard L. Armitage, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs echoed that when he said, "The economic importance of Asia and the Pacific to the United States outstrips that of any other region, including Europe" (11:29). No less than Secretary of State George Schultz agreed with this Asian philosophy in his remark, "To understand the future, you must understand the Pacific" (12:11). Many other prominent civilian and military leaders appreciate and support this analysis. The interests of the US have been, and will continue to be, interwoven with that of our East Asian friends. If Asia is important to the US, then it follows that our major military bases will be the central ingredient in the formula we develop to protect those interests.

What then is the strategic importance of Okinawa? More than anything else, the Pacific is a maritime region. Countries separated by the sea must operate in a nautical environment to survive. Trade between nations is heavily dependent upon commerce on the high seas, and those nations that can control the seas will be those that become, and remain, economically strong. Japan is a classic example of a nation whose very existence depends on its overseas commerce. Whether importing resources from the Middle East, or exporting goods to the US, Japan must maintain a steady flow of trade to survive. The Japanese understand this, and have agreed to defend their territory, including sea lanes, out to a limit of 1000 nautical miles (12:12). Given Okinawa's excellent geographic location, adjacent to major sea lanes to the Indian Ocean and beyond, it assumes a most important strategic link for the defense of southern Japan.

While the Japanese view Okinawa as vital to their defense plan, the US sees this island in a broader perspective. Indeed, Okinawa is seldom mentioned at all regarding its role for the defense of Japanese sea lanes. Instead, the US looks at Okinawa as one link of a defensive line that stretches from New Zealand to the Aleutian Islands. This defensive line, and most particularly the Japanese portion, holds the key to interdicting the Soviet Pacific Fleet should a major conflict occur. Short of a theater level confrontation, the Japanese islands,

and especially Okinawa, are necessary to counter "the Soviet Union's relentless drive to increase its military power and expand its influence in East Asia..." (24:276). The US, as a world power, must continue to resist Soviet attempts to dominate Asia. By viewing Okinawa in the larger context of its role for the defense of the entire region, rather than its position as a guard for Japan's flank, Okinawa assumes a significant strategic value for the US.

Other East Asian nations might view Okinawa's strategic importance differently depending on their relationship with western free-market economies. For many years the People's Republic of China (PRC) has been one of our foremost opponents in the region. Their support of North Korea and Viet Nam during US conflicts with those nations was to be expected in light of our ideological differences. It follows that the Chinese feel a US military presence on an island so close to their shores would constitute a major strategic threat. Although our relations with the PRC are improving daily, Okinawa will remain a strategic question mark for the Chinese.

Another possible regional opponent is North Korea. With its always threatening military posture, and continuing desire to reunite the Korean peninsula, North Korean forces, under Kim Il-Sung's direction, will pose a continuing threat to regional security. "From Kim Il-Sung's perspective, US imperialism is North Korea's number one enemy and the main stumbling block to Korea's reunification" (2:160). North Korea is well aware that III MAF marines are stationed only a short flight away, ready to reinforce the soldiers of the US 2nd Infantry Division should North Korea choose to invade the south.

Likewise, Taiwan, the Philippines, Viet Nam, and all Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) members realize that Okinawa is a major strategic weapon in the US arsenal in East Asia. Depending on the US to maintain its presence on Okinawa, many of these small countries cannot afford to increase military defense spending should the US decide that Okinawa is no longer important. Yet, Dr. Gaston J. Sigur Jr. (23:4) recently said in an address on US policy toward East Asia, "We also intend to protect and preserve those interests essential to security and stability". Okinawa will play a strategic part in that process.

## Chapter Five

### US OPTIONS FOR OKINAWA

#### INTRODUCTION

As the world moves into the 21st century, it is time to examine our role in East Asia, and Okinawa, to ensure the US is pursuing the best course of action to further our national interests. As regional stability grows, and political relationships change, US objectives may also change. Unless we continue to scrutinize our Asian policies, we may find our country supporting policies that are more harmful than good. The US has a large investment on Okinawa. This investment is designed to support our goal of promoting regional stability. For the past 40 years we have used Okinawa to protect Asia, and the economic resources it contains. However, the last decade has seen a quantum leap in new dialogue between former antagonists. We have reached a crossroad, and it is time to look to the future. Our Asian investment may not be as necessary as it once was.

The US has three major options regarding our involvement on Okinawa. First, we could choose to maintain the status quo. This option supports a policy that calls for maintaining a large US force on Okinawa, with the Japanese government providing periodic facilities improvements to help defray the cost (27:--). At the same time, America could urge the Japanese to increase their defense spending and modernize their military forces. The second option would recommend an increase in our involvement on Okinawa. As a result of Soviet advances, the option would stress strengthening our naval and aviation assets. The third option is to selectively reduce our force structure on Okinawa, replacing US forces with Japanese units. As the opportunity for low intensity conflict (LIC) increases in the Americas, perhaps some forces now on Okinawa might be more useful if they were stationed in the US. Let's examine each option.

#### OPTION ONE - STATUS QUO

This option has been successful for the last 20 years. Our economic ties to Japan, and current political treaties, have required our active presence in the region. It is advantageous to have military forces available for deployment to other areas

in the region. Okinawa is a convenient location from which to launch military operations in support of our policies. Unfortunately, the cost of maintaining these forces has also increased (27:--). At the same time, Japan has been able to make great economic gains using our defense umbrella, thus reducing the amount it has to spend on defense. Japan, realizing it has an advantage, and understanding the political sentiments which Americans have toward their trade surplus with the US, has begun to spend more on defense, and has provided millions of yen to upgrade and replace old US facilities on Japanese soil (28:--). It is doubtful, in today's climate of congressional austerity, that the Department of Defense could have obtained funding for these improvements. However, Congress may still perceive Japan's efforts as not enough. Funding aside, is it really necessary to maintain the status quo?

There is always the possibility that the US may be required to support our Asian partners in a low intensity conflict. Having forward deployed forces available would reduce the time necessary to respond to such an assignment. At present, the Japanese Self-Defense Force is unable to replace US forces that are stationed on Okinawa. Given the reluctance of many Japanese to support a build-up of Japanese military strength, it is doubtful that Japan could fill any vacuum created by a US withdrawal. Yet, aside from the obvious Soviet presence, East Asia is reaching a time when the chance for conflict in the region is greatly reduced. ASEAN and other regional alliances like it may be the real defense posture of the future. In time, the US presence on Okinawa may come to represent a detriment to security. It is encouraging to see the PRC resolve its Hong Kong and Macao issues peacefully, and it is hoped that eventually the Taiwan issue will follow. As Kim Il-Sung departs, new Korean initiatives may reduce tensions on that peninsula. As all of Asia leans toward the economic benefits of free-market government, the US should prepare for the day when Okinawa and East Asia no longer need our support.

#### OPTION TWO - INCREASE US FORCES

The second option would be to increase our presence on Okinawa. This region is "heavily armed" (2:1). A larger US presence might be necessary to keep the region stable. A case could be made for adopting this option based on the Soviet threat. However, the US force strength while large, is not endless. Economically and politically, this option would meet great resistance from the American public and congressional leaders. With East Asia stabilizing, and defense cost taxing more of the US annual budget, support for an increase in aid to the region would be unrealistic. It is hard to imagine America increasing its defense spending to protect a country (Japan) which it owes several billion dollars in trade debts.

### OPTION THREE - WITHDRAWAL

The final option available would be to reduce the US military presence on Okinawa. Under this proposal, the US would initiate a gradual withdrawal of our forces, replacing them with Japanese units capable of performing the same mission. If adopted, the US would risk weakening its prestige in the region, and could limit its ability to protect American interests throughout East Asia. However, a partial withdrawal of selected forces, phased in over a period of sufficient length to train Japanese units, might be very effective. For example, the marines of III MAF could be returned to bases under US control. Guam, Hawaii, or California could be used for this purpose. Military forces can now be airlifted around the world on short notice. When responding to a situation which requires marine combat forces to prepare for a landing on hostile shores, it makes little difference if the forces are airlifted to the scene in 3 hours or 10 hours. Once Japanese forces are trained and equipped to assume aviation missions, the 18th TFW and ASW P-3 squadron could also be returned to the US. If given enough time to prepare for the US departure, the Japanese could easily perform the duties presently assigned to US military forces. Politically, just the threat to withdraw might be used to encourage the Japanese to increase their defense spending to a level commensurate with their standing as a world economic superpower. Regardless of the timetable established, there is no reason why this option might not be implemented safely, without degrading the stability of the region. The key to this option is to return only those units that would probably not be in direct confrontation with the Soviet forces. For security reasons, the 7th Fleet and certain intelligence gathering activities would probably have to remain well into the 21st century.

## Chapter Six

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Of the three options presented, the recommended course would be to begin planning for withdrawal of our forces. This recommendation is based on the assessment that East Asia will continue to grow economically, and will stabilize as more nations participate in free-market trade. Our forces will, at best, have only a limited impact on East Asia. It is time to let our Asian partners participate more fully in their defense. It is also time for the US to recognize that the Asia of today bears little resemblance to the Asia of 40 years ago.

The US needs to more effectively employ its limited military forces in order to meet the most probable threat. That threat has a much greater chance of occurring in the Americas than in East Asia, especially in the next century. Japanese forces could easily assume missions that our forces now perform. It remains only to choose which forces and in what priority they can return. Because most marine units are not even on Okinawa most of the time, they would be likely candidates for early removal.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff stress that forward deployment of US forces is one of the strengths of our global strategy (21:9). This is certainly true in Europe, but has doubtful applicability on Okinawa. Anything our ground forces can do from a base on that island, they can also do from a base on Hawaii or Guam. Besides, Hawaii and Guam are American soil, with all the advantages, and few disadvantages that foreign bases have.

Japan is continuing to expand its military force. ASEAN will be a power in East Asia in the future. It is time for the US to support our commitments to lesser developed countries in the Americas. The likelihood of a future conflict in Central America is great. Only by realizing this fact will the US be ready for that conflict. We must begin planning now. The first step is a realignment of our deployed military forces. After 40 years, it is time to say "sayonara" to Okinawa.

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