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**FUTENMA AIR BASE  
AS A HOSTAGE OF US-JAPAN ALLIANCE:  
POWER, INTERESTS AND IDENTITY  
POLITICS SURROUNDING MILITARY BASES  
IN OKINAWA**

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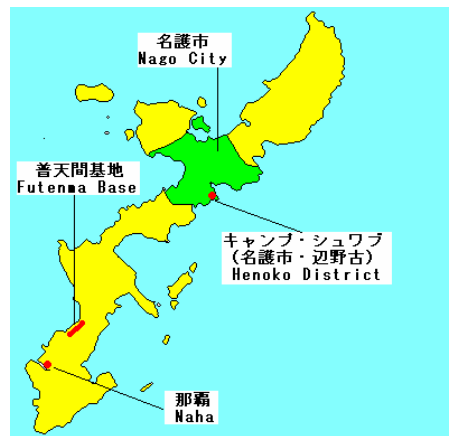
## **ABSTRACT**

This paper first critically analyses the mainstream understanding of the Futenma relocation issue mainly as an issue to do with domestic politics in Japan and Okinawa, at the expense of its important implications for Japan's alliance with the US and relations with Asian neighbours. The 10-year inertia of the re-location of Futenma base has been linked to the locals' protest against the new base construction, and the local governments' constant demand to reduce the US military presence. Still dominant neorealist theory and influential liberal internationalist theory have contributed to excluding factors such as history, identity and local economy in Okinawa from any considerations on Japan's foreign policy in an anarchic post-Cold War East Asian international relations. The paper explores the constructivist international relations perspective in order to examine how the local economic, cultural and historical experience of Okinawa can be conceptualised as a problem in a decision making domain relevant to the US-Japan security alliance and Japan's foreign policy. The paper argues that Japan's current policy on Futenma Air Base confirms itself as a junior rather than an equal ally of the US, while limiting the possibility of more autonomous multilateral security engagement with its Asian neighbors, especially China. In other words, Japan's policy on Futenma Air Base relocation serves as a marker of the diplomatic direction of the country, at a crossroads of confronting its past war responsibility and constitutional change towards legitimate militarisation towards capability of attacking overseas.

## INTRODUCTION

Together with the trade conflicts between the two economies, the exceptionally heavy presence of US military bases in Okinawa has been a source of tension for US-Japan bilateral relations since the end of World War II.<sup>1</sup> In the post-Cold War context, the 1995 rape case of a schoolgirl by three US Marines created by far the most severe crisis for the stability of US-Japan security alliance. In 1996, US and Japan agreed to return Futenma US Marine Corps Air Station to Okinawa. This was on the condition that an alternative facility was built in Nago City, on the coast and close to another major US Marine Corps base, Camp Schwab and the small hamlet of Henoko.

Figure 1. Futenma Base and Henoko in Okinawa Main Island



Ten years later, the old and dangerous Air Station in Futenma is still operating. The construction of an alternative air base in Henoko has yet to start because of the difficulty in reaching an agreement with local governments at city and prefecture levels (Nago and Okinawa) on the construction methods and location. The long-term anti-base residents' round-the-clock sit-in and other marine protest actions that physically blocked the mandatory environmental assessment by the Japanese government have been even more significant obstructions. The US government officials have been pressuring the Japanese officials to hasten the relocation process. In May 2007 a Maritime Self Defense Forces (SDF) minesweeper appeared off the shore of Henoko before dawn, to enforce the necessary environmental survey. This shocking use of SDF against citizens indicates the importance that this issue holds for security.

In August 2004, a US combat helicopter crashed on a building inside the Okinawa International University campus, located immediately next to the Futenma Marine Air Base. Not surprisingly, the accident rekindled raging resentment towards the ongoing US military presence in Okinawa, triggering another round of mass protests and rallies. The Okinawan

citizens' opposition to the relocation of Futenma within the prefecture reached 82% according to an *Asahi Shimbun* poll. However, the accident had much less impact on the bilateral alliance than the rape case in 1995. In the intervening nine years, the question of the continuing US military presence in Okinawa was reduced to questions of shape and location: where and what forms should that presence take? Not, should there be a presence at all? Once again the matter became a domestic one to be resolved by Tokyo and Okinawa local governments. It was no longer a foreign policy and inter-state issue.

Naturally, Okinawans will always oppose more military presence, including the construction of a substitute for Futenma Air Base in Henoko. Within the local political arena, the argument has been demoted to how Okinawans play the political game with the Japanese government. Now the limited objectives in this game do not involve the question of Okinawans' safety, security or democracy but focus on how to extract maximum compensation and subsidy for accepting the construction of a new military base. Dominant understanding of base politics in Okinawa has made the question one to be resolved by a mixture of haggling and administrative discretion.

For the Okinawan host community however, the problems caused by the bases are inevitably and ultimately related to questions of local, national and international security. Obviously, the bases are there to serve US overseas military activities and to cement Japan and Okinawa's co-operation with these activities. Okinawa's dense and disproportionate hosting role is a direct consequence of the island's geographically specific wartime victimization as well as its historical and ongoing marginalisation. In this sense, the US foreign bases in Okinawa therefore mean something very different than they do in mainland Japan.

The issue is also deeply related to Japan's foreign policy, which is at a crossroad. Its management of the Futenma relocation issue could have implications for future Japanese foreign policy, especially in relation to the quality and character of its alliance with the US. How equal or dependent as a partner is Japan going to be in this alliance? Additionally, how is a now militarising Japan going to deal with its war responsibilities? Will it, in its relations with regional neighbours, and as it militarises, continue to present itself as a nation still clinging to its pre-war imperial and fascist past? These are big questions with profound regional and global security implications.

A number of questions present themselves here: Why has the Futenma relocation issue been framed so tightly as a domestic issue? Is local compensation the only issue and administrative resolution enough to settle everything? What would be gained by placing the

Okinawan base question within a larger national and international security frame and inviting wider public participation in whatever discussion or debate might follow? Most fundamentally perhaps, what gets in the way of wider perspectives and more democratic forms of discussion? In the balance of this paper, I begin to explore this question in a more limited way, principally by considering how conservative international relations theory helps to sustain conservative foreign policy practice in seeking to maintain the status quo – a status quo in which Japan is a junior partner to the US and Okinawa both the prize, and the hostage.

The paper briefly identifies relevant international relations perspectives in order to examine how the US-Japan security alliance has come to be conceptualised as a problem or decision making domain standing apart from the local economic, cultural and historical experience of Okinawa. It then turns to overlooked issues of history and identity politics in Okinawa and discusses how and why they are relevant to larger Japanese foreign policy questions as these play into the international security of East Asia. Finally, the paper argues that Japan's policy on the Futenma Air Base limits and distorts its foreign policy options. Japan may well consolidate itself as a 'client state' rather than become an equal ally of the US (McCormack 2007). It could at the same time rule out the possibility of more autonomous multilateral security engagement with its Asian neighbors, especially China. This would be an important loss to Japan, to East Asia and to the world.

### **THE (NEO) REALIST PERSPECTIVE: SEPARATING THE INTERNATIONAL AND DOMESTIC**

The reason for deployment of US forces in Okinawa for the past 60 odd years is Japanese-US security relations, or alliance. Policy-makers and commentators have explained the rationales for this alliance mostly from realist and neo-realist perspectives. Anarchical outlook and basic lack of trust prevail in relevant discussions of the East Asian security environment. Balance of power and alliance politics are crucial means to survive in such an environment. In the post-war period, the Japan-US alliance has been justified in precisely these realist terms.

Realists consider that relations among states are naturally anarchical because there is no authority above states. Although it has long history reaching back to Hobbes or even Thucydides, this outlook became dominant in the aftermath of the Second World War as a critique of idealism and liberal institutionalism based on universal values (especially Carr 1946; Morgenthau 2005). Two world wars, a holocaust and nuclear warfare put an end to these dreams. Balance of power, especially military power, is considered a more reliable avenue for order in international relations. Given the anarchical character of the international

system, individual states, should always behave in a way that maximises national interest defined in terms of securing safety and survival by increasing its relevant capabilities. According to realists, order-building should be the primary concern of diplomacy and foreign policy. Alliances and war preparation are among the most important instruments for states to achieve order in international relations that is inherently unstable.

Neorealist theory radicalises the realist argument. It assumes a state's behaviour to be structurally – and completely – determined by the anarchic international system. The state necessarily behaves so as to maximise its chance of survival. Imperatives within states are different. International politics, according to an influential neo-realist theorist Kenneth Waltz, needs to be considered separately from domestic politics. Affairs within the state related to society, history and even economics need to be understood in different structural constraints from those in international system (Waltz 1979: 79-80, 91-92, 100-101). Classical realism on the other hand, makes room for consideration of domestic affairs such as history, while neorealists are able to filter them out as 'domestic affairs'. The neo-realist logic permits a more exclusive focus on power and maximizing of state safety; unconstrained by internal complications, especially where these might involve consideration of ethics and morality. For foreign policy-making, this neorealist thinking was particularly influential during the Cold War.

In the Okinawan context, US bases have created dilemmas at historical, moral as well as economic levels. The first military bases in Okinawa were those constructed by the Japanese military during World War II. They were lost to the Americans in the bloody Battle of Okinawa and extended in the course of the US occupation. The Okinawans lost 160,000 or one-third of their residents' lives in the Battle of Okinawa. This experience is different from that of mainland Japanese experience of war – reified in Nagasaki and Hiroshima – because of Okinawa's identity. For over four centuries, from 1429 onwards, Okinawa was a sovereign nation – the Ryukyu Kingdom – until it was annexed by Japan in 1879, only 70 years before WWII. During that time, Okinawan citizens were subjected to discrimination and described as 'backward' second-class citizens, who had to learn the Japanese language, and were pressured to assimilate.

Japanese military's aggression towards the local residents during the Battle of Okinawa continues to be a source of conflict between the residents and the Japanese government whose official position involves denial of all wrong doing.<sup>2</sup> It is important that today's US military presence is understood as an extension of the history of Okinawa's abuse and marginalisation by Japan. The experience of war as a colonial appendage and, quite

literally, as a battlefield, gave rise to an absolute pacifism that constitutes what being ‘Okinawan’ means today. It also informs the collective identity of diverse anti-base social movements and energises their activism (Tanji 2006, Chapter 4). Continuing complicity in war by hosting US forces – and the Japanese Self Defence Forces for that matter – thus poses an acute moral dilemma for the Okinawans. In addition to that, the US military presence has contributed to Okinawa being the most impoverished, crowded, and polluted prefecture in Japan. Its economy continues to be dependent on the military presence in a variety of ways including the fostering of a large and abusive sex industry. Autonomous city planning is impossibly restricted by the space occupied by the US forces. Okinawa remains a service industry economy and servicing the bases is its main business. It is a “base economy” and is reliant on direct revenues from the US military and, even more so, on Japanese government’s special budgets paid to the communities as compensation for hosting military bases.

These historical, economic and moral complications, however, are not permitted to enter the sphere of foreign policy concern. They are dealt with between elected local political representatives and the Japanese government officials. The negotiation between the central government and the local representatives in the margin are of course influenced by power imbalance between Tokyo and Okinawa. But the opinions of Okinawan citizens that might, for cultural and moral reasons, be hostile to a continuing US presence and its projects of renewal (e.g. the construction of Futenma Air Base) are often manipulated at election time by economic insecurity and priorities (Miyagi and Tanji 2007; Yoshikawa 2007). In any case, issues are typically discussed and resolved domestically in this limiting way. This does not mean that the US bases in Okinawa are irrelevant to Japan’s foreign policy. However, the established views prevent the issue from being brought together and debated in this way.

The neo-realist perspective and the radical independence and priority it assigns to foreign policy making is helpful here. Foreign policy about the survival of Japan and maintaining the security alliance with the US is priority not to be disturbed by less important domestic concerns. In order to maintain the status quo of the alliance, the government of Japan chooses to allow the US forces to keep using the base facilities in Okinawa. Apart from that, Okinawa hosts 75% of all exclusively US facilities stationed in Japan. If Okinawa’s cultural sensibilities or priorities are sometimes ignored, and its democracy or economy are a little damaged in the process, then these are a small price to pay for a national security that cannot be compromised. Any way the proper place for these questions is away from the main game with a little money and media manipulation to ease the way. This approach also has the further advantage of minimising the offense of a foreign military presence that might be

experienced by Japanese nationals outside Okinawa (out of sight, out of mind), thus shielding the alliance from wider Japanese resentment. Okinawa has been managed separately and put in its place – mostly. Realist international relations theory, especially the neo version, has provided important assistance.

### **LIBERAL INSTITUTIONALIST PERSPECTIVES ON OKINAWA'S FUTENMA AIR: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN EAST ASIA**

In 1995, however, Okinawa's domestic concerns temporarily enjoyed national international security status. The kidnap and rape of a 12 year-old girl (already noted above) by three US marines and the angry local reactions of the Okinawans briefly attracted the international spotlight. The mass protest by normally pragmatic and politically uninvolved 85,000 Okinawan residents demonstrated the size of this crisis. In the following year, the US and Japanese governments agreed on a major overhaul of arrangements and a downsizing of US forces in Okinawa. In response to this temporary crisis, the US and Japan established SACO (Special Action Committee on Okinawa) to do this work. Futenma Air Base was the biggest item on the agenda. Although SACO claimed to have reduced significant land surface taken up by the US forces, it pretty much kept Okinawa's existing function as a host to US forward offensive bases. Most bases were scheduled for upgrading, re-grouping or relocating within Okinawa – as was the case with Futenma.

With the end of Cold War, the neo-realist perspective in international relations also became less dominant, making room for liberal institutionalism. The optimism of economic liberalism favoured a new political architecture: an international order based on common interests in a globalised market-oriented economy coupled with a liberal democratic domestic order. Possibilities for international co-operation within a group of states operating on the basis of or within similar economic and political systems came to be argued ever more convincingly by increasingly confident liberal institutionalists. However, where states outside the sphere of 'democratic peace' were concerned, the liberal institutionalist position was very similar to the realist view: that the international system was anarchical and its only currency was force. International co-operation and regime building are measured in terms of objective factors such as rational interests and economic and military capabilities by the liberal institutionalists as well.

In northeast Asia, where China and North Korea are regarded as continuing threats, the anarchical view of international relations remained strong. Adviser to the Department of

Defense and prominent international relations scholar Joseph Nye had re-defined the US security policy in northeast Asia with his 'Nye Report' issued in February 1995. Reflecting his liberal institutionalist perspective, Nye stressed the importance of strengthening multilateral regime building processes predicated on economic prosperity and free trade. The Nye Report, however, insisted on the importance of maintaining the status quo as far as the US military presence –some 100,000 troops – in East Asia, in Japan and Korea, was concerned. (This disappointed the Okinawans who had expected some reduction of their bases with the end of Cold War). The Report also stressed the continuing importance of the existing US-enforced order in East Asia: a web of bilateral security alliances with junior allies, rather than a strengthening multilateral security regime (Department of Defense (Office of International Security Affairs) 1995: 24-26).

Even though the Report emphasises the importance of economic interdependence and regime building, the picture of order here remains one controlled by dominant military power. Domestic factors such as open economic system and 'democracy' are taken into account to a limited extent, in so far as they qualify to be allies with the US. Yet, mistrust and anarchy still reins. In this sense, the version of liberal internationalist view on the post-Cold War international relations in East Asia in the Report is compatible with neo-realism. SACO was an attempt to deal with Okinawans' discontent with US bases by relocation and reintegration, without delving into what constitutes the discontent: history, local political economy and identity.

### **CONSTRUCTIVIST PERSPECTIVES ON FUTENMA AIR BASE AND OKINAWA: IMPLICATIONS FOR SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN EAST ASIA**

At around the same time, another strand of international relations theory expanded the scope of the discipline to include historical and culturally informed analyses (for example, Wendt 1992; Finnemore 1996; Katzenstein 1996; Kratochwil 1989). This is sometimes identified as the 'constructivist turn' or perspective in international relations (Checkel 1998). The most important contribution of this perspective was that it problematised actors in international society and opened their character, construction and identity up to inquiry. As collective actors, states are not understood as unitary or as simply motivated by an abstract national interest. States have complex interests, which they acquire, argue about, articulate and project in complex ways. Constructivist theory is often still state-centric, but it begins to fill in the huge analytical gaps left by realist and liberal positions. Important for my argument, it makes

room for the exploration of shared subjectivities and the often intangible historical and normative complications that bear on the making and behavior of states and other significant international actors. For these reasons the constructivist perspective is also able to provide a better understanding of the processes of construction of norms in international society, such as human rights, environmental protection and arms reduction (Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Klotz 1995). As the actors become more complex, so do their actions and their society.

Specifically related to Japan, Peter Katzenstein has established the importance of institutional culture and historical processes of identity construction in the development of Japanese security policy (Katzenstein 1998). The constructivist perspective can also contribute to creating a richer framework for understanding the Okinawan base problem as an international security issue. Of course, Okinawan society and history have been studied by a wide range of humanities scholars and social scientists. All the same, bringing this body of work and argument to the discipline of international relations so as to expand its analytical frames is a worthwhile, and necessary, exercise. We can better see what is going on and, perhaps also, what should be done in Okinawa. The alternative is a scholarly discussion in which the participants speak and argue without hearing one another.

If only for a brief moment, the 1995 schoolgirl incident created a crisis sufficient to prompt the two governments to review and rectify the imbalance of US presence in Okinawa and to resolve to reduce the burden on the residents. In the mid-1990s, as Funabashi Yoichi described, Japanese-US alliance was 'drifting' (Funabashi 1997) – in large part because of the loss of its obvious common enemy, the Soviet Union. Then, when the two parties failed to come to terms with each other in lengthy rounds of trade negotiations, the US Congress questioned the rationales for the alliance with Japan. Even more ominously, the rape then highlighted the wider 'Okinawan problem' and directed international attention simultaneously to the US foreign military's violence against local women, the violation of landowners' rights, and especially to the SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) that granted various privileges to the US forces. These questions pointed clearly to a larger one: Do overseas US foreign military bases threaten the security of the population rather than protect it? The legitimacy of the bilateral alliance was seriously in question.

Attempts were also being made at Japanese national government level to redefine the alliance with the US. For example, a private advisory consortium to the prime minister issued the 'Higuchi Report' in August 1994, which called for a more independent Japanese foreign policy. It advocated expanding the role of the Self Defence Forces in sending peacekeeping operations overseas. Most importantly, it stressed the importance of reducing emphasis on the

exclusive partnership with the US, by engaging more seriously in multilateral regime-building with other Asian countries specifically in the area of international security (Hughes and Fukushima 2004: 71). In other words, consideration was being given to the creation of a new identity for Japan. Instead of the passive and dependent actor in international society that it had been in the post-war period, Japan was to become or was thinking about becoming an assertive and independent actor, capable of leadership.

The Okinawan crisis in 1995 coincided with the opportunity for sea-change in Japan's foreign policy. Even if only briefly, Japan was led by a socialist prime minister, not by the long incumbent Liberal Democratic Party. The time provided a political opportunity for Japan to drastically alter its relations with the US by making clear demands for a substantial reduction of its military presence in Okinawa, if not the whole of Japan. Making such assertion would have been consistent with the international norms of human security as well as minorities' rights protection, thus making Japan's partnership with the US less exclusive, and enabling Japan to show diplomatic leadership.

The Japanese government's policy on Futenma has been, and will continue to be, an indicator of the country's diplomatic direction. This is specifically so in relation to the way in which it balances its militarist past with current constitutional change and the question of militarisation. No less importantly, the way it balances its relations with the US and its Asian neighbours, particularly China will also be affected.

Tanter argues that an undemocratic, militaristic and 'emperor-fascist' pre-war Japan should be considered history. Japan's '*Heisei* militarisation', he argues, should be understood as an 'endogenous' process of normalisation and further movement towards any other advanced economies – with a proportionate military capability (Tanter 2005: 163-64). Yet this point remains controversial. Question marks are placed on how autonomous the Japanese Self Defense Forces (SDF) are going to be, how independent of the US military line of command? Then there is also the question of whether Japan is going to become a military power prepared to use offensive weapons (by revising the pacifist Constitution) without first confronting the past, without acknowledging past war crimes against neighbouring countries and Okinawa?

Depending on how it deals with these matters, Japan has four possible future strategic paths or roles to choose from:

1. as a militarised US 'client state', possessing SDF capability of offensive attacks, integrated under the command of US forces;
2. as an independent, ultra-nationalist and aggressive state possibly armed with nuclear weapons;

3. as a US 'client state' with self defense-only SDF;
4. as an independent state with autonomous SDF that has reconciled with past war responsibilities.

The first of these paths maintains the US-Japan security alliance but is likely, especially if it involves fully developed theatre missile defense system, to antagonise China and escalate arms race and anarchy in East Asian international relations. The second path is the most destructive option, both for Japanese-US relations as well as Japan's relations with Northeast Asian neighbours (China, North and South Korea in particular). In recent years, former prime minister Koizumi's visits to Yasukuni shrine, read as representing the rise of nationalism in Japanese society, raised concerns that Japan might not be too far from taking this path. US congress's demand for an apology against prime minister Abe's public denial of the state's responsibility for Japanese military's sexual slavery during WWII demonstrates the US concern that Japan might not remain subservient especially in military matters. The third path simply extends the current status quo. The fourth path will also cause heartburn for the US – but much less. It is a path that best promises Japanese non-regression to a militarist past. It is also the course of action most likely to establish Japan as a co-operative regional leader and to establish the foundations for good relations with China and other neighbours in the region; foundations for building regional security that does not rely on a US military presence.

Japan's current policy on Futenma Air Base clearly anticipates paths (1) and (3). In other words, where US bases in Okinawa are concerned, the Japanese government has been totally submissive and has fully accommodated the US military's convenience and preferences. The Japanese government has also completely ignored the history (the living memory of the Battle of Okinawa, for example) that informs Okinawan base opposition (Tanji 2006: Chapter 4) and simply refused to give considerations of this kind a place in foreign policy discussion. The same point applies to the many damaging impacts of the bases on daily civilian life in Okinawa.

At the same time however, Japanese government policy on the Futenma relocation issue and the limited framing of the debate signals the improbability that path (4) might be followed. And so it is clear that this local Okinawan issue, the relocation of Futenma, has serious implications for international security, Japan's role in the region, its international/national security policy and outlook as well as impacting on the likelihood of constructing a multilateral security community based, perhaps, on a China-Japan leadership. On closer inspection, the framing of the debate serves not to insulate foreign policy decision

making or to respect its overriding importance. It serves, rather, to favour some positions over others and provides some ways of making decisions over others.

In 1996, the LDP Prime Minister Hashimoto issued a joint declaration on security with then US president Clinton, pledging Japan's renewed loyalty as an ally. The US troops in Japan were to be kept at existing levels, and would be strengthened by integration with the Self Defense Forces (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan: 1996). Regarding Okinawa, the US and Japan agreed on the return to Okinawa of the current Futenma Air Base on the condition that a substitute was constructed in another location in Okinawa. In the decade following the brief inter-state crisis of 1995, questions raised by an unhappy Okinawa again became a domestic issue, a conflict between Tokyo and Okinawa, and within Okinawa.

Today, Okinawa, particularly Futenma Air Base and the protesters in Henoko, remains a sore point of the US-Japan alliance. The insecurity inherent in the alliance is concretised in the Futenma Air Base, a hostage to the bilateral alliance. This is clear from the words of former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld: 'if Futenma is not moving soon, the public opinion against the US forces might rise again and dismantle the US-Japan security alliance' (Ehata 2005: 84). The most conspicuous reminder of the colonial status of Japan and Okinawa (and the source of much unhappiness) is the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) that allows US forces anachronistic 'extraterritoriality' (Johnson 2006: 172).<sup>3</sup>

The US is likely to accept a substitute location outside Okinawa, even in mainland Japan, if this means an earlier closure of Futenma Air Base. Yet the Japanese government has stuck to the idea of relocating to Henoko and nowhere else; it has used the base-tied subsidies and special budgets for Okinawan economic development to prevail. The Japanese government understands that building a new US base in mainland Japan could cause bigger problems for the alliance: they may then have hostile mainland Japanese public opinion and not just hostile Okinawans, to deal with. This would certainly be more expensive and a more risky course of action. For the time being, it's worth continuing to buy Okinawan silence and obedience.

## **CONCLUSION**

As discussed in this paper, the Okinawan problem has been predominantly understood as a domestic political issue that stands apart from foreign policy and national/international security questions. This view has been supported and strengthened by the realist and neo-realist perspectives in international relations that have dominated the making and the understanding of alliance politics in northeast Asia even after the Cold War. The insecurity of

Okinawan residents and abuse of their minority status and rights within Japan have thus been considered 'outside the scope of analyses' as far as the Japan-US security alliance is concerned.

After the Cold War, alternative international relations perspectives expanded theoretical horizons. It became possible to open national security issues up to questions of national history, identity and culture. Constructivism is useful in addressing the oversights of realist and neo-realist, as well as liberal institutionalist theory.

Within these expanded horizons Okinawa becomes an opportunity for Japan to begin reconstructing its identity in the international realm as well as vis-à-vis the US as an ally. The absolute closure of Futenma (i.e. without relocation within Okinawa) is also a demand consistent with the international norms such as human security, repudiation of militarism and gender violence, as well as arms reduction. Adhering to such norms would enable Japan to transform its image among nations in northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Taking a more assertive position would also create breathing space in its currently exclusive relations with the US. Japan would become a sovereign rather than a 'client state'. This would certainly contribute positively towards the building of a multilateral security regime in the region that is not controlled by the dominant US interests.

Historically speaking, Japan stands at a crossroad in a changing international landscape. Japan can choose a diplomatic path that either extends or begins to deviate from the basic trajectory established during the Cold War. It can remain a US client state, a junior ally, seeking to avoid offending the superior partner at any cost. This will involve a greater military contribution to the US global mission and Japan is on course to considerably upgrade (as well as legalise) its own military capability of overseas military offense. The opportunity costs of this course of action are high. So, one might argue, are the costs of change: it might cost the US alliance.

But is this a real fear? Today, alliance with Japan is clearly indispensable for the US too. Of all US allies, Japan is the most generous host nation. The 7<sup>th</sup> Pacific Fleet permanently stationed in Yokosuka is more important than any other overseas US facility. These factors alone make Japan one of the most important allies to the US. What does this mean? It means, finally, that after the kicking and screaming, a Japanese refusal to allow the relocation of Futenma Air Base within Okinawa is unlikely to permanently damage the alliance with the US. This is not a credible excuse for the Japanese government not to be brave and grown up either.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The biggest crisis was perhaps the period before the revision of US-Japan Mutual Security Pact in 1970, when the height of students' movement against the US-Japan security alliance merged with the Japanese public request for Okinawa's repatriation from the US military government. With the return of Okinawa to Japanese administration in 1972, Japan and the US consolidated the alliance by making the US military presence in Okinawa permanent, while subsiding the Japanese mass discontent with prolonged US occupation of what was considered a Japanese territory (See Tanji 2006, Chapter 6).

<sup>2</sup> For example, in 2007, 'the education ministry ordered publishers of seven high-school textbooks to be introduced next April to remove references to the forced suicides', to which a number of Okinawan municipal parliaments made official protests to the central government (McCurry 2007).

<sup>3</sup> SOFA exempts US military personnel from domestic criminal jurisdiction as well as responsibility for environmental pollution (Johnson 2006: 172-180).

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