

## Efforts to Generate A New Wave of Okinawan Resistance

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### Abstract

*Since World War II the United States' military, political, and economic influence have remained relatively unchallenged in the Indo-Pacific arena. For decades Japan and the Japanese island prefecture of Okinawa has hosted tens of thousands of U.S. personnel as part of forward deployed deterrent strategy able to respond to an entire continuum of challenges. Despite the ever-emerging threats in both capacity and capability, the Indo-Pacific area has become the new geopolitical fault line in the battle for regional hegemony. Stuck in the shadows is an interactive struggle for identity, power, and relevance. This effort can be observed firsthand on the Japanese island prefecture of Okinawa, where an enduring Okinawan resistance attempts to generate results and invigorate relevance against current Japanese and American pol-military efforts along a fragile and dynamic fault line of both resolve and influence. This exploratory study examines not only the current securitization and spectrum of current Okinawan resistance efforts that attempt to blunt Japanese and American securitization and posturing on the island, but also the cultivation and synchronization of these efforts meant to specifically mature and advance a unique localized 'identity' and 'burden.'*

*Keywords: securitization, Okinawa, resistance, identity, Japan.*

### Introduction

For several decades, following the defeat of imperial Japan by Allied forces, a local Okinawan population has struggled and labored to shed the engineered mechanisms of a suppressed unique identity and the physical realities of an overwhelming U.S.-Japanese constructed militarized habitat. Having a homegrown identity inhibited by the Japanese military and then overwhelmed by a U.S. war machine both during and after World War II, an Okinawan population and its wounded psyche has endured not only abuse and marginalization, but has also struggled to emancipate and break free from a burden of humiliation and surrounding militarism. Only by a diverse and evolving constellation of community resistance groups has an Okinawan people been able to make earned and deliberate incremental process against an imposing U.S. military and Japanese mainland government that at times have seemed determined to sacrifice an Okinawa island and populace for the collective survival and wellbeing of both the Japanese mainland or U.S.-Japanese Security Alliance. With little opportunity for autonomy and recognition, the island of Okinawa and a fragile collective psyche has collectively attempted manifestation from a military colony into a new sense of local autonomy and regional sovereignty. This effort is meant to liberate itself from struggle and perceived oppression.

Time and time again, the U.S. and Japanese governments have suppressed various efforts for both Okinawan burden relief and demands of respect and understanding. Since the end of World War II, different Okinawan resistance elements and groups have at times consolidated efforts and focus to make marginal improvements in both Okinawan civil and social rights. These groups remain determined to make sure that a unique internationalist anti-war and pro-peace perspective, and a developed ideology of pacifism and opposition to hegemony transcend the traditional boundaries of the Japanese nation-state to forcefully develop a credible and owned identity. This Okinawa identity and freedom is meant to be realized and universalized within and beyond the simple Pacific island confines, but also into a global and localized psyche.

The Okinawan resistance to both Japanese mainland governmental neglect and American militaristic burden has historically been comprised of various labor unions, local socialist and communist parties, anti-U.S. landowners, woman's organizations, and anti-U.S. base activists. All of whom have contributed and helped sustain distinct phases in the history of the Okinawa struggle. These original resistance groups and a series of ever emerging new ones have cultivated an Okinawan collective identity. Their efforts have ensured not only that the collective burden and struggle of Okinawa remains front and center as a subject of protest but ensures the all-encompassing resistance movement and its components are constantly constructed, redefined, changed, and sustained for both proper development of protest and resistance and repertoires of storytelling.

On unique wave of organized and formulated opposition against American military presence intended to generate enough effort against localized societal humiliation, pressure, and encroachment. The protestors' efforts and demands were consistent with what they had worked for since Okinawa's reversion back to mainland. Also, their strategy to use the formal procedures of democracy even if it was knowingly within the context and framework of a Japanese constitution that was knowingly overshadowed by the lasting U.S.-Japanese Bilateral Defense Treaty were a deliberate effort meant to work within the restraints and limitations of the system.

However, despite the Okinawan resistance movements efforts to close a symbolic and physical dominating Marine Corps Air Station Futenma located in the middle of densely populated Okinawa, despite their best efforts to stop the Futenma Replacement Facility being built in an environmentally sensitive Henoko Bay, and despite the resistances' ongoing efforts to work within the existing Japanese legal and political system to produce burden reduction and local autonomy, the community of protestors have had little recent success. Despite shouldering and showcasing a legitimate and enduring historical narrative of exploitation and oppression, the various Okinawa resistance elements have not been able to compete with the dominating realism residuals and narratives from the regions various on-going geopolitical security dilemmas and revitalized power competitions. Both the Japanese and American militaries and governments are consumed with strengthening and advocating for the bilateral alliance in order to maintain a regionalized hegemonic status quo. The recent infusion of military modernization and external threat framing by the two national governments has stymied Okinawan resistance's progress for burden reduction and greater autonomy. The movement has been forced to change tactics and discourse in efforts to stay relevant and progress forward with achieving a variety of lasting and newly realized goals such as U.S. military burden reduction, environmental sustainment, civil equality, localized autonomy, and unique identity recognition.

As U.S. and Japanese administrators, defense apparatuses, and policymakers worked together to modernize and meet a variety of perceived external threats such as North Korea nuclear ambitions, increased Chinese encroachment, and forced conventional and strategic security upgrades due to post 9/11 realities, a community of Okinawan resistance organizations remained frustrated due to the lack of progress and fragmented due to the lack of internal and external focus and audience. However, when a U.S. military helicopter crashed into Okinawa International University campus next to Futenma airbase in August 2004, the spectrum of Okinawan resistance seized their opportunity to consolidate messaging, focus, and energy. Since this event, the community of protest has attempted to securitize a local Okinawan population's human security safety desires. The crash and the newfound messaging resonated to a now aware audience of locals and Japanese politicians that the allowance of and supported construction of a new U.S. military base will not just bring new economic opportunity. The new symbol of U.S. imperialism and oppression will perpetuate the threat of the war machine and unsafe conditions across an Okinawa local life.

Since 2004, a variety of original and newly formed Okinawa resistance groups through both discourse and actions has continued to deliberately securitize various human security elements of the Okinawan population in attempts to stay relevant, generate progress, and capture the required audience needed for change. This work intends to highlight specific and ongoing securitization efforts by Okinawa protest groups and discuss the successes and limitations of a possible new 'fourth wave' of resistance.

## **Research Questions**

By examining prior literature regarding history and identity of Okinawan population and by examining current efforts of securitization by Okinawa resistance groups, the study aims to answer the following research questions:

- Is there current attempts at engineering and sustaining a 'fourth wave' of resistance?
- Are their indications of a local Okinawan resistance effort attempting to securitize and cultivate efforts meant to specifically mature and advance a unique 'identity' and 'burden'?
- If so; what is the securitized resistance's successes and limitations?

Together these research questions will be used as a guide to explore current efforts and attempt to push past Dr. Miyume Tanji's foundational work regarding Myth, Protest and Struggle in Okinawa. Tanji's framework detailing how a fragmented Okinawa community of protest has utilized myth and imagination to generate three critical waves of protest and progress will serve as a basis for understanding for the elements, histories, and requirements that have been harnessed by an Okinawan resistance community to induce desired advocacy and change. Tanji's analysis has identified three distant waves. By bridging current content and efforts with Tanji's work, a gap determining if the current collective of Okinawan resistance is able to generate a new wave of resistance by securitizing existential threats against their perceived human security requirements can be addressed.

## **Theoretical Framework**

This study looks to utilize Senior Lecturer in International Security in the School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Dr. Monika Barthwal-Datta's developed and expanded version of Securitization Theory. By recognizing and including the various human security elements needed to shed proper light and creditability on the Copenhagen School's classic Securitization Theory, her expanded theory ensures that any study of security does not just focus exclusively on the threat perceptions and powers of persuasion of certain kinds of actors. Her model deliberately includes real situations of urgency where a referent object is threatened in indisputable circumstances. It is with this expanded version and construct of security, a model which refers not only to freedom from threats to the physical survival of communities, but also to their livelihoods and way of life-which that characterizes the analytical frame adopted in this study.

It is the non-traditional authority of the various Okinawa resistance group's efforts that attempt to generate a securitization of a variety of human security elements. These groups action attempt to ensure threats are dealt with by both a unique and localized perception and phenomena. Whether in the context of an active or passive danger, these protest groups intend to highlight to a worldwide, national, and localized audience that is able to affect the internal and external public policy realm for interest advancement and goal attainment.

In addition, Dr. Barthwal-Datta's framing of human security which framework emphasizes the improvement the real-world conditions of individuals and communities by tackling the insecurities they face within their uniquely identified socio-economic and political setting is used throughout the study to define the first independent variable to be examined. This specific study human security would be related and defined as activities and incidents of rape, crime, environmental degradation, noise pollution, enduring sense of lack of autonomy and self-determination. Finally, Karl Gustafsson, Linus Hagstrom, and Ulv Hanssen's construction and explanation of transnational powerful narratives, uniquely constructing Japan's pacifism is utilized to describe the second independent variable. As the authors explain, the "pacifist narrative included both exceptionalism and pride in deliberately weakened military posture" (Gustafsson et al, 2019, p. 5) It is this specific model that a distinct Okinawan pacifist pride assumes a relational identity and uniquely constructs itself through the differentiations of a massive U.S. military war machine and a Japanese national government pledged on military force modernization.

## **Methodology**

This qualitative and exploratory approach examined any successful and unsuccessful securitization practices by current and various Okinawa resistance groups. Narrative content was

collected and thematically coded and examined to determine if the current securitization efforts are generating momentum and action for cause and relevancy. This content analysis examined current lines of effort and specific discourse within an encompassing Okinawa resistance movement. Data points from no less than two dozen current and relevant sources of information, material, narrative, and analysis to include material pertaining to: current Okinawan political environment, Okinawan specific human security discourse, journalistic interviews about the state of Okinawan resistance, comprehensive and foundational works relating to Okinawan identity and resistance efforts, current environmental group press releases and research papers, relevant and localized open source news articles and releases were utilized.

The study deliberately constructs a dependent variable comprised of current Okinawan resistance group's securitization efforts that successfully induce a non-state security agenda and resistance group implemented desired policy action. Independent variables regarding a hand-selected localized human security and uniquely manifested identity specifically modeled around a perceived Okinawan burden and anti-militarism are constructed and examined. A developed hypothesis stating; the current Okinawan community of resistance successfully securitizes select human security and identity elements to achieve progress and recognition is tested and utilized in conjunction with the constructed independent and dependent variables.

### **Results and Discussion**

It is evident from the specific content analysis that a variety of Okinawan resistance groups and individuals have carefully and deliberately utilized particular securitization discourse and messaging in an attempt to energize and complete the securitization process. Douglas Lummis, the coordinator for Veterans for Peace, Ryukyu/Okinawa Chapter, emphasized the fact that the then-Secretary of Defense for the United States Donald Rumsfeld called the Futenma airbase, the installation in the center of densely populated Okinawa "the most dangerous airbase in the world" (Lummis, 2018). He would go on to describe in detail the lack of proper and standard air safety mechanisms that the U.S. chooses to neglect. Specifically, Lummis highlights the military inability "to protect the public health, safety, and welfare" (Lummis, 2018). Maki Sunagawa, a prior research fellow at Okinawan Christian University, interviewed Dr. Daniel Broudy, who specifically highlighted the then-current Okinawa's governor attempt to deliberately rename ongoing U.S. military construction efforts. Broudy notes that the governor's efforts were "to turn the public's focus onto explicit names," where this manipulative and chosen discourse and action pointing to illegal action by the Americans and a disregarded voice of an Okinawan majority (Sunagawa, 2015, p.12).

Kelly Dietz makes clear in her highlighting of previous pro-resistance Okinawan Governor's comments that Okinawa is "not a mere prefecture, but something special and distinct" (Dietz, 2016, p. 229). Her efforts explaining the broader transnationalism and transition in the Ryukyus Islands, emphasizes actions by anti-military and pro-Okinawan groups and individuals where they must face the reality that the "politicization of Okinawa identity [that] reflects a historically novel and liberal citizenship as its object of struggle rather than the goal" (Dietz, 2016, p.236). This message eludes to the criticality and necessity of a pro-Okinawan movement needing to take drastic and extremist action not only in efforts to produce wanted change, but merely just to raise awareness and relevance to the right audience.

The content analysis of foundational works regarding the history and state of Okinawan resistance makes clear that the struggle over the Marine Corps base at Futenma and the plan to replace it, commonly represented as a constant resistance and opposition over the acceptance and construction of a single base, is therefore much more. The language and actions of the protest movement over the last several years show the desperation and shift from victim to a security and survival mentality and discourse in an attempt to raise human security requirements against both the nation-states of Japan and the United States. This new reinvigorated sharp narrative and tonality is meant to combat the overarching and dominant mentality of both nation-states that "more often than not, normalization and remilitarization were identified as beneficial to and even necessary for, the preservation of peace" (Hagstrom and Hanssen, 2016, p. 282).

On a daily basis, protestors gathered in front of the construction site of the Futenma Replacement Facility make comments to the fact that they "will not excuse the oppression of the administration, which is forcing base construction through" (Jones, 2019). The voices against U.S. military and

Japanese construction efforts make it known that if “the administration ignores local public opinion, unabashedly uses dubious means to sidestep legitimate procedures...there is no way for local governments to avoid subordinating themselves to the central government...this is a situation that could shake the very foundation of local autonomy” (Asahi Shimbun, 2019). Following a glass and metal window falling from a U.S. military helicopter into an Okinawa Elementary school playground in December 2017, the U.S. military expressed regret. However, anti-U.S. officials and groups made clear that “this kind of incident causes worries among not only people at the school, but all the people in Okinawa and should never happen” (AFP, 2017). The various opposition groups let it be known publicly that activism and prevention against accidents like the helicopter window, the noise pollution, and crimes committed against the population were now seen as a matter of human security and survival. Determined to expand the movement and energize discourse through the island, in mainland Japan, and into regional areas, pro-resistance supporters are eager to “light a signal fire here in Okinawa for restoring decent democracy” (The Japan Times, 2019).

Perhaps the most obvious and potentially penetrating line of securitization effort by resistance forces deal with addressing environmental degradation in support of pro-military construction efforts. In 2018, Peter Galvin, co-founder of the Center for Biological Diversity, noted that the Futenma military airbase replacement facility would be “an environmental atrocity. Wiping out these gentle, culturally important animals would forever stain America’s international reputation” (Sullivan, 2018). The rally and efforts by the protesters to protect some of the last known Dugong sea animals in the Okinawan waterways “has come to symbolize [their] struggle against the presence of U.S. military bases and both the Japanese and U.S. governments. Protecting the Dugong has come to mean protecting ourselves, our land, the sea, and our future (Hideki, 2019, p.9). The protestors made sure to let it be known that “Henoko-Oura Bay is a local Okinawa treasure...destroying this bay doesn’t mean losing these 262 endemic and endangered species. It also means losing irreplaceable life” (Letman, 2019, p.9).

By deliberately and strategically shifting away from the traditional and obvious political challenges and discourse, activists and anti-U.S. groups have chosen to focus of the fragility and necessity for human security elements involving their environmental surroundings to draw attention and action. Whether it be protesting military construction efforts in canoes in Dugong sanctuaries or organizing a civil protest against U.S. military activities in Okinawa’s pristine Yambaru Forest the organizers and activist have been able to draw considerable attention and resonation amongst various regional and international environmental groups ensuring their message of fragility and survival lines on.

## **Conclusion**

Despite this energized resonation and newfound connection between international and regional awareness to an Okinawa localized securitization effort through human security and pacifism, the Okinawan community of resistance has yet to achieve their desired end state. U.S. military construction continues in Henoko Bay to date, the air station located in the dense part of the island is as active and operational as ever, and tens of thousands of U.S. military personnel are still stationed in Okinawa with both U.S. and Japanese officials reiterating the age-old narratives of deterrence and bilateral security requirements. The resistance groups, despite their best efforts in manipulative and selective discourse and action, have failed to capture and persuade the required audience needed to complete the securitization cycle. The various resistance groups and local awareness that have expanded through intense regional and international outreach still have not captured nor reached the authoritative audience elements needed for agenda setting and policy change.

There is without doubt evidence at attempts at generating a new wave of Okinawa resistance. There is evidence specifically highlighting and attempting securitization in addressing localized human security and unique identity. However, despite reoccurring evidence and narrative of securitization efforts, the U.S. political apparatus, but more importantly the political entity located in mainland and Tokyo have yet to capture the urgency and necessity to elevate the variety of Okinawan human security issues and identity requirements past ordinary discourse and politicization. No evidence to date eludes to policymakers or agenda setters succumbing to the resistance efforts. In simplistic and sober terms government officials such as Prime Minister Abe suffocates securitization efforts time and time again by reiterating the official position that “the government is resolved to deliver results step by step to reduce the prefecture’s burden of hosting U.S. military bases” (The Japan News, 2019). In other words,

Okinawan resistance groups despite their best efforts remain fragmented and unable to raise their concerns to the proper audience and agenda setting level, the status quo will remain in effect till a new wave of resistance can be formulated and generated.

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