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If You Liberated Us, Why Are You Still Here? Dilemmas of Global U.S. Military Basing

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Abstract: *This article assesses local tensions that plague the U.S.-centered hub-and-spokes security framework in the Western Pacific region, which finds its most concrete expression in increasingly vulnerable legacy installations. I start by considering how people living outside the fence in places like Guam and Okinawa have tended to see the U.S. military, while summarizing global trends in U.S. base expansion and contraction outside of the continental United States (OCONUS). I tie this past to the most common dilemmas of global basing manifesting today, explain how these dilemmas have been understood, and highlight core concerns undergirding most base protest cultures. In the absence of sweeping policy changes to legal structures that disenfranchise militarized civilians in the most heavily fortified islands in the U.S. global base network, changing the way recent history is represented at U.S. controlled public sites could catalyze meaningful change within perennially troubled relationships between the U.S. military and overburdened host communities.*

Keywords: *military bases, colonialism, history, politics, security, protests*

Indigenous Chamorro scholars from Guam have remarked that the American liberation story about Guam's place in U.S. history cannot be taken seriously because the U.S. military never left.[1] This circumstance persists both because of, and in spite of, the sacrifices Indigenous Islanders and other long-term local residents continue to make in the name of American defense. Even a cursory review of WWII history from the perspective of Indigenous Chamorro/Chamoru peoples reveals the unusually cruel suffering they endured during the Pacific War. Mariana Islanders were mobilized to fight on both sides of the Japan-U.S. conflict, and this largely unacknowledged legacy continues to inflict pain on local communities today.

I am not Indigenous, but I grew up and lived for 23 years on the island of Saipan north of Guam, where I came of age struggling to make sense of how this island chain was American since no one on the U.S. mainland seemed aware of its existence. When it did come up, Guam was the subject of middle-of-nowhere jokes. One U.S. congressman suggested that Guam could tip over if too many Marines were stationed there, a comment for which he was widely ridiculed, yet he was likely critiquing thinking that reflects the unsinkable battleship/aircraft-carrier American vision of this island as one big military base (Wilkie 2010).

A similar case of disproportionate base hosting prevails in Okinawa, the Japanese prefecture which shoulders the burden for the U.S.-Japan alliance by hosting a disproportionate share of bases. On both islands, the overwhelming role the military bases play in local socioeconomies means that bases are an unavoidable and polarizing feature of local life. Bases are polarizing because of the stark differences in power they embody that puts them outside of local decision making about their existence from the start. The degree to which an Islander embraces or rejects the military presence determines on what side of local politics they are likely to land. In general, the more "hardened"[2] or old the facility, the more hardened the opinions about them.

1 For this phrase, I am indebted to a Filipino-Pohnpeian scholar from Guam, Vincent Diaz, Professor and Chair, Department of American Indian Studies, University of Minnesota-Twin Cities.

2 This is U.S. military jargon meaning large installations with a lot of fixed assets, as opposed to prepositioned assets or "lily pad" type facilities, which tend to be smaller and scattered more broadly worldwide with the goal of moving necessary equipment quickly where and when needed.

Another way of talking about huge, hardened facilities is to describe them as "Little Americas," as does anthropologist and military base scholar David Vine (Vine 2017: 45). This language acknowledges the messy way that bases such as Kadena (Okinawa) and Andersen (Guam) create distinct socioeconomies that embody American military-cultural qualities. In contrast, the official U.S. government description of foreign bases in the Department of Defense (DoD) Base Structure reports explain the size of bases in terms of their potential replacement value. According to the most recent report, only about ten percent of current DoD installations are overseas. However, this information does not account for overseas military expenditures in the Pentagon budget and various other defense spending outside of the continental U.S. (Vine 2017: 195-213). It also does not say anything about how foreign bases fit into the fabric of local societies.

The social impact of such bases is multifaceted. U.S. bases, especially large ones dating back to WWII and the early Cold War period, have given rise to the existence of families of mixed descent, with blood ties to both host communities and American military personnel or their affiliates. This creates a circumstance wherein people have become accustomed to living with contradictions—such as clocking out of one's job on base to protest its existence on the weekend. Consider the case of anti-base former Okinawa mayor Denny Tamaki who talks about how he has never met his American military father (Rich 2018). Or the high rates of military service existing alongside staunch anti-military activism that characterize the fractured national allegiance within Guam's colonial modernity. On islands like Guam and Okinawa, where about 25% and 20% of the land, respectively, is hosting military installations, Islanders are forced to confront the presence of the U.S. military as a feature of everyday life. Since these bases are controversial, conflicting entanglements are common.

From perspectives inside the U.S. military however, the choice to keep Guam militarized is not up for debate. In addition to its proximity to China, the lack of choice about self-determination makes the U.S. unincorporated territory of Guam a favored site for military buildup. Guam is more legally integrated into U.S. systems than other so-called second island chain locations, and it is therefore easier for the U.S. military to force changes—like declaring eminent domain over land. This is different from other parts of geocultural Micronesia formerly colonized by Japan, where Islanders were given a choice about what territorial status they desired with the U.S. (although never asked *whether* they wanted to be affiliated with the U.S., meaning that neocolonial rather than decolonial is the more appropriate descriptor). Thus, Guam is distinct in the region for having been a U.S. Naval colony since 1898 and for being considered too strategically important to let the Islanders determine their own political destiny, despite this privilege being given to other Micronesians who have not been U.S. subjects for nearly as long. This mistreatment within their own neighborhood has understandably caused lasting discontent on the island.

Although U.S. citizenship was granted to Guamanians in 1950, the Islanders still lack a voting delegate to a Congress that largely determines their fate. The United Nations still lists Guam as one of the world's few remaining non-self-governing territories, leading many people to refer to the U.S. as a colonial power in Guam.[3] In a comparable but distinct way, the U.S. held unilateral control of Okinawa from 1945 to 1972, 20 years longer than the Allied Occupation of Japan. Since the latter year, this prefecture has been under the authority of the Japanese national government. The struggle for local autonomy in Okinawa persists, while leaders in both the U.S. and Japan continue to oppose such bids today. In this sense, the lopsided power structures to which Okinawan Islanders are subject is highly comparable to Guam. When compared to NATO bases, for example, the bilateral treaty that undergirds installations on Okinawa enables more streamlined exercises of power because the U.S. must consult with only one treaty partner rather than a group of nations. These commonalities across Okinawa and Guam are not

3 For a history of the U.S. military on Guam and the emergence of indigenous nationalism, see Hattori 2001: 186–202.

lost on these Islanders, who have formed transnational protest networks to combat this network of bases and the multinational military operations they enable.

Today Guam is the focus of growing DoD efforts to bolster robust deterrence against an increasingly belligerent China and North Korea. If these facilities matter for the world's great powers, what do they mean for locals? Does the presence of military bases on islands like Guam and Okinawa make them more safe, or less so? This is a classic security dilemma that is not unique to these islands even if it feels more intense in the Western Pacific than perhaps anywhere else. The U.S. DoD correctly fears that Guam is a favored target of U.S. adversaries, which has mobilized even further military buildup. Guam is considered part of the U.S. "homeland" from a defense perspective, even if Islanders and the U.S. military are likely the only Americans who could locate it on a map, reflecting a further complication of the relationship between the U.S. government, the U.S. military, and the people of Guam.

The paradigm of island hosts becoming overdetermined targets is not represented in the traditional American understanding of the international roles played by U.S. foreign military bases. Most U.S. mainlanders might say that foreign bases have performed an important stabilizing function in the global system led by the U.S. They may understand this as including reinforcing alliances, helping combat terrorism, providing efficient and smooth-flowing global resource networks, guaranteeing access to assets, providing service facilities, facilitating military 3C (command, control, communication), inhibiting balance of power conflict, and deterring aggression (Calder 2007: 1). These functions were more easily defended in earlier eras when the global power structures themselves were not the targets of sustained and destabilizing challenges. The last two, especially—inhibiting conflict and deterring aggression—have come under increased scrutiny by those who compellingly argue that the mere existence of a base can catalyze conflict and invite aggression by powers that view them as unwelcome in the neighborhood.

Compared to CONUS (continental U.S.) bases, the legal structures constraining options for dispute resolution overseas are more complex. The need for American security professionals and their allies and partners to be sensitive to local politics has been supported by scholarship, and such sensitivity is actively pursued by many in the DoD. Yet broader change will require more genuine engagement with local communities that have not had a choice about being part of the military apparatus. If a kinetic war did break out, managing or mobilizing these base-adjacent populations would become a critical security issue for the U.S. military and its network of friendly forces. Therefore, how people living around sensitive defense infrastructure feel about its presence should be central to military planning. The U.S. military does not operate in a vacuum, although uniformed people in power unfortunately do not usually take time to thoroughly consider local contexts that enable and constrain daily life in and around critical defense installations.

Dilemmas of Global Basing

Base-adjacent populations matter to strategy, operations, and tactics, but they are rendered invisible in OCONUS (outside the continental United States) sites through legal contracts that U.S. leaders have often leaned on when pressed for answers by residents living outside the fence. A brief review of the history of base expansion and contraction reveals that the legacy installations that comprise the so-called tip of the spear in this tense region of the Western Pacific are not just unpopular with locals, but their persistence has arguably been out-of-step with shifting U.S. posture priorities.

Bases like those in Guam, an island acquired by the U.S. in 1898 as a spoil of victory in the Spanish-American War, were first an extension of empire that took the form of refueling stations for naval vessels. Then, the U.S. inherited many sites from the British empire at the end of the Second World War, at the same time it dramatically expanded its hold-

ings especially in the Pacific areas taken from Japan. Since that time, bases have expanded and contracted in tandem with forward policies tied to kinetic and cold wars, with big expansions during the wars in Korea and Vietnam and following the 1979 Iranian Revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. This ultimately led to the creation of CENTCOM (1983) and prioritization of the Middle East region. The emergence of AFRICOM (2007) rounded out the total global geographic combatant command structure.

This came just as the U.S. was aiming to shrink its overall global basing footprint in the interest of mitigating conflicts between U.S. personnel and host nationals. This led to a turn toward so-called lily pad bases, as is clearly visible on the African continent where there is an unmistakable emphasis on barebones facilities with few if any troops, a frequent reliance on contractors, and secretive use of drones and surveillance aircraft. They are often called forward operating sites or cooperative security locations and hold prepositioned weapons or personnel. The current forward posture with respect to foreign installations announced by DoD Secretary Lloyd Austin in the 2022 National Defense Strategy sharpens its focus on the threat posed by China, especially in INDOPACOM where there is an ongoing reinforcement of the oldest bases accompanied by an opening of new bases in a way not seen since WWII.[4] It would seem the U.S. base posture has largely come full circle. In the meantime, the world has changed.

While this historical account makes it seem as though the U.S. has always controlled the transformations to its foreign basing footprint, many changes have been instigated from outside. Although the U.S. closed many domestic bases after the Cold War during BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) and concurrently sought to do so overseas, foreign bases are subject to contracts with other governments and impacted by the domestic politics within those countries. Base closures at Vieques, Puerto Rico, and Subic Bay and Camp Smith in the Philippines happened in the context of overwhelming popular host national opposition to them, with the latter bases' downsizing and closures also influenced by the high cost involved in cleanup after Mt. Pinatubo's eruption.

But some bases opposed by locals for decades have not closed as a result, even when it arguably would have been in the best interest of the U.S. and its allies. The headwinds causing these delays are hard to understand without a close reading of local histories and politics. Bases in places like Okinawa where there is longstanding opposition to the U.S. military presence that has not resulted in closures presents what one scholar calls a stability bias, or an inability to make changes because of tactics devised by the Japanese government in alignment with the U.S. to shore up the status quo (Calder 2007: 174–5). The protests that erupted following the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old girl by two marines and a sailor instigated widespread public anger and drew global attention, leading the governor of Okinawa to refuse to sign leases extending U.S. base access until certain demands were met. In response, the Japanese government eventually removed the prefectural governor's ability to manage local leases for the bases, and shortly thereafter Tokyo negotiated a deal whereby the Japanese national government would pay more for these land leases than their estimated value. These payments were meant to help the poorest prefecture in Japan to narrow the economic gap with the mainland. But they amount to a small part of the prefecture's economy: less than five percent of gross income was from base-related income by 2020, down from about 15% before reversion (Okinawa Prefecture, 2018: 12). During the period of U.S. control and shortly thereafter, most Okinawans were poorer than most American service members stationed there. But today, the Okinawan middle class earns more than the lower-level military personnel living nearby, which has helped to change their interactions with the U.S. military for the better (Inoue 2017: 66–7).

Nowadays, people who protest U.S. military bases in the Western Pacific islands are far more diverse than

4 The U.S. Marine Corps opened its first new base in 70 years at Camp Blaz in Dededo, Guam on January 26, 2023.

they were during the height of U.S. military neo-colonization following WWII (1950s–70s), and many hail from the global middle class of college-educated people. Cultural anthropologist and military base scholar Inoue Masamichi's instructive study of the socioeconomics of protest culture in Okinawa suggests that people who are likely to support bases in Okinawa are the upper classes (business owners) who gain from the commercial boons offered by the bases, in addition to the working classes employed on them (Inoue 2017: 129, 187–93). Inoue's use of socioeconomic class structures to assess the motivations of different groups with a stake in base questions opens up room for debate about whether this kind of power dynamic is unique to Okinawa, or relevant to how base-adjacent power works in a more general sense.

What is somewhat unique in this area is the triangulated geopolitics of the U.S., Japan, and Okinawa regarding the base issue. Each group with a stake in the struggle is responding to the political consequences of this lopsided exercise of power. Long-term protestors opposed to the construction of a replacement facility at Henoko Bay have stalled progress on this project that was long tied to the closure of Marine Corps Station Futenma, whereas engineering challenges and insufficient budgets represent more proximate explanations for the delay. Meanwhile, American military and government leaders with the power to dramatically change these circumstances have appeared to approach the issue with arrogance and fear indicative of a general inability to apprehend the larger forces at play, while remaining aligned with powerful stakeholders in Japan and angering the largely middle-class activists.

The slow move of some of these Okinawan facilities to Guam, another site of longstanding opposition without substantial change, poses questions about the viability of U.S. forward bases in places where people do not have a meaningful say in their role. The lack of change in the face of popular opposition in Guam and Okinawa exemplifies a common dilemma of global U.S. military basing: that this security framework impacts surrounding non-military populations significantly but does not acknowledge its impact in a coherent way.

Sociologist and international affairs scholar Amy Austin Holmes makes this point in her study of German and Turkish bases, in which she theorizes the overlooked subjectivity of non-U.S. populations who have no choice about being the targets of the U.S. military government manifesting as the global baseworld, calling them a "protectariate," a term that combines the concepts of protectorate and proletariat (Holmes 2014: 4). Once seen broadly as a security provider during the Cold War, this network is now a rusting series of increasingly secretive locations over which the Pentagon is less likely to have outright ownership than to be party to shared-use arrangements that could disappear in the event of a change in regime or administration. Other occurrences may also lead to base vulnerabilities. Holmes cites comparative historical examples to conclude that whatever host nationals may feel about their entrapment in this network, historically, change has been most likely to be forced on the U.S. military industrial complex via work stoppages by people employed on bases (Holmes 2014: 39–40). Other catalysts of change have been sudden natural disasters or human-made incidents like violent crimes that led to widespread scrutiny, sometimes to the point of international condemnation. The latter kind was especially key to the emergence of the so-called lily pad basing orientation intended first to cut costs, and second, to keep Americans from creating international incidents by putting fewer of them abroad in the first place.

The idea that non-elite foreign nationals lack the ability to change their relationships with the U.S. militarized protection regime is not seen as a source of vulnerability within its ranks. Nowadays the U.S. is building up hardened facilities at sites seen by key leaders as vulnerable vis-à-vis their proximity to powers such as China. American top brass often fail to understand fully that their vulnerability lies not only in being targeted by adversaries and the security dilemma posed by the presence of bases, but also in the continued disenfranchisement of local hosts

through the repeated denial of their participation in decisions that make them political subjects of the U.S. They are covertly conscripted to be militarized communities, without much official acknowledgement of this status beyond the occasional description of them as a problem to be managed.

The power of the U.S. military to shape many discourses around these populations can include coopting the language of protestors to describe the military as the victim, rather than the other way around. For example, protestors working against environmental damage caused by base "encroachment" onto undeveloped sites in Puerto Rico in the 1990s soon saw this term used by military planners to describe the intrusion of base-adjacent communities into military base areas (McCaffrey 2009: 230). I have heard the term used loosely to describe places like Futenma Air Base where people live right up against the fence surrounding it. Donald Rumsfeld once called it the most dangerous base in the world because of this circumstance. Information operations have also been put in place to rebrand negative publicity or popular opposition to military sites and activities in places like Guam and Okinawa (Mitchell 2018).

The rebranding of the story of U.S. overseas military bases is a strategy of narrative manipulation for the twenty-first century. The need for propaganda about bases intensified after the Cold War destabilized assumptions about their role as global security providers, while other social and technological shifts enabling broader public debate proliferated. At the same time, messaging aimed at quelling dissent is a tool of old-world colonialism characterized by elite actors telling stories in favor of status-quo power structures. In the modern (industrial) era, there is no imagined national or imperial community in which the role of the press is not a central factor in its functioning. For the U.S. military, information operations and strategic messaging are aspects of national strategy guiding the formation of policies. These policies are not considered available for public debate because of how much power information operations wield.

But the gap between what professional historians understand about the history of this region, and what U.S. military leaders believe (or say they believe) poses its own kind of security risk. U.S. leadership appears as though they do not understand the history of the bases on which they continue to operate with extreme impunity. This need not continue to be the case. Many generals and colonels I have taught in Air Force Culture and Language Center and Air War College courses have acknowledged that mistakes have been made in heavily fortified island bases and have expressed empathy for the plight of subjugated populations. But they are not supported by the government structures that set the policies and tone for how to directly speak to foreign publics' distaste for bases. This support might include programs to create public-facing messaging crafted by groups that are deeply invested in this history, including Indigenous Islanders, local host communities, or U.S. and Japanese military historians.

U.S. strategic planners should actively seek out and change policy based on input from the civilians who live next to bases, along with engaged outsiders who research and publish information about related themes. The era of empire was supposed to have ended with WWII, while Cold War justifications for U.S. foreign bases are passé. But a range of reasons, including willful ignorance for the sake of maintaining power, along with the tendency to overclassify information that is not inherently sensitive, are preventing the emergence of meaningful conversations about difficult histories that continue to play themselves out in the present day. If U.S. military brass continue to not communicate honestly with neighbors from whom they have historically withheld self-rule, they may find that the future warfighting domain has become one in which real power is rendered diffuse in social contexts irreparably beset by unresolved anger.

Sovereignty vs. Local Control

People protest U.S. military bases for a range of reasons, which I summarize in Figure 1 based on a review of secondary scholarship. Evolving studies

on populations affected by basing suggest that areas with perennial protest cultures have sovereignty concerns at their core.[5] This is nowhere more evident than on Okinawa and Guam, where the key issue might be better summarized as a concern with gaining a meaningful degree of local control.

Figure 1: Most Common Reasons People Protest U.S. Military Bases

- Questions about Sovereignty or Local Control
- Security Dilemma: Do bases make us more, or less, safe?
- Land Claims and Contracts
- Crimes Committed by U.S. Personnel, including Murder and Rape
- Environmental Degradation and Contamination Cleanup
- Noise Pollution
- Accidents: Autos and Aircraft
- COVID 19 Containment
- Economic Costs of Bases in Tourism-Driven Economies
- Quality of Life/ Opportunity Costs

Taking a long-term view of base-adjacent populations, discontent with subjugation does not get easier to manage as time passes. It just becomes more entrenched in local society. Ultimately, it is misguided to cast doubt on the long-term anger in places like Okinawa about the presence of the U.S. military, and the Japanese government for forcing the burden of base hosting on this prefecture. It comes across as manipulative to suggest that these protestors have been hired by Chinese forces interested in souring the U.S. reputation there, as some have asserted. This is a feature of Okinawan identity that must be seen as genuine by the U.S. military establishment.

In the context of China's rise as a geopolitical competitor to the U.S. and Japan's late 2022 Ministry of Defense strategy documents that call for an increase in defense spending to 2% of GDP, an erroneous sense may have taken hold in Japan-based U.S. military and civilian government agencies that resistance to the alliance's patchwork military programs has diminished significantly. But for many Okinawans, no external threat is going to register as deeply as the existential threat that military bases pose daily. What's more, public opinion polls show a national trend toward greater recognition across Japan of Okinawa's lopsided base hosting burden. This is despite China's rise also fostering neutral or positive feelings for the presence of U.S. and Japanese forces across Japan. But the accelerating Chinese threats in the skies and seas do not justify the U.S. and Japanese military presence for people who are categorically opposed to it. Similarly, anti-military protestors are not likely to welcome military buildup as a means of increasing a sense of safety and security. These protestors are more likely to see the Chinese intrusions into Japanese territory as the fault of the U.S. and Japanese governments that have set up camp in Okinawa without asking the Okinawans if they wanted them there in the first place.

Discontent over base buildup activities in Okinawa has remained pronounced in recent years. At Henoko Bay where undersea sand with the reported consistency of mayonnaise makes land reclamation extremely difficult, a long-running flotilla of small boats blocks offshore construction. Japanese riot police have caused injuries to demonstrators, who persist despite crackdowns described by a UN Special Rapporteur as "disproportionate restrictions on protest activity" (United Nations 2016). More recently, these restrictions have included decisions by Japan's highest court. In September 2023, the Supreme Court in Tokyo backed the land minister's earlier decision to nullify the Okinawa Prefecture's rejection of 2020 redesign plans for the unexpectedly soft undersea terrain (Yamaguchi 2023). In these and other ways, civilian and military branches of the U.S. and Japanese governments have for years undermined Okinawan attempts to exert more control over the local military base issue, removing local decision-making authority over their presence.

This is not the only way for such relationships to

5 For studies that illustrate the importance of unresolved sovereignty disputes undergirding anti-US military protest cultures, see: (Calder 2007), see also (Cooley 2008), see also (McCaffrey 2009: 218–242).

develop. Consider a place like Palau, which resisted U.S. attempts toward more direct political incorporation until it finally gained sovereignty in 1994. The Republic of Palau recently invited the U.S. to be a strategic partner. As difficult as Palau's relationship with the U.S. was in past decades, nowadays it is better perhaps because there is a stronger local sense that old wounds have been addressed in ways that enabled them to select their own political status. They are no longer a territory under U.S. administrative authority, although they were until 1994 per the terms of the UN Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands government. In contrast, Okinawa and Guam do not have independence or even local autonomy over critical security decision making. Until these core issues undergirding protests are addressed, the unrest will persist. Underneath the environmental, social, economic, and other concerns represented in Figure 1 will always be unresolved anger about the inability to maintain meaningful decision-making authority on basic questions of safety and security.

Everyone with a stake in regional and local security ought to be invited into discussions about ongoing military buildup and its direct links to the experiences of the recent past. Once these discussions conclude, how the U.S. and Japanese governments intend to incorporate local views must also be publicly discussed. It is not enough to solicit public feedback about a proposed project, and then not publicly share the ways that this feedback will be incorporated into future planning.

Writing Social Histories of Base-Adjacent Communities

The U.S. and its allies might proactively address some dilemmas of basing by writing new historical narratives published in local U.S. military units, such as the history pages on large base websites. It is possible to take a social history approach to writing the history of U.S. bases so that it acknowledges viewpoints of opposition groups in ways that incorporate them into conclusions about lessons learned. To do this, the U.S. military would need to adopt a new orientation to information operations in and around these legacy installations. These new policies would need to be concerned with establishing more authentic stability and security for local populations first, with great powers benefitting secondarily from the strengthened relationships that would likely emerge over the long-term as a result. In the short term, improving history narrative production and distribution would necessarily involve social justice and reparations work. In the long-term, it would likely result in changed contracts that grant more local autonomy, or even sovereignty, to Indigenous governments. Both short- and long-term scenarios are preferable to the status quo. U.S. senior leadership would be well served by separating questions about whether the U.S. military remains a security guarantor in the Asia Pacific through island bases, from questions about whether they allow local governments to make their own decisions about military base-hosting arrangements. The U.S. military should allow island base communities to have the right to make this decision and not fear the possible outcomes of local plebiscites, elections, or constitutional referenda. This is because the U.S. military will remain a globally powerful force whether or not they keep a disproportionate share of installations in Okinawa and Guam.

In the short-term, the U.S. military could do a lot to improve methods for telling stories about itself. Histories promoted by governments tend to be stories of nation-states that describe people and places in ways that foster a shared sense of identity. Military base historians define history in this way, and they could learn from similarly nation-state framed public histories that are more aligned with (imperfect) U.S. National Park Service interpretive themes, for example. These might help mitigate the anger that people feel by not having representative voices inside the "Little America" installations that are deeply intertwined with surrounding communities. The U.S. and Japanese governments need to start reimagining these communities by seeing their contradictory realities for what they are, a move that will require democratizing how stories about them are recorded and shared. The U.S. military is not simply a mili-

tary actor but is a cultural and economic force that enables and constrains daily life for base-adjacent communities. Giving people a greater voice in how their island communities are represented by the U.S. government may improve both local and great power relationships.

To that end, U.S. strategic planners ought to consider inviting allies, partners, and local small n-nationals to help construct public messaging that is honest about U.S. mistakes to help heal sensitive relationships. The U.S. has a long history in the Western Pacific that locals remember, even if Americans do not (to their peril). Locals with a family background of military service should be encouraged to participate in these efforts that may involve historical reconciliation that has not yet been addressed. In the long-term, the U.S. and Japan might invite multi- and transnational actors (such as the United Nations World Heritage Site committee) to the conversations about colonial history and its lasting specters.

It is understandable that the U.S. government, historically and disproportionately represented in the Western Pacific by the DoD, has not been equipped to broach this topic in the past. But transparency and fragmented power inherent in America's democratic ideals cannot be foregone in the quest for military readiness. Broadly conceived, debates about security ought to evolve to encompass the full spectrum of threats experienced within the heavily populated and highly sensitive areas, for example those adjacent to Aegis ashore reconnaissance sites, which would likely be targets in a conflict. Good ideas can encourage mutual understanding despite the U.S.-led system's lopsided power. This will prove true to the extent that they can be realized in regions that continue to sacrifice the most.

Disclaimer: The views expressed are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Air Force, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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