The Impact of the U.S. Military Presence on the Japanese Mainland: A Case Study of the Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni

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Abstract

Since 1951, the U.S. military has been responsible for over 200,000 crimes and accidents and the deaths of over one thousand Japanese civilians. Because American personnel are granted partial extraterritorial rights, in most cases, the suspects are never arrested. In addition to the perception of the U.S. military as a danger to public safety, activities such as early morning/late night aviation exercises are viewed by local communities as negatively affecting their quality of life by contributing to noise pollution and environmental degradation. Despite the common assertion among Japanese and U.S. officials that the U.S. military presence in Japan is to help protect Japan, there exist many Japanese protest groups that publicly oppose the U.S. military presence. The Japanese media and press succinctly call this, "the U.S. base problem." Given that much of the "U.S. base problem" literature is focused on Okinawa, this research report aims to take a closer look at Marine Corps Air Base (MCAS) in Iwakuni city. By interviewing 18 anti-Iwakuni base activists living near MCAS Iwakuni, the activist's concerns, sentiments, and personal encounters with U.S. military personnel were understood and documented. The findings indicate that civilian concerns regarding MCAS Iwakuni could be grouped into three major themes (psychological, economical, cultural) and those themes were in turn compared with the civilian concerns documented in Okinawa. While 18 activists are not meant to represent all of Iwakuni city or any of the surrounding districts, they do represent a small but very important cross-section of Iwakuni city, Miyajima, Atadajima, and Hiroshima city. Moreover, their voices represent a side of the U.S. base problem in Iwakuni that is rarely, if ever, presented to the public at large.

1. Preface

Slated to become the largest U.S. military base in East Asia by 2014, Marine Corps Air Station in Iwakuni city, Japan (MCAS Iwakuni) is currently home to more than 5000 U.S. military personnel and eight different squadrons of U.S. Marine aircraft. Having recently built a new off-shore runway that was completed in early 2010, military aircrafts on-base frequently conduct landing practices in the early mornings and late evenings where aircrafts repeatedly land and then quickly take-off without shutting off their engines to simulate the difficulties of night landing. In addition,

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fighter aircrafts like the F-18 Hornet conduct low-flying exercises over the adjacent Seto Inland Sea and the Japanese mainland to practice radar evasion techniques. While Iwakuni base is located next to the Seto Inland Sea, they are also right next to the heart of Iwakuni city that has a population of 150,000 people. Additionally, the base is also located less than 30 miles away from Hiroshima city and Miyajima, a UNESCO World Heritage site that is famous for its religious and cultural significance.[1] However, while the base's proximity to culturally important and populated Japanese cities cause significant disturbances to the surrounding civilian area, Iwakuni's geographic proximity to the Korean peninsula is also one of the reasons why the U.S. military considers Iwakuni base to be of paramount importance in both deterring potential North Korean and Chinese aggression in addition to the defense of Japan.[2]

2. Introduction

As I walked along the narrow backstreets of Iwakuni city, all I could see was a flurry of yellow as the numerous protest flags lining the streets waved back and forth in the wind. Every billboard and banner referenced the U.S. military base and every poster advertising the next mayoral candidate had an anti-base motto on it. As was written on the flags and banners, the entire city seemed to scream "We don't need a bigger Iwakuni base!" and yet, almost metaphorically, there was no one else in the streets or general vicinity to witness this visual public uproar. For the first time since the U.S. took over Iwakuni base at the end of World War II, Iwakuni city was vocalizing their opposition to the U.S. military base, but to this day, every major television broadcast or national newspaper makes no reference to Iwakuni city's plight. The focus has always been Okinawa. The U.S. base problem has become so routinely associated with the happenings in Okinawa, that the crimes, accidents, and noise from helicopters and fighter jets (often referred to as "noise pollution" by the activists) caused by the Iwakuni Marine Corps are completely unknown by the majority of the Japanese public. In this sense, Iwakuni city is a region where some of the people's voices are left unheard.

A great deal of literature has been produced by Japanese and American scholars regarding the way U.S. military bases in Japan are negatively affecting the surrounding civilian populations, but it is without a doubt that the vast majority of the literature deals exclusively with Okinawa. As a result, the "base problem" in Japan is only really understood in the context of what has happened and what continues to happen in Okinawa. The problem with this is that there still remain numerous U.S. military bases on the Japanese mainland with radically different demographic, geographic, and cultural features that can significantly alter the way Japanese civilians around U.S. bases are affected. Instead of using Okinawa's situation as a catch-all for all that has been happening around U.S. military bases in Japan, a much closer look needs to be taken at the mainland in order to see if they really are the same, and if they are not, how, and more importantly, why they are different.

3. Literature Review

The existing literature on the way Japanese citizens living in Okinawa are affected by the U.S. military highlight a number of historical, cultural, and economic factors that are unique to Okinawa.

As Masahide Ota, former governor of Okinawa and professor at University of the Ryukus, explains, because Okinawa was the theater of Japan's only land battle with the Allied Forces during World War II, the island's civilian population suffered the most, both at the hands of American forces *and* Japanese forces. Having experienced wartime atrocities where Okinawan civilians were badly mistreated and even murdered by the very Japanese soldiers they believed would protect them, Ota indicates that those on Okinawa experienced the war and had a radically different encounter with the U.S. military both during the war and after, when they occupied and administered Okinawa until 1972.[3]

There is also a separate cultural feature that complicates the U.S. base problem in Okinawa. Since Okinawa reigned as an independent nation called the Ryuku Kingdom until it was annexed by Japan in 1878, Okinawans still maintain a feeling of distinction from mainland Japanese people both in terms of culture and identity.[4] As Ruth Ann Keyso (2000) highlights, even as recent as the 1980s, it remained important for many for those in Okinawa to maintain a separate identity as "Okinawan" rather than simply Japanese. This feeling of cultural distinction has led many anti-base activists in Okinawa to feel resentment against the Japanese Government for sacrificing their safety and autonomy to the U.S. both during and after the war for the benefit of mainland Japan.

There are economic aspects of the Okinawa base problem that are different from Iwakuni. Unlike MCAS, the U.S. military built bases like Marine Corps Air Station Futenma after the war by forcefully taking land from Okinawan citizens, bulldozing their homes, and fencing off the area. As a result, since the U.S. continues to operate in Okinawa on land that they physically took from Okinawan citizens, the Japanese Government, on behalf of the United States Government, pays rent to the Okinawan landlords.[5] While military bases like MCAS Futenma take up acres of land that could be commercially developed, that very same land generates a very generous income in the form of compensation subsidies to Okinawan landowners.

The literature on Okinawa's base problem indicates that the U.S. military bases on Okinawa operate in a completely different historical, cultural, and economic landscape than those on the mainland. Many of the intricate details that have shaped the way Okinawans feel about the U.S. military do not apply to those living near MCAS Iwakuni. Iwakuni was never the site of a major land battle and while residents there have experienced frequent bombing raids, Japanese civilians were never targeted by the Japanese military in the way Okinawa's civilians were. Yamaguchi prefecture (where Iwakuni city is located) is on the mainland and had been part of the Japanese nation since 1600.[6] Furthermore, all the land that MCAS Iwakuni uses is owned by the Japanese Government so though Iwakuni city receives compensation money from the central government for hosting the U.S. base, no direct land subsidies are given to individual Iwakuni citizens.[7]

It needs to be noted that there is some Japanese literature on MCAS Iwakuni. Articles such as Ikeda Shintaro's "The U.S.-Japan alliance and local politics" and books like former Iwakuni city mayor Ihara Keisuke's "The wind that blew through Iwakuni: The citizen's fight against base expansion," do discuss MCAS Iwakuni, but they focus primarily on how MCAS Iwakuni came to be and how the base has affected the Iwakuni city government's relationship with Japan's central government. None of the literature really provide the in-depth oral testimonies of how individual Japanese citizens living near MCAS Iwakuni have specifically been affected by the U.S. military and how their personal encounters with U.S. soldiers have the shaped their impressions of the U.S. military. The following report is an attempt to bridge this gap in the literature.

4. Methodology

This research report attempts to cast some light on the way Japanese citizens around Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni have been affected by the U.S. military presence. All the activists were interviewed in a one-on-one environment in Japanese (question and reply), without an interpreter. A semi-structured approach was taken where all anti-Iwakuni base activists were asked open-ended questions such as how they were personally affected by the U.S. military presence, how they felt about the U.S. military, and how their feelings about the U.S. military has changed from the past. However, the order in which the questions were asked and the type of follow-up questions asked varied depending on the activist's response. A range of activists were chosen, both in terms of location (Iwakuni, Hatsukaichi, Atadajima, Miyajima) and age (38-89), but the primary focus was kept on Iwakuni base activists in order to ensure that those interviewed would be both knowledgeable and deeply affected by the U.S. military. This research report is

not intended to be a complete and thorough overview of how the general Japanese public around Iwakuni base feels about the base. The people interviewed only represent a small cross-section of the Iwakuni population. However, the following collection of translated viewpoints proves that there exist Iwakuni citizens that strongly oppose the U.S. military presence. These citizens all adamantly reject the current proposals to expand Iwakuni base and many even go as far to demand the complete elimination of U.S. personnel from Iwakuni base. Their life stories and personal encounters with the U.S. military can help us understand the different economic, historical, and cultural factors that have shaped the way some residents around Iwakuni base have politically and psychologically dealt with the Iwakuni base, from the 1950s till today.

Representatives from two primary anti-Iwakuni base networks were directly interviewed in order to achieve a range of opinion and experiences with the U.S. military. The "Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution" (over 2300 members) was singled out as the largest anti-Iwakuni base networks in Iwakuni city. The second network, "Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents,"[8] (over 1200 members) is the largest anti-Iwakuni base association outside of Iwakuni city. They include members who live in neighboring districts such as Atadajima, Miyajima, Hatsukaichi, and Hiroshima city. Their voices were considered relevant to the scope of this research since the Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni routinely conduct practice runs and produce noise pollution beyond the borders of Iwakuni city. In addition, since there is a quick, inexpensive, and direct train route connecting Iwakuni city to the larger and more vibrant Hiroshima city, the risks and fears of crimes and incidents from U.S. personnel are felt beyond Iwakuni city.

It needs to be noted that while a total of 18 activists were interviewed, only certain segments of the interview were translated and transcribed here. Many citizens expressed similar sentiments and in those cases, the passage that best detailed and reflected that sentiment was chosen. Below, are there voices.

5. Psychological Aspect – Feeling like a Colony

5.1 M (74), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution, Iwakuni City Congressman[9]

When I was in elementary school, which was during the 1950s, I remember I was with a group of other children and we were waiting to cross the street. We saw a military jeep approaching so we waited for the jeep to pass but as it came near, it started to slow down. There were American soldiers standing up on the jeep, yelling loudly, and they started throwing what I thought were small rocks at us. All of us started backing away in order to avoid getting hit but as I looked at the shiny objects rolling around on ground, I realized they were throwing coins at us. Japanese yen specifically. All of us started scrambling around to pick up the money and I remember seeing a number of kids running towards the jeep that was moving away from us with their arms stretched out, as though expecting them to throw more money. We were kids then, so of course we were excited to suddenly see all this money lying around, but as we were picking them up, our school teachers started running out from the school and yelled at all the kids to drop the money and come back into the school. I remember one of the teachers even slapped one of the other boy's hand to make him drop the money. As he was about to pick it up again, the teacher grabbed the student by the arm and started pulling him back to the school while screaming at everyone to drop the coins. "Japan is an independent nation now!" the teacher would yell, "don't let them treat you like dogs, as though you're orphans!" That became a famous incident that was picked up by all the regional newspapers back then. It's not like they were handing out chocolates or chewing gums. The soldiers were literally throwing money at us. They act and treat us with this colonial mentality, as though we are inferior to them. It was in that kind of environment and time period I grew up, so when I heard stories about American soldiers throwing handicapped people over bridges into rivers or how they 'accidentally' shot people because they mistook them for ducks, I wasn't at all surprised. In the past, U.S. soldiers were seen as people who did bad things.

They often robbed civilians, vandalized homes, cars, and other property, and because they were so strong, there was nothing we could do to stop them. The U.S. soldiers were much stronger than the average Japanese civilian back then. So of course we all grew up fearing and despising the U.S. soldier."

5.2 M (89), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution[10]

I used to fly fighter planes in the Japanese air force back in World War II. At the end of the war, I was scheduled to fly out in the third wave as a kamikaze pilot in the case the Allied Forces decided to invade Southern Japan. When the war ended, I was grateful that my life was spared, but I was equally fearful of what would happen to Japan now that we had surrendered. I remembered hearing what happened to those countries once Japan had invaded and defeated them and I could only imagine that the same fate awaited us…Fortunately for us, the U.S. treated us far better than I had imagined, and we even became a close U.S. ally, but to this day, they are still on our soil. Even during the 60s and 70s they conducted aviation exercises and you have to remember that fighter planes back then used propeller engines. You remember how I told you I was in the air force. So the sound of loud propellers is something I've closely associated with the war. I hated the sound of those propellers. Every time I heard them, it would remind me of the war and all the people I lost because of it. I moved about 10km away just so I could escape that noise. But now the U.S. fighter planes use jet engines which are much louder than the propeller ones. And though they don't sound the same, I can hear them now. You wouldn't believe it. They're deafening. They're so loud that the windows shake when the fly by. And every time I hear them, I can't help but be reminded of the war. I want to forget. But it's hard not to think about the past when you still hear the Americans and think about how they got to be here.

5.3 M (53), Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents[11]

I never really had a problem with the U.S. military until very recently. Although I live in an area where I can hear the jets, I was never really that disturbed by it. However, about 12 years ago, while I was driving around a bend, my car was hit in the side by a U.S. soldier who was driving way too fast around the curve. I don't know for sure, but he was young, and next to him was a pretty, young Japanese girl, and I guess he was just trying to impress her by going fast. When we both got out of the car, he started apologizing profusely, in English of course, and that was fine, but then after a little bit, he told me he was going to drive back to the base and get some help. I didn't really know English so I would just yell "No," but he kept trying to convince me that I would be better compensated if he went back to the base. It seemed incredibly suspicious, so I refused to budge until the police arrived. Later on I was told that had he gone back to the base, I wouldn't have been able to hold him responsible and get any compensation money from him. That in itself is ridiculous, but what's even more absurd is that these American soldiers come here thinking they can break the law, and in the rare occasions they get caught, they can just go on pretending like nothing ever happened as long as they're able to return to the base on time. I don't know how the Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA)[12] is taught in the U.S., or in the base, but I feel like all the American soldiers are just told to run back to the base as quickly as possible and then everything will be fine. There are always rotten apples in any group, so its not like I think all American soldiers are like that, but because of the SOFA, and this "I can do anything I want and get away with it" mentality, I think American military personnel are particularly prone to reckless and dangerous behavior, simply because they think they don't have to face the repercussions.

5.4 M (42), Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents[13]

Japanese culture has a lot of unspoken rules. And I don't expect every foreigner to understand everything about the culture and behave in the same way as a typical Japanese, but I do expect them to respect the rules when they are informed about it instead of mocking it. For instance, just last week, I was standing on a train that was departing from

Hiroshima city, and not far from me were five American soldiers. Or at least they looked like American soldiers. They were muscular, had tattoos, and shaved heads. (Laughter) For me, that's what an American soldier looks like. Even though it was a pretty crowded train, they were unjustifiably loud. I don't know if they were drunk, but they would practically yell every word and laugh uncontrollably while they bumped into me and other people who were standing next to them. I got so mad that I yelled at them, "Be, quiet, please," and I know they heard me because they stopped for a second, but then they just laughed at me and kept continuing their behavior. They are guests in Japan, like any other foreigner who is touring Japan, but they should understand that they are no longer in America and that they need to respect Japanese culture. If they are American soldiers, they need to be especially sensitive to this, since most Japanese people willingly invite and welcome foreigners who are here as tourists, but there are many people like me who don't really want the U.S. military in Japan. If you are an unwelcomed guest, you should be a little more sensitive and careful about how you act…Its because of small incidents like this that make me believe that Japan is still a colony of the U.S. Because U.S. military soldiers come here and act like they can do what ever they want without having to consider local rules or sentiments. Its even more painful to think about how the Japanese Government is practically condoning this attitude and behavior since we're the ones who are forced to pay for their housing and utilities with our taxes.

5.5 M (38), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution[14]

I never used to have any real opinion on the U.S. military. The Iwakuni base had been built by the Japanese Government before World War II even started so Iwakuni city has co-existed with the base ever since I was born. I never really felt like there was anhything unusual about it. The noise from the planes is something you just get used to after a bit, and until I joined the movement, I didn't even know it was coming from U.S. airplanes. I don't even really recall seeing that many U.S. personnel around Iwakuni city since the yen has been pretty strong ever since my childhood. That naturally means it's cheaper for U.S. personnel to eat and drink within the base rather than go outside of it. And if they go out, they go to Hiroshima city using the direct Sanyo line instead of going out in Iwakuni city. However, upon learning from the regional Chugoku newspaper that the Japanese and American governments were planning on expanding Iwakuni base even more and bringing in additional aircrafts, I was enraged. I didn't know much about the U.S. military at Iwakuni base, but that plan to expand the base was what got me interested in joining the anti-base movement and that's when I started to think about how Iwakuni base was economically weighing down the city and the country. For instance, you already heard about how factories were forced to move out after their chimneys were cut down right? And did you know that U.S. personnel keep their air conditioners on all day even when they're out training? Its true, I heard it from one of my friends who works on the base. Its because they don't want to wait for their rooms to cool down after a long day! They don't think about how wasteful that is because they don't pay for the electricity! We do! And then you have to think about how U.S. fighter planes routinely violate their permitted flight paths. For instance, you're not supposed to fly over Miyajima island because it's a World Heritage site, but there are so many photographs of them not only flying over Miyajima, but flying way under the permitted height. I don't know if the individual marines are being ordered to violate the rules or if they're simply being reckless and doing it themselves, but I hate how they use our air space like its their playground. If they're here to protect us, I expect them to act professionally. There's all this talk about how dangerous China and North Korea is, but for me that feels too abstract. The dangers and fears caused by the U.S. military are real. For me, they are the ones endangering Japan.

5.6 M (89), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution[15]

The Iwakuni base is a frustrating issue because it still evokes a lot of sad and painful history. There is a lot of elderly people in Iwakuni who have experienced World War II, and I can't speak for all of them, but I can say that there is a strong resistance to resisting the Iwakuni base…Even though I am voicing my opposition now, sometimes I still

feel a bit hesitant. You have to realize that when Japan went to war, we were told that unless we fought, we would lose everything – our families, our homes, everything. Thankfully we still have our country and a place to call home, but for people like us, we see the U.S. presence on Japanese soil as a result of Japan losing the war. I now participate, but in the beginning, I never thought it was our place to protest. So when I saw young people, or at least people who were born after the war, complain and talk about how terribly Iwakuni's base activities affected their lives, I felt sadness, anger, and humiliation. I felt guilty for having lost the war, for not having fought hard enough…The predominant view is changing, but I can still see why some elderly people in Iwakuni might be opposed to protesting the Iwakuni base. Its certainly not because they want it there…"

5.7 F (61), Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents, Co-Chair and official Spokeswoman [16]

During the 60s and 70s when the dollar was still so strong against the yen, something like 360 yen to the dollar, it was so much cheaper for U.S. soldiers to leave the base and drink outside the base. As a result, Nagarekawa (night district) in Hiroshima city was always full of U.S. troops, it didn't matter even matter if it was a weekday or weekend. Although I never had a problem, I often heard stories about U.S. soldiers getting into drunken brawls with Japanese people, particularly around the night life district. And I don't think they ever got in trouble for it or got reprimanded in any way because of the Status of Forces Agreement. These occurrences got to be so well-known actually that my parents forbade me from being anywhere near that part of the city after 6pm. Can you imagine? Its like having off-limit areas in your own home. I had club practice after school so some times when we ran late I had to rush home! I can even remember the first time I was really late. My mother was so angry with me. Even though I was only late by one hour, she was worried sick thinking something had happened! When I asked her what all the big deal was, my mother would say that U.S. soldiers in Hiroshima city were there for only one thing, Japanese girls. And that even if they seemed pleasant, they could not be trusted because they were there to relax, get drunk, and act irresponsibly. It's ridiculous really because Japanese men can be like that too when they're drunk, but I know that I was always a bit wary of Americans back then because of what people said about them.

6. Economic Aspect – Lost Jobs and Revenue

6.1 M (47), Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents, Co-Chairman of Miyajima Tourism Center[17]

As the chairman of the Miyajima Tourism Center, you have to understand that the noise pollution caused by the Iwakuni base is placing our very livelihood at risk. The people of this island depend exclusively on the money tourism brings in. This means we need repeat-business. The planes flying overhead right now don't seem as loud right now because its peak hours and there are a lot of people outside, but after about 4pm or 5pm, you have a lot of people who come to this island to enjoy the quiet and serene atmosphere. Many of them come as families or bring their elderly relatives and stay at our 'ryokan' (guest house). But lately, when the planes fly by, even if its not directly overhead, they make a booming sound that can be heard very loudly, especially since there is no other kind of noise on this island. We even discourage people from driving cars on this island in order to preserve the quiet atmosphere. The noise from the planes can get so loud that I've had people come up to me and ask what that loud annoying noise was and whether or not it could be stopped. This is incredibly concerning because when the economy of your entire island depends on tourists coming in, you want to make sure that the people who come leave the island with absolutely no complaints what so ever. Imagine someone coming to Miyajima and they love the landscape, the buildings, the culture, and the food. They may think it's a wonderful place to bring their family, or their aging grandmother or grandfather, but when they hear that noise, they're going to change their minds and think that Miyajima isn't really suitable. If just one family

decides not to stay in Miyajima every day, and you tally up how much revenue it could've generated in one year, you realize it's an exorbitant loss. The American soldiers don't really bring in that much money either. They live close enough so none of them stay the night. For us, it would be much more profitable if Iwakuni base closed, since the lack of noise would probably help bring in more money than the visits by American soldiers would have.

The most difficult thing about the Iwakuni base problem is that we already know that the one thing we want is completely unrealistic. It's too drastic. When I protest the Iwakuni base, I can't simply ask for it to be moved to Okinawa, or another neighboring prefecture. That would just be moving the problem, rather than resolving the problem. For instance, I can simply demand that the flight routes for American planes be changed so that they do not fly over or any where near Miyajima. That would be so easy for the U.S. military to do. It would resolve my concerns and that solution is very realistic. But if they change the flight routes, they may have to fly closer to Hatsukaichi in which case the people there would be even more troubled. I don't want that. So the only viable solution that makes everyone happy is for the U.S. personnel in Iwakuni to leave Japan, but achieving that is much more difficult and politically unrealistic. Voicing our frustrations with Iwakuni base only makes us more conscious of the problem, without giving us any realistic way to solve it. I think that's the most frustrating aspect of this problem.

6.2 M (81), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution[18]

On a practical level, the base employs over a thousand Iwakuni citizens and the base continues to bring in major governmental compensations. It's difficult to vocalize opposition to the base we don't want to feel responsible for throwing Iwakuni citizens out of a job. It's also particularly challenging because Iwakuni mayors and city congressman have relied heavily on running Iwakuni city using governmental compensation for hosting the base. I think the general sentiment here is that if we oppose the base and take away their major funding, not only will we seem ungrateful to those congressman who are working to improve our city, but we will also be hurting countless other citizens here who are using city-funded services like the subsided bus routes and hospitals that are being run using government subsidies…The reason I'm willing to protest is because I believe that the base is actually stifling economic growth in Iwakuni. It's taking up some of the best land, and because of the planes that need to take off here, factories have to follow very strict height guidelines. That means they cant build chimneys and since they cant built chimneys, factories and jobs don't come into this area and go elsewhere. As a matter of fact, do you know about the Teijin factory? In the 1960s there was a huge chimney that stood pretty close to the Iwakuni base runway and the Iwakuni base commander ordered the chimney to be taken down because it constituted a flight risk to departing fighter planes. As a result, the factory moved to Matsuyama city, and over 5000 Iwakuni citizens were laid off. Along with the height restriction, there's always the high risk of flight accidents so companies don't want to set up factories here. If the base was removed, Iwakuni citizens may lose their jobs, but they would easily be able to get another job when new companies move in. The Iwakuni base is economically killing Iwakuni city."

7. Cultural Frustration

7.1 M (75), Association for Lawsuits against Iwakuni's Noise Pollution[19]

"Perhaps my greatest frustration regarding the Iwakuni Marine Corps Air Base doesn't have so much to do with the military itself, but the way the base topic has made me realize how undemocratic Japan is…For instance, Iwakuni is a conservative town. Some of the most powerful conservative Liberal-Democratic Party[20] prime ministers like Kishi Nobuske, Sato Eisuke, Abe Shinzo have come from Yamaguchi prefecture and so this entire region has been known as a solid conservative stronghold. Iwakuni in this regard is especially conservative. I don't know how specifically to define it, but even though the entire population experiences noise pollution, the higher risks of crimes and accidents,

and of course the belittling treatment as a colony, the general mood has always been to stay quiet about the base because our politicians have supported the base in the past. Our mayors have traditionally been pro-base as well as most of the city congressman. The LDP's traditional view has always been to uphold the security pact with the United States in order to ensure Japan's safety. We have always been told that the Iwakuni base is a necessary burden and so speaking out against it seemed 'against the grain.' You see, everyone here is shouldering the base burden, so it seems selfish and impolite if you're the only one complaining and everyone else is silently stomaching the problem. There is a phrase here where we say 'the nail sticking out gets hammered down,' and most of the people in Iwakuni are still afraid that protesting the base and expressing any kind of minority opinion will lead to them getting criticized and hammered down by the general public. Have you heard about the recent incident at the bakery? A drunk U.S. soldier broke the front glass of the bakery at some point during the night and the store's security camera caught the entire incident on tape. The incident became a heated discussion at the city congress and the bakery owner came in to testify and showed everyone the tape. Apparently one of the congressmen called him afterwards and scolded him for showing the tape. Can you believe that? I guess he was afraid that the incident would persuade the other members of congress and the public to oppose the Iwakuni base, thereby hurting Iwakuni city's ability to receive additional compensation from the central government. The bakery owner did nothing wrong in my opinion, and the local government shouldn't work to stifle the voices of the very people they're representing, but Japan, at least Iwakuni, is still kind of like that. The mood of the city makes it very hard to say what you want and express how you feel."

7.2 M (53), Association of Hiroshima Prefecture's Western Residents[21]

I live on Atadajima, and it's a very small island, probably no more than 300 people. Everyone knows everybody. I'm sure you know already but Atadajima is located right in front of Iwakuni base's runway. As a matter of fact, the new offshore runway that was built this year, the one that was built 1km towards the sea in order to minimize noise pollution for Iwakuni city residents, is actually now 1km closer to us so the noise is even louder now than it was before. The noise is so loud that I have seen children cry and run back into their houses in fear. I can only describe it as absolutely deafening. You wouldn't be able to hear right now. The thing is, even though the entire island is constantly being bombarded, no one on the island openly protests the noise or the base. I'm part of the "Association of West Hiroshima Prefecture Residents" but I don't tell anybody on Atadajima of what I'm doing and I certainly don't participate in public demonstrations. I use the association only as an informational outlet. I can't even take the flyers the association produces home with me because of what might happen if somebody finds it. Do you know the term "murahachibu?" It means you get completely ostracized from the community. The anti-protest atmosphere is very strong on Atadajima so if someone finds out that I've been betraying the community sentiment, I'll earn a very bad reputation and everybody will hesitate to talk to me. Even if they sympathize with my beliefs and feelings, even if they oppose the base as well, they'll still distance themselves from me because of the fear of what would happen to them if they are seen to be associating with me.

8. Results

The interviews with the 18 activists expressed a diverse range of opinions regarding the U.S. military presence at Iwakuni, but their personal stories and sentiments could be grouped into three basic themes.

The first was the psychological element of feeling subservient, or feeling "like an American colony." All individuals in this category expressed grave concern regarding the inconsistency of Japanese citizens being forced to endure what could only be described as "reckless and demeaning" behavior by U.S. military personnel at a time when Japan was supposed to have regained its status as an independent nation. U.S. military personnel were perceived to

be behaving without any respect for local laws or cultural rules and the resulting fear, guilt, anger, and humiliation characterized this sentiment of "feeling like a colony."

The second common theme was Iwakuni base's negative economic effect on the city and the districts around it. While businesses may have thrived during the 60s and 70s when the strong dollar (365 yen to the dollar) encouraged U.S. soldiers to spend money outside the base, citizens still saw U.S. military personnel as stifling major economic growth in Iwakuni city by removing Japanese factories from Iwakuni city and discouraging future constructions in the area. Noise pollution caused by jet fighter planes are still a major business concern for areas such as Miyajima that rely exclusively on tourism and there seems to be a widespread sentiment that the U.S. military activities in the area are doing much more harm to their business than good.

Finally, a number of Japanese citizens have hinted at a certain "cultural frustration" whereby those feeling passionate against the Iwakuni Marine Air Corps feel unable to fully express their opinions in their communities out of fear for damaging their reputation. The Iwakuni base problem is an issue they seek to change, but their inability to openly vocalize their opposition without fear of being reprimanded from their political representatives, or having their actions criticized behind their backs is causing them extreme frustration and unhappiness with their community. Some have even claimed that this particular issue has made them disillusioned with Japanese democracy. It should be clear that the cultural frustration expressed here is not so much from the fact that the majority of the civilian community is supportive of the Iwakuni base, but rather that the majority is against the act of vocalizing opposition. There exists a cultural stigma associated with protesting the U.S. military. In this case, the base problem in Iwakuni goes to show that the U.S. military base personnel and their interactions with the Japanese residents living around them is not the only factor that is making the base problematic. The results indicate that in addition to the lack of media and scholarly coverage on the way the U.S. military is affecting Iwakuni, there may very well be an additional cultural dimension that is causing great discontent by preventing Iwakuni citizens from having open dialogue with each other.

While the reasons for this cultural stigma require more research, Iwakuni's different historical experience with the Allied Forces in World War II may be a strong contributing factor. As the stage of Japan's only land battle during World War II, those on Okinawa have a completely different memory of World War II in comparison to those on mainland Japan. Civilians on mainland Japan did not receive the gruesome treatment by Imperial Japanese troops as civilians on Okinawa experienced, and because of that, much less hostility is felt against the Japanese Government and more antagonism against the U.S. military. Instead of remembering how Japanese soldiers accused innocent civilians for acting as American spies and killing them in Okinawa, those on the mainland remember how the U.S. intentionally targeted the civilian community and avoided military targets. As one of the activists later explained, "even though Japan had already agreed to surrender, this was on August 14th, the day before the emperor broadcasted Japan's surrender, a fleet of B-29s flew over Iwakuni and bombed the entire station area. They hit homes, factories, everything near the train station, and 600 people died. They knew the war would end but they continued the attack anyway… and not a single bomb fell on Iwakuni base…They knew they would use it when they came to Japan so they kept the base in pristine condition."[22] Because Iwakuni's historical experience with World War II was different, the citizen's memories and perceptions associated with the Japanese military, and thus the Japanese Government, were better and their perceptions of the American military were worse. They did not feel betrayed in the same way did Okinawans did. As a result, the post-war culture of the Japanese community around MCAS Iwakuni remained more tolerant of Japanese Government policies, such as having the U.S. military operate at Iwakuni city.

Additionally, as some of the elderly like activist M (89) revealed, even after 60 years, there is still a strong sense of guilt felt among those who participated in the war and experienced Japan's defeat. To them, the U.S. Iwakuni base had not always been a fixture of Iwakuni's landscape that had been there all along. It *became* American after World War II, and because they were part of the event that led to its change, they feel responsible for all the problems the base

caused and continues to cause the surrounding civilian community. As the personal narratives indicate, this sentiment will not only dissuade Japanese war veterans from criticizing the U.S. base, but if widespread, it may very well have been one of the strong influencing factors that helped create the stigma associated with criticizing the U.S base. Currently, the number of Japanese citizens who are 65 years or older make up 26.1% of Iwakuni city's population[23] (Ginowan city, where MCAS Futenma is located, only has 13,113 elderly comprising 14.3% of the total population)[24]. With war veterans comprising such a large portion of the city's population, Iwakuni city's post-war community culture was largely founded and still upheld by war veterans who discourage overt anti-base activism, not because they support the base, but because they see it as a reflection of their own past failures.

9. Conclusion

A closer inspection of civilian sentiment in Iwakuni city revealed psychological, economical, and cultural features that were both similar to and different from Okinawa. The feeling of subservience, this theme of "feeling like an American colony" is closely documented in Okinawa's case. While Iwakuni never experienced some of Okinawa's historical incidents, such as being occupied and administered by the U.S. forces or having homes bulldozed to build military bases, the common problems associated with the U.S. military personnel such as wild and reckless behavior within the civilian community and the deafening noise from aircraft produced similar feelings of humiliation, anger, and intolerable frustration. The economic aspect and the general sentiment of how the U.S. military hurt the city's economy more than it helped it was also closely paralleled.

Perhaps the biggest potential difference and the area that should be most explored in the future is the community culture around the U.S. military base. The mainland's different experience with the Allied Forces during World War II may have created a unique cultural stigma to vocalizing any opposition to the U.S. military base. Whether it is due to the differences in the way the mainland was treated by Japanese Imperial Forces or the U.S. Forces, more research needs to be conducted to fully understand why some Japanese activists feel hesitant to join or let others know about their involvement in the anti-base movement.

The personal narratives of the anti-Iwakuni base activists provide two significant contributions to the "U.S. base problem" literature. The first is that it introduces the Iwakuni base and the surrounding civilian community as a separate topic of analysis in a field that is overwhelmingly focused on Okinawa. The voices of actual citizens are documented and their personal encounters with the U.S. military, the environment they were raised in, and their current concerns provide a glimpse inside a divided community that is largely overlooked, especially in the context of "U.S. base problem" literature in English. This research helps to fill this gap.

The second contribution is that the results of this research can serve as a template for future comparative studies. Analysis of the activists' accounts highlight unique historical, economical, and cultural features that have shaped the way Iwakuni civilians view the U.S. military and how it has prompted them to protest the U.S. military presence. These results can be used to see whether or not Okinawan citizens were affected differently. As was outlined in the brief literature review above, there are historical, economical, and cultural differences in the way Okinawa citizens and those in Iwakuni experienced the war and the post-war era. Gathering the individual voices of those affected and conducting a detailed comparative study can be the only way to accurately isolate the different factors that have led to a vocal protest movement with a different level of intensity. Furthermore, additional research can be done on U.S. military bases at Atsugi, Yokota, Yokosuka, and Sasebo and those results can again be compared with MCAS Iwakuni. Every base community should be thoroughly examined and none should be assumed to be understood simply because they have a U.S. military base nearby. Atsugi and Yokota are U.S. Air Force bases, and Yokosuka and Sasebo are U.S. Naval bases. The type of base dictates different kinds of military exercises that undoubtedly have a different kind of effect

on the surrounding civilian community. A particularly interesting area of focus would be to compare the community's cultural component. The stigma against protesting in Iwakuni culture goes to show that there are subliminal factors that can dictate how the community's mood and sentiment regarding the U.S. base is expressed. Not enough comparative research has been done on Iwakuni and on the other mainland bases to know if this cultural factor is specific to communities near Iwakuni, or if it is more widespread.

Perhaps most importantly though, the voices of those living near MCAS Iwakuni have shown that Okinawa should not and cannot be used as a model example of how U.S. military personnel are affecting Japanese civilians everywhere. In the same way it would be unfair to assume that the interviewed anti-Iwakuni base activists speak for all of Iwakuni city, Miyajima, Hatsukaichi, Atadajima, and Hiroshima city, it is wrong and misleading to assume that the experiences and attitudes seen in Okinawa sum up the experiences of those elsewhere. Civilian experiences, attitudes, and opinions are different based on a myriad of features and the only way to get a complete and thorough understanding of the U.S. base problem in Japan is to take a much closer look at those affected and make sure that none of the people's voices are left unheard**.**

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Endnotes

[1] Shintaro Ikeda, "The U.S.-Japan Alliance and Local Politics," Hiroshima Journal of International Studies 14 2007: 1

[2] Ikeda, 2

[3] Masahide Ota, Okinawa: Senso to Heiwa [Okinawa: War and Peace]. (Asahi Shimbun: Tokyo, 2007), 22

[4] Ruth Ann Keyso, Women of Okinawa: Nine Voices from a Garrison Island (Cornell University: Ithaca, 2000) 136

[5] Keyso, 138

[6] Yamaguchi Prefecture Website, http://www.pref.yamaguchi.lg.jp/theme/profile/prof03.html (accessed on 9/1/2010)

[7] Ikeda, 3

[8] Mission Statement: We are a civilian organization that opposes and protests the expansion and strengthening of Iwakuni base in the name of protecting peace, community safety, and the environment. (Homepage: http://www.k5.dion.ne.jp/~stop/iwakuni-kichi/)

[9] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/17/2010

[10] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/10/2010

[11] Personal interview at Hatsukaichi City 7/24/2010

[12] The Status of Forces Agreement is the legal basis for the American military presence in Japan. The agreement grants the U.S. military custody of Americans accused of crimes until Japan formally issues an indictment against them
[13] Personal interview at Hatsukaichi City, 7/24/2010
[14] Personal interview at Hatsukaichi City, 7/24/2010
[15] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/5/2010
[16] Personal interview at Hatsukaichi City 8/10/2010
[17] Personal interview at Miyajima, 8/19/2010
[18] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/5/2010
[19] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/5/2010
[20] The Liberal-Democatic Party was the political party in power for most of Japan's post-war era. They were the ones in power when Japan signed the Security Pact with the United States. They suffered their first political defeat in 2009 to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ)
[21] Personal interview at Hatsukaichi 7/28/2010
[22] Personal interview at Iwakuni City, 8/17/2010
[23] Iwakuni City Homepage *www.city.iwakuni.yamaguchi.jp/* (Accessed on 9/1/2010)
[24] Ginowan City Homepage *www.city.ginowan.okinawa.jp/* (Accessed on 9/1/2010)