

# Shifting Terrain

The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia



Sheila A. Smith

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# Shifting Terrain

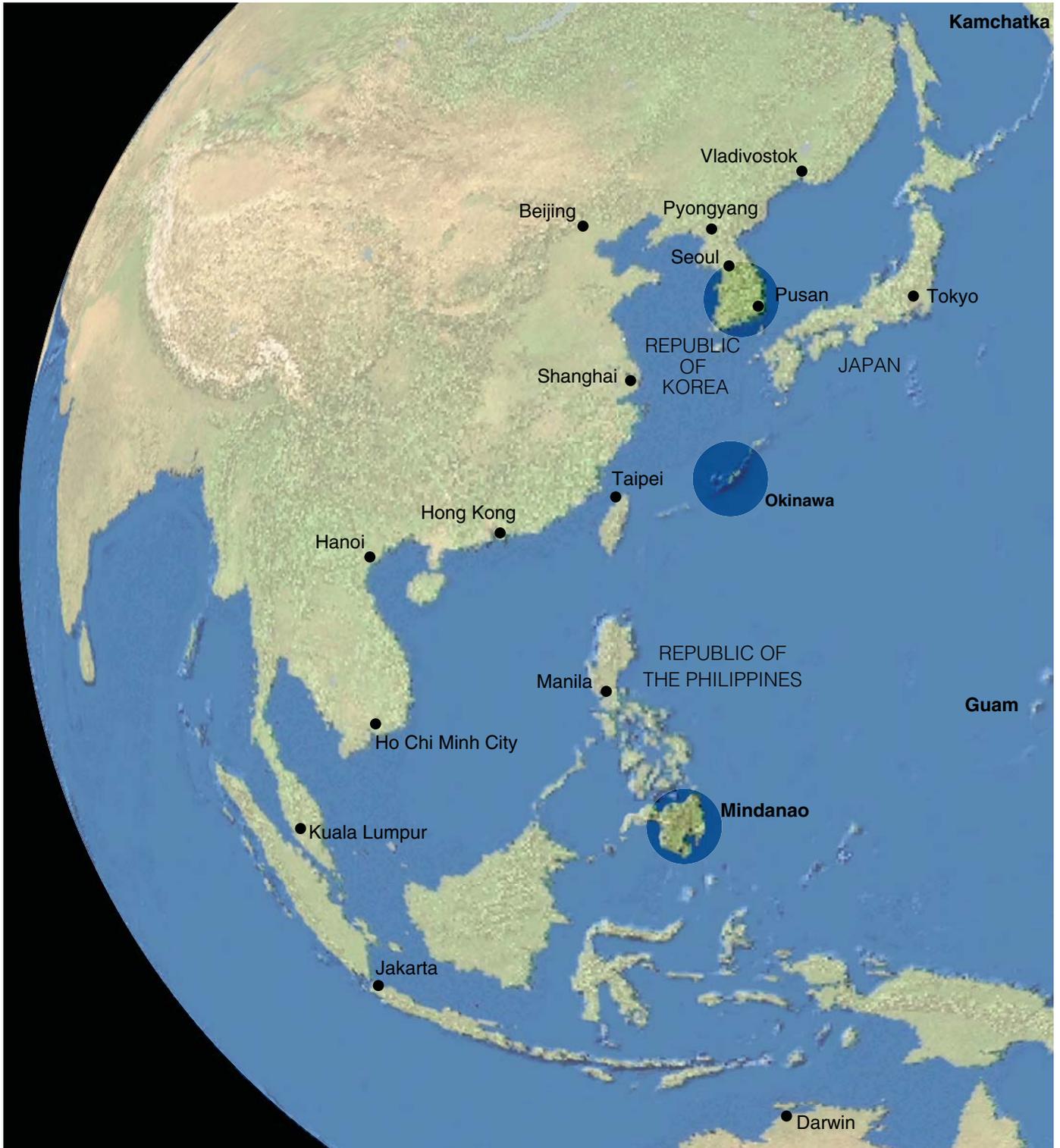
## The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia

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*The U.S. military presence in Asia today impacts the domestic politics of Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines. Most American forces are based in Okinawa, Japan, and throughout South Korea, and troops regularly visit the Philippines for training and joint exercises.*

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Editor's note regarding personal names:

Although names are typically written with surname first in Japan and South Korea, all surnames appear last in this publication to avoid confusion for readers.

## SUMMARY

The United States has maintained military forces in the Asia Pacific region since the end of World War II and its alliances with key countries in the region continue today to be seen as critical to regional peace and stability. Academic and policy attention has focused on the shifting regional balance of power or the new sources of instability in the region, yet a parallel story has gone largely untold. Complex social and political changes in the countries that have hosted U.S. forces are changing the way governments in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines manage the American troops stationed in their countries.

The history of each U.S. alliance in Asia has demonstrated the challenge to national sovereignty that accompanies the presence of foreign troops. Public sensitivities to the terms of the U.S. presence have pitted citizen's claims against the protections afforded to American troops by Tokyo, Seoul, and Manila. Democratic transitions in each society have produced calls for greater national government discretion over the use of U.S. forces stationed in these countries. Early in the postwar era, the Japanese government called for a revision in the initial security treaty with the United States, adding a stipulation for "prior consultation" with the Japanese government in the event of use of these forces beyond the mission of Japan's defense. Decades later, similar calls for amending the original terms of the U.S. presence were evident in the Philippines and South Korea. Constitutional revision in the Philippines recalibrated the decision-making powers of the executive and legislative branches of government, with the result that the United States was asked to withdraw from two of its strategic bases in Asia. More recently, in South Korea, the continued need for U.S. forces to defend the South against the North produced revisions in the Status of Forces Agreement that outlines the terms of the presence as the democratization process gained momentum.

Policymaking surrounding the American military presence in these societies, however, extends beyond the high politics of national security planning agencies and national political leaders. Outside of government, and often in localities far from the center of national power, the goals and the impacts of U.S. military forces deployed in the Asia Pacific region are viewed more in terms of their social costs than their strategic value. The national government's policy agenda is increasingly questioned and challenged by local governments and citizen activists. Crimes and accidents reverberate nationally, revealing significant changes in the complexion of anti-base sentiments. New citizen interest groups, including those advocating for protections and rights of women and environmental conservation, have helped recast the issue of the U.S. military presence in national politics.

As the U.S. government seeks to transform its global military presence, and as the process of realigning America's overseas military forces proceeds, Washington must consider these new domestic influences on governments that host U.S. forces. Broad public support in these societies for a shared security agenda will be the foundation for future alliance cooperation. But Washington, Tokyo, Seoul, and Manila must give greater attention to the local impacts of U.S. forces and develop policies that mitigate the pressures on local residents. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, to be successful new initiatives for managing the presence of American forces in each of these societies will need to conform to domestic law and meet public expectations for government accountability. National governments in Asia's democracies must balance their national security goals with these new norms of democratic practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

For nearly half a century, the United States has maintained military forces in the Asia Pacific region. These forces, based in Japan, South Korea, and, until 1992, in the Philippines, were central to the broad network of alliances created in the wake of World War II. From their inception, these alliances were designed to defend against communist expansion, and the strategic rationale for U.S. forward-deployed military forces was to project American power in a global Cold War competition with the former Soviet Union.

Today, more than a decade after the end of the Cold War, the United States has adopted a new and very different military strategy, one designed to respond globally to a variety of new threats—most notably the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism. To accomplish this, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) has completed its Global Posture Review, and has announced significant changes in the organization of America's military. This is a global transformation in the operations and deployment patterns of the U.S. military, but it has significant regional impact. To incorporate these new priorities in the Asia Pacific region, the United States has already expanded its security cooperation with its key allies—the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea. In 2004 and 2005, respectively, agreements were concluded with the Republic of Korea and Japan regarding the realignment of U.S. forces in these countries.<sup>1</sup> If successfully implemented, the U.S. military presence in the Asia Pacific region will look significantly different within a decade.

But there is an equally important shift underway that will ultimately shape this process of transforming the American military presence in the Asia Pacific region. Domestic political change in these key allied societies has increased significant pressures from within that cannot be ignored by the governments hosting U.S. forces. Host governments have argued that the presence of these forces contributes to national security and indeed to the regional balance of power. Yet, the tension between the national goal of security planning and the often localized impact of foreign troops makes this argument less than persuasive for those who bear the brunt of the associated costs.

Already, the public perception that there are significant costs associated with the U.S. presence has had an impact on alliance policymaking in the region. In each alliance, the host government has faced considerable domestic complaints about the terms of the U.S. military presence. The most dramatic result was the request for the U.S. military to leave the Philippines in 1991, but domestic political tensions in Japan in 1995 and South Korea in 2001 also led to intense local opposition to national government initiatives to realign American military forces in these countries. In both instances, tens of thousands of citizens took to the streets to demonstrate against their government's management of the U.S. presence, suggesting deep discontent with the terms of the presence in each society. These large-scale demonstrations have been peaceful, but they also raise questions about the sustainability of a sizeable foreign troop presence in democratic societies.

Clearly, the future of the U.S. military presence in the Asia Pacific region rests as much on the tolerance of host societies as it does on government efforts to forge new strategic alliance goals. Yet, we still know little about what prompts moments of citizen outrage and, more importantly, about the policy changes that result. What are the internal pressures on governments that affect the policy of maintaining U.S. military bases and forces overseas? Are these protests aberrations in response to specific incidents, or do they represent longer term and more deeply rooted citizen concerns about security cooperation with the United States? How do national governments seek to address citizen concerns?

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## THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE

To answer these questions, we must look within the societies that host U.S. military forces in the Asia Pacific region. Moreover, we need to view this not solely as an issue of global or regional strategy, but rather as those who host the presence should look at it—as an issue of national governance. The Shifting Terrain research project focused on the policy of hosting U.S. military forces in America's three major allies in the Asia Pacific region: Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines (see box, page 6). For many, the question of whether the United States should maintain military forces in the region is one of strategic goals and objectives, and the decision making surrounding the transformation of American forces belongs at the highest level of government within the halls of the political leadership and national security bureaucracies. But time and again, potent domestic political challenge to national government decisions on

the U.S. military presence has demonstrated the broader influences at work that shape the ability of the U.S. military to deploy and operate forces in these countries. The relationship with the United States has occupied a central place in the domestic political narratives in each of these societies, and the politics surrounding the U.S. military presence have often reflected deeper tensions and ambivalences regarding the influence of the United States over broader national goals. Moreover, all three of these societies have undergone significant democratic transitions over the past half century, although the trajectories of events and catalysts for change have differed considerably. Thus, to capture the domestic

politics that surround this issue of an extended foreign troop presence, the Shifting Terrain project team took a step back from the strategic debates of the day, and instead framed the policy issue of the U.S. military presence as one of national governance.

Shifting Terrain also brought a cross-national perspective to the study of the U.S. military presence. Whereas much of the literature on these aspects of U.S. alliances in Asia has focused on the particular histories of the individual alliances, the Shifting Terrain project explored the experience of national governments, local host communities, and civil society actors that focus their attention on the impact of the American military presence. The depth of expertise of the international research team (see box, page 7) also facilitated a cross-national contrast of the domestic political institutions and processes that shape policymaking on U.S. forces in each of these three very diverse societies. Workshops and field studies in regions that host U.S. military forces in the Philippines, Japan, and South Korea allowed greater access to data on the impact of the U.S. military presence, as well as to the myriad voices and groups that have a stake in future policy decisions.

This cross-national study of the politics surrounding the U.S. military presence in each society reveals that there are common challenges shaping national policymaking: the need for greater accountability of both the U.S. and host governments and a more transparent set



*The Shifting Terrain research team meets with Deputy Minister Chong Sang Yu in the Seoul headquarters of the newly formed Special Commission on USFK Affairs, Office of the Prime Minister. Discussion at the November 2004 meeting focused on coordinating local and national policies regarding hosting and realignment of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK).*

## THE SHIFTING TERRAIN PROJECT

### PROJECT OBJECTIVES

Shifting Terrain is a multiyear (2004–2006) collaborative research project of the East-West Center, funded by the Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership and the Japan-U.S. Friendship Commission.

The United States and its Asia Pacific allies have renewed and readjusted their alliance since the end of the Cold War, but have not satisfied the desire of many citizens in the region to see the U.S. military presence in their communities reduced. Outside of government, and often far from the centers of national power, citizens increasingly view the U.S. military presence more in terms of its social costs than its strategic value.

The Shifting Terrain project highlights aspects of American troop presence that have received little sustained analytical attention. It offers a comparative cross-national study focusing on the U.S. presence as an issue of national governance, with a particular emphasis on citizens' perspectives. The objective of Shifting Terrain is to examine how and why the presence of U.S. forces in Asia is affected by domestic political change and to suggest how alliance policies can better address citizen concerns.

Research workshops and field studies were conducted in Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines—the United States' three critical allies in the region with an extended history of hosting the U.S. military. Shifting Terrain's multinational research team met with academic and policy researchers, government policymakers, nongovernmental organizations, and local citizen activists in Okinawa, Japan (April 2004); Seoul, Pyeongtaek, and Tongducheon, South Korea (November 2004); and in Mindanao and Manila, Philippines (April 2005).

In addition to this Special Report published by the East-West Center and a comprehensive website ([www.shiftingterrain.com](http://www.shiftingterrain.com)) the Shifting Terrain project will also produce other products, including an edited volume for academic press publication and a series of essays introducing local voices commenting on the U.S. military presence.

## THE SHIFTING TERRAIN RESEARCH TEAM

Each member of the research team has extensive fieldwork experience in at least one of the national cases. Collectively, the team brings together extensive research experience in international relations and security policy issues, as well as in the comparative study of politics and society in the Asia Pacific region.

**Sheila A. Smith**, Shifting Terrain project director, is a fellow in Politics, Governance, and Security studies at the East-West Center. She specializes in Japanese domestic politics and foreign policy and the international relations of the Asia Pacific region. Among her publications are “A Place Apart: Okinawa in Japan’s Postwar Peace,” in Iriye and Wampler, eds., *Partnership: The United States and Japan, 1951–2001* (New York: Kodansha International, 2001), and editor, *Local Voices, National Issues: Local Initiative in Japanese Policymaking* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Smith earned her BA, MA, and PhD from the Department of Political Science, Columbia University.

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**Masaaki Gabe**, professor of International Politics on the Faculty of Law and Letters at the University of the Ryukyus, Okinawa, has written widely on the Okinawa base issue and the U.S.-Japan alliance. Currently, he is

working with other scholars on a diplomatic history of the early postwar policies of U.S. occupation authorities in Okinawa. His recent publications include “Okinawa from a Geopolitical Perspective,” in an edited volume by Japan’s prominent Asian specialists entitled *Asia’s New Century* (Iwanami Shoten, 2003). His most recent books include *Nichibei Anpo wo Kangaenaosu* (Kodansha Gendai Shinsho, 2002) and *Okinawa Henkan to wa Nandattanoka* (NHK Shuppan, 2000). Gabe completed his graduate study in the Faculty of Law of Keio University.

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**Katherine Moon** is the Jane Bishop Associate Professor of Political Science at Wellesley College in Massachusetts. She teaches international relations and the politics of Korea/East Asia. Her research on the impact of the U.S. military presence on women in Korea resulted in a path-breaking monograph, *Sex Among Allies: Military Prostitution in US-Korea Relations* (Columbia University Press, 1997). Moon also writes extensively on the democratization process in South Korea, including: “Korean Nationalism, Anti-Americanism and Democratic Consolidation,” in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *Korea’s Democratization* (Cambridge University Press, 2003). Moon received a BA from Smith College and PhD from Princeton University.

of policies regarding the decision making affecting the interaction between American soldiers and host-nation citizens. Moreover, the task of managing a foreign troop presence in democratic societies also calls for better integration of national and local policy management within host societies. Not only national security planning agencies, but local governments and citizens, as well, are asked to share a role in implementing the policies that affect local communities in their interactions with the U.S. military.

In Japan, the Shifting Terrain project team concentrated on Okinawa, which has been home to the bulk of U.S. military forces in the country since the mid-1970s. In South Korea, we visited Tongducheon, a city built around the U.S. Army presence established as a result of the Korean War in the early 1950s, and Pyeongtaek, site of a proposed government effort to expand and consolidate U.S. military forces in that country. And in the Philippines, we sought to understand the new dynamics that shape the citizen response to the 1999 Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in Mindanao, where the longstanding tensions between Christian and Muslim communities have created waves of rebellion and terrorist violence.

In each location, we found similar actors engaged in the issue of the U.S. military presence. Local and national government representatives discussed the administrative procedures and practices that affected their effort to host a foreign troop presence. The nongovernmental interest groups active in this policy area—both those adamantly opposed to the U.S. presence and those whose interests are simply affected by the presence—were remarkably similar across the three national cases.

Our research team met with a range of citizen organizations. Some focused specifically on the base issue in their communities, while others had broader interests. We met with citizens openly and actively opposed to the U.S. military presence, yet not personally impacted, and with those whose lives are affected every day, including local economic and business leaders, women's groups (many but not all affiliated with religious organizations), and landowners. In some instances, these citizens were highly organized in their efforts to affect the policymaking process. It was also clear from our interviews at the local level, however, that many individuals were propelled into the public sphere as a result of their frustration with a seemingly indifferent national government. For these citizens, government attention to their problems was frustrated by the "diplomatic wall" of bilateral security treaties, and the mechanisms for mediating private interests and compensating losses associated with the U.S. military presence were widely viewed as inadequate.

Security cooperation with Washington remains high on the agenda of these governments, but the role of U.S. forces stationed in Japan and South Korea is changing. As the Japanese and South Korean militaries reorganize their own capabilities to cope with a markedly different regional environment, the Japanese and South Korean governments will need to clarify for their citizens the value of continuing to host U.S. forces in their societies and the role the U.S. military will play in meeting shared security concerns. The situation is similar today in the Philippines, despite the fact that there are no longer any American military bases there. The new U.S. mission of counterterrorism has many in the Philippines revisiting the question of just how much control their government has over U.S. forces within their nation.

Citizen concerns about the scale of U.S. forces, about their behavior and accountability within domestic societies, and ultimately, about the purpose of these forces in a volatile and rapidly changing regional and international environment, must be addressed by national leaders in Tokyo, Seoul, and Manila as they seek to continue their security cooperation with Washington.

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