

ALLIANCE MANAGEMENT AND DOMESTIC PROTEST

Even as the Cold War was ending, there were signs that public tolerance for U.S. military bases and forces was being tested, with public protests creating demands on national governments to reconsider how citizen interests are affected by the presence of U.S. forces in their countries. Indeed, public disgruntlement over these foreign troops has had a considerable impact on policy decisions within the three major U.S. alliances in Asia.

The most conspicuous example was the failure of the U.S. and Republic of the Philippines governments in the early 1990s to successfully renegotiate the terms of the U.S. military

presence there.² After months of often tense negotiations between the two governments, a new agreement was crafted to extend the United States' ability to use its major Philippine bases. But there was considerable opposition to this in the Philippine legislature, and dissension even within President Corazon Aquino's government. In the final days, she sought to rally public opinion in support of her government's new treaty with Washington in the hope that popular affinity within the Philippines for the United States would outweigh the opposition of key national legislators. Despite Aquino's appeals, the Philippine Senate rejected the treaty by a vote of 12–11.³ Each senator who voted was required to state his or her reasons, and the halls of the Senate were charged with emotion regarding the meaning of the U.S. military presence for

Philippine identity. It was also a moment of transformation for Philippine politics, as forces opposed to the dictatorship of former President Ferdinand Marcos sought to define the country's future. Even Senator Juan Ponce Enrile, minister of defense under Marcos and a close "friend" of the U.S. military, voted against the treaty. Reflecting the complex emotions that framed the U.S. bases at that critical moment of political change, he proclaimed his opposition to allowing the U.S. bases to remain on Philippine soil:

I cannot live with a treaty that assumes that without some 8,000 servicemen and some passing warships we shall fall flat on our faces. I cannot believe that the vitality of this country will be extinguished when the last bar girl in Olongapo turns off the last light in the last cabaret.... I have a higher vision of this country's importance than as a depot of diminishing importance of a foreign power....⁴

As a result, the U.S. Air Force and Navy were asked to abandon two of the largest U.S. military bases in the region, Clark Air Base and Subic Naval Facility. On November 24, 1992, the last U.S. naval ship left the Philippines. Support for a continued military presence in one of America's longest, and in many ways closest, relationships in the Asia Pacific region had come to an end.

Pol Medina, Jr.



The return of the U.S. military under a Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) in 1999—eight years after the Philippine Senate refused to renew an agreement on U.S. military bases—is the subject of this cartoon from the book Ink and Politics by Philippine political cartoonist Pol Medina, Jr.

Thousands of South Koreans took to the streets of Seoul in 2002 to protest the U.S. military verdict that American troops would not be formally sanctioned for their involvement in an accident that killed two Korean schoolgirls.



AP/World Wide Photos

Within years, crises erupted in the two other allied societies that host U.S. military forces. This time it was the behavior of U.S. military personnel that became the focal point of contention. In 1995, the Japanese government faced intense citizen criticism of its handling of the U.S. military presence when a 12-year-old schoolgirl was brutally raped in Okinawa Prefecture. Local residents took to the streets in protest, and then-Governor Masahide Ota called for a review of the Japanese government's policy of hosting American forces in his constituency. Ota ultimately took his claims all the way to the Japanese Supreme Court, arguing that the national government was placing a disproportionate burden on the residents of Okinawa for the maintenance of the U.S.-Japan security treaty. Tolerance for the activities of U.S. military personnel stationed in Okinawa, as well as for the national government's handling of problems associated with U.S. troops, had evaporated, and the protest that emerged in response to the rape called for a broad reassessment of the Japanese and U.S. governments' handling of the American military bases in Okinawa, including demands for a withdrawal of U.S. forces from the island.

These claims from within Japanese society coincided with an effort by the two governments to revamp their alliance, and to redefine their military cooperation to meet the changes in regional security after the Cold War. The stakes for both Japanese and U.S. security planners were high, and the two governments began a policy review guided by the newly formed Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) to respond to criticisms from Okinawa Prefecture.⁵ Faced with 85,000 demonstrators in September 1995 in the streets of Naha, the capital of Okinawa, Japan's national policy planners were quick to attempt to meet the demands of Okinawa's governor for greater local voice in the policy of managing U.S. military forces at the local level, but they did not go so far as to ask for a reduction in U.S. forces nor did they attempt to move U.S. forces out of Okinawa Prefecture to other localities within Japan. A decade later, the two governments are still confronting the fact that the majority of U.S. military personnel stationed in Japan are located on this small island, and there has been little progress made regarding the Japanese government's proposed solution of building a new base to consolidate forces within the prefecture.

While Japan's national policymakers sought to portray the protest that came from Okinawa as a local problem, a more recent protest against the U.S. military forces in South Korea had a decidedly national audience.⁶ Two young girls were killed in 2001 when a U.S. military armored personnel carrier on a civilian road struck them as they were walking home from school. The accident was widely publicized, and came at a time when the alliance relationship between the two countries was somewhat fragile as a result of differences over policy with North Korea. Moreover, a tumultuous presidential election was underway, and the candidate that eventually won the Blue House campaigned on the need to revisit the U.S.–South Korea alliance, especially the status of U.S. forces on Korean soil.

The announcement by U.S. officials that the driver and commander on the scene would suffer no sanction for the accident led to several large-scale but peaceful protest demonstrations in Seoul in 2002. For many, this outburst of anti-Americanism was attributed to generational change, and a decreasing belief among younger South Koreans in the necessity of the U.S.–South Korean alliance. Upon closer inspection, however, it is clear that these events represented a much broader set of transformations within South Korea. The American military's place within South Korean society was at the vortex of a public questioning of national priorities, and indeed of national identity, as South Koreans sought to consolidate their democracy.

While Japan's national policy-makers see the protest from Okinawa as a local problem, recent protests in South Korea had a decidedly national audience

Newly elected President Moo Hyun Noh thus began his presidency with the task of renegotiating the size and location of the U.S. military in South Korea, and of reshaping the dynamics of his country's security relationship with the United States.

Clearly, the domestic forces that affect decision making regarding the U.S. military presence in these allied societies are dynamic and complex. But the future of the U.S. military presence in Asia rests as much on the tolerance of these societies as it does on the effort to forge new strategic goals for the alliances with Washington. Periodic attempts to gauge public sentiment regarding the policy of alliance with the United States through opinion polling provide some sense of public support for or against the policy. But these polls do not translate into an understanding of the interplay of citizen concerns and government policy initiatives that shape the U.S. military presence. Past episodes of conflict, and the policy adjustments that have resulted, continue to inform efforts to gain citizen support for the continued presence of the U.S. military within these societies. To gain a better understanding of the reasons why citizens oppose or support the U.S. military presence, a more in-depth examination of the issues, actors, and policymaking initiatives surrounding the U.S. military is needed.