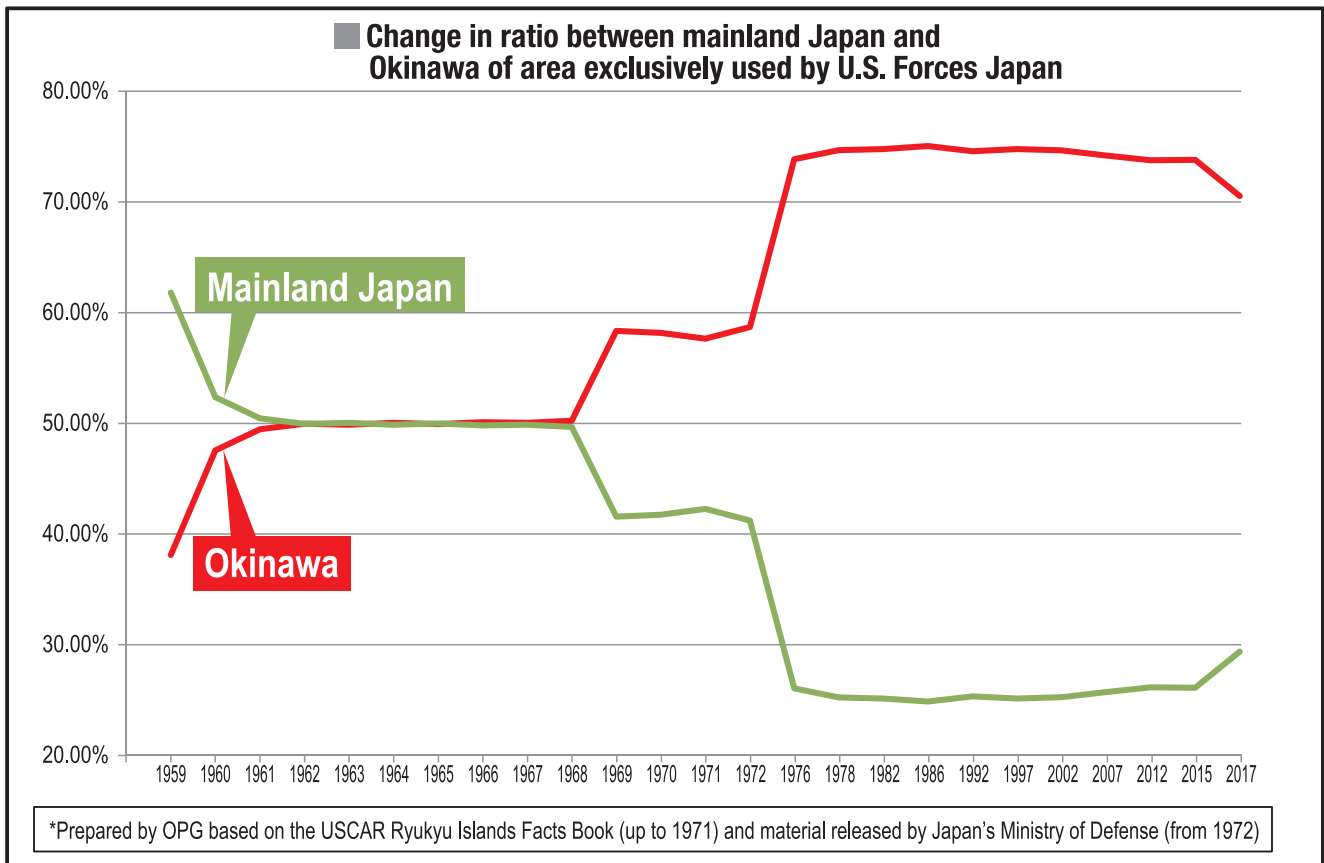


Q7

Aren't the U.S. military bases concentrated in Okinawa for military reasons?

When we look at the change in total area set aside exclusively for U.S. military facilities in Okinawa and mainland Japan, we see that although there was a greater percentage sited in Japan proper during the 1950s, a pattern developed around the time of the prefecture's reversion to Japan in 1972 whereby more than 70% of the U.S. military bases came to be concentrated in Okinawa, just as we see today.



The reasons behind this shift are the transfer of military units to Okinawa and the consolidation and reduction of bases in mainland Japan to quell anti-American and anti-base sentiment while, at the same time, bases were expanded and their function strengthened in Okinawa, which was governed by the U.S. military.

A former Japanese defense minister and even a former U.S. secretary of defense have stated definitively that U.S. military bases do not need to be in Okinawa for military reasons.

In December 2012, then Defense Minister Satoshi Morimoto stated, "The U.S. Marine Corps doesn't have to be in Okinawa for military reasons, but Okinawa is the best place for them to be for political considerations."

In addition, former U.S. Defense Secretary William Perry, who agreed to the SACO Final Report, said in an interview with the Japanese media that there is nothing special about the geographical position of Okinawa militarily, and locating bases in Okinawa presents political and economic issues.

Recent improvements in missile technology have conversely placed the U.S. military bases at risk militarily due to their concentration in Okinawa, and this vulnerability has been pointed out in the United States as well.

Moreover, the U.S. Government Accounting Office identified numerous deficiencies in the current plan to relocate Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Henoko, including the shortening of the runway from the current 2,800 m to 1,800 m, a length incapable of accommodating emergency landings by fixed wing aircraft. The GAO also pointed out that the maintenance of security capabilities in this area is not possible.

It is evident that there is no military rationale for concentrating the U.S. military bases in Okinawa, and the current relocation plan of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma to Henoko should also be revised from a military perspective.



Campaign against U.S. military bases (Tokyo, 1965)
Courtesy of Kiichi Hoshi