

Country report: Japan
the 7th International Meeting of International Women's Network Against Militarism, 2009

Kozue Akibayashi, Ed.D.

Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Kyoto branch

1. US forces in Japan

2/23/09
The US forces in Japan have stationed in Japan under US-Japan security treaty signed in 1960. Status Forces Agreement was also signed to stipulate the status of forces in Japan at the same time. US military facilities exclusively used by the US military are located at 85 locations (33 on mainland Japan, 52 in Okinawa) in Japan as of January 1, 2009¹. This should be noted however, that these numbers do not include facilities jointly used by the U.S. forces and Japan Self-Defense Forces. In recent years, joint practices and operations of US forces and JSDF have been increasing. The prefectures housing US military facilities are: Okinawa, Aomori, Kanagawa, Tokyo, Yamaguchi, Nagasaki, Hokkaido, Hiroshima, Chiba, Saitama, Shizuoka, Fukuoka, and Saga. These facilities cater to various needs of the US forces including training and practices, communication, storage, airfields, etc. While Okinawa is burdened by a disproportionately large number of facilities and operations and exercises that are more directly linked to the wars waged by the United States, communities around the bases on mainland Japan have also been suffering from noise, risk of radiation leak or other forms of environmental destruction, crimes and accidents by US personnel. According to Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there are about 50,000 troops, 4,000 civilian workers, 50,000 family members living in Japan.

In recent years, under the Koizumi administration from 2001-2006, one of the most loyal allies of the Bush administration, militarization of Japan has intensified, expanding the military capability of JSDF for closer military ties with the US military.

1.1. Security Consultative Committee "Agreement"

In 2005, the bilateral committee on security, SCC, comprised of Secretaries of State and Defense of the US and Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Defense of Japan, issued a joint statement titled "U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future," that laid the foundation of the development of closer military ties between the two countries in the name of "interoperability" between the two militaries. It emphasizes the need for closer bilateral cooperation in the era of global uncertainty without clearly identifying the nature of "uncertainty." It was in this document that the transferring Marines stationed in Okinawa to Guam was articulated to, as they claim, reduce the burden of Okinawa.

1.2. Nuclear Aircraft Carrier George Washington home port in Yokosuka, Kanagawa
In September 2008 the nuclear aircraft carrier George Washington was deployed in Yokosuka,

Draft only

Kanagawa, as its new homeport, replacing another aircraft carrier. Despite resistance by some peace organizations who points out the danger of possible radiation leak, the deployment was decided without disclosing sufficient information. Meantime, some “minor” accidents were reported but the details were not disclosed by the US military.

1.3. Sympathy budget

The Japanese government has supported the presence of the US military in Japan in many ways. Host Nation Support, or “Sympathy budget” is among the most crucial aspect of such support. Since 1979, the Japanese government has given generous financial support to the US military stationed in Japan that covers various costs including utilities of the housings on the bases, part of salaries of Japanese workers on the bases, building costs of luxurious entertainment/recreational facilities, costs for transferring practices and others. In recent years, yearly, the Japanese government pays over 270 billion yen (about 270 million USD - USD1=JY100). For the relocation of Marines to Guam from Okinawa, the US government is demanding that the Japanese government bear the major part of the costs such as transferring and building infrastructures or housings.

2. Japan Self-Defense Forces

JSDF was established as Police Reserve in the post-WWII period in Japan in 1950 while it was still under occupation by the United States. Although the political system was changed from the imperial military regime that invaded China and other Asian nations in 1930's and 40's, some members and a part of the structure of the Imperial military remained as the foundation of the Police Reserve and continue to be so in JSDF. With the constraints of the Constitution of Japan whose article 9 renounces war as a means to solve disputes and possession of armed forces, JSDF has engaged in disaster rescues within the country. However, there has always existed a discussion about expanding the missions of JSDF to defend the nation from external threats in order to be a “normal” nation. The SCC agreement of 2005 explained above on increasing the military capacity of the JSDF should also be placed in the domestic political context of intensifying militarization. The incident earlier in 2008 then the chief of staff of the Air Self-Defense Force, Toshio Tamogami was forced to resign for his “essay” in which he revealed his revisionist view of the history of Japan asserting that Japan never invaded other nations shows the aspect of the notion of JSDF members to which we need to pay more attention.

JSDF has expanded its mission in recent years particularly since Defense Agency was promoted to Defense Ministry in 2007. Unlike its major mission to be confined to domestic matters, now JSDF has been more widely deployed overseas for varied missions not only rescue but assisting US forces in its war on terror. JSDF is now deployed in the Indian Ocean for replenishment operation with the US forces, to the coastal areas of Somalia to cope with

Draft only

pirates. These are one of the few examples of expanded operation of JSDF, an ongoing increasing militarization of Japan.

In addition, operations of the Coastal Guard need more scrutiny. Unlike JSDF, whom the general public pays more attention, the Coastal Guard has developed its capacity for long time to defense the coasts of Japan. When people in Henoko engaged in a long-lasting action to halt the construction of off-shore military facilities, their non-violence direct actions were met by the Coastal Guards who was deployed even from USMC Camp Schwab

3. Sexual Violence and Crimes

Sexual violence and crimes committed by US personnel remain a serious problem on mainland Japan, too, though the idea that it is a problem of militarism is not yet widely shared among the general public. Below are a few surface cases of sexual crimes among much larger number of hidden cases.

3.1. Iwakuni/Hiroshima case

In October 2007, a 19-year-old woman reported to the Japanese police in Hiroshima that she had been gang-raped in a car at a deserted parking lot by four US marines stationed in Iwakuni air station in the adjacent Yamaguchi prefecture, whom she had met at a club. After weeks of investigation and interviewing the accuser, Hiroshima Police did not press charges against the four suspects as it explained that the suspects were denying the charges and the accuser's explanation was ambiguous. However, the accused were brought to US military court-martial and tried. All four were found guilty in lesser charges than rape, such as sexual misconduct.

The case posed challenge to women's groups in Hiroshima who have specialized in sexual violence but not familiar with military violence. Some feminist advocates were reluctant to highlight the case as a military violence case, expressing their reservation about making distinction between civilians and military personnel. The case also revealed an issue that the network members on mainland Japan need to address

3.2. The struggle of "Jane"

"Jane," an Australian national, is a victim of rape by a US soldier in Yokosuka in 2002. When she went to Yokosuka Police right after the rape had occurred, she had to wait for 10 hours for the police to take to the hospital and talk to her. The police did not press charge, not the US military court. The rape was characterized as a private matter between the two. She brought a civil case to the Japanese court and won the case against him with the ruling of compensation. However, the perpetrator was discharged from the military and returned to the US. Jane was unable to this day to hold him responsible. Jane started a campaign in Japan

in 2005 for better and just treatment of rape victims in the criminal justice in Japan. She has also traveled to Okinawa to address at citizens' rallies against US military bases.

4. Japanese groups' actions: Challenge militarism from a gender perspective

The Japan group has been a part of the network since its onset in 1997, having the background of solidarity action with OWAAMV particularly through the work built by the late Yayori Matsui, the feminist journalist. Groups and individuals from Japan who have participated in the past network meetings are diverse, and we have not worked together as a unified group, but all of us have addressed various issues of militarism. In the 7th International meeting, women from WILPF Kyoto, a branch of the Japan section of WILPF, and Hokkaido Peace Network participated. Matsumura Machiko of Yufuin, Oita, members of Asia Japan Women's Resource Center in Tokyo, and Otsuki Junko of Hiroshima and some others including one working on "comfort women" issue showed interest in participating but could not.

4.1. Hokkaido Peace Net

Hokkaido Peace Net is based in Hokkaido, the northernmost prefecture where Self-Defense Forces have large military facilities and some of the U.S. Marine Corps training was transferred from Okinawa in late 1990's is joining the network for the first time. Among the issues addressed by Hokkaido Peace Net is support of the sexual harassment lawsuit brought by a female JSDF member in Hokkaido in which a female member brought a case to the court to bring justice to the violence imposed on her by her male superior on duty. She reported to the

4.2. Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Kyoto

WILPF Kyoto was established in 2007 by students of Ritsumeikan University and Kozue as a branch of WILPF Japan. WILPF is one of the oldest women's peace organizations in the world established in 1915 mainly by women in the US and Europe to stop WWI. WILPF Kyoto's actions have focus around studying and dissemination information about military violence, violation of the human rights of women, and security. We visited Okinawa in 2008 and held two public exhibits on our learnings. We collected petitions in solidarity with actions taken in Okinawa.

4.3. Asia Japan Women's Resource Center (Tokyo)

AJWRC was established by Yayori in 1995 and have been one of the major women's human rights NGOs in Japan. AJWRC organized a tour to visit Japan in 2008 in which Suzuyo and Kozue joined and spoke at the community panel discussion on security held at the University of Guam. Their journals (in Japanese and in English) are very important source of actions and feminist analysis.

Draft only

4.3. Hiroshima

Hiroshima group was recently connected to the network at around the problem of the Iwakuni/Hiroshima rape. Though a collaborated action was not taken at the time, there emerged smaller groups who connect the interrelation between sexism and militarism.

For general information

Security Consultative Committee. (2005, October 29) U.S.-Japan alliance: Realignment and transformation for the future.

Security Consultative Committee. (2006, May 1). United States-Japan roadmap for realignment implementation.

¹ Ministry of Defense of Japan

<http://www.mod.go.jp/j/defense/chouwa/US/sennyousisetumennseki.html>