

CIA: How to shape Okinawan public opinion on the U.S. military presence

Jon Mitchell

In 2012, the Central Intelligence Agency's Open Source Center published a manual for U.S. officials advising them on how to shape Okinawan public opinion about the large U.S. military presence on their island. Categorized *For Official Use Only*, the 60-page CIA report is titled *A Master Narratives Approach to Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa*. It was released under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act and the full text is now available [here](#).

The manual:

- advises U.S. policy makers to claim that the U.S. military benefits the economy, promotes cultural exchange and provides disaster relief
- warns U.S. officials not to mention military deterrence or the environment
- criticizes the Japanese government for being insensitive to Okinawan issues
- describes discrimination against Okinawans as a problem solely involving the island and Tokyo; the U.S. bears no blame
- outlines five "narratives" which, the CIA claims, enables Americans to understand Okinawans' character



Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa

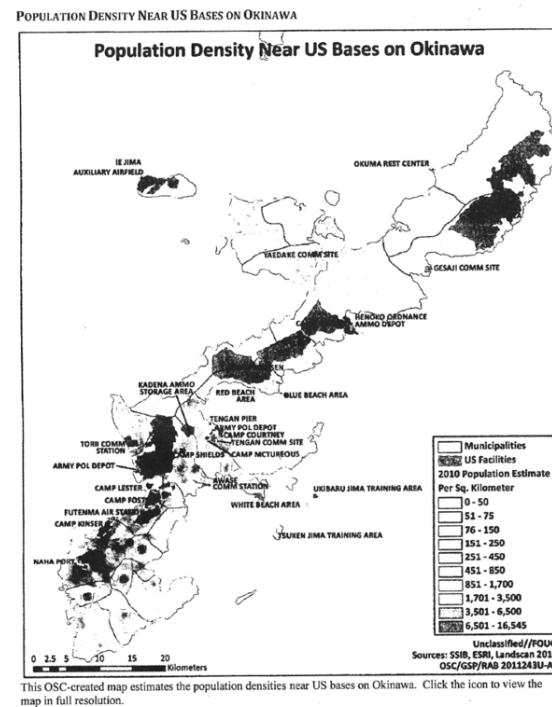
Brief background: the U.S. military presence on Okinawa

Between 1945 and 1972, Okinawa was directly ruled by the U.S. military and its bases stored a vast array of nuclear and chemical weapons. The island was used to launch wars in Korea and Indochina; during the U.S. occupation (1945-52), Okinawans' were driven from their land, much of which was turned into US military bases, and were victimized by frequent

crimes and accidents involving military personnel.¹

In the run-up to Okinawa's reversion to Japanese control in 1972, residents were promised *hondo nami*, that the proportion of military bases on their land would be reduced to a comparable level to those on mainland Japan. However, not only were all military bases retained, but today the prefecture is host to 70.28% of the U.S. military presence in Japan – and the Japanese government is currently constructing a large new USMC base in the pristine waters of Oura Bay, Nago City.²

Today, the 31 U.S. military bases on Okinawa take up approximately 15% of the main island while contributing only 5% to the prefecture's economy.³ These installations continue to contaminate the environment but under the U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA), the U.S. is not responsible for clean-up costs. Meanwhile, crimes committed by U.S. service members target local residents; indeed, internal military reports obtained under the U.S. Freedom of Information Act reveal previously-unreported sexual offences against women and children in recent years.⁴



From "Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa"

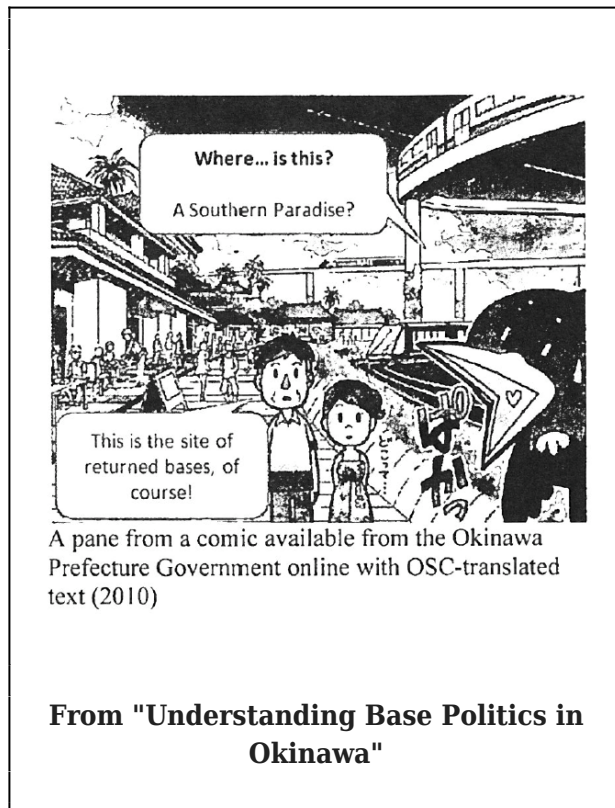
Since the early days of the U.S. occupation of Okinawa, the CIA has maintained a constant presence on the island. Prior to Reversion, its large base at Camp Chinen coordinated operations in Southeast Asia and the Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) at Yomitan was the service's largest overseas monitoring post, compiling reports on Soviet, Chinese and Japanese media broadcasts.⁵

Economic, cultural and humanitarian benefits

The CIA report, *A Master Narratives Approach to Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa*, states that most influential Okinawans understand there is no credible economic alternative to military bases and, it claimed,

that at least prior to 2012, the Prefectural government had been “unable to articulate a concrete funding source for a vision of Okinawa without bases.” The CIA also states that “pragmatic elements within the prefectural government seek to preserve the economic quid pro quo with Tokyo over US bases.”

Consequently, the CIA advises U.S. policy makers to adopt economic arguments to justify the U.S. military presence. “Okinawans might be receptive to the message that US forces in Okinawa provide security and stability if they saw a connection with Okinawa’s goals of economic integration with and outreach to the rest of Asia.”



Furthermore, the report states “the bases in Okinawa help to keep the region safe and thereby enable enhanced regional economic and cultural exchange.”

The CIA advises manipulating Okinawans’ pacifist spirit by propagating messages about how the military can help in regional

humanitarian and disaster relief efforts. The manual urges U.S. policy makers to mimic the Japanese Self Defense Forces’ Public Relations model of emphasizing “peace, family and community.”

At the same time, the CIA warns policy makers that, if they tried to use humanitarian operations to justify the military presence, it “would probably be viewed skeptically by Okinawa’s media, although the public might be more open-minded.”

“Communication pitfalls” - deterrence and the environment

Both Tokyo and Washington have long claimed that U.S. bases on Okinawa provide deterrence from attacks by North Korea and China.⁶

However, the CIA manual recommends that U.S. policy makers not mention military deterrence because it might exacerbate Okinawans’ resentment of being burdened with the majority of U.S. bases in Japan: “Okinawans may react with frustration to messages about the deterrence value of U.S. forces because that does not answer their ‘why us’ question.”

The CIA also cautions policy makers that “skeptics of the deterrence argument will almost certainly look for ways to undermine it.”

The manual advises officials to side-step any mention of the military’s impact on the island’s environment: “Okinawan support for environmental preservation presents challenges to alliance managers.” The CIA warns that “Okinawa may pressure Tokyo to expand environmental guarantees for base land - including revision of SOFA provisions on environmental remediation.”

On Okinawa - and mainland Japan - environmental contamination has delayed redevelopment projects and cost Japanese tax-

payers millions of dollars to treat.⁷ Citing reports from the newspaper, *Okinawa Times*, and TV station, *Ryukyu Asahi Housou*, the Agency seemed particularly concerned about revelations that Agent Orange had been stored, sprayed and dumped on Okinawa.

Discrimination and Okinawa

The CIA claims that Okinawans' sense of discrimination is solely due to their mistreatment by Tokyo - and Washington can do nothing to improve the situation. Moreover, the Agency claims that that media and local leaders are responsible for linking the prefecture's military burden to the discrimination issue.

The CIA identifies the fact that Okinawans' feelings of discrimination are rooted in three commonly-held beliefs: "The Japanese government used Okinawa during WWII to save the mainland," "Okinawa was left out of postwar economic growth" and "Japan permits higher concentrations of US bases in Okinawa."

The summary is correct but it omits the U.S. role in perpetuating discrimination against Okinawans.

The CIA argues that Okinawans' feeling of discrimination are due to "Okinawa's complex relationship with Tokyo" so "it is not likely to be countered by any direct action on the part of the United States."

Given the provenance of the manual, unsurprisingly there is little mention of many of the wrongdoings which the U.S. committed during its 27-year occupation of Okinawa (1945 - 1972) and in the years since. Only briefly cited are the 1950s forcible land seizures (which relocated more than one third of the main island's population) and the 1959 Miyamori Elementary School jet crash (which killed 18 and injured more than 200 civilians).

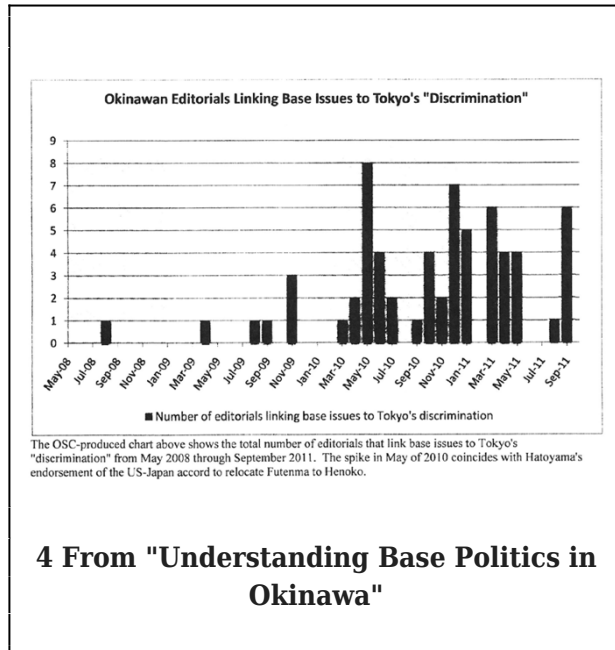
The manual states, "Tokyo can be tone-deaf to the narratives and historical events that have shaped Okinawan attitudes." There is no mention of the tone-deaf narratives favored by US policymakers.

The CIA cites instances of Japanese government comments that angered Okinawans. For example, in November 2011, the director of the Okinawa Defense Bureau, Tanaka Satoshi, compared the construction of the new USMC base in Nago City to rape. In December 2011, Defense Minister Ichikawa Yasuo admitted that he knew little about the details of the 1995 gang rape of an Okinawan girl by three U.S. service members that touched off the largest protest demonstration in Okinawa's history.

However, the CIA report fails to cite many other similar disdainful comments from U.S. officials. In November 1995, for instance, Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Richard C. Macke was dismissed from his post when he suggested it would have been cheaper to hire a prostitute than the car the three rapists used to abduct the young girl.⁸ Likewise in March 2011, U.S. diplomat Kevin Maher lost his job following reports he had called Okinawans lazy and manipulative.⁹

In addition to attributing Okinawans' feelings of discrimination solely to Tokyo, the CIA blames the prefecture's politicians and the media for incriminating the U.S. in the issue: "Okinawa's political leaders and media have shaped the discrimination narrative to implicate the United States by making their central grievance with Tokyo the 'disproportionate burden' of hosting US Forces."

The CIA report identifies former governor Ota Masahide (1925 - 2017) as the "key figure in shaping narrative (of discrimination)" citing his policies as governor and his writings about Okinawan issues.



Extensive monitoring of Okinawan media, entertainment and the "five narratives" to understand Okinawans

Base Politics in Okinawa reveals that the CIA has been collating data from the island's media for decades; the OSC, and its predecessor, the FBIS, compiled daily summaries and in-depth reports to guide officials on how to influence public discourse about the island.

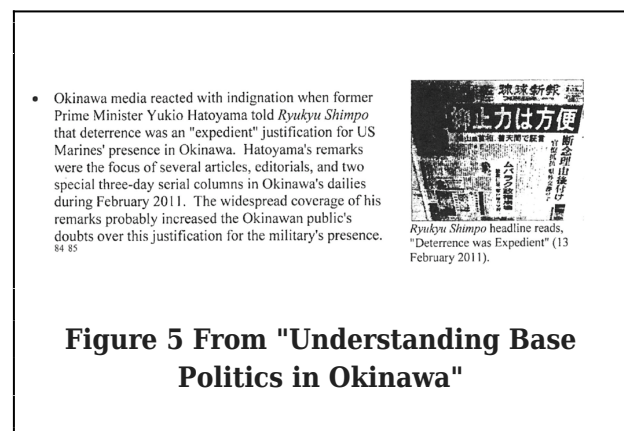
Among the manual's contents are examinations of some of Okinawa's most successful pop groups and TV dramas, including Begin, Mongol800 and local superhero, Ryujin Mabuyer.

The CIA report seems critical of Okinawa-set dramas produced by Japan's state broadcaster, NHK. The series, *Winds of Ryukyu* (1993) and *The Tempest* (2011), are criticized for presenting "idealized versions" of Okinawan history. The report claims that such shows may encourage residents to see their island as a crossroads to Asia with the ensuing risk (to the U.S.) that they might be able to sustain themselves economically without a Pentagon

presence.

The report also tracks the number of newspaper editorials between May 2008 and September 2011 which connected the disproportionate U.S. military presence on Okinawa to discrimination by mainland Japan. It concludes the increase in such editorials was due to Democratic Party of Japan Prime Minister Hatoyama Yukio's acceptance of the relocation of MCAS Futenma to Nago City in May 2010.

In 2009, Hatoyama was elected Prime Minister of Japan on the back of a manifesto that included a promise to move the Futenma replacement base outside Okinawa. His u-turn on the pledge caused widespread anger on the island and his popularity plunged. He resigned in June 2010.¹⁰



Drawing on its interpretation of the island's history and popular culture, the CIA claims Okinawans can be understood on the basis of five "master narratives"- "the historically grounded stories that reflect a community's identity and experiences, or explain its hopes, aspirations, and concerns."

The CIA has also produced master narrative manuals to explain the attitudes of people elsewhere, including Syria, Afghanistan and Muslim communities in France (see below).

According to the report, Okinawans' attitudes

can be explained in terms of the five master narratives: Victimization, Discrimination, Peaceful People, Beautiful Island and Asia Crossroads.

OSC Analysis: Okinawa's Master Narratives

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SUMMARY OF OKINAWA'S MASTER NARRATIVES

3 January 2012

Master Narrative	Condensed Description	Context	Implications
Victimization	"We have been the victims of oppression, domination, and episodic violence."	This narrative directly involves the US presence in Okinawa today – in the form of noise, accidents, and crime. Okinawans do not feel like the United States adequately acknowledges the perceived negative effects of the US military presence on Okinawa. Key concepts: respect, recognition	Okinawans' sense of injustice and helplessness over events involving US military personnel on the island contributes to a feeling that some degree of recognition of Okinawa's "burden" should be forthcoming from Washington and Tokyo. Focusing on the positive "impact" of bases while not acknowledging their perceived burden is unlikely to resonate with Okinawans and could backfire.
Discrimination	"Tokyo treats us differently than other prefectures in Japan, seeing us as second class citizens and expendable."	Okinawa's political leaders and media have shaped the discrimination narrative to implicate the United States by making their central grievance with Tokyo the "disproportionate burden" of hosting US Forces. Key concepts: equality, fairness	Fundamentally, the discrimination narrative is about Okinawa's complex relationship with Tokyo and, therefore, is not likely to be countered by any direct action on the part of the United States. Further, Okinawans may react with frustration to messages about the deterrence value of US forces, because that does not answer their "why us" question.
Peaceful People	"We embrace nonviolence and believe we have a moral obligation to be ambassadors for peace. Our culture has long valued the principles of peace and cherishing life, and our experience during WWII has further cemented these values."	Okinawans are taught in school that international conflicts are best addressed by heeding life, rather than by making war. Anti-base activists use Okinawa's strong tradition of peace to cast the US military presence as inimical to the Okinawan spirit. Key concepts: pacifism, spirituality	US messaging that addressed the role of Okinawa-based forces in regional humanitarian and disaster relief efforts would be consistent with the general themes of the narrative. Such messaging, however, would likely be viewed with skepticism by Okinawa's media. It is possible that the Okinawan public would be less cynical about such messaging.
Beautiful Island	"Okinawa is a beautiful island. We are responsible for preserving our natural environment and have an obligation to hand it down to future generations."	Okinawans express an intense pride in the natural beauty of their islands. Okinawans will want new base projects to be undertaken with high regard for the environment and internal base land to undergo thorough environmental remediation measures. Key concepts: environmentalism, spirituality	US actions demonstrating a policy of good stewardship of base land – such as quick and transparent response to accidents that could be detrimental to the environment – could help in this regard. US messaging regarding such a policy would possibly be subject to criticism unless well supported by actions and examples.
Asia Crossroads	"Long ago, our ancestors traveled the ocean and prospered through trade with China and Southeast Asia. We have a future as a crossroads of exchange and trade in Asia."	Influential Okinawan figures often use the narrative implicitly, but sometimes explicitly, to present the US bases as obstacles to a prosperous future for Okinawa. Key concepts: prosperity, harmony	Because most Okinawan leaders appear to be realistic about the prospects for quickly realizing credible alternatives to the bases, this narrative does not present a near-term challenge to the bases. The narrative might provide opportunities to highlight the role of the bases in fostering a stable environment for regional economic integration.

Open Source Center

This OSC product is based exclusively on the content and behavior of selected media and has not been coordinated with other US Government components.

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From "Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa"

1. "Victimhood (sic)... is central to their identity," states the report, citing historical events such as the Japanese government's 1879 seizure of the island and the 1945 Battle of Okinawa. The CIA claims this belief bestows military accidents and incidents with a "greater symbolic meaning," noting that the 1995 rape "continues to have currency in Okinawa." Elsewhere in the report, another comment implies that Okinawans use the U.S. military as "scapegoats", without going into further detail.
2. A sense of discrimination is also prevalent among Okinawans, claims the CIA report. Such a feeling is attributable to mainland Japan's mistreatment of Okinawa but, as explained above, the report relieves the U.S. of any responsibility for this discrimination or

ability to reduce it. The Japanese government is "tone-deaf" to Okinawans' attitudes and history, the report states.

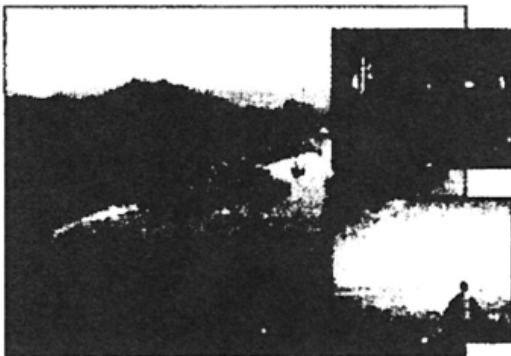
The two narratives of victimization and discrimination are strongest among Okinawans, according to the report, and they "present the greatest challenges for the United States when it comes to messaging and alliance management."

3. According to the CIA, the third narrative via which Okinawans can be understood is the idea of a Peaceful People. Grounded in Okinawans' experiences in World War Two, Okinawans "claim a special moral authority" of being a peaceful people. The report accuses mainland Japanese groups of exploiting Okinawa's peace activism to protest against the U.S. military. However, hypocritically, the report also advises U.S. policymakers to play upon islanders' peaceful attitudes by stressing U.S. military support during relief operations. In its discussion of "Peaceful People", the CIA also conjectures that fewer members of the younger generation may "identify with pacifist ideals."

4. The Beautiful Island narrative is "relatively new, but it is widely shared"; Okinawans "see their natural environment as a source of pride" claims the report. Its authors warn U.S. policy makers that new base construction and the discovery of contamination on former military land creates problems for them in convincing Okinawans of the benefits of the military. To influence Okinawans' feelings, the CIA advises policy makers to conduct better "actions and examples" vis-a-vis environmental incidents.
5. The final narrative is "Okinawa can again become a crossroads of Asia" which the Agency describes as "loosely inspired by historical accounts" of the Ryukyu Kingdom's Golden Age when it prospered as a trading nation. The CIA advises U.S. policy makers not to be overly-concerned

with this narrative because "it does not appear to present a compelling alternative vision for the future of the island" and so "does not present a near-term challenge to the bases."

The report suggests that the narrative "presents positive opportunities for the United States" by persuading Okinawans that military bases "enable enhanced regional economic and cultural exchange."



NHK's 2011 drama "The Tempest" portrays a Ryukyu Kingdom embroiled in political intrigue.



NHK's 1993 drama "Winds of Ryukyu" is credited with helping to popularize exotic aspects of Okinawan culture with a Japanese audience.

From "Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa"

From theory to practice: The impact of the CIA's Okinawa guidance

The guidelines found in *Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa* have been widely adopted by the U.S. military on the island.

The report advises that humanitarian relief operations can be used to persuade Okinawans of the advantages of military bases. Following the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal and April 2016 earthquake in Kumamoto, Japan, the military extolled the role of Okinawa-based Marines in relief operations. Particularly emphasized was the deployment of MV-22 Ospreys from MCAS Futenma - an apparent attempt to justify stationing the unpopular aircraft with its record of numerous crashes on Okinawa.¹¹

JAPAN'S SDF EMPHASIZE FAMILY, COMMUNITY IN COMMERCIALS



The SDF web-exclusive commercial titled "Good Father" says, "There are children as young as my son affected, so I wanted to help. I'm not just in the SDF; I'm also a father" (2011).¹³⁸



In the nationally aired SDF commercial titled "Smiling Day," the narrator says, "The more smiles we encounter, the stronger we become" (2011).¹³⁹

From "Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa"

The CIA's claim that U.S. bases encourage cultural exchange seems to have been taken up

by military PR directors on social media such as Twitter and Facebook where the USMC frequently uploads posts promoting English conversation lessons on- and off-base taught by U.S. service members, sports events and other U.S. cultural outreach programs.¹² Such messaging frequently targets young Okinawans, a generation which the CIA speculates, is losing its pacifist attitude.

The clearest impact of the CIA's advice is in the briefings given to marines newly-arrived on the island. As reported by The Asia-Pacific Journal in July 2016, so-called Okinawa Cultural Awareness Training lectures contain numerous inaccuracies and denigrate Okinawans as having "double standards."¹³ The contents of these lectures from February 2014 include distinct phrases from the CIA manual, including descriptions of Okinawans' attitudes vis-a-vis victimization, discrimination, "Asia Crossroads" and the "Beautiful Island narrative."

The addition of these phrases in 2014 lectures seems almost certainly a direct result of the CIA manual published in 2012.

CIA and media monitoring

The Okinawa report is the latest in a long history of CIA investigations into foreign open source intelligence. Since the 1940s, the Agency has monitored overseas media and compiled its findings into reports for U.S. agencies such as the State Department and Department of Defense.

The CIA section initially tasked with this work was the FBIS which intercepted radio, news

wire and TV broadcasts to determine how overseas events might impact U.S. interests and how the U.S. might influence other nations.

During the Cold War, FBIS ran approximately 20 listening stations around the globe with the largest at Yomitan, opening in 1949. Staffed with American and third country nationals, the office compiled information on the Koreas, China, the Soviet Union and Japan. The majority of the land of the Yomitan FBIS was returned in 2006.¹⁴

In 2005, the CIA announced that the Open Source Centre (OSC) would take over the work of FBIS.¹⁵ The OSC's goals included the analysis of material and its wide dissemination throughout the U.S. government, stated the CIA at its inception. Approximately six years later, the CIA apparently launched its "Master Narratives" project with the goal of analyzing (1) the attitudes of foreign populations and (2) the ways in which these attitudes could be exploited by the U.S. government to manipulate public opinion. Classified *For Official Use Only*, only a handful of these reports have been released to the public, including ones about Afghanistan (January 2011), Al Qaeda (September 2011) and Syria (June 2012).¹⁶

Created during the brief period of rule by the Democratic Party of Japan, the publication of *Understanding Base Politics in Okinawa* suggests that the CIA perceived the administration as a possible threat to the U.S. military presence on Okinawa.

The CIA renamed the OSC the Open Source Enterprise in 2015 but its functions remain the same.¹⁷

Jon Mitchell is a British Journalist and correspondent for The Okinawa Times. He was awarded the Foreign Correspondents' Club of Japan Freedom of the Press Award for Lifetime Achievement for his reporting about human rights issues - including military contamination - on Okinawa. He is the author of *Tsuiseki: Okinawa no Karehazai* (Chasing Agent Orange on

Okinawa) (Koubunken 2014) and [Tsuiseki: Nichibei Chiikyoutei to Kichi Kougai](#) (U.S. Military Contamination in Japan) (Iwanami Shoten 2018). Mitchell is a visiting researcher at the International Peace Research Institute of Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo, and an Asia-Pacific Journal contributing editor.

Notes

¹ For example, see Gavan McCormack and Satoko Oka Norimatsu, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States*, Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

² Government of Japan, “U.S. military bases” ([Zainichi beigun isseitsu](#)), Ministry of Defense, January 1, 2018.

³ Okinawa Prefectural Government, [U.S. Military Base Issues in Okinawa](#), Washington DC Office.

⁴ Jon Mitchell, [U.S. Marine Corps Sexual Violence on Okinawa](#), Asia-Pacific Journal, February 1, 2018.

⁵ Jon Mitchell, Base on Okinawa used to monitor media throughout Asia, ([Asia zenikino houdou, Okinawa de bouju](#)), Okinawa Times, April 6, 2018.

⁶ For example, see: Bruce Klinger, [Top 10 Reasons Why the U.S. Marines on Okinawa Are Essential to Peace and Security in the Pacific](#), Heritage Foundation, June 14, 2011.

⁷ Jon Mitchell, Japan-U.S. Status of Forces Agreement and U.S. base contamination, ([Nichibei chiikyoutei to kichi kougai](#)), Iwanami Shoten, 2018.

⁸ Irvin Molotsky, [Admiral Has to Quit Over His Comments On Okinawa Rape](#), New York Times, November 18, 1995.

⁹ Justin McCurry, [US sacks diplomat over remarks about Okinawans](#), Guardian, March 10, 2011.

¹⁰ For example, see: Masami Ito, [Retired Hatoyama still on Futenma quest](#), Japan Times, January 1, 2013.

¹¹ For example, see the USFJ press release (May 17, 2015) on the Nepal earthquake [here](#) and a USMC press release (April 20, 2016) on the Kumamoto earthquake [here](#).

¹² The most illuminating Twitter feeds for the U.S. military in Japan are those run by [Kadena Air Base](#), [III Marine Expeditionary Force](#) and [U.S. Forces Japan](#).

¹³ Jon Mitchell, [Okinawa: U.S. Marines Corps training lectures denigrate local residents, hide military crimes](#), Asia-Pacific Journal, July 1, 2016.

¹⁴ Mitchell, April 6, 2018.

¹⁵ Central Intelligence Agency, [Establishment of the DNI Open Source Center](#), November 8, 2005.

¹⁶ One of the best resources for other OSC Master Narratives – including Afghanistan and Syria – is the website [Public Intelligence](#).

¹⁷ Steven Aftergood, [Open Source Center \(OSC\) Becomes Open Source Enterprise \(OSE\)](#), Federation of American Scientists, October 28, 2015.