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Nicholas Evan Sarantakes. *Keystone: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S. Japanese Relations*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2001. xxiii + 264 pp. \$34.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-89096-969-4.

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## Okinawa Prefecture under American Occupation

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### Okinawa Prefecture under American Occupation

Much has been written about the island of Okinawa, its strategic location, and the battle fought there from April to July 1945. This was the largest amphibious military campaign fought anywhere in the Pacific Theater during the Second World War, and the three-month campaign claimed 12,000 American and 100,000 Japanese lives.[1] With the defeat of Japan, Okinawa came under American control and became critical in U.S.-Japanese relations and remains so today even since its return to Japanese administration in 1972.[2] Okinawa has in many ways been and remains a keystone in the foreign policies of both the United States and Japan.

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, presently an assistant professor of history at Texas A&M University, received his doctorate in 1997 from the University of Southern California. *Keystone: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S. Japanese Relations* is a revision of Sarantakes's doctoral dissertation. Structurally his book has ten chapters, 15 illustrations, and three maps, and begins with a lengthy introduction in which Sarantakes describes the goal of his research—to trace the American occupation and rule of Okinawa over a 27-year period from the invasion on 1 April 1945 through 1972 when the United States returned the prefecture of Okinawa to Japanese administration. This is a study of American foreign policy and, as

the author states (p. xx), is not a comprehensive examination of American-Okinawan social interaction during the period of occupation and it is not a comprehensive analysis of Japanese foreign policy in terms of U.S.-Japanese relations or Japanese-Ryukyuan relations.

Perhaps surprisingly the history of the occupation of Okinawa has not been well studied. Fortunately, Sarantakes makes use of materials from a variety of resources, some only recently declassified and made available to the public. He has consulted a variety of primary sources from nineteen archives, among them four presidential libraries (Eisenhower, Johnson, Kennedy, and Truman), the National Security Archive at George Washington University, papers of notable individuals deposited at five universities (Arkansas, Georgia, Harvard, Princeton, Southern California, and Southwestern), the MacArthur Memorial, military archives such as the unit histories of the Twentieth Air Force at the Air Force Historical Research Agency, the National Archives and Records Administration, and the Hoover Institute. Sarantakes has also made use of thirty-seven oral histories, in the main of military personnel and U.S. government officials. In addition, 192 books (including numerous official records of the U.S. Civil Administration of the Ryukyu Islands, the U.S. Congress, and U.S. Department of State), 25 articles and book chapters, unpublished materials, the Haldeman Papers on CD-ROM, and a motion picture and a tele-

vision program are cited as references. The citations are through 1999 and include three very recent and related works—John Dower’s *Embracing Defeat: Japan in the Wake of World War II* (1999), Walter LaFeber’s *The Clash: U.S.-Japanese Relations throughout History* (1997), and Michael Schaller’s *Altered States: The United States and Japan since Occupation* (1997).[3] Watanabe Akio’s *The Okinawa Problem: A Chapter in Japan-U.S. Relations* (1970) is also mentioned (p. xvii, 200). Sarantakes points out that the best known book about this era is actually a novel, *The Teahouse of the August Moon* (1954) by John Patrick which has also been rendered into a motion picture and television production.

There are three themes in Sarantakes discourse (pp. xviii-xx): First, that Okinawa was a colony—“Americans used the term freely, although policymakers did so mainly in private—because U.S. military forces stationed on the island had a dual mission in the double-containment system.” During the war, American forces on Okinawa could check any Japanese advance on the Chinese mainland and, later, the proximity of the island to the Asian mainland made it ideal as a force against Communist China. In both cases air bases on the Ryukyus were essential for initial strikes and as staging areas for the rapid deployment of U.S. Marines. A second theme is that the colony existed and continued to exist despite the efforts of politicians in Japan, Okinawa, and the United States. Partisan politics with sharp and subtle distinctions in Japan and Okinawa, and bureaucratic confrontations, interservice rivalries, and civilian-military disputes in America shaped the official position of the U.S. government. The third theme is that the United States needed and obtained local consent (or acquiescence) to rule the colony and make it a base for military operations. Local labor and construction companies assisted in building the vast complex of military bases and as a result the island’s economy became one of the most prosperous in East Asia due to construction and businesses that serviced the needs of the American military.

Sarantakes begins his narrative (Chapter 1: “The Battle,”) with a review of the campaign for Okinawa and a discussion of the American ground forces offensive led by Lt. Gen. Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr., and notes the serious interservice rivalries between the U.S. Navy, Army, and Marine Corps. This is in contrast with the defensive posture of the Japanese 32nd Army under Lt. Gen. Ushijima Mitsuru that had constructed elaborate defensive fortifications on the southern part of the island. Plans were underway for the development of forward air

bases on Okinawa for Operation Olympic, the invasion of southern Japan, and the use of the island as a staging area for Tenth Army troops who would be a part of Operation Coronet.

The subsequent chapter, “Occupation in a Vacuum: 1945-47”, documents American uncertainty whether to keep or return the island to Japan. The strategic position of Okinawa in the western Pacific and Southeast Asia caused indecision on the part of President Truman in spite of Okinawans’ desire to remain as a prefecture of Japan. Overcrowding, food shortages and transportation problems, substandard housing, and the delicate questions about political, cultural, and economic issues are reviewed. Other exacerbating issues considered are prostitution, rape, venereal disease, minorities (black and Filipino troops), malaria, and typhoons.

In Chapter 3: “Debate, Decision and Diplomacy: 1947-51”, the policy debates in Washington between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the State Department about the fate of Okinawa are examined, and Truman’s continued indecision is documented. The retention of Okinawan military bases was seen as paramount and there was a need to both protect and monitor the Japanese because of threats from the Japanese Communist Party. The Japanese feared that Okinawa might become another Puerto Rico but settled for American forces being stationed in the Ryukyus to keep U.S. troops out of metropolitan Japan. Sarantakes presents a useful discussion of “trusteeship” versus “strategic trusteeship” and the concept of “restricted sovereignty” (e.g., with an Okinawa similar to the Panama Canal Zone where the United States administered the territory and the inhabitants retained their original citizenship).

Chapter 4: “The Making of An American Colony, 1950-56” focuses on events that led to the decision to keep Okinawa and the negotiations of the Japanese peace treaty that gave the island legal sanction—“residual sovereignty”—which would give Japan a basis for claims to the island in the future. Sarantakes evaluates the development of the island during the first half of the 1950s in Chapter 5: “The Difficult Years, 1956-60” and considers the crisis over the proper form of rent payments to Okinawan landlords, the replacement in 1957 of the military governorship with a high commissioner of the Ryukyu Islands, the appointment of Douglas MacArthur as ambassador to Tokyo in 1957, and the election of socialist Kaneshi Sarchi in January 1958. A controversial article, “The Outraged Okinawans,” in *Harpers* magazine was written by a former Marine officer, Barton Biggs, who

argued that Americans were alienating the Okinawans is examined, and the fear that the Ryukyus would come under Japanese control became a significant issue, and we are informed how MacArthur manipulated negotiations so that the Ryukyus were excluded from the Japanese defensive zone. By the time of President Eisenhower's visit on June 19, 1960, the southern half of the island of Okinawa was a single U.S. base.

With Chapter 6: "Reischauer vs. Caraway, 1961-64" we are informed about the troubles that confronted the U.S. in terms of the administration of Okinawa and the effect this had on U.S.-Japanese relations. "The Road to Reversion, 1964-67" is the title of Chapter 7. Sato Eisaku became the Prime Minister of Japan in 1964 and served until 1972. Okinawa was a paradox in Japan's foreign policy, and Sato became the first Prime Minister since Tojo Hideki to visit Okinawa, becoming an ardent advocate for reversion. Sarantakes reviews the reversion efforts, political instabilities and riots, the Reischauer versus Lt. Gen. Albert Watson II conflict, and Sato's visits to Washington. The island became a logistical center and supply base for the U.S. Army during the Vietnam War, but the Air Force made minimal use of the air bases due to local opposition on Okinawa. Subsequently, Albert Johnson became the new Ambassador and Sarantakes comments that he was more professional and efficient in comparison to Reischauer's tenure (p. 147). The issue of reversion is also discussed in detail, notably Okinawan newspapers favored a step-by-step reversion, while military opinions (particularly those of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) and the State Department were strained but coalesced around the views of Robert S. McNamara. By the mid-1960s the process of reunification of Okinawa with Japan was underway.

Chapter 8: "Reversion, 1967-69" is an assessment of the developments in Tokyo and in Okinawa that moved the United States and Japan closer to reversion. The background to the Nixon-Sato joint communique announcing the return of Okinawa to Japanese administration is reviewed. The development of the Nixon Doctrine (Japan would rearm and develop nuclear capabilities in exchange for Okinawan reversion) is assessed and the major role of Alexis Johnson and the lesser role of Henry Kissinger are detailed. In Chapter 9: "Aftermath", the author documents anti-American riots in Okinawa in December 1970, reviews American sources of opposition to U.S. policy (American veterans organization such as the VFW; the business community, particularly the Chamber of Commerce; and the U.S. Congress, notably Senators Hollings and Fulbright). In the latter instance, the issue

was the Congressional role in foreign policy formation (advice and consent).

Lastly, Sarantakes in Chapter 10: "Conclusion" considers the U.S. decision to retain bases on Okinawa against Communist (Soviet and Chinese) threats and a potential Japanese threat. However, the Americans soon realized that there was no Japanese military threat but that Japan was an ally of dubious dependability. Three themes are apparent during the U.S. occupation of Okinawa: 1) Okinawa was an American colony in all but name for military reasons. 2) Okinawa was a political issue in Japan but not in the United States except in the federal bureaucracy (the Pentagon and State Department). 3) Okinawans did a great deal to influence the course of events and grew stronger during the occupation—especially economically. The author asks the question: Was American rule good or bad? He notes that Okinawans have both grievances and gratitude toward the United States. Nonetheless, the American presence on Okinawa resulted in the United States realizing that prewar and postwar Japan were quite different, that the Japanese made more political concessions than the United States during the Cold War, and the Communist threat molded U.S. interactions with the Japanese during the postwar era.

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes has prepared a very well documented assessment of the Okinawa-United States-Japan foreign policies during the 27 years of American occupation. He shows how foreign policy disputes in the United States (the Pentagon, State Department, and Executive Office) and in Japan ultimately coalesced to create a conducive political atmosphere for reversion. Although there were groups in the United States, in Japan, and in Okinawa opposed to the ratification of the reversion process, clever politicians and diplomacy prevailed, and anti-American opposition in Okinawa was thwarted. This is an interesting episode in American foreign relations and Sarantakes has told it well. Subsequent assessments of American-Japanese foreign relations after 1972 may be found in a number of publications.[4]

A recent book, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa: Literature and Memory* by Michael S. Molasky (1999) considers the Japanese occupation literature. Okinawan authors provide a perspective on the occupation that differs from mainland Japanese experiences, in that American occupiers put a new face on an old problem—one that viewed American occupation as a continuation of prejudice and oppression. The current stance of Okinawa's Governor Inamine Keiichi, asking the United

States for a reduction in American military presence on Okinawa, is contrary to both American and Japanese policies. However, Inamine is motivated by a series of crimes committed by American servicemen, but his plea apparently falls on deaf ears as the new United States administration has pledged to make Japan (and Okinawa) a center of a new United States global security strategy.

#### Notes

[1]. Among the more recent books on the Okinawa campaign are those by Roy E. Appleman. *United States Army in World War II: War in the Pacific, Okinawa, the Last Battle*, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 2000; George Feifer, *The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, London Ticknor & Fields, 1994; Simon Foster, *Okinawa, 1945: Final Assault on the Empire*, London: Sterling, 1995; London: Cassell, 1999; and Robert Leckie, *Okinawa: The Last Battle of World War II*. New York: Viking, 1995). Hiromichi Yahara's, *The Battle for Okinawa*, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997, provides the Japanese perspective on the campaign.

[2]. *The Origins of the Bilateral Okinawa Problem: Okinawa in Postwar US-Japan Relations, 1945-1952* by Robert D. Eldridge, New York: Garland Publishing, 2000; Chalmers Johnson's *Okinawa: Cold War Island*, Tokyo: Japan Policy Research Institute, 1999; United States General Accounting Office, *Overseas Presence: Issues Involved in Reducing the Impact of the U.S. Military Presence on Okinawa*, Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1996; reprinted, Reginald L. Fun and

Carol L. Schuster, editors New York: Diane Publishing Co., 1999.

[3]. Dower's *Embracing Defeat* has been reviewed for H-NET: <http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews.showrev.cgi?~path=14641959882665>

[4]. Michael H. Armacost, *Friends or Rivals? The Insider's Account of U.S.-Japan Relations*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1996, reviewed for H-NET: <http://www.2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=10996868995747> Takeshi Matsuda, *Konomama de Yoinoka Nichibei Kankei [Are They Okay? : The Current Japan-U.S. Relations]*, Tokyo: Sogensha Press, 1997, reviewed for H-NET: <http://www.2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=25975888870842> Michael J. Green and Patrick M. Cronin, editors, *The U.S.-Japan Alliance: Past Present, and Future*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1999, reviewed for H-NET: <http://www.2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=25595979847625> and <http://www.2.h-net.msu.edu/reviews/showrev.cgi?~path=7561939941717>

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