

Book Review

Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Keystone: The American Occupation of Okinawa and U.S. Japanese Relations*. (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 264 pages.

LARRY VALERO

University of Salford
Salford, Greater Manchester, UK

The small, balmy, cyclone-prone island of Okinawa was at the crux of U.S. strategic interests in the Pacific for nearly three decades. Nicholas Evan Sarantakes tells the intriguing story of Okinawa and its role in American-Japanese relations during much of the Cold War. *Keystone* is the sixth installment in the important Foreign Relations and the Presidency series published by Texas A&M University Press.

Keystone is primarily a military-diplomatic history, but Sarantakes effectively weaves in the domestic political, cultural, and social dimensions of the American occupation of Okinawa after the Second World War. The most important of the Ryukyu Islands, Okinawa had been a possession of Japan until American forces successfully invaded the island in the spring of 1945. Sarantakes explains that the island soon became valued in Washington for its dual purpose of containing the potential for resurgent Japanese militarism and the growing tide of Communist expansion on the postwar Asian mainland.

The narrative begins with a vivid account of the bloody battle for Okinawa. A former West Point commandant, Lieutenant General Simon Bolivar Buckner, Jr. played a prominent role in the battle as the commander of the U.S. invasion force. American forces met no resistance during their amphibious landings, but encountered fierce Japanese opposition during their advance through the island's interior. Buckner pushed vigorously for the U.S. invasion of Okinawa and had concrete postwar plans for the island, but was killed in action during the waning stages of the battle. The future of Okinawa remained in political and bureaucratic limbo with Buckner's death.

As Sarantakes skillfully demonstrates, the ultimate status of Okinawa remained uncertain well after the war with the State Department and the Joint Chiefs of Staff taking opposite views on the issue. The military saw the island as an important strategic asset providing the Air Force and Army with a critical base to project power against China and the Soviet Union. Lingering doubts over Japan as an ally remained prevalent in military circles even after the signing of the Japanese peace treaty in 1951.

The State Department viewed the American occupation as the most serious challenge to the U.S.–Japan alliance. The U.S. military governed Okinawa under the fuzzy concept of “residual sovereignty” and in effect the island became an American colony. A series of American diplomats, including Ambassadors Douglas MacArthur II and Edwin Reischauer, came to see reversion to Japanese sovereignty as a necessary step to avoid an irreparable breach in diplomatic relations.

Lieutenant General Paul Caraway, the high commissioner of the Ryukyu Islands, vigorously opposed the views of Ambassador Reischauer. Caraway sought to protect the American military's position on Okinawa and its strategic claim over the western Pacific. He also believed the American occupation to be in the best interest of the Okinawans and the Japanese. In a high stakes bureaucratic struggle over policy, Caraway won out over his erstwhile opponent in Tokyo and as a result, little changed in terms of American governance over Okinawa.

The emergence of Japanese Prime Minister Sato Eisaku in 1964 brought Okinawa a major step closer to reversion. Sato was both a strong supporter and friend of the United States and a determined advocate of Okinawan reversion once in office. From the American perspective, an unwavering commitment to the U.S.–Japan alliance was a necessary precondition for the reversion of the Ryukyu Islands to Japanese sovereignty. Against the backdrop of the deepening war in Vietnam, Sato garnered widespread public support for reversion among his countrymen, while still promising a continuation of close security ties with the United States—a challenging political course in mid-1960s Japan. Sato was also a skilled diplomat and worked diligently with the Johnson and Nixon administrations to cement a final deal on Okinawa's fate.

On the American side, U. Alexis Johnson was the key State Department official who negotiated an agreement on the Ryukyu Islands, serving first as U.S. ambassador in Tokyo and later as undersecretary of state. Johnson and his Japanese colleagues sought a solution that preserved the security alliance, yet returned administrative rule to Japan. In the end, both sides got what they wanted despite considerable political opposition to the agreement in Japan and the United States. A timetable was finally set with reversion scheduled for 1972. Sarantakes argues persuasively that reversion came at just the right time, before permanent damage to U.S.–Japan relations had occurred.

Sarantakes provides a balanced account of events. His detailed treatment of Japanese and Okinawan domestic politics is one of the strongest aspects of the book. The domestic environment is a perspective often neglected in strategic histories of the Cold War. Meticulously researched and adeptly written, *Keystone* is a highly readable volume illuminating a little understood or appreciated aspect of contemporary international relations. It will surely appeal to both general readers and specialists of Asian-Pacific security affairs alike.