



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative

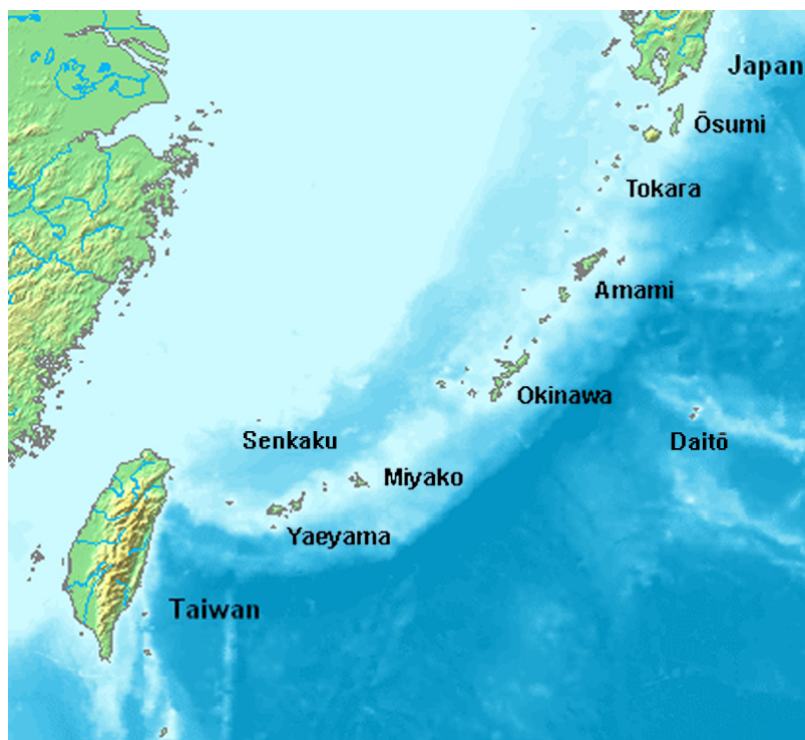
Frustration in Okinawa islands

What is the issue?

Frustration still lingers in Okinawa even after 50 years of its reversion to Japan from US rule.

What is Okinawa?

- Okinawa is an island group in Okinawa Prefecture of Japan.
- They are part of the larger Ryukyu Islands groups.
- A prefecture in Japan is similar to states in USA and Provinces in Canada.
- Japan is divided into 47 prefectures which rank immediately below the national government.



What is the history behind Okinawa islands?

- During WW2 - U.S. troops, in their push for mainland Japan, landed on Okinawa's main island on April 1, 1945.
- After an intense battle of 3 months Okinawa was sacrificed by Japan's imperial army to defend its mainland.
- The island group remained under U.S. occupation for 27 years until its return to Japan on May 15, 1972.

Why was Okinawa occupied?

- U.S. military considered Okinawa's strategically important to maintain its troop to deter Russia and communism in the region.
- So while ending the 7 year U.S. occupation in Japan USA separated Okinawa and several other south western remote islands from the rest of Japan under San Francisco treaty in 1952.
- U.S. military occupation of Okinawa helped Japan to address its worries about Russia and concentrate on the post-war economic surge lowering its defence spending.

How did this affect the Okinawans?

- Under U.S. military occupation local Okinawan government had little decision-making power.
- Demands for reversion to Japan rose in the late 1950s across Okinawa over the confiscation of local land for U.S. bases.
- Many Okinawans demanded tax reform, wage increases and better social welfare systems to correct disparities between Okinawa and the rest of Japan.
- But the delayed reversion, the heavy U.S. military presence and mismanaged development funds have hampered the island's economic, educational and social development.

What are Okinawa's main problems today?

- The island is not free of military bases.
- Under bilateral security pact majority of US Troops and military facilities in Japan are still stationed in Okinawa.
- Okinawa's average household income is the lowest and its unemployment is the highest of Japan's 47 prefectures.
- If land taken by the U.S. military is returned for other use, it would produce 3 times more income for Okinawa than the island now makes from bases.
- Because of the U.S. bases, Okinawa faces noise, pollution, aircraft accidents and crime related to American troops.
- The decision of central government of Japan to move Futenma air station within Okinawa instead of moving it elsewhere as demanded by many Okinawans.
- The construction of a new runway at Henoko Bay off Okinawa's eastern coast despite 72% opposition in Okinawa's 2019 referendum citing environmental destruction and soaring costs.
- Rapid deployment of Japanese missile defense and amphibious capabilities on Okinawa's outer islands, including Ishigaki, Miyako and Yonaguni, which are close to geopolitical hotspots like Taiwan.

What are the implications?

- All these has created resentment between Okinawa and the Japanese mainland.
- There are complaints of discrimination and claims that Okinawans are forced to serve an expendable role to protect mainland Japan.
- Some people have started calling for independence from Japan.

Reference

<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-why-frustration-lingers-in-okinawa-50-years-later-7918304/>



IAS PARLIAMENT

Information is Empowering

A Shankar IAS Academy Initiative