

PM: U.S. Bases in Asia: Yankee Go Home!

By Polly Mann

Of all the Twin Cities publications covering ethnic communities, the Korean Quarterly stands out. It is more a magazine than a newspaper in its content, colored illustrations, photographs and the use of many writers. In its Fall 2011 edition is a lengthy article, "Of Bases and Budgets," by Christine Ahn of the Korean Policy Institute and Hyun Lee of the National Campaign to End the Korean War (originally published by Foreign Policy in Focus. October 6, 2011. fpif.org) which provided much of the material for this column.

The article points out that for 66 years there have been U.S. troops in South Korea. That number today is 28,500. A recent sexual assault case involving a U.S. soldier has exacerbated the growing dissent over this occupation. It began in 1992 when a U.S. soldier, Kenneth Markle, brutally murdered 27-year old Keum E. Yoon. It wasn't the first such crime. According to the National Campaign for the Eradication of Crimes by U.S. troops in Korea, U.S. soldiers have committed tens of thousands of crimes against South Koreans since the beginning of the occupation in 1945. However, these soldiers are exempt from being charged under South Korean laws because of an agreement with the United States. They are turned over instead to the U.S. military which tries them.

Some years ago WAMM was host to several women from Okinawa where the same situation exists. In addition Okinawans were disturbed by the noise and the pollution from several U.S. air bases there and were attempting to have them removed. The people of Guam are likewise resisting the presence of U.S. military bases and especially a proposed plan to transfer 8,000 U.S. marines from Okinawa to Guam. The Pentagon received an unprecedented 10,000 comments of concern in 2009 about the planned Guam build-up.

Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma is working on legislation that would reduce overseas military personnel in Europe and Asia. He also recommends canceling the deployment to Guam from Okinawa of 8,600 U.S. Marines and their 9,000 dependents. The Sustainable Defense Task Force proposes to cut military forces in East Asia which would save billions in taxpayer dollars. Here, in Minnesota, we could initiate a campaign encouraging our U.S. representatives and senators to support these reductions.

Polly Mann is a co-founder of Women Against Military Madness and a regular contributor and columnist for the WAMM newsletter. She serves on the WAMM Newsletter Committee.