Volume 10 | Issue 54 | Number 53 | Article ID 4658 | Dec 31, 2012

Okinawan Appeal to US Senate

Asia-Pacific Journal Feature

Between 2012 and 2014 we posted a number of articles on contemporary affairs without giving them volume and issue numbers or dates. Often the date can be determined from internal evidence in the article, but sometimes not. We have decided retrospectively to list all of them as Volume 10, Issue 54 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

米国上院への沖縄の訴え

Though Okinawa has receded from national and global consciousness since 3:11, nothing of the "Okinawa problem" has been resolved. The governments of the US and Japan agreed in 2006, and then in 2009 and again in 2010, that Japan would construct a new comprehensive military facility (estimated cost ca. $10 billion) for the US Marine Corps in the pristine waters of Oura bay in northern Okinawa, and pay another $6 billion towards the construction of new facilities for the Corps in Guam, where 8,000 Marines and their dependents would move. But Okinawa, at every level including, from November 2010, the Governor, insists that no new base will be built on the island (video of recent protests).

When Defense Secretary Gates said recently that he wants these agreements moved forward during the spring of 2011, it was clear that the only way that could happen would be by Okinawa surrendering or its resistance being crushed.

Furthermore, both governments face acute financial problems, and Japan the additional burden stemming from the catastrophe that struck its entire Northeast region on 11 March.

The visit to Okinawa on 26-27 April by two key members of the US Senate, Karl Levin, chair of the senate Armed Services Committee and Jim Webb, chair of the Foreign Relations Sub-Committee on East Asia and the Pacific, was therefore highly significant. To mark the occasion, on 27 April the Okinawan daily, Ryukyu shimpo, took the must unusual step of publishing in English an editorial in the form of an "Open Letter" to Senator Levin. The original text in English and in Japanese.

Ryukyu Shimpo Editorial: Open letter dated April 27, 2011 to Mr. Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Dear Friends of the U.S. Congress,

We recommend that the United States Government implement a dramatic change in policy and remove the facilities at Futenma Air Station from Okinawa altogether. The people of Okinawa are both hopeful and anxious as they

https://doi.org/10.1017/S155746601201618X Published online by Cambridge University Press

wait to see how American democracy handles this test.

Do we want a situation in which every time the United States sneezes, Japan follows; in which if the United States orders Japan to turn to the right that is exactly what happens? Or do we want a situation in which both parties respect each others' opinions and do not hesitate to state their position on matters, however difficult that may be. Which kind of U.S.-Japan relations would you prefer?

Dear Mr. Carl Levin, Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and Mr. Jim Webb, Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on East Asia and Pacific Affairs, We appreciate that the two of you, both representatives of the U.S. Congress, are visiting Okinawa and hope that you have opportunities to engage in dialogue with many local people during your stay.

In the 66 years that have passed since the end of World War II, the United States has been a teacher of democracy for the people of Okinawa both through positive and negative examples. Throughout our long-standing relationship, the people of Okinawa have been sincere in raising the matter of how the United States and Japan should seek to create a genuine friendly relationship in which both countries respect human rights.

Ongoing humiliation - patience wears thin

April 28 is the date when the United States and Japan concluded both the San Francisco Peace Treaty and the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty in 1952. With this, Allied Occupation forces withdrew from Japan and Japan attained independence. The San Francisco Peace Treaty determined that Okinawa and Amami Oshima would be separated from the mainland islands of Japan and put under the control of the U.S. military.

After the war, Okinawa faced many trials and tribulations during the reign of the U.S. military government, which took control of Okinawan people's land at the point of a bayonet and used bulldozers to build military bases. They blatantly violated the basic human rights of the local people with outrageous behavior and placed limitations on Okinawa's autonomy.

The people of Okinawa see April 28 as a day of humiliation. Notwithstanding their normally placid temperament, their patience has been worn thin by ongoing humiliation at the hands of the U.S. military.

The problem is symbolized by the problems surrounding the return of the Futenma Air Station. In April 1996, the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed that the United States would return the land used by Futenma Air Station, which is located in a densely populated area, to Okinawa on the basis that the facilities would be moved to an alternative location within the prefecture. However, local Okinawans have consistently opposed the construction of such replacement facilities.

The Governor of Okinawa Hirokazu Nakaima and all the heads of the various municipalities of Okinawa are opposed to the agreement reached by the Japanese and U.S. governments

https://doi.org/10.1017/S155746601201618X Published online by Cambridge University Press

by which the U.S. military would relocate the Futenma Air Station facilities to a coastal area of Nago City. Okinawa's prefectural assembly passed a resolution calling for the Futenma Air Station to be relocated out of the prefecture or out of Japan altogether, and in the national election, all politicians who accepted the option of relocation of the air station within the prefecture lost their seats.

In an opinion poll carried out in Okinawa last May, following the U.S.-Japan agreement, 84% of respondents opposed the relocation of the facilities at Futenma to Nago City's Henoko district. When asked by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about his view of the Futenma issue, former Director of the Japanese Affairs Office in the U.S. State Department, Kevin Maher, commented that in the worst case scenario the U.S. should maintain the status quo, which would neither pose a problem for its military nor be detrimental to the interests of the United States.

This is an irresponsible stance. The U.S. government is a central player in this matter and should feel guilty for neglecting what is clearly a dangerous situation.

Okinawan people feel that they were sacrificed in the name of defense of the main islands of Japan during the Battle of Okinawa and that the same occurred after the war in the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. They also feel that an underlying structural discrimination exists towards them.

Although Okinawa only accounts for 0.4% of the land area of Japan, 74% of U.S. military facilities in Japan are located in Okinawa and 70% of U.S. military personnel in Japan are stationed in the prefecture.

U.S. military and the Self-Defense Forces carried out Operation Tomodachi following the Great East Japan Earthquake of March 11. The people of Japan are grateful for the efforts of the U.S. military in transporting relief aid, clearing rubble, and restoring Sendai Airport to a situation in which it could function again.

While we Japanese salute the dedication of U.S. military personnel, the excessive burden placed on Okinawa by the presence of U.S. bases and the ongoing unwelcome behavior of U.S. military personnel overshadows those positive feelings.

Even after Okinawa's reversion to Japanese administration in 1972, residents of Okinawa have continued to be on the receiving end of incidents, accidents and crimes involving U.S. military personnel.

Hazy ideal of the Obama Administration

Since the reversion, there have been about 500 accidents such as crashes and emergency landings involving U.S. military aircraft. Military personnel have committed over 5500 crimes, 560 of which involved acts of violence. It is likely that many female victims end up crying themselves to sleep without ever reporting what has happened to them, so the figures are potentially even higher than this.

The Okinawan people see the Japan-U.S.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S155746601201618X Published online by Cambridge University Press

Status-of-Forces Agreement, which grants a privileged status to the U.S. military forces in Japan, as an unequal treaty, and therefore seek fundamental revisions to this Agreement. This is the collective will of the Okinawan people.

Recently, a U.S. civilian employed by the military caused a fatal accident but was exempted from prosecution because the accident was judged to have occurred when he was “on duty.”

Such disregard for human lives and human rights by both the U.S. and Japanese governments based on the Japan-U.S. Status-of-Forces Agreement is unconscionable.

President Obama's coming into office gave the Okinawan people great hope that “change” would occur. They wondered how Okinawa would be affected by the transition from the unilateralism of the Republican Party to policies of international cooperation and by President Obama's advocacy of “a world without nuclear weapons.”

Among the ideals espoused by President Obama and in the new challenges that he took up, the people of Okinawa sensed that there may be benefits for mankind that involve sustainable development and transcend America's own national interests. However, it would seem that military logic has come to overshadow these ideals.

The sea off Henoko is precious in that it is the natural habitat of the dugong, which is a protected species. If the governments of the United States and Japan push through the construction of a new base, the U.S. military will not only find itself surrounded by hostility from the people of Okinawa and mainland Japan, but also from members of conservation movement groups all over the world. We consider that the closure and removal of the facilities at Futenma is necessary to rebuild good neighborly relations between the U.S. and Okinawa and we hope that you sense and accept the sincerity of the “spirit of Okinawa.”

To respect the will of the people of Okinawa, please show us the true worth of American democracy and demonstrate to us the determination to make major changes to the Agreement between U.S. and Japan as it pertains to Futenma.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S155746601201618X Published online by Cambridge University Press