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Another Appeal from Okinawa

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.

沖縄よりもう一つの訴え

Okinawan calls that the dangerous Futenma Air Station be closed and no new bases be built in the prefecture continue. On April 27, the Ryukyu Shimpo *newspaper addressed an open letter in English to Carl Levin, Chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee stating* "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." *The plan to build a new base in the environmentally sensitive Henoko has sparked outrage and the opposition of 84% of Okinawans according to recent polls.* The Okinawa Times*, highlighting pollution, accidents, and crimes, echoes the* Ryukyu Shimpo*'s call that the controversial US-Japanese plan be reconsidered.*

Okinawa Says No: Futenma reversion demanded, without relocation on the island

Okinawa Times

April 27, 2011

Takayuki Maeda, Political Correspondent

Several VIPs from the Japanese and US sides are scheduled to visit Okinawa over the coming 2 weeks: as a beginning, Sen. Carl Levin, who chairs the Armed Services Committee, arrived here in Okinawa yesterday. It's been 15 years since Japan and the US agreed to return Futenma Air Station and 5 years since the Roadmap for Realignment Implementation, so it may be a good chance to provide an overview of so-called "Kichi Mondai (base problems)" in Okinawa.

Overcrowded with US Bases

After the battle of Okinawa in 1945, US forces secured many military bases: these were not limited to the former Imperial Japanese facilities like Kadena Air Base but included other occupied civil land such as Futenma Air Station.

In 1950, GHQ began building "permanent" military bases in Okinawa. After the ordnance on land acquisition procedures in the Ryukyu Islands was issued in 1953, many areas were taken over often by armed soldiers: Iejima island (1953), Isahama of Ginowan Village (1955) and so forth. Such seizures were often

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done with “bayonets and bulldozers.” Thus the US bases in Okinawa grew much larger. In 1972, when the Okinawa islands were returned to Japanese sovereignty, US bases occupied 70,828 acres (28,661 ha) or 23% of Okinawa Honto island.

After reversion, US base area has decreased, but little by little. There still remains 57,563 acres (23,293 ha) of bases or 20% of the Okinawa Honto in 2009. The rate of reduction is less than 20% in 37 years.

According to the Okinawa Prefectural Government, the Prefecture hosts one fourth of all US bases in Japan in number, or 23% measured by land area. Focusing on the facilities exclusively used by US forces, the rate rises to 74%. Okinawa Prefecture has only 0.6% of the total Japanese land, and the Okinawa main island (Honto), where nearly all of the US bases are located, merely 0.3%. The root of the Okinawa base issue rests in the fact that such a large portion of US military bases is unfairly distributed to this tiny island.

Accidents and Crimes by personnel

Nearly 90% of the Okinawan population lives in Honto island, thus the population density of the island almost equals that of Fukuoka Prefecture (1,018 people per square kilometer), the 7th most densely populated prefecture in Japan (This means that Honto is three times more crowded than Guam). The fact that many military bases reside in this small and highly populated island could explain why there are so many accidents and crimes committed by US personnel against local residents, and that is another reason for friction.

According to the Okinawa Prefectural Government, 59 accidents related to the US bases occurred in 2009, which included forced landings of military aircraft, environmental pollution caused by waste oil leakage, and forest fires. On average, 75 cases occur annually. This excludes traffic accidents and crimes caused by US personnel: there were 50 other criminal cases in addition to 179 traffic accidents (in 2000). These amounted to approximately 1-2% of all accidents and crimes committed on Okinawan soil respectively, the percentage of which seems to have slightly risen in the last 10 years.

Two of the most shocking cases were the rape case by 2 Marines and 1 Sailor against a schoolgirl in September 1995 and the helicopter crash accident in August 2004 at Okinawa International University, Ginowan City. In the former case, the organizer announced that more than 80,000 islanders gathered to protest this shameful crime, while the latter case, though there were no casualties, made all Japanese people recognize the danger posed by Futenma Air Station located in the very center of the city. Moreover, many came to view the Status of Forces Agreement as unfair, as it gives the US Forces the right to refuse to hand over suspects to Japanese authorities and to refuse on-the-spot inspections.

Futenma Relocation and Guam

The rape case of 1995 gathered significant attention nationwide, and the Okinawa Prefectural Government for the first time decided to demand that the Japanese and US Governments remove the danger of Futenma by

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returning it. The then Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and US Ambassador to Japan Walter Mondale jointly announced in April 1996 the complete reversion of Futenma, but with the condition of relocating heliports inside the Prefecture. In December the same year, the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee (2+2) adopted the report of the Special Actions Committee on Okinawa (SACO), which formalized the reversion of the Northern Training Area and other facilities in addition to Futenma.

But it was very difficult to set the location and form of relocation of facilities while listening to various groups' different interests. Then, in May 2006, both Governments agreed on the Roadmap for Realignment Implementation. The Roadmap includes the reversion of Futenma and 5 other facilities south of Kadena Air Base after the completion of the Futenma Relocation Facility (FRF) in Henoko, Nago City, and moving some 8,000 Marines to Guam. Removing the dangers of Futenma was thus overwritten as realigning US forces Japan, and the Futenma issue and Guam realignment finally came to be a "package".

The situation changed in 2009 when the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) came to power. DPJ insisted during the general election in August that Futenma be moved at least outside of Okinawa, so the people of Okinawa expected they would no longer see the dangers of Futenma or FRF in the prefecture, with the leadership of the new Government. But the Government, on the contrary, agreed again with the US that FRF be constructed in Henoko. The Okinawans furiously refused to accept it. In November the same year, the incumbent Governor Hirokazu Nakaima was reelected saying it was impossible to introduce FRF anywhere in Okinawa. As a result, there came to be practically no room for the relocation to take place. Mr. Nakaima is now demanding the Governments make sure that Futenma be removed from Okinawa and the footprint of US forces be reduced, meaning Futenma and other facilities' reversion and Guam relocation should be done without regard to the FRF agreement. (Translation slightly revised)

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on the Okinawa base issue:

Norimatsu Satoko, Hatoyama's Confession: The Myth of Deterrence and the Failure to Move a Marine Base Outside Okinawa

Gavan McCormack, Norimatsu Satoko and Mark Selden, New Year 2011, Okinawa and the Future of East Asia

Terashima Jitsuro, The US-Japan Alliance Must Evolve: The Futenma Flip-Flop, the Hatoyama Failure, and the Future

Norimatsu Satoko and Ryukyu Asahi Broadcasting, Assault on the Sea: A 50-Year U.S. Plan to Build a Military Port on Oura Bay, Okinawa

Gavan McCormack, Ampo's Troubled 50th: Hatoyama's Abortive Rebellion, Okinawa's Mounting Resistance and the US-Japan Relationship (Part 2, Part 3)

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