The Asia-Pacific Journal | Japan Focus
Volume 10 | Issue 54 | Number 178 | Article ID 4793 | Dec 31, 2012

Three Messages from Okinawa 沖縄から三通のメッセージ

C. Douglas Lummis

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 12 Number 30 with a date of 2012 with the understanding that all were published between 2012 and 2014.

C. Douglas Lummis

This might be one for the Guiness Book. On April 19, 2014, a ceremony was held at the fishing village of Henoko, in Nago City, Okinawa, marking the tenth anniversary of the continuous sit-in by residents and supporters opposing the construction of a new U.S. Marine Corps Airbase there. Actually it's seventeen years since the U.S. and Japanese governments announced that the USMC Airbase at Futenma, in crowded Ginowan City, would be closed, or rather packed up and moved to this new base at Henoko, as soon as it is built. Seventeen years and, far from being built, construction has not begun and isn't likely to in the foreseeable future.

It is not surprising that the people of Nago oppose the plan. What is remarkable is that the people of Ginowan, who stand to benefit by the removal of the base, support the Nago residents in their opposition. In fact, the great majority of all Okinawans oppose the plan. And the more the U.S. and Japanese Governments ignore their opposition, the angrier they get.

In 2010 the conservative Prefectural Governor, who had been supporting the base project with certain conditions, was advised that he could not win reelection unless he changed his position. He chose the slogan "outside the Prefecture" (県外移設) which, in the Okinawan vernacular, means "to mainland Japan", and won the election. What is interesting about this slogan is that it dares to demand that the mainland Japanese take responsibility for their overwhelming support (81%) for the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty, under whose authority the bases are located in Japan (mostly Okinawa). For three years the Governor made a show of resisting the construction, but in December of 2013 he suddenly changed his position, thus putting an end to his career as an influential political figure. Opposition leadership has returned to the grass roots.

The three messages appearing below were written just before U.S. President Barack Obama's arrival in Tokyo for talks with Prime Minister Abe Shinzo. Two of them are addressed to Obama; the third is not, but probably its authors had his visit in mind. At the Abe-Obama press conference in Tokyo on 24 April, Abe reaffirmed his "strong will" to push through the Henoko construction plan. That is, he reaffirmed his utter lack of understanding of the Okinawa situation. The U.S. and Japanese governments are so accustomed to getting their way in Okinawa that they have been unable to grasp that this

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466012016749 Published online by Cambridge University Press

time it won't happen. The Henoko base plan has made no headway for seventeen years, and it is not going to make any headway this year or next. It is remarkable how much power can be generated by a small number of people when they become adamant. Like a famous American author once wrote, it takes a village.

Mr. President: Do not smother democracy in Okinawa!

April 23, 2014

Ryukyu Shinpo

President Obama, we extend a hearty welcome to you. We welcome your visit to Japan and place our highest hopes in the outcome of the meeting between you and Prime Minister Shinzo Abe.

You are scheduled to meet with Prime Minister Abe to announce a Japan-US joint statement on the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement (TPP) and on the deepening of the Japan-US alliance.

However, we think priority on your agenda for that meeting should be given to the closure and removal of the U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. At this very moment, the residents in the urban areas around the Futenma base are exposed to noise and risk of accidents involving U.S. aircraft. We strongly believe that the United States should return the Futenma base unconditionally in order to provide a dramatic solution to the Okinawa problem. At the same time, the two governments should address Japan-U.S. relations so that they are placed on a sustainable footing and in such a way that the people can repose their trust in them.

Pride In and Love for One's Home

In January this year, the celebrated American linguist Noam Chomsky and other intellectuals from the United States and Europe criticized the building of a new base in Henoko as part of a deal to deepen and widen the military colonization of Okinawa.

Those people were demanding the unconditional return of the Futenma base. Their statement pointed out that Okinawans have suffered what the U.S. Declaration of Independence denounced as "abuses and usurpations."

They have voiced support for the Okinawan people's struggle for peace, dignity, human rights and the protection of their environment.

If you are familiar with the ideals expressed in the founding of the United States, you are able to understand the seriousness of their statement opposing the Henoko relocation plan by their citing of the Declaration of Independence. Okinawa Governor Hirokazu Nakaima accepted facility relocation to Henoko at the end of last year, but most of our residents are demanding the closure and removal of Futenma regardless of ideological inclinations. That solidarity among Okinawan people is not based on any particular ideology. The people generated that solidarity from universal values such as love of freedom and democracy, i.e. the most basic of human rights. That solidarity also derives from "love for one's home," to preserve both the invaluable natural environment and its integrity from any further damage.

Mr. President, it couldn't be the case that you dismiss democracy in Okinawa, could it? Eighteen years have passed since the Japanese and U.S. governments agreed on the return of the entirety of the Futenma base, but on condition that they would relocate its facilities within Okinawa. However, in the meantime,

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according to public opinion surveys within the entire prefecture, the number of the people who favor the Henoko relocation plan has never accounted for a majority of the adult Okinawan population. In January last year, our representatives, including members of the Prefectural Assembly, mayors and chairmen of all 41 municipalities within the prefecture and others requested Prime Minister Abe to abandon the Futenma relocation plan to somewhere within the prefecture, and to close and remove the base entirely. They have also sought to reverse the deployment here of the U.S. Marines MV-22 Osprey transport aircraft.

Mr. President, you would not enforce such a plan, even if it were national policy, opposed by the majority of the population and the leaders of all local governments, in your own country.

The United States Continues to Violate Human Rights

During the Battle of Okinawa, the U.S. armed forces built the Futenma base on land that the U.S. military occupied in order to prepare for their attack on mainland Japan. They acquired Okinawan land with no consent from its owners. For that reason, the existence of the base violates the Convention on the Laws and Customs of Land Warfare. That convention forbids the seizure of property in wartime. Therefore, we think that that also violates Okinawan human rights.

Along the margins of the Futenma base, the U.S. military neglects to designate any clear zones, or buffer areas, on both sides of the runway, which it is duty-bound to do under the Civil Aeronautics Act for the safety of neighboring residents. It is a serious human rights problem that such a situation has persisted for such a long period, and further. Furthermore, the deployment of the Osprey to Okinawa and the noise pollution caused by it and other military aircraft trouble the people of Okinawa.

Okinawan people see both the possible permanence of the Futenma base and the proposed relocation of the base to Henoko as continuing human rights violations.

Article 1 of the International Covenants on Human Rights which were agreed in 1966, states, "All peoples have the right of self-determination." We clearly understand that Okinawan people have a right to determine for themselves things that have such important impacts on them.

In 2009, the Okinawa Regional System Conference suggested that the Japanese government should designate Okinawa as a special region. According to that suggestion, people who possess sovereignty own the right to establish a new government that works on their behalf, and to set up regional governments.

Having experienced the hideousness of land war and suffering rule imposed by the U.S. military, many Okinawan people have been demanding the recovery and restoration of self-determination.

Dear Mr. President, we would not like you to make the mistake of strangling democracy in both Japan and the United States by forcing through the Henoko relocation proposal and thereby violating the dignity of the Okinawan people.

(English translation by T&CT)

Henoko April 19 Declaration

Today we commemorate 10 years of sit-in to block the drilling survey [of the designated Marine base site at Henoko, Northern

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Okinawa]. It is now actually 17 years since local residents rose up in protest against the bases, and it is more than 16 years since Nago citizens in a city plebiscite showed their intention by voting "No to any new base."

We remember as if it were yesterday how on this day 10 years ago local residents, Nago citizens and other Okinawans after an overnight vigil gathered in the pre-dawn darkness and repulsed the trucks and workers that had come to enforce the drilling. Through the fierce, year long marine resistance struggle that began that day and was carried out on the sea-front and on canoes and small boats and on the construction towers erected in the sea, we endured blazing summer heat and biting cold wind and the violence inflicted on us by government-employed workers and we succeeded in having the plan to reclaim the coral reef scrapped. We believe that victory was due not just to local residents and Nago citizens but to the circle of support by people beyond Okinawa and extending world-wide.

Despite this, the two governments, Japan and the United States, remained determined to construct a new Henoko base, come what may. They persuaded the then Nago City mayor and the Okinawan Governor to accept a new "V"-shaped design, and pressed ahead with an illegal environmental impact study and other procedures, even dispatching the Maritime Self-Defense Forces to support the survey. In response, Nago citizens in 2010 gave birth to a new city administration led by Mayor Inamine Susumu and pledged to prevent any base construction on land on sea. That momentum then carried over into the "all-Okinawa" opposition to "any base transfer within the prefecture." Even Governor Nakaima Hirokazu, who till then had been in favour of conditional acceptance of the base, switched his stance to "move Futenma Base outside Okinawa." However, at the end of last year [2013], surrendering to threats and financial inducements of the new LDP government under Prime Minister Abe Shinzo, one that drips with discrimination against Okinawa, he trampled on the will of the people and licensed the reclamation.

The situation we now face is certainly no less severe, and may indeed be even more severe, than what we faced 10 years ago. In January of this year [2014] we made clear the will of the people by re-electing Inamine Susumu as mayor, by a large margin. Yet just two days after that election, the Abe government, as if to show its contempt, began steps towards base construction, mobilizing all its forces, including [consideration of] a special criminal law and a special measures law and mobilizing police and coastguard, to suppress the resistance of the Okinawan people including Nago citizens.

And yet, despite all the pressures and assaults the two governments have visited upon us over these ten, or rather these 17, years, we have not surrendered. For the sake of our children and grandchildren we have stood firm on an anti-base principle and it is a matter for our pride, and a mark of our solidarity, that we have prevented the driving of even one single construction peg into the beautiful seas that stretch out here before us. We now possess a mayor of steadfast conviction who protects the "safety and security" of citizens and we enjoy the strong support of distinguished figures and intellectuals from around the world. We are building an even stronger movement than before.

We call for the withdrawal of the reclamation license issued by Governor Nakaima, for the abandonment by the governments of Japan and

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466012016749 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the United States of the plan to construct a new base at Henoko, and for the closure and dismantling of the Futenma base. We declare anew our resolve to pass on to our children and grandchildren these beautiful, bio-diverse seas, home to the dugong.

Participants at the gathering to commemorate the 10 year-long sit-in to oppose the survey drilling [of Oura Bay], (representative: Urashima Etsuko)

Henoko Beach, Nago City, Okinawa,

April 19. 2014. Translated by Gavan McCormack

Letter to Hon. Barack Obama, President of the United States

Dear Mr. President,

We welcome your visit to Japan.

And we wish to take this opportunity to tell you about the U.S. Marine Corps Air Facility at Futenma, in Okinawa. In 1945, during the Battle of Okinawa, the people of Futenma, to escape the conflagration, had to leave their beloved village and become refugees. When they returned after the battle was over they found their houses gone and their fields destroyed by bulldozers. The tombs of their ancestors, which stand at the center of the Okinawan faith, were also destroyed. Their home village had become an American airbase.

Even though that was in time of war, the construction of the U.S. military base at Futenma was in violation of international law. And so we believe it is the responsibility and the duty of the American Government to end this continuing illegal situation by immediately returning the village to the people.

And for these reasons, we believe that America does not have the qualification to demand an alternative site for this base.

All the more, as the Okinawan people have never once in their history agreed to accept U.S. military bases on their land.

In the Nago City mayoral election in January this year, the citizens made clear their refusal to accept a new base at Henoko, in that City.

And as both opinion polls and election after election have shown, Okinawans are overwhelmingly opposed to this new base construction.

Dear Mr. President,

We fervently hope that you will carry out your duty and responsibility concerning the above matter, and protect America’s dignity and pride.

Sincerely,

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The more than 200 participants

And the 52 sponsors

Of the April 22 Nodake Sound Picnic

(Futenma, Ginowan City)

C. Douglas Lummis *is a Lecturer at Okinawa International University. He had promised himself to write no more about the Japanese Constitution, but when he read the newest LDP amendment proposal, broke that promise. This essay is abbreviated and somewhat rewritten from the new afterword to his Kenpo wa Seifu ni taisuru Meirei de Aru (Heibonsha) which was reissued this year (original 2006).*

Asia-Pacific Journal articles on related themes include:

John Mitchell, Military Contamination on Okinawa: PCBs and Agent Orange at Kadena Air Base

Michael Penn,"Two Elections and Japan's Most Unwanted Base" and "A Democratic Victory in Nago, Okinawa"

Gavan McCormack, The Front Line in the Struggle for Democracy in Japan – Nago City, Okinawa

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