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Exploring Solutions to the U.S. Military-Base Issues in Okinawa

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Abstract

The issue of the U.S. military bases in Okinawa has been a pawn in relations between the U.S. and Japan. Both sides seem to have been reluctant to find a real solution to the issue. This is because the solution would inevitably result in a reduced force presence in Okinawa and open a discussion on Japan's security weaknesses. It would raise questions such as: Should Japan revise article nine of its constitution? Should Japan have nuclear weapons? These are heavy topics for post-war Japan and no one seems keen to break the seal on these issues. The issue over the bases had therefore hardly been discussed until former Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama raised the issue. However, his failure to relocate the Futenma marine base led directly to his resignation. This report tries to change the view of Okinawa bases as a diplomatic "pawn" and instead to use them as a practical tool to open a new horizon in U.S.-Japan relations. This author proposes a solution that changes the terms of the debate into a win-win situation for both the Japanese government and Okinawa.

Opening Pandora's Box

It was extraordinary that Japanese Prime Minister Yukio Hatayama risked the fate of his administration and relations with the United States merely over the location of a U.S. Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS).

Tokyo has spent 16 years attempting to relocate MCAS Futenma, whose aircraft are primarily transport helicopters. The interests of Japanese bureaucrats, who persistently seek to retain the status quo, have often coincided with those of the U.S. Marine Corps, which is loath to relinquish its oversea bases. They have probably found it in their best interests to keep the issue unresolved as by default this maintains the status quo.

The most conspicuous effort to maintain the current situation is the deliberate and exaggerated claim about the geographical superiority of Okinawa. Japan's Ministry of Defense explains in its annual White Paper[1] that the concentration of U.S. bases in Okinawa is attributed to its proximity to Asian areas compared with the mainland U.S. and Hawaii.

The Marines make up the largest number of the U.S. forces stationed in Okinawa, accounting for 61 percent of the total manpower of U.S. forces there, and representing 75 percent[2] of

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[1] When a twelve-year-old school girl was raped by three U.S. Marines in 1995, the Japanese government was forced to explain why Okinawa had to carry such a burden. A 1996 version of the Defense White Paper stated that the geographical advantages of Okinawa justified the disproportionate allocation of U.S. military bases there.

[2] "Okinawa Beigun Kichi No Genjou [The US military bases in Okinawa]," http://www.pref.okinawa.jp/kititaisaku/

the total area of U.S. military bases and facilities in the prefecture. They are mobile forces, fully capable of operating elsewhere; their operational flexibility is exemplified by the fact that their naval vessels for transporting personnel, equipment and relief supplies are stationed in Sasebo Port[3] in Nagasaki Prefecture, not in Okinawa. For example, if a crisis occurs on the Korean peninsula, those vessels have to head southward to pick up service personnel and supplies in Okinawa before sailing northward again.

The U.S. Marine Corps is not a weak organization whose unit operations would collapse if they were not stationed in Okinawa. The Marines in Okinawa make expeditions in vessels deployed from Sasebo to the Philippines, Australia, Thailand, and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific region for military exchanges, providing humanitarian assistant, rescue/disaster-relief operations and more. The vessels are always raising their anchors and crisscrossing the Pacific Ocean.

In other words, they hardly ever stay in Okinawa. The Japanese government does not explain this fact to its people. For some reason the mainstream media does not report it. When Prime Minister Hatoyama tried to find a relocation site for Futenma on mainland Japan, most of the mainstream media expressed fear of declining confidence in the U.S.-Japan relationship without reviewing the possibility and rationale of Hatoyama's policy.

Most Tokyo-based newspapers urged the government to lighten the burden on Okinawa, to protect the U.S.-Japan security relationship and to maintain the U.S. presence in Japan for deterrence. Since the government and mainstream media have insisted time and again that the bases in Okinawa are important and its geographical superiority is an irreplaceable asset for the Japan-U.S. alliance, it seems too late to reverse course.

At the risk of opening Pandora's box, it is imperative to find a way to enable the Marines to relinquish Okinawa without compromising the Japan-U.S. alliance, in a manner that will benefit the Marines. The issue could be solved immediately if mainland Japan, not only Okinawa, decided to accept the Marines. However, it is too late now to build a new U.S. military base on mainland Japan. It is necessary to set conditions favorable for the Marines in exchange for them leaving Okinawa.

Although I am not a strategic or military analyst, I propose a set of recommendations based on years of experience in observing the Marines in Okinawa.

There Is a Solution

I believe that these proposals will drastically reduce the burden of the U.S. military presence on the people of Okinawa and also help strengthen the Japan-U.S. alliance.

Firstly, the routine functions and operations of the Marines in Okinawa should be clarified.[4]

(1) The Marines stationed in Okinawa travel to allied countries in the Asia-Pacific region to enhance military exchanges through joint military exercises. In recent years, they have also

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D-mokuji.html (Okinawa Prefectural government official website).

[3] Located on the west coast of northern Kyushu, 490 miles or 790 km from Okinawa.

[4] Based on interviews with US military officials in July-December 2007, in Hawaii.

focused their efforts on civil affairs operations, such as repairing schools and roads or setting up field hospitals to provide medical care for locals in less affluent villages in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. They also provide emergency rescue operations for large-scale natural disasters, such as major earthquakes and tsunamis.

(2) To provide a future U.S. presence in the Pacific region, the U.S. Marine Corps is set to network joint training centers in Australia, the Philippines, Thailand and South Korea, centering on Guam.

(3) Ground combat units are dispatched to Okinawa from the U.S. for a six-month mission. After receiving approximately two and a half months of initial training they go on expeditions by amphibious warfare ships deployed from Sasebo. They visit allied countries to engage in planned military exercises and civil affairs operations. When they return to Okinawa, their six-month mission is complete and they are replaced by the next units.

To continue these missions, the Marines do not have to stay in Okinawa. Those on a six-month rotation may be dispatched to Guam, not Okinawa, and achieve their missions by traveling to allied regions from Guam and carrying out their other duties from there. If they need to conduct joint military exercises with Japan's Self-Defense Forces, they can do so in larger areas, such as Hijudai in Oita Prefecture, the Fuji Maneuver Area in Yamanashi and Shizuoka, Ohjojihara in Miyagi and Yausubetsu in Hokkaido.

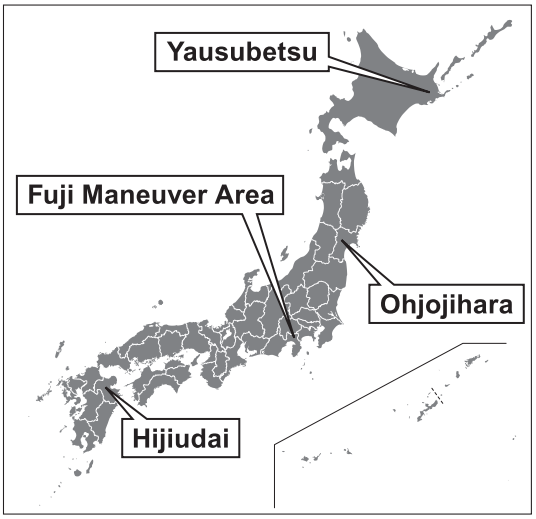

Figure 1:
Source: Based on data from Japanese Ministry of Defense's official home page, created by the author.

The September 2011 issue of *Foreign Affairs* ran an article entitled "Tokyo's Transformation" by political scientists Eric Heginbotham, Ely Ratner, and Richard J. Samuels. They theorized that the particular location of the Marines is "less critical, as long as training facilities and infrastructure are adequate."

All they have to do is change the rotations. Since this means that the U.S. Marine Corps will lose Okinawa, there will be certain damage to their prestige. But if it is possible to offset their losses, negotiations can be brought to a successful conclusion.

The crux of my recommendations is to set conditions acceptable to the Marines. These conditions would include the provision of high speed vessels (HSV); the continuation of Japan's financial support for U.S. forces that transfer from Okinawa to new areas; and the participation of Japan's Self-Defense Forces in civil affairs operations and humanitarian operations by forming a "Joint Expeditionary Unit" with Pacific Marines. This will become a great opportunity to demonstrate a new form of the Japan-U.S. alliance in the Asia-Pacific region.

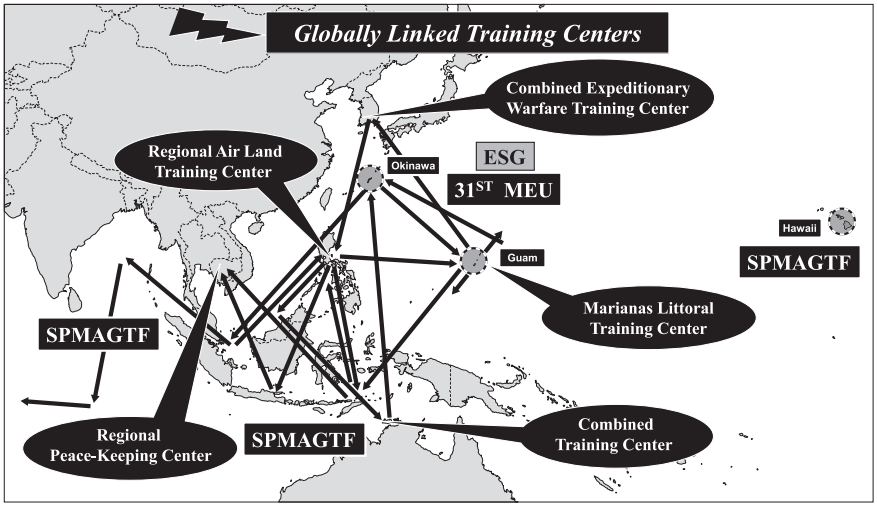

Figure 2: Future USMC Pacific Presence
Source: U.S. Pacific Command official website, 2007.

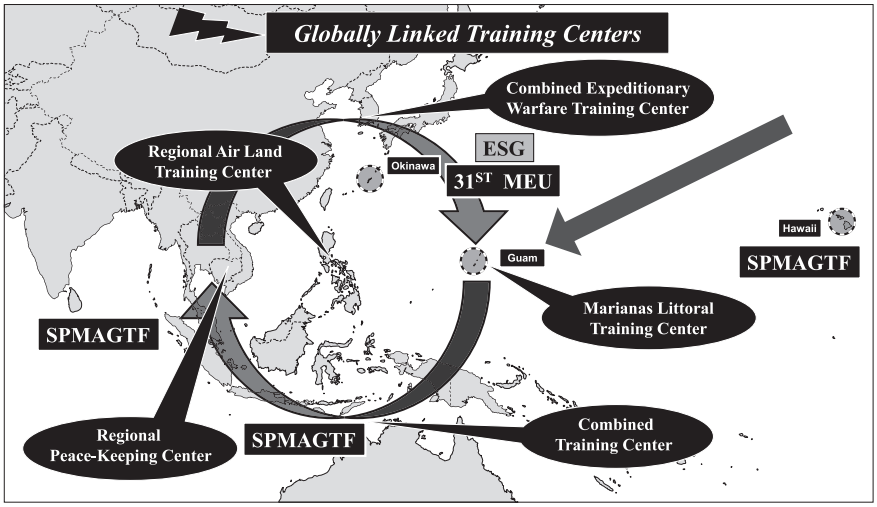

Figure 3: The figure is modified by the author to show that the Marines can be deployed in the Asia-Pacific region without permanent bases in Okinawa.
Note to Figures 2 and 3: MEU is Marine Expeditionary Unit. SPMAGTF is Special Marine Air Ground Task Force.

In recent years, Asia has seen increasing natural disasters such as earthquakes and tsunamis. If Japan and the U.S. can together establish a multinational platform for addressing global challenges, such as disaster-relief operations, it will help deepen the Japan-U.S. alliance, which both countries have been striving for. Dedication to international contributions to help stabilize people's lives will also enable Japan to actively publicize the significance of its alliance with the U.S. without revising Article 9 of its war-renouncing constitution. Furthermore, China could be invited into the network, which has the potential to improve the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region considerably.

We should substantially reduce the burden of the U.S. military presence on local communities in Okinawa. We should also envision a new form of the Japan-U.S. alliance in the Asia-Pacific region and seek to establish a network for civil affairs operations. This is perhaps only a layman's way of thinking, but the Okinawa military-base issue will go nowhere without innovative ideas.

It would be unfortunate if the Marines were to stay in Okinawa and remain a source of friction with locals and remain as a bone of contention in the U.S.-Japan relationship. Above all, it is unfortunate that the Japanese and U.S. governments have been unable to solve the issue for decades, and it is unfair to the long-suffering people of Okinawa.

Issues involved with military bases cannot be left unattended any longer. The aim of this paper is to propose solutions to these issues and to highlight reasons why they need to be addressed.

Background to the Stationing of the U.S. Marine Corps in Okinawa

As mentioned above, 74 percent of all U.S. military facilities in Japan are located in Okinawa, and 75 percent of those facilities in Okinawa are used by the Marines. Since more than 60 percent of U.S. service personnel stationed in Okinawa are Marines, many of the U.S. military-base issues in Okinawa, including incidents and accidents involving service personnel, stem from the stationing of the Marines there.

Many people believe that the U.S. Marines have been continuously stationed in Okinawa since the end of the Second World War. However, this is not true. They returned home after the Battle of Okinawa. It was mainly the U.S. Army and U.S. Air Force that originally constructed military bases in Okinawa.

When the Korean War broke out, U.S. forces were dispatched to the Korean peninsula. In 1953, Marines landed on Japanese soil once again to provide strategic support to forces deployed on the Korean peninsula. They were stationed at Camp Gifu in Gifu Prefecture and at the East Fuji Maneuver Area in Yamanashi Prefecture.

In those days, Japan witnessed protests across the nation against a plan to expand U.S. military bases. The U.S. forces, which had decided to use Japanese shells in the Korean War, planned to build a firing range in Ishikawa Prefecture's Uchinada region (1952 – 1953) and on Mt. Asama in Nagano Prefecture (1953). However, the plans were canceled because of strong opposition coming from local residents.

Also in Tokyo, local residents clashed with riot police, and mounted fierce opposition to the forced requisition of land planned for the expansion of the Tachikawa Air Base. This became known as the Sunagawa Uprising (1954–1956). Again, local residents succeeded in scrapping the plan. In Yamanashi Prefecture, where Marines were stationed, local women stormed into military training areas to launch fierce opposition by throwing themselves at howitzers during firing exercises (1954).

The Marines moved to Okinawa in 1956 as if they had been expelled from mainland Japan. There was little military rationale for staying in Okinawa, which was far more distant from North Korea than Gifu and Yamanashi. After all, the Japanese government shoved the Marines away to a

small southern island so that it could ignore any political problems that might arise from them being stationed there.

By then, the area of U.S. military facilities in Okinawa, including the Kadena Air Base, ammunition depots and Army facilities, amounted to approximately 40,000 hectares, accounting for 30 percent of the island's total area. Of this area, 44 percent occupied what used to be farmland. Most of the flatland known for its rice production in Okinawa before World War II was requisitioned by U.S. forces.

In its 1954 master plan for relocation to Okinawa, the U.S. Marine Corps demanded a total of 29,200 hectares of land to construct new base facilities. Half of the land was farmland and the plan would have forced 1,200 households out of their homes. If U.S. marine bases had been constructed according to the master plan, nearly half of Okinawa Island would have been surrounded by barbed-wire fences.

Records at that time reveal that the U.S. Army, which already had a vast base in Okinawa, opposed the plan because having a Marine Corps military base in the same area would have paralyzed the Army's control and command functions. The Marines were also reluctant to stay in Okinawa. In May of 1955, the U.S. Consul General in Okinawa sent a telegram to Washington asking them to rethink the plan, maintaining that Okinawa's political issues would become unsolvable if Marines were relocated to the island. When General Headquarters of Allied Forces in Tokyo announced the relocation of the Marines to Okinawa, the Consul General complained that only Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson could explain the relocation.

At first, the Marines were at Camp Schwab on the northern part of the island. Army troops were repatriated throughout the 1970s due to the restructuring of the U.S. forces. The Marines took over vacated tracts of land, expanding their footprint through distribution and transfer of their functions. Consequently, the large-scale land requisition included in the master plan was not implemented.

It should be noted here that it was not the U.S. military that wanted to station Marines in Okinawa; their relocation was under the initiative of the U.S. Secretary of Defense. Marines started to be stationed in Japan from the early 1950s after the Korean War in order to support permanent U.S. forces in South Korea. Their first station site was on the mainland; however, there were strong anti-military protests. The Marines therefore had to come to Japan's southern islands, which are much further from the Korean peninsula.

Concentrating U.S. military bases in Okinawa was a political decision rather than a purely military decision. Okinawa was made a scapegoat to stop the ever-growing anti-base protests in Japan from spreading further.

History is said to repeat itself, and we witnessed the same phenomenon half a century later. In the review of the U.S. forces in Japan in conjunction with the U.S. military realignment, the U.S. decided to transfer 8,000 Marine troops to Guam. The Marines were not keen on this decision but it was a political settlement arranged by Tokyo and Washington in order to reduce the burden of the U.S. military presence on the people of Okinawa.

A high-ranking Marine official[5] stated that the decision came from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. This had parallels with a similar remark made by the U.S. Consul General in Okinawa half a century earlier. As noted above the Consul General was reluctant to explain the reason behind the move and instead referred his interrogators to Secretary of Defense Wilson.

Figure 4: Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld holds a meeting with Keiichi Inamine, Okinawa's governor, November 16, 2003.

There are many commonalities between the decision to relocate the Marines from Gifu and Yamanashi prefectures to Okinawa and the decision to transfer them to Guam. In terms of the political climate, anti-base protests were spreading across the nation when the former decision was made, whereas the latter decision was made in the context of public anger at the 1995 rape of a 12-year-old local schoolgirl by three U.S. servicemen.

The former decision was taken after the armistice of the Korean War. At that time the U.S. military implemented a realignment of its forces. The latter decision also coincided with the realignment of U.S. forces to meet post-Cold War needs and challenges. Both decisions were made by the U.S. Secretary of Defense, and the Marines were reluctant to relocate in both cases.

This means that the locations of U.S. military bases were decided not based on military factors, but on political expediency. I will now illustrate how the relocation to Guam was decided.

Issues involved with the U.S. military base in Okinawa, which attracted considerable attention following the rape incident, were brought to a tentative settlement in 1996 (about a year after the incident) with the conclusion of the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) by the Japanese and U.S. governments. They agreed to relocate MCAS Futenma from a densely populated area to a less populated area in northern Okinawa. The people of Okinawa opposed the agreement, but the Japanese government continued negotiations with Okinawa's prefectural government. Negotiations remained locked in stalemate. Okinawa disappeared from the diplomatic agenda between Tokyo and Washington and despite local opposition, both governments agreed on the relocation of MCAS Futenma within the island of Okinawa and the return of the land. The issue just awaited implementation and the Okinawa issue was not expected to be on the table in the context of the U.S. military realignment.

However, something unexpected occurred from the standpoint of diplomatic and defense policymakers in Tokyo and Washington. On November 16, 2003, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visited Okinawa during his whirlwind tour of Asia.

He looked over MCAS Futenma, which is located in a crowded residential area, from a

[5] Interviewed by the author in 2007. The official requested anonymity.

Marine helicopter and acknowledged the danger of Futenma. He then paid a visit to the Okinawa prefectural government to meet with Governor Keiichi Inamine. The governor had a litany of bitter complaints about the daily lives of local residents and economic activities disrupted by the presence of the U.S. forces and never-ending incidents and accidents involving U.S. service personnel. He also made a plea to alleviate the burden of the U.S. military presence on local communities.

Secretary Rumsfeld, who appeared relaxed at first, seemed to stiffen as the meeting progressed. The visit must have been an uncomfortable experience for him. Immediately afterwards, reactions to this encounter began to emerge in Washington: the U.S. Pacific Command received an order from Secretary Rumsfeld to reduce the number of Marines stationed in Okinawa.

The Marines also re-assessed their relocation to mainland Japan and looked to Hokkaido or Kyushu as possible relocation sites. But it was politically difficult to secure land for building new military facilities on the mainland. Consequently, they came up with a dispersed arrangement plan in which the Marine's headquarters and logistic supply units would be relocated to Guam and the combat troops deployed on a rotational basis would use military-base installations in Okinawa.

Some Japanese experts analyzed the plan as a new arrangement necessary for the war on terrorism, but the point seems inconsequential. By dispersing troops, they will incur higher transportation and communication costs. More than anything, the Marines themselves are hesitant about the plan.

The U.S. military has over 1.2 million men and women on active duty. The U.S. Marine Corps is the smallest branch of the military with 157,000 members[6] and its budget is allocated by the U.S. Navy. In light of such circumstances, there are concerns about whether enough federal funds will be earmarked for them after their relocation to Guam. The U.S. media pointed out this difficulty when their relocation to Guam was decided.

After the financial crisis of 2008, the relocation to Guam has become difficult to implement due to the deteriorating fiscal situation of the U.S., especially as relocation costs are likely to balloon to more than double the amount estimated by the Pentagon. Recognizing this, in 2010, the U.S. Senate cut government-proposed outlays for the relocation by 70 percent, and no further funding was allowed in 2011.

The Marines may end up having nowhere to turn. At times like this, Japanese bureaucrats seem eager to maintain the status quo. U.S. military bases may remain in Okinawa or the Marine Corps may be downsized amid the U.S. budget crunch. Their future prospects remain uncertain.

The Okinawa Issues Are Part of Japan's Internal Affairs

Do issues involving U.S. military bases really fall in the realm of diplomacy and security? Looking at the background of the Marine Corps' relocation to Okinawa from mainland Japan, and how their current relocation to Guam was decided it is difficult to conclude so.

It is conventional wisdom that the U.S. military bases are concentrated on Okinawa due to

[6] Active duty military personnel strengths as of December 31, 2011 (U.S. Department of Defense).

the island's geopolitical importance. The Japanese archipelago stretches from the Russian Far East to Taiwan. It has been said that the archipelago acts as a bulwark against China and Russia, discouraging them from projecting their presence into the ocean. Okinawa, in particular, is said to be an important strategic point for keeping an eye on China – a country developing into a major power. However, is the preconceived notion that Okinawa lies at a critical geopolitical juncture correct? Here are some points to consider.

1. Marines constitute the largest percentage of U.S. service personnel stationed in Okinawa, but their means of transportation is stationed elsewhere.
2. MCAS Futenma helicopters alone cannot transport many troops.
3. Many Marines are often away from Okinawa, serving in Iraq and Afghanistan or visiting allied countries in Asia.
4. Marines are a rapid deployment force with mobility to serve anywhere in the world.

The question about their means of transportation is conclusive evidence to disprove a preconceived notion of the importance of them being based in Okinawa. MCAS Futenma helicopters can transport only a limited number of troops and therefore only a few hundred troops can be transported to nearby islands.

In emergency situations, large transport aircraft or amphibious warfare ships will carry troops, but none are stationed in Okinawa. Therefore, if something extraordinary happens in North Korea, for example, the vessels will have to travel to Okinawa from Sasebo, Nagasaki, in order to pick up troops and supplies before heading northward again. Is this reasonable?

It is more reasonable that the large transport aircraft carry the Marines from the mainland U.S. directly to the destination, rather than flying all the way to Okinawa to pick up Marines there. For three to four months, during the Gulf War, 93,000 Marines were airlifted from mainland U.S. to the forward base in Saudi Arabia. The 13,000 or 14,000 Marines stationed in Okinawa were too few to carry out major combat operations against an enemy country. Units of this size are dispatched primarily for disaster-relief operations, military exchanges with allied countries, and other missions.

In Japan, many people are thankful for the U.S. forces' presence in Okinawa and for helping to maintain Japan's security. But this is a grave misconception.

Many Marines based in Okinawa are away from their bases because they are serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moreover, they regularly visit Thailand, the Philippines and Australia for joint military exercises. They demonstrate their presence by constantly making the rounds of allied countries in the Asia-Pacific region instead of staying in Okinawa.

Prime Minister Hatoyama resigned on June 2, 2010, to take responsibility for his broken campaign promise to move MCAS Futenma off the island of Okinawa. Few, if any, heads of government have resigned over the issue of foreign military bases. Hatoyama said before his resignation that it was possible to relocate the whole U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Okinawa to somewhere else on mainland Japan, but that it was difficult as a matter of practicality.

What is "a matter of practicality"? The then secretary general of the ruling Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), Katsuya Okada, offered the following explanation. "In the past I think we've used the phrase 'the U.S. Marine Corps stationed in Japan are an important deterrent.' We meant the Marines

in general, though that does not mean they should stay in Okinawa. In reality, however, there is no place other than Okinawa that can host them. We have no choice but to ask the people of Okinawa."[7]

It is an example of NIMBY – Not In My Back Yard. The U.S. was flexible about relocating the Marines from mainland Japan. Immediately after the rape incident, issues involving military bases in Okinawa became recognized in the U.S. When Secretary of Defense William J. Perry was asked about responses in a Senate hearing, he said that the U.S. was prepared to assess any proposal from Japan. In this regard, Assistant Secretary of Defense Joseph Nye unequivocally stated that the U.S. would also assess the relocation of the Marines to mainland Japan.

However, it was the Japanese government that discouraged the move. Former Vice Defense Minister Takemasa Moriya revealed in an interview that they had considered it impossible to secure new land for building base installations on mainland Japan, because even the relocation of training facilities faced vehement protests there (September 13, 2010).

Washington was positive about the relocation of the military base in Okinawa to mainland Japan, but Japan's policy was to concentrate U.S. military bases in Okinawa. This is most unfortunate for the people of Okinawa.

Issues involving military bases are at an impasse. Local residents do not want the status quo in regard to MCAS Futenma and are also against its relocation within the prefecture. Since mainland Japan has a history of ousting U.S. troops, any attempt to relocate the base there may cause the Japan-U.S. alliance to come apart at the seams. With deteriorating fiscal conditions, the U.S. is unlikely to stretch its budget to relocate the Marines to Guam.

To date, the Japanese and U.S. governments have concluded many agreements between them to solve the Okinawa issues, but practically no progress has been made. Both governments have probably been content with the situation. The eternal theme between the two nations is that as long as the status quo is maintained, there is no particular problem.

It seems their true intention is to offer Okinawa as a sacrificial lamb. Some mainstream media outlets commented matter-of-factly that they should avoid throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The Japanese government and mainstream media are filled with a desire to maintain the status quo in Japan-U.S. relations rather than reporting truths.

The people of Japan could not help but sit passively on the sidelines as Prime Minister Hatoyama resigned over the Futenma issue. The mainstream media exaggerated the grievances of the U.S. government and criticized his diplomacy.

Many major newspaper companies in Tokyo carried editorials on the subject, but most of them were short on specific ways to solve the issue. They simply repeated three key phrases: do not undermine the Japan-U.S. alliance; reduce the burden of the U.S. military presence on the people of Okinawa; and maintain the deterrent. However, if the Marines cannot stay in Okinawa any longer, to what extent will the Japan-U.S. alliance actually be damaged? If they move out of Okinawa, will it be impossible to maintain the deterrent? Will the burden on the people of Okinawa be mitigated only by relocating MCAS Futenma within their tiny island?

[7] He made these comments at a press conference at the DPJ offices, Tokyo, February 14, 2011.

They made claims without addressing these questions. Not only the media, but researchers who are considered to be well-informed experts have also failed to address these questions. The biases of the Fourth Estate thus played a part in the debacle that resulted in the resignation of the prime minister. A civilian political leader was replaced over the issue of a foreign military base, and the government still has an anti-democratic policy of forcing hardship on the people of Okinawa, who are one of the most vulnerable groups in domestic politics. They pretended that a simple political issue of deciding the locations of military bases – an issue that only takes domestic coordination – is a diplomatic or security issue, and disguised it with such phrases as "deterrent," "the geographical superiority of Okinawa" and "alliance."

Deciding the locations of U.S. military bases is a key concern in the domestic politics of any host nation. Without acknowledging such a fundamental premise, fair and sensible discussions cannot be expected with regard to military bases in Okinawa. The Japanese government does not have a trump card in its diplomacy with the U.S. government regarding military bases. Washington can tighten the screws anytime by telling Tokyo that little progress has been made over MCAS Futenma. All Japan can do is to try and be nice and say it has been working hard. This hampers progress.

To build a strong Japan-U.S. relationship, it is necessary to put aside this preconceived notion and implement revolutionary solutions to issues involving military bases in Okinawa. My suggestions are just one of the approaches to issues involving U.S. military bases.

An Island of Military Bases

Fighter planes and helicopters fly just above an elementary school located in the immediate proximity of MCAS Futenma. All the children playing in the schoolyard can do is to cover their ears with both hands.

The noise poses problems not only in the daytime. When everyone is asleep at night, the roar of state-of-the-art jet planes reverberate in the residential districts around Kadena Air Base. Planes sometimes fly at around 2:00 a.m. or 3:00 a.m. while air force officials claim that when crossing the Pacific to the United States, it is necessary to take off from Okinawa before dawn in order to land during daylight hours in U.S. time zones in order to ensure safety, as pilots are tired after long flights. Of course, the noise disturbs the sleep of many residents – adults, children, the elderly and the sick. People wonder why U.S. military commanders prioritize their flight schedules over peoples' peace.

Local legislatures near the base have repeatedly demanded that the U.S. forces and the Japanese government ban nighttime flights, but the Japanese government simply said that they could do nothing about the operations of the U.S. military bases. Local residents have no one on whom they can vent their anger. The U.S. forces persist in giving priority to their operations. The reason is not clear, but what is clear is the lack of civilian control there.

Since Okinawa is a small island, every move the U.S. forces make has a direct impact on the daily lives of local residents. Locals often say "the island of Okinawa exists between facilities" or "people live amongst military bases" rather than military bases existing among people. Large-scale U.S. military bases were constructed when Okinawa was under U.S. military occupation after World

War II. The U.S. forces seized large swaths of land that were privately owned at the time.

In Okinawa, approximately 100,000 people – a quarter of the islands' population – lost their lives, and almost all the land was burnt during the war. The U.S. forces sent locals into internment camps and put up barbed-wire fences on the vacated land. When locals were allowed to return home, they found their hometowns had been turned into vast military bases within those barbed-wire fences. They had no choice but to build shacks and live alongside the fences. That was the beginning of the postwar years in Okinawa.

Back then, all the industries were devastated in Okinawa, and it was considered fortunate if men could find work as gardeners and women as maids at service personnel's houses in the bases. Okinawans lived their days looking at the well-maintained lawns in the bases and the poverty of their surrounding residential areas. They remain on Okinawa to this day and, as one researcher in political history recently commented, Okinawa still represents an extension of imperialism. Nobody comes to help those struggling with the roar of jet planes before dawn. Left vulnerable, Okinawans have little choice but to face the gigantic institution of the U.S. forces alone. In such circumstances, Okinawa is like a colony for U.S. forces.

Approximately 74 percent of bases and other facilities exclusively used by the U.S. military in Japan are concentrated in Okinawa. The number of U.S. military personnel in Okinawa accounts for more than 60 percent of thirty-five thousand military personnel stationed in Japan. Major U.S. military facilities located in mainland Japan include Misawa Air Base (Aomori), Yokota Air Base (Tokyo), Yokosuka Naval Port (Kanagawa), Naval Air Facility Atsugi (Kanagawa), Sasebo Port (Nagasaki) and Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni (Yamaguchi). They have yet to pose any major opposition because of the way their locations are distributed and the low noise levels, especially at ports.

Figure 5: Territory of U.S. military bases in Okinawa

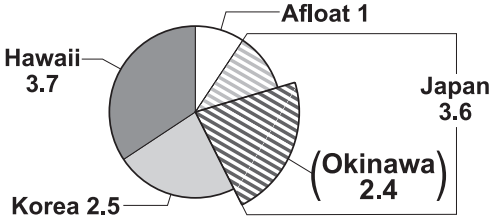

Figure 6: U.S. military strength in the Asia Pacific region

Source: U.S. Defense Department statistics.

Therefore, issues involving military bases are considered unique to Okinawa, causing the prefecture to be isolated both politically and socially. Issues involving bases have become someone else's problem in Japan.

Furthermore, many people maintain that the U.S. military presence in Okinawa underpins the security of South Korea and Taiwan, which keep an eye on China and North Korea. However, they may not be

prepared to accept Marines in their own countries. Those countries most likely feel that the Marines should stay in Okinawa. Today, any country that tries to accept U.S. troops and construct bases for them will meet strong opposition from local residents. It is not politically viable.

The issue of U.S. military bases in Okinawa is going nowhere. Today, little attention is paid to the extent of the burden the presence of those bases place on the people of Okinawa. The U.S. forces maintain a forward deployment of about 100,000 troops in Asia, of which 25 percent are stationed in Okinawa. The Japan-U.S. Security Treaty stipulates that they are stationed there to help defend Japan against foreign adversaries, and secure the safety of the Far East.[8] This means that all allies located in the Far East enjoy the security umbrella provided by the U.S. military presence.

Such allies in Asia are Australia, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Thailand. Their combined total land area is 8.9 million km^2, and Okinawa represents only 0.025 percent with an area of 2,300 km^2. Okinawa is a very small island, yet a quarter of the U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific region are concentrated there. Are there any other communities that are forced to bear such an unequal security burden? Okinawa must be the only place in the world under such a heavy military burden.

In addition to the physical burden, the institutional issue of giving a higher priority to military operations than to the daily lives of local residents has further compounded problems related to U.S. military bases.

The problem remains that U.S. forces continue to retain total control of their bases. The U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement grants extraterritorial rights to U.S. military bases in Japan.[9] Even if the governor of Okinawa requests entry into the base premises, he is not allowed to enter the gate without the permission of the base commander.

In August 2004, a U.S. Marine helicopter crashed into a building located on the campus of Okinawa International University, and burst into flames. The campus is adjacent to MCAS Futenma. The Marines at Futenma jumped over the fences and rushed to the crash site, immediately cordoning off the area with yellow tape. The young Marines used their caps to prevent TV camera crews from filming, and news censorship was imposed. The Okinawa Prefectural Police requested to investigate the helicopter, but the U.S. Marine Corps declined and carried it away on a crane truck. The incident laid bare the total lack of civilian control.

Okinawa has also suffered huge economic losses because of the presence of military bases. The economic benefits of hosting the bases are only five percent of the prefecture's GDP. About 8,000 Okinawans work on the bases, but this is only a small fraction of Okinawa's working population of around 600,000. The bases in which they work occupy 20 percent of the total landmass of the main island.

According to public opinion polls conducted by the *Okinawa Times* on January 3, 2012, 21 percent of Okinawans want the immediate return of all US military bases in Okinawa to local people and 66 percent are in favor of planned and gradual retreat of the U.S. military presence. On top of this, 87 percent of local citizens want the US military to leave the island.

[8] Article 5 and 6, U.S.-Japan Security Treaty.
[9] Article 3, U.S.-Japan Status of Forces Agreement.