
Understanding the Issue of U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa

Céline Pajon

June 2010



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Translated by Nicholas Sowell

ISBN: 978-2-86592-745-6
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IFRI
27, RUE DE LA PROCESSION
75740 PARIS CEDEX 15 – FRANCE
Tel : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
Fax : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 60
Email: ifri@ifri.org

IFRI-BRUXELLES
RUE MARIE-THERESE, 21
1000 – BRUXELLES – BELGIQUE
Tel : +32 (0)2 238 51 10
Fax : +32 (0)2 238 51 15
Email: info.bruxelles@ifri.org

WEBSITE: ifri.org

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Executive Summary

The failure of Prime Minister Hatoyama to transfer the dangerous U.S. military base of Futenma out of Okinawa hastened his resignation, announced on June 2. After almost than nine months of procrastination and contradictory statements, and acknowledging the complexity of an issue that has been pending for 14 years, the Japanese Prime Minister finally threw in the towel.

The issue of U.S. bases in Okinawa is indeed particularly complex because it combines different logics and sometimes contradictory dynamics at three levels of governance. Internationally, the presence of American forces on its soil is a quid pro quo for US protection of Japan in the case of an attack. The bases are also key focal points of Washington's regional and global military presence. At the local level, the U.S. military presence has shaped the history, the territory, as well as the economic, social and cultural profile of Okinawa over the last sixty years. It also causes significant disturbances to local communities. The management of these issues by the central government in Tokyo raises the question of its relationships with geographical and cultural fringe regions like Okinawa.

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Introduction

On May 20, 2010, Japanese mainstream media announced the failure of Prime Minister Hatoyama to meet one of his key election promises, namely to transfer the dangerous Futenma military base out of the Okinawa Prefecture. The announcement ended almost nine months of procrastination and contradictory statements by the government on the matter. These delays have greatly angered the people of Okinawa, who feel cheated, as well as the American ally, in whose eyes Tokyo has lost much of its credibility. Finally, the disastrous management of this sensitive issue showed Prime Minister Hatoyama's lack of leadership and only hastened his resignation, announced on June 2.

The Hatoyama government had wanted to strengthen the Japan-US alliance by re-balancing it and "ending the strategic dependence of Japan on its ally". However, it made the mistake of tackling the complex transfer of Futenma without prior consideration of the alternatives it could propose. The question of Futenma, which goes back 1996, is indeed fraught with failure. Moreover, it lies at the heart of the realignment plan of U.S. troops in Japan, which was adopted in 2006 and confirmed in early 2009.

The issue of U.S. bases in Okinawa is indeed particularly complex because it combines different logics and sometimes contradictory dynamics at three levels of governance. Internationally, the presence of American forces on its soil is a *quid pro quo* for US protection of Japan in the case of an attack. The bases are also key focal points of Washington's regional and global military presence. At the local level, the U.S. military presence has shaped the history, the territory, as well as the economic, social and cultural profile of Okinawa over the last sixty years. It also causes significant disturbances to local communities. The management of these issues by the central government in Tokyo raises the question of its relationships with geographical and cultural fringe regions like Okinawa.

Japan and Okinawa in U.S. Strategy

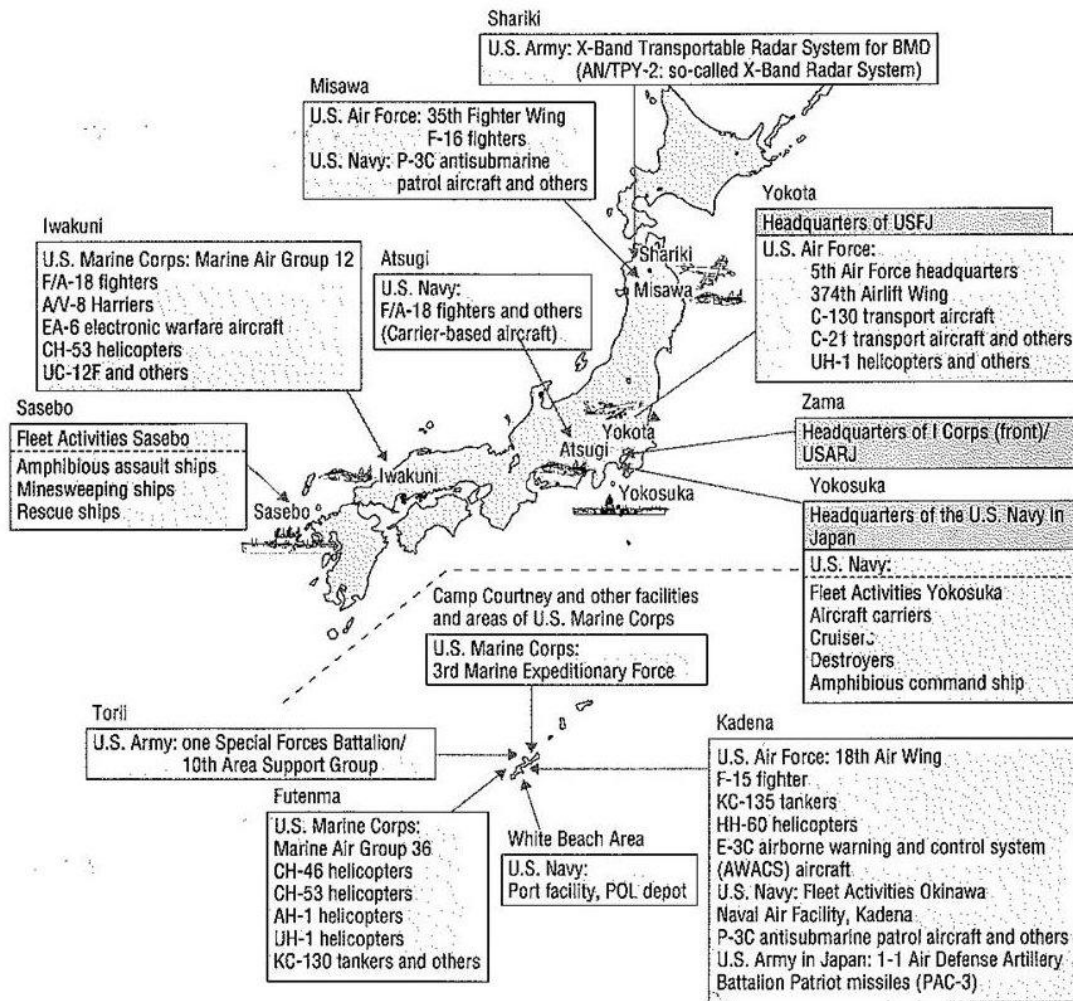
Commonly referred to as the “Keystone of the Pacific”, Okinawa is the largest island of the Ryukyu archipelago, itself located in the south of the Japanese archipelago, and 1500 km from Tokyo. The small island of Okinawa (100 km long and 15 km wide) is exceptional in that it hosts about 23,000 U.S. soldiers and 21,000 of their relatives, half of the troops stationed in Japan under of the security alliance with the United States (representing one in three American soldiers stationed in Asia-Pacific). Okinawa’s surface area represents only 0.6% of Japan’s landmass, but hosts 75% of U.S. bases located on Japanese territory.¹

However, Okinawa has its own history and set of characteristics that distinguish it from other regions in Japan. Formerly the independent kingdom of the Ryukyus, which was part of the Chinese tributary system, the archipelago was conquered and occupied by the Japanese Satsuma clan from 1609. Following the Meiji Restoration, the kingdom was fully integrated into the Japanese State (1879). Geographically closer to China, Okinawa has a very different social culture from Japan, with its own language, an indigenous religion, gastronomy and a different musical culture.²

¹ Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan-White Paper 2009*, Tokyo, 2009, p.227.

² See Okinawa-ken kôiku linkai (ed.), *The History and Culture of Okinawa*, Okinawa, The Board, 2000.

Figure 1: U.S. Military Bases in Japan



Source: Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan-White Paper 2008*, Tokyo, 2008.

A fait accompli

The largest amphibious military attack in the Pacific theater began on Okinawa at the end of March 1945. For three months, the Japanese tried to resist American occupation of the island and both sides suffered heavy losses in their ranks (12,000 American casualties, and 107,000 Japanese dead, including 100,000 civilians, many of which the Imperial Army forced to commit suicide rather than fall into enemy hands).³ It was the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. The island was

³ See Roy E. Appleman, James M. Burns, Russell A. Gugeler, and John Stevens, *Okinawa: the Last Battle*, Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2000.

almost completely razed to the ground. The Americans then used Okinawa as a base to prepare the invasion of Japan's main islands. On August 15, 1945, after the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the unconditional surrender of Japan ended World War II in East Asia and the Pacific. U.S. forces then took up quarters in the military bases of the Japanese Imperial Army during the occupation of Japan from 1945 to 1952.

The 1951 Defence Agreement and the Fate of Okinawa

During the occupation, Prime Minister Shigeru Yoshida (1946-54) proposed to the U.S. authorities to permanently host military bases on Japanese territory. He negotiated this favor in exchange of three guarantees:

- the recovery of national sovereignty as quickly as possible and under good conditions;
- the guaranteed access to the U.S. market to sell goods, and the possibility for Japan to concentrate on economic development without paying the cost of maintaining an army and an independent defense force;
- security assurances against communism, whose influence was growing in Asia at the time.⁴

The Americans thus obtained a military presence at a lower cost in Asia, which was torn apart by the Cold War (the Korean War: 1950-53). This allowed them to contain the communist advance in Japan and Asia, and to control any possible resurgence of Japanese militarism.

The return of Japanese sovereignty thus involved the signing of a security treaty with the United States, which took effect in 1952 and was revised in 1960.⁵ The Treaty gave American troops access to military bases on Japanese territory to support the two missions assigned to the U.S., namely to ensure the defense of Japan if attacked, and to maintain security in the "Far East".⁶

⁴ Michael Shaller, *Altered States: The United States and Japan Since the Occupation*, Oxford University Press, USA, 1997, p. 26.

⁵ The Treaty of 1952 stipulated that U.S. troops could use bases in Japan to maintain security in the Far East and possibly maintain public order in Japan, at the request of the Tokyo government. The revision of the Treaty in 1960 aimed to rebalance it in Japan's favor: the United States made a clear commitment to defend their ally if attacked. U.S. presence on Japanese territory was the counterpart of this commitment.

⁶ *Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between the United States and Japan* (日本国とアメリカ合衆国との間の相互協力及び安全保障条約 *Nippon-koku to Amerika-gasshūkoku to no Aida no Sōgo Kyōryoku oyobi Anzen Hoshō Jōyaku*?), Washington, 19 January 1960.

The Japanese Constitution of 1947 prohibited the maintenance of armed forces and the recourse to war. The U.S. bases thus represented a kind of "insurance policy" guaranteeing homeland security. For the Americans, the facilities became part of U.S. military strategy, which relies on an international network of bases described by some analysts as an Empire.⁷ The restoration of sovereignty in 1952 did not, however, cover the Ryukyu archipelago, whose strategic importance in the eyes of Americans justified the continuation of a trusteeship. Okinawa was handed back to Japan 20 years later, in 1972.

Japan and Okinawa at the Heart of U.S. Deployment in Asia

The strategic location of Okinawa, (Taipei, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Seoul, Manila and Tokyo are all within a radius of 1,500 km) explains why the island remains a vital cornerstone of U.S. forces in Asia.

The return of Okinawa to Japan in 1972 followed bilateral negotiations, including secret agreements that have been officially recognized this year.⁸ But it also followed from a doctrine of disengagement defined by Nixon in 1969, according to which allies had to bear more of their defense burden. As a result, many bases around Tokyo were closed and forces partially redeployed to Okinawa, accentuating the geographical imbalance already observed.⁹

The U.S. Still Present in Asia After the Cold War

The end of the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet bloc directly led to the disappearance of the principal threat that had determined the strategic positioning of the United States across the globe. In the Asia-Pacific, 135,000 American soldiers were based in allied countries (including 50,000 in Japan, 45,000 in South Korea and 15,000 in the Philippines), countries which then questioned the legitimacy of such a large American presence whose economic and social costs were substantial.¹⁰

However, Americans did not disengage from the Asian theater. The interests of the U.S. in the region were confirmed and new threats identified as early as 1995: North Korea's (nuclear and missile threat) and the rise of Chinese power justified maintaining a

⁷ Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic*, New York, Metropolitan Books, 2004

⁸ "Editorial: Report on Secret Pacts", *Asahi Shimbun*, 11 March 2010.

⁹ Yamazaki Takashi, "The Geopolitical Context of 'Redefined Security': Japan and the US Military Presence in the Post Cold War Era", *URP Research Paper*, 2006.

¹⁰ Sheila Smith (ed.), "Shifting Terrain: The Domestic Politics of the U.S. Military Presence in Asia", *East-West Center Special Reports*, No 8, Honolulu, East West Center, March 2006, pp. 9-12.

deterrent capability.¹¹ Only 35,000 soldiers were withdrawn (which included all troops stationed in the Philippines in 1992),¹² reducing the average to 100,000 troops in Asia Pacific during the 1990s.

The alliance with Japan has been thus more than ever the cornerstone of U.S. security commitments in Asia, and the reasons for the American presence in Japan were clearly identified. They include "the strategic location of bases" and "comparative cost advantages" of facilities that benefit from a high-level, technical infrastructure.¹³ In 1990, Japan contributed up to 45% of the costs of U.S. bases on its territory, a percentage which increased to 75% in 2007.¹⁴

For the Japanese, despite concerns about the effectiveness of American protection against the ballistic threat from North Korea in particular (a North Korean Taepodong missile was fired over Japan in 1998), the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States has not been questioned.¹⁵ Indeed, Japan has decided to strengthen its alliance with the United States for two reasons. Firstly, Tokyo believes it to be the most effective strategy for dealing with threats in the post Cold War world.¹⁶ Secondly, the alliance offers a valuable framework for developing Japan's own defense capabilities.¹⁷

In Okinawa, the local population was overwhelmingly in favor of a reduction in the military bases. Okinawans have been disappointed by the scarcely perceptible impact of the redeployment of U.S. troops, as they had hoped to reap a "peace dividend" after 1989. Only 4% of land has been returned from sites whose use had no negative impact on the safety or noise levels for the population.¹⁸ Moreover, the Gulf War (1990-91) increased the use of bases on Okinawa.

¹¹ Department of Defense, *U.S. Security Strategy for the East Asia-Pacific Region*, Washington, USGPO, February 1995.

¹² Following the vote by the Philippine Senate against the new Security and Cooperation Treaty with the United States, signed in 1991.

¹³ In 1990, Japan paid for 45% of the costs of U.S. bases on its soil. (Captain Larry W. Nelms, U. S. Navy, *Japan's Host Nation Support: Future Outlook*, The Industrial College of the Armed Forces, National Defense University, Fort McNair, Washington, D.C., 1993). Since 1978, Japan has contributed to labor costs of Japanese employees working on U.S. bases, and on the construction of facilities for the U.S. army.

¹⁴ Emma Chanlett-Avery, William H. Cooper, Mark E. Manyin, "Japan-US Relations: Issues for Congress", *CRS Report for Congress*, Washington, 3 June 2009, p. 10.

¹⁵ See Morihiro Hosokawa, "Are US troops in Japan needed?", *Foreign Affairs*, Nov/Dec.1998.

¹⁶ In 1998, Japan decided to develop an anti-missile shield with Washington.

¹⁷ The alliance indeed benefits from the re-direction of Japanese defense policy since 1991, which consists in reinforcing its military capacity (military normalization), in order to contribute more effectively to the maintenance of peace internationally. The Self-Defense Forces (created in 1954) are in fact a real army, if not by name, with a personnel of 240,000. Their budget of \$44 billion is the 5th largest in the world, according to SIPRI Yearbook 2008.

¹⁸ Robert D. Eldridge, "Post-Reversion Okinawa and U.S.-Japan Relations: A Preliminary Survey of Local Politics and the Bases, 1972-2002", *U.S.-Japan Alliance Affairs Series 1* (May 2004), Center for International Security Studies and Policy, Osaka University, p. 92.

The rape of a Japanese girl by three U.S. servicemen in 1995 led to the most important antibase demonstrations in the Prefecture of Okinawa since the handover. In response, a 1996 report commissioned by Tokyo and Washington (see below) called for the transfer of the most problematic bases (especially Futenma).

After 9/11: Posture Review of U.S. Troop Deployment and the Maintaining of a Deterrent Capability in Japan

After 9/11, the United States embarked on a strategic shift towards the transformation of its overall military positioning. In response to new post Cold War threats and hyperterrorism, the redeployment of U.S. forces has aimed to develop the capability, deployability and mobility of troops to respond rapidly in crisis theaters, according to the QDR 2001.¹⁹ The realignment calls for the strengthening and capacity enhancement in Northeast Asia, not only to ensure stability in the region (North Korea, Taiwan Strait) and protect U.S. allies, but also to serve as advanced bases or stepping-stones that allow U.S. forces to be projected globally.²⁰

The Global Posture Review of 2004 therefore announced that the troops levels would not be cut in Japan, while South Korea would benefit from a substantial reduction of forces (a redeployment of 12,500 troops out of 37,500).

The redeployment of troops was an opportunity for Washington to reduce sources of friction stemming from the local impact of bases, to ensure their sustainability and to improve the strategic flexibility of U.S. forces and their capacity for rapid deployment to distant theaters. It may also permit the alliance to be strengthened militarily, with a better balancing of responsibilities and improved interoperability between armed forces.²¹

For its part, Tokyo wanted to preserve the deterrent capability of U.S. forces while reducing pressure on populations living next to bases that lead to recurrent tensions.²²

¹⁹ The plan foresees a global reduction in the number of troops (60,000 to 70,000 soldiers worldwide), but an increase in their capacity to intervene and their effectiveness, thanks to internal reforms of the army (notably through better interoperability and the setting up of rapidly deployable intermediate and specialized army corps), along with the RMA (Revolution in Military Affairs, involving the shift from the “industrial era” to high technology and information technology).

²⁰ “hubs for power projection in future contingencies in other areas of the world”, *QDR 2001*, and mentioned in *The National Security of the United States of America*, September 2002, White House.

²¹ “Testimony by Admiral Thomas B. Fargo, United States Navy, Commander, U.S. Pacific Command, Before the House Armed Services Committee, United States House of Representatives, Regarding U.S. Pacific Command Posture”, March 31, 2004.

²² Furthermore, Japan actively supports the United States in its war on terrorism (by sending troops to Iraq and in the Indian Ocean). U.S. nuclear and missile support

The bases in Japan are still relevant for the U.S strategy: the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk based at Yokosuka took part in the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Combat aircraft stationed at Misawa and Kadena were also deployed in Iraq as of 2003. The bases in Okinawa in particular are crucial to force projection in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East.

The Realignment of U.S. Forces in Japan

In 2005, the security alliance was redefined as it shifted from being an alliance focused on defending Japan and maintaining regional stability to being a global alliance. The shift was accompanied by bilateral talks on the reorganization of U.S. forces in Japan.²³

The outcome of the negotiations was announced in May 2006, as a "roadmap for realignment implementation", leading to a stronger alliance of greater interoperability between U.S. and Japanese forces, and the further integration of Japan in America's global strategy (with the arrival of a strategic command of the Army 1st Corps, at Camp Zama near Tokyo).

The biggest challenge for the allies was to find ways to alleviate the negative impact of bases on local communities, particularly in Okinawa. The roadmap thus provided for the withdrawal of 8,000 Marines (and 9,000 of their relatives) from Okinawa to Guam, on the condition of the actual transfer of the dangerous Futenma base to another site also located in Okinawa.

In order to understand the deadlock that has become a significant irritant to the alliance, it is essential to examine the question of bases at the local level.

remains indispensable to Japan in the face of threats from North Korea and China, whose rapid military modernization is raising questions.

²³ See the Joint Declaration of February 19, 2005 and the Interim Report "U.S.-Japan Alliance: Transformation and Realignment for the Future", October 29, 2005.

The Multifaceted Impact of the U.S. Presence in Okinawa

Military bases can be defined as enclaves that have some of the characteristics of extra-territoriality. They are militarized areas under the control of another state for the purpose of training and troop deployment, as well as the stockpiling of equipment and soldiers. These bases are places of work and life of men (mostly) of foreign nationality who are posted for varying periods and are authorized to bring their families to live near them. These bases, as military structures bringing together foreigners at a given place and time, have an impact on the national territory of the host state and, primarily, on the local community.

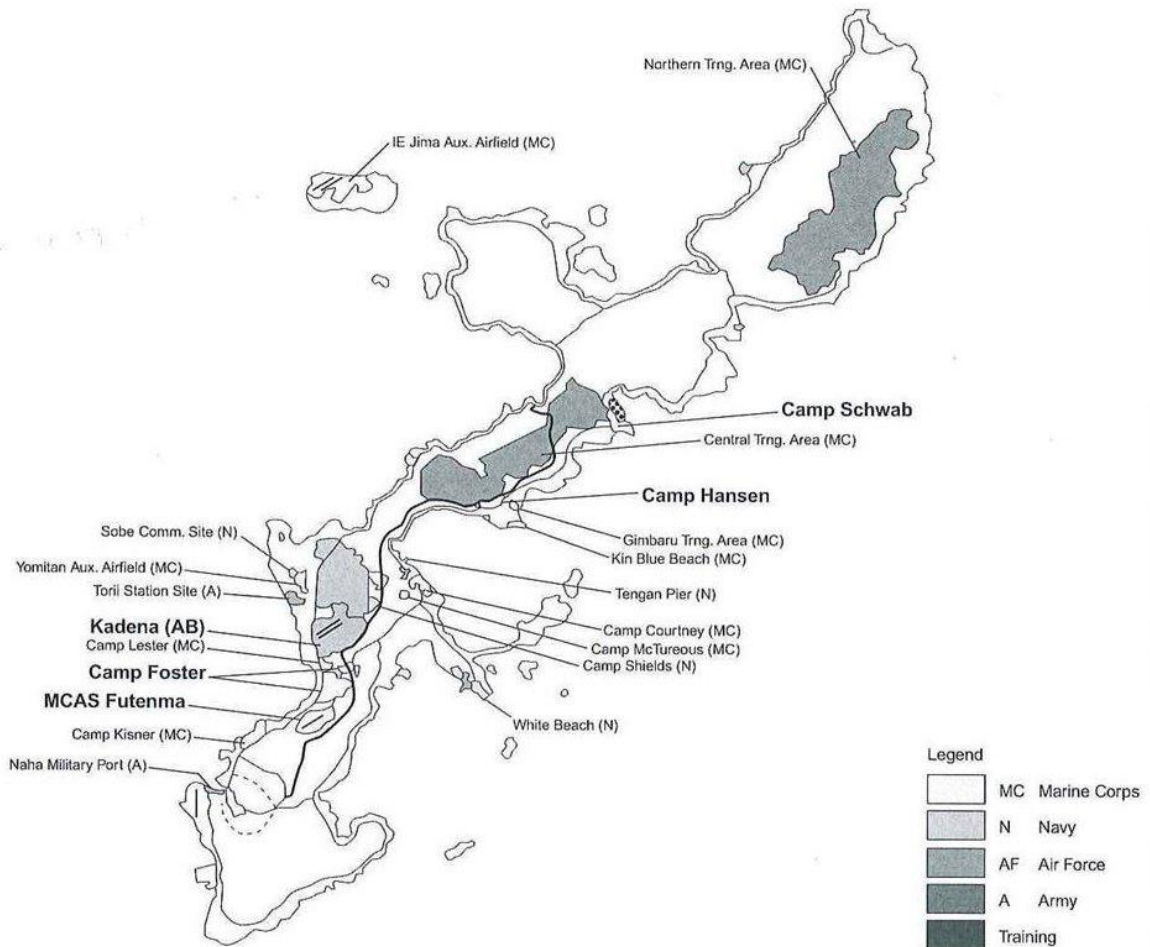
The Territorial Impact

The bases are concentrated in the south and center of the main island of Okinawa and occupy a large share of arable land. The issue of acquisition of these lands for military exercises remains sensitive in Okinawa. In 1953, the U.S. occupation authority confiscated the land (half of which was agricultural) from more than 50,000 owners in order to expand military bases. Despite the widespread protests that took place in 1956 (*shimagurumi-toso* – or the fight of the entire island), the system continued and the Americans paid regular rent to the wronged owners.²⁴ In 1972, the Japanese government took over these lease payments, since the bases are part of the security treaty, and opposition to the system has weakened under pressure from national and local authorities. Since then, as the land rents have increased significantly, the opposition to the loan system has remained very small. However, this symbolic issue resurfaced in 1995.

Moreover, as the bases occupy about 20% of the main island of Okinawa, they strongly constrain traffic, which is constantly congested. With the urbanization of the last forty years, the bases have increasingly impinged on local communities (in terms of noise and pollution). They represent a real obstacle to the implementation of an economic development policy or urban planning by some municipalities.

²⁴ Takashi Yamazaki, "Politicizing Territory: the Transformation of Land Struggle in Okinawa, 1956", *Studies in the Humanities*, vol. 54, n°3, 2002, pp. 31-65.

Figure 2: Principal U.S. Military Bases in Okinawa



Source: *Overseas Presence. Issues Involved in Reducing the Impact of the U.S. Military Presence on Okinawa*, United States General Accounting Office, GAO Report, Washington, March 1998, p. 17.

An example: the Futenma Air Base

The Futenma base covers 500 hectares and occupies one quarter of the city of Ginowan. It is located in the heart of a densely populated urban area with 88,000 inhabitants. The heliport consists of a 2,800 meter-long runway, hangars and communication and repair installations and is one of the largest Marine air bases in Japan, home to the airborne division of the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (3rd MEF).²⁵

²⁵ The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) is an advanced force, rapidly deployable for missions ranging from humanitarian emergency aid to high-intensity combat. It has around 15,000 troops in Japan.

The city of Ginowan has gradually been built-up around the base, and with increasing urbanization the risks associated with military activities of the base have increased. In August 2004, a helicopter crashed on the campus of Okinawa International University, miraculously causing no casualties. The air base is also a source of significant noise pollution for residents. On June 27, 2008, the Naha court also ordered the government to pay ¥140 million in compensation to 400 neighboring residents of the base, while refusing to grant their request to ban flights at night and early mornings.²⁶ The closure of Futenma would remedy these disturbances and the threat of accidents, as well as allowing for more coherent urban planning and the boosting the municipality's economy.

Figure 3: The Futenma Air Base, Municipality of Ginowan



Source: *Messages from Ginowan*, Ginowan City, 2005

²⁶ "Futenma noise damages appealed", *Japan Times*, 10 July 2008.

The Economic Impact of the U.S. Presence

The presence of the bases and the particular history of Okinawa have hindered the economic development of this Autonomous Prefecture, and have contributed to the emergence of a "distorted" economy. It is commonly said that the Okinawan economy depends on the 3Ks: "*Kichi, Kankou, Kokyo-koji*", i.e. the bases, tourism and public money (subsidies and public works).

According to figures from the Bank of Japan, in 1972, 23.4% of the income of the Prefecture of Okinawa came from public works and subsidies. A further 15.6% and 8% came respectively from the bases and tourism. In 2004, the share of public subsidies amounted to 38.2%, with tourism accounting for 9.6%, while the bases' share had declined to 5.3% only.

Figure 4: Three Key Factors in the Okinawa Economy

	billion yen	
	1972	2004
1) US military bases	78 (15.6%)	201 (5.3%)
2) Public investment & public expenditure	117 (23.4%)	1,449 (38.2%)
3) Tourism	40 (8.0%)	363 (9.6%)
1)+2)+3)	235 (46.9%)	2,018 (53.2%)
Total GDP of Okinawa	501 (100.0%)	3,792 (100.0%)

Source: Hidehiko Sodano, "Okinawa Economy: Light and Shadow", *Bank of Japan, Naha Branch*, 2007, p. 20.

Several observations can be made:

1. The share of income related to the bases has declined

These revenues are tied to the revenues of companies and commercial suppliers of various goods and services situated around the bases, the salaries of Japanese employees on the bases (about 8,800 in Okinawa) and the rents paid to landowners. The decline in the share of income from the bases is linked to the gradual reduction of troops, but especially the relative decline of their purchasing power. Soldiers thus consume more on the bases. However, the presence of bases partly determines the significant subsidies granted by the Japanese state, which actually have a greater impact on the economy of Okinawa.

2. Public investment has increased significantly

At the handover, the Japanese government promised that Okinawa would catch up economically with the living standards of "central"

Japan: the so-called *hondo-nami* policy. The development of the island was therefore fostered using the drip-feed of state funds, accompanied by major public works programs. More recently, money paid in compensation by the government to municipalities that host bases has been increased in the face of rising local protests.

3. For 30 years, Okinawa has failed to develop a self-sustaining economy

The island is still very dependent on the 3Ks (rising from 46.9% to 53.2%). The objective of economic catch-up has not been achieved either: the ratio of incomes between Tokyo and Okinawa stood at 2.3 to 1 in 2004.²⁷ At around 7.8%, the unemployment rate is twice the national average (in 2007).²⁸

Consequently, the island and its municipalities are more fragile and dependent on the government subsidies granted in exchange for accepting the bases. The difficult economic conditions in Okinawa largely explain why governors supported by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP - in power in Tokyo from 1955 to August 2009) have been elected since Masahide Ota (1990-1998) (Keiichi Inamine -1998, Hirokazu Nakaima-2006), even though a majority of inhabitants want a reduction in the U.S. bases. Residents fear that subsidies will be stopped due to lack of cooperation with authorities in Tokyo.

The Social Impact of the Presence of Troops

Positive interactions between local communities and the American soldiers and their families do exist and are encouraged, particularly through programs and associative activities. Similarly, if the Okinawans have reservations about soldiers, they more willingly welcome Americans as individuals. American culture is very popular and some communities draw on the present or past presence of the bases by orienting their urban development projects around the American influence, which has been integrated into local identity.²⁹

However, the presence of U.S. troops is first associated with prostitution, which has accompanied the development of the bases. At the height of the Vietnam War when the bases were used intensively, the local police estimated there to be more than 7,300 prostitutes. Subsequently, some red districts lapsed into disuse.³⁰

U.S. soldiers are also a source of crime (including violence against women). This is all the more sensitive in Okinawa as the

²⁷ Figures taken from the Bank of Japan. Hidehiko Sodano, "Okinawa Economy: Light and Shadow", *Bank of Japan*, Naha Branch, 2007.

²⁸ The 2008 crisis led to rising unemployment in Japan, which stood at 5% in March 2010.

²⁹ For example, the town of Chatan has developed an American-style shopping district called the "American Village".

³⁰ Interview with Takazato Suzuyo, Co-chair of Okinawan Women Act Against Military Violence, Naha, 14 June 2006.

majority of military personnel are from the Marine Corps: young men (18-25 years old), with a high rate of turnover on the island. They have not yet founded families, as is the case of the older and more stable staff in other units. The Prefecture of Okinawa has identified more than 5,400 crimes attributed to American troops since 1972.³¹

The 1995 Crisis: the First Episode of the Futenma Saga

On September 4, 1995, the rape of a 12-year old Okinawan girl by three G.I.s angered the population and major demonstrations were held, bringing together nearly 85,000 people.³² Okinawans protested against insecurity due to the U.S. presence, against the legal privileges accorded to arrested American military prisoners, and demanded a reduction or even complete departure of the bases.

The SOFA Issue

Legally, the presence of foreign military forces is governed by the Status of Force Agreement (SOFA). The SOFA grants privileges to military personnel who are not subject to the laws of host countries. This status is similar to that of diplomats. However, it differs in that it is negotiated on a case-by-case basis with the host country. In this case, the criminals covered by U.S. law are only handed into custody to the Japanese authorities once their guilt has been established.³³ After the rape in 1995, Tokyo and Washington decided to apply SOFA in an "optimal manner" for Japanese parties: in cases of "heinous crimes" such as rape, the defendants are directly placed into custody with the Japanese authorities.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² See the web page of the Okinawa Peace Network of Los Angeles, dedicated to the demonstrations of 1995: http://www.uchinanchu.org/history/1995_rape_incident.htm. Last accessed 19 May 2010.

³³ *Agreement under Article VI of the Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States of America regarding Facilities and Areas and the Status of United States Armed Forces in Japan*, Washington, 19 January 1960. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/usa/sfa/pdfs/fulltext.pdf> Last accessed 19 May 2010.

The SOFA is the most visible element of extraterritoriality and is considered by the Japanese municipal authorities hosting the bases as unfair and as impinging on Japanese sovereignty. It is a highly sensitive issue because it is related to the daily safety of persons. In addition, as the bases are controlled by the U.S. military, the Japanese authorities are not allowed to enter them freely, nor have right of inspection over activities in the bases. In 2000, the Okinawa Prefecture filed a petition with the Japanese and U.S. governments to request a review of the 11 Articles of the SOFA. Following another rape committed in 2003, 14 Prefectures have requested the revision of SOFA.³⁴

A few weeks after the rape, the Governor of Okinawa, Masahide Ota, showed his anger by refusing to sign the leases of land rented to the U.S. bases (to be renewed every five years on behalf of the Japanese government).³⁵ The Japanese government lodged a law suit against Ota, whose official functions required him to sign the documents. Ota went to the Supreme Court to explain that the American military presence impinges on fundamental rights of citizens of Okinawa (to live in peace and security) and challenged the constitutionality of the U.S. presence on Japanese soil. The Court stated that the loaning of land to the U.S. bases was not contrary to the Constitution.

In September 1996, the Governor organized a referendum in which 89% of votes were cast in favor of reducing the bases and reviewing the legal status of U.S. troops.³⁶

Given the growing frequency and magnitude of the protests against the U.S. presence in Okinawa, Tokyo and Washington set up a special committee to study ways of reducing the negative impacts of troops and bases by reorganizing and possibly reducing their surface area.

³⁴ "Governors Call For Revisions to SOFA", *Japan Times*, February 13, 2003.

³⁵ The Governor is similar to a French Prefect, but is not nominated by the government and instead is elected locally (as for example the Presidents of France's Regional Councils). Moreover, Ota was elected as an independent candidate, but with strong support from the political left.

³⁶ Robert D. Eldridge, "The 1996 Okinawa Referendum on U.S. Base Reductions: One Question, Several Answers", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 37, No. 10, October 1997, pp. 879-90.

In its final report in December 1996, the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) set out efforts to reduce noise disturbance and sought improvement of the functioning of the SOFA, retrocession of 11 tracts of military land in the south of the island, and in particular the relocation of the dangerous Futenma base in Okinawa.³⁷

The report proposed that the Futenma base be handed back and replaced by a runway using land reclaimed from the sea near Camp Schwab, in the town of Nago in the north-east of the island (see map). This would be an offshore installation in order to minimize disruptions to the neighborhood.

The Repeated Postponement of the Futenma Base Transfer

But the transfer of the Futenma base, originally promised for 2003 at the latest, has still not taken place. Since 1996, a gridlock has prevailed among the different actors, whose dynamics can be summarized as a strong and disparate local opposition, made up of a coalition of environmentalists, pacifists and women's movements, which oppose the coalition supporting the basic project, namely building contractors, elected officials of the LDP, and retailers. The local authorities, who originally were against the project and who resorted to direct democracy to support their position (the referendums in Okinawa in 1996, and Nago in 1997), have yielded to promises of subsidies made by the government. The poor economic situation of the island is the first concern of Okinawans, who elected governors supported by the coalition government in both 1998 and 2006.

In 1999, the government thus officially announced that the plan would be implemented, and would be accompanied by a development plan for northern Okinawa worth ¥100 billion. In return, the G8 was held in the Prefecture in 2000.

But local opposition has hardened and continued to prevent the authorities from carrying out the environmental audit, which is obligatory prior to the construction of the base.

³⁷ Minister for Foreign Affairs Ikeda, Minister of State for Defense Kyuma, Secretary of Defense Perry, Ambassador Mondale, *The SACO Final Report*, 2 December 1996. <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/n-america/us/security/96saco1.html> . Last Accessed 19 May 2010.

Figure 5: Background for the Construction of the Futenma Air Station Replacement Facility (FRF)

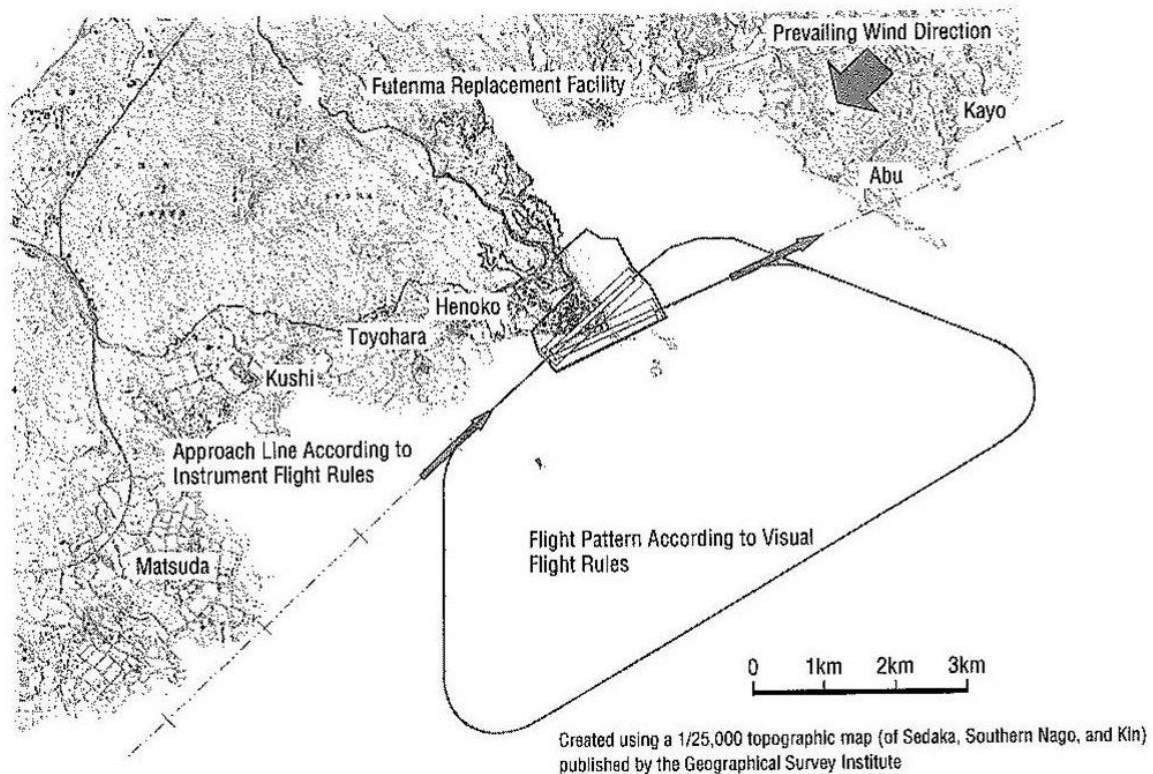
Month & Year	Background	Remarks
April 1996 December	Prime Minister Hashimoto and U.S. Ambassador Mondale held a meeting and the total return of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma (MCAS Futenma) was expressed SACO Interim Report SACO Final Report → Construction of a sea-based facility off the east coast of the main island of Okinawa	Up to local government's acceptance of the FRF and the Cabinet decision (three years and eight months)
November 1999 December	Governor of Okinawa Prefecture Inamine expressed that the coastal area of Henoko in Nago City was designated as the relocation site Mayor of Nago City Kishimoto expressed that the city would accept the FRF "Government Policy on Relocation of MCAS Futenma" (Cabinet decision) → Construction in the "Coastal Area of Henoko, Nago City in Camp Schwab Water Area"	From the Cabinet decision to the development of the Basic Plan (two years and seven months)
July 2002	Development of the "Basic Plan of the FRF"	From the development of the Basic Plan to the beginning of the EIA (one year and nine months)
April 2004 August September	The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) procedure started (Abolished in 2007) A helicopter of U.S. Forces crashed into a university campus in Ginowan City, Okinawa Offshore operation of the boring survey started	
October 2005	A new plan was agreed on in the SCC document → The FRF will be constructed in an "L"-shaped configuration that combines the southern shoreline areas of Camp Schwab and adjacent water areas of Oura Bay	
April 2006 May August	A basic agreement was concluded with Nago City and Ginoza Village → The plan to construct two runways aligned in a "V"-shape was agreed on, regarding the construction of the FRF The FRF plan was finalized in the U.S.-Japan Roadmap for Realignment Implementation Memorandum of Basic Understanding was concluded between the Defense Agency and Okinawa Prefecture "GOJ Efforts for USFJ Force Structure Realignment and Others"(Cabinet decision) → Abolition of 1999 GOJ Policy Establishment of the Council on Measures for Relocation of MCAS Futenma	
June 2007 August	Survey of existing conditions started The EIA procedure started	
March 2008 July	Survey based on the EIA scoping document started Establishment of "the working team on eliminating the danger associated with MCAS Futenma" and "the working team on facilitating the construction plan for Futenma Relacement Facility and environmental impact assesment"	

Source: Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan-White Paper 2009*, Tokyo, 2009, p. 240.

Japanese democracy is being put to the test: territorial injustice and discrimination against Okinawa are managed by the central government with subsidies. It is challenged by a dynamic, local direct democracy. Moreover, the issue of the Futenma transfer is a hostage to different groups with competing interests (especially those of local construction companies). Also, other proposals to relocate the original base to another municipality have never really been studied. Takemasa Moriya, number two in the Japanese Defense Agency who has monitored the case since 1996, was arrested in November 2007 and sentenced (in 2008) for corruption.

In 2005, the thorny issue of the transfer of Futenma was at the center of negotiations on the redeployment of U.S. troops. Although the U.S. authorities considered that Tokyo's difficulties are purely internal, they were willing to accept a second plan (a heliport built on the beach) and then even a third (a V-shaped runway).

Figure 6: The 2006 Plan for a V-Shaped Runway in Henoko Bay, Nago



[Source](#): Ministry of Defense, *Defense of Japan-White Paper 2008*, Tokyo, 2008.

After signing the roadmap in 2006, the Americans expected Japan to carry out the plan diligently, and were not willing to accept a renegotiation.³⁸ However, despite new grants conditional on the cooperation among the municipalities hosting the bases, local protests has continued. The announced departure of 8,000 Marines and 9,000 of their relatives is still conditioned to real progress on the relocation of the Futenma base to Henoko Bay.

³⁸ Apart from the progressive integration of the USFJ and the Japanese Self-Defense Forces, the roadmap sets out the relocation of 8,000 Marines from Okinawa to Guam. Furthermore, an agreement has been reached on the transfer of the Futenma base near the barracks of Camp Schwab (Cape Henoko) at Nago. Planes causing noise disturbances would be relocated to Hondo (the four main islands of Japan), while some swapping would occur between the Atsugi base (located in a densely-populated area that has become a suburb of Tokyo) and the Iwakuni base in the Prefecture of Yamaguchi, where 57 FA-18 Hornets are being transferred.

Conclusion

The accession to power of the Democratic Party in August 2009 has led to the questioning of a number of certainties established under the rule of the LDP since 1955. It is hard to deny the legitimacy of claims by the Hatoyama government for rebalancing and redefining the alliance. But the revision of the 2006 roadmap, and more fundamentally the question of U.S. bases in Japan needs to be accompanied by a more general examination of the role and future of the alliance, a public debate and positive proposals by Japan, which did not happen during the negotiations of 2005-2006. From this point of view, the DPJ government is right in seeking to reopen the issue and put forward its own priorities to its U.S. ally.

However, the government has certainly made a strategic mistake by starting to tackle the most complex and most sensitive question within the alliance, and doing so with neither prior consideration of how to approach the issue nor any credible alternative to offer Washington.

With the announcement of a return to the 2006 plan, Hatoyama appears to have doubly betrayed Japanese voters, going back on his original promise to move Futenma "at least outside the prefecture of Okinawa" and giving in to U.S. demands that seek to stick closely to the 2006 agreement. In reality, the issue of U.S. bases in Okinawa is so complex that alternative options are very limited. Furthermore, a reconsideration of the U.S. presence in Japan and Okinawa would imply a serious challenge to the security alliance between the two countries, which Tokyo does not want.

However, the government's inability to resolve the issue and the incessant procrastination have provoked strong criticism and pressure, both in Okinawa and Washington. On 25 April, 90,000 people gathered in Okinawa calling for the departure of American troops.³⁹ The government has revived the hopes and anger of the people by making hasty promises. It has also created unnecessary tension with its U.S. partner just as Democratic administrations came to power on both sides of the Pacific, which should have created an opportunity to conduct a thorough review to redefine the alliance.

³⁹The council members of the Nago municipality, who had accepted the transfer having fiercely negotiated benefits, have been wrong-footed. The city of Nago has accused Tokyo of not taking into account the sacrifices made to allow for the adoption of a bilateral agreement in 2006, and to reduce the problems of public insecurity around Futenma.