



The Proposal to Build a Nuclear Power Plant in Tokyo and to Move the Futenma Base from Okinawa to Mainland Japan

C. Douglas Lummis

Just over thirty years ago the anti-nuclear power activist Hirose Takashi (who I knew because we frequented the same coffee house in Tokyo) said to me, "I have converted to the other side. I am writing a book arguing that nuclear power is safe after all." He smiled to see how startled I was, and then went on. "Nuclear power is perfectly safe, right? That means there is no reason to build nuclear power plants in such far-away places. Building all those towers and stringing all those long wires costs a lot of money, and then because of the resistance in the wires you lose much of the electricity in the form of heat. Tokyo's power plants should be built in downtown Tokyo. The electricity would be cheaper, and instead of dumping all that hot water into the ocean as they do now, they could pipe it directly into people's homes, for cooking, bathing and washing clothes and dishes. If it's safe, why not?"

The resulting book *Nuclear Power Plants to Tokyo!* (東京に、原発を！ 1981) was a best seller, got a lot of media attention, and made many people very angry. Hirose also made a leaflet, and passed it out to commuters outside Tokyo's Shinjuku station. Men in business suits would shout at him, "What do you mean! That's dangerous!" Hirose would say, "Oh, are you against nuclear power?" "No, of course not. But the plants should be put far away from big cities, where fewer people live." "Oh, you mean somebody else should face the danger, and not you?"

The book was a great success at revealing big-city egotism. The people of Tokyo (and Osaka as well) want the electricity, but not the danger. The same is true today. Many people haven't grasped the significance of the fact that the melted-down nuclear power plants at Fukushima are owned by the Tokyo Electric Company. The electricity they generated was sent to Tokyo. The people who live in Fukushima get their electricity from a different company.

There is a similar story behind the fact that 75% of the US military bases in Japan are located in tiny Okinawa. The great majority of the Japanese public wants the US military near to (as they imagine) protect them, but not *too* near. Opinion polls show that over 70% of the Japanese people support the Japan-US Security Treaty, which provides for locating US military bases in Japan. As I wrote last time, far fewer Okinawans support that treaty – in an opinion poll done a few years ago, just 7% responded that they thought the treaty "contributed to the security of East Asia." Okinawans have no historical memory of a military presence making them safer. The 1945 Battle of Okinawa, in which between a quarter and a third of the Okinawan people were killed, took place *because* there were Japanese military bases there. And if war comes to Okinawa again, it will be *because* of the US bases on the islands.

A growing number of Okinawans are becoming sensitive to the fact that this unequal distribution of the bases is a form of discrimination, and that they are being treated as a colony. They are saying, The Yamato Japanese are the ones who want the US military to protect them, so isn't it reasonable to locate the bases in Yamato Japan? In particular, shouldn't the US Marine Air Base at Futenma be relocated to mainland Japan rather than to northern Okinawa? So far the Japanese Government absolutely refuses to consider this idea. It is a virtual taboo.

Thus, the anti-base movement in Okinawa is evolving from an anti-war movement to an anti-war/anti-colonial movement.

Last autumn Hirose came to Okinawa to give a talk on the Fukushima disaster, and we talked about the similarity between his "Nuclear power plants to Tokyo" idea, and Okinawa's "Futenma Marine Base to Yamato Japan" movement. I suggested to him that one difference between them was that his idea was a satire, not meant seriously, whereas the Okinawan idea is meant seriously. But he strongly denied this, and said he was absolutely serious. "I don't write satires," he said. "Actually bringing nuclear power plants to Tokyo is the only way those people can be made to understand."

After his talk in Naha I joined him on the stage for a conversation on just this subject. You can see this (in Japanese) on YouTube [here](#).

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