



## Anti-Osprey Rally in Okinawa 沖縄におけるオスプリー反対運動 Sep. 16, 2012

### Asia-Pacific Journal Feature

Since the Fukushima Daiichi crisis, Tokyo and other major cities have been the sites of anti-nuclear demonstrations on a scale beyond any mass protests seen in mainland Japan since the "season of politics" of the 1960s and 1970s. Specifying "mainland Japan" is necessary, however, as Okinawa Prefecture, the southern islands occupied by the United States as a military colony between 1945 and 1972, and [host](#) to 25% of the total US military facilities in Japan despite making up only 0.6% of the country's land area in the decades since, has repeatedly seen huge rallies against this unjust burden. The largest protest movement to date was sparked by the rape and brutalization of a 14 year old girl by three American servicemen in 1995. Today, protests against the deployment of the V-22 Osprey aircraft to Okinawa are beginning to rival the earlier movement in scope.

On September 9 2012, rallies demanding the removal of the aircraft, which critics have decried as unsafe and a crash risk that could start forest fires in ecologically sensitive areas or hit populated areas, were held at several sites in Okinawa and accompanied by a demonstration in Tokyo. According to the organizers, over 100,000 gathered to protest in Okinawa. Other media [placed](#) the number in the tens of thousands.



The September 9 rally from the air.

The Okinawa Prefectural Citizens' Rally Against Osprey Deployment released a resolution spelling out the major objections to the Osprey deployment:

From [Peace Philosophy Center](#)

We are gathered here today to protest with indignation against the forceful deployment of the vertical take-off and landing transport aircraft, the MV-22 Osprey, and to call for the withdrawal of its deployment plans.

Due to the presence of the US forces' bases, the citizens of Okinawa prefecture have been imposed with a multitude of damages related to military facilities. Looking just at the years since the reversion of Okinawa to Japan in 1972, the number of criminal cases involving US military personnel and/or other related persons has reached close to 6,000. At present, incidents, accidents, and noise damage related to the US forces continue.

With the abduction and rape of a local schoolgirl by three US servicemen in September of 1995, The Okinawan People's Rally was held in October of the same year where 85,000 citizens gathered to voice their anger and protest against the US forces. In response to the strong protest by the people, the Special Action Committee on Okinawa (SACO) was established, and both governments of Japan and the United States agreed to the full return of MCAS Futenma.

However, it has been 16 years since the agreement was concluded and MCAS Futenma still remains in the middle of a densely populated urban area and continues to threaten the lives and assets of the Okinawan people.

Against this background, the United States government gave notice that the "structurally defective" Osprey aircraft is going to be deployed to the dangerous facility

of MCAS Futenma, and these aircraft have already been unloaded at MCAS Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture. Furthermore, it has become apparent that the Osprey would be in operation not just at MCAS Futenma, but also in training at Kadena Air Force Base and at the Northern Training Area. With the risks of crashes, accidents, and noise issues resulting from the training and operation of the Osprey which spans throughout all of Okinawa, the concern, anxiety and indignation of the citizens have risen to unprecedented levels.

The Osprey has had repeated accidents since its development stages and has caused a large number of fatalities. We have even seen this year crashes in Morocco and in the State of Florida. Experts cite its structural deficiencies and thus, we cannot accept the Osprey deployment without sound confirmation of its safety.

The citizens of Okinawa adamantly oppose further burdens imposed by the military bases. Moreover, if the national government ignores the calls of the people of the prefecture, we declare that we will work to unify the consensus of the prefecture's citizens opposing the bases.

We strongly urge both governments of Japan and the United States to take seriously and sincerely the indomitable resolve of the citizens against the Osprey deployment and to immediately withdraw the deployment plans, and to close and remove MCAS Futenma.

The above is resolved as stated on this 9th day of September, 2012.

The Okinawa Prefectural Citizens' Rally Against Osprey Deployment

*On September 17, Asia-Pacific Journal Coordinator Gavan McCormack, published an op-ed in the Okinawan newspaper Ryukyu Shimpo. McCormack places the current movement in historical context.*

**This is no longer an opposition movement but a prefecture in resistance, saying "No."**

Original [here](#)

Great issues are at stake in the Osprey contest and the 5 August Meeting. After four decades of lying to, discriminating against, and betraying Okinawa, time and again, decade after decade, the governments of Japan and the United States now seem to have provoked it to an intolerable degree. By determining to impose on it something that the people of Okinawa say they will not accept, they substitute authoritarianism for democracy.

At the Ginowan City protest meeting in June 2012, Shinjo Yoshitaka, the president of heads of the neighborhood community associations in Ginowan City, spoke of Okinawa's culture of enduring up to a certain limit, beyond which the endurable becomes unendurable (nijitan nijitan nijiraran). His words distilled Okinawa's pain. Now is such a point, when either the national government or the people of Okinawa must submit. The odds in favour of the state and against the people are of course huge, but for nearly 20 years the people have held the state at bay, blocking one after another design for a new base and now the imposition of the Osprey. This time the stakes are higher than ever and the outcome will have a profound effect on Japanese democracy, the Japan-US relationship, and the world.

Two decades after the end of the Cold War, the relationship between Tokyo (backed by Washington) and Okinawa resembles nothing so much as that between Moscow and Budapest or Warsaw at the height of the Cold War. Okinawan views are as much respected and listened to in Tokyo and Washington today as once Hungarian and Polish sentiments were respected in Moscow.

After decades of struggle, however, on these issues there is no longer an Okinawan "government" and "opposition." Local government heads and assemblies, social and citizen groups are one, and it is the conservative Governor who suggests that if the Osprey are so safe they could be deployed to Hibiya Park or Shinjuku Gyoen. This is no longer an opposition movement but a prefecture in resistance, saying "No." Japanese history has no precedent for this.

There is of course much more at stake than the Osprey. The Okinawan movement that says "No" to the Osprey says "No" also to the Futenma substitution project at Nago and "No" to the Osprey Helipad construction project at Takae. It also is deeply sensitive to other signs of intention to militarize the Southwestern islands in general and turn Okinawa into a front-line of confrontation with China: to construct a new (Self-Defence Force) base on Yonaguni, to have US and Japanese forces gradually merge and share the existing bases (in the name of "bilateral cooperation"), and to turn Shimojishima airport on Miyako Island and Mageshima in Kagoshima Prefecture into bases.

When the DPJ abandoned one by one its 2009 electoral pledges and began to morph into a clone LDP, mainland Japan sank into a stupor of political disillusion, but Okinawa returned to struggle with renewed energy. The local government elections and the All-Okinawa protest meeting of 2010 were expressions of its determination. Wikileaks and Mitsuyaku helped by shedding further light on the nature of the state and the Ampo system. They showed the lies and deceit on which the system rested, from the initial false promise of a reversion that would be "no nuclear weapons and on a par with the mainland" (kakunuki hondonami) through the years of evasion or manipulation of various laws (especially the environmental law) and the consistent discrimination against Okinawa, to Noda's false promise of "burden lightening."

DPJ governments began to show even greater servility to Washington and greater hardness to Okinawa than their LDP predecessors. Prime Minister Noda's admission that "Once the American government has decided on deployment, there is no point in us going on about whether to do this or do that" was a rare, public admission at the highest level of the humiliating and clientelist (zokkoku) nature of the US-Japan relationship. However, by endorsing the Pentagon plan to deploy the Osprey not only in Okinawa but throughout Japan, they stirred the awakening of an "Okinawan" spirit of resistance on a national scale.

Even some of those most faithful to Washington now call for the deployment to be delayed, not because they believe in the sovereignty of the people but because they are afraid. They fear the Osprey struggle has the potential to grow into a nation-wide, anti-base and anti-Ampo movement, a struggle that might threaten Ampo itself. They now promise to investigate and explain, but ultimately their commitment is to enforce the Washington-Tokyo will. In any case, post 2011, explanations from Tokyo, whether on nuclear matters or on Okinawa matters, have little credibility. It is not for Tokyo to explain more or better but to apologize and to withdraw.

Today's Okinawa struggle is a root struggle over how Japan is governed and how it should be governed. In a rapidly changing world in which the US is losing both its economic and its moral authority, how can it be in the national interest for Japan to cling to its client state dependence on the United States and to steadily militarize? The anti-militarist Okinawan struggle constitutes a precious resource, pricking the national conscience and spurring mainland Japan to greater civic courage.



A protest outside the Diet Building in Tokyo

*The editors of the Ryukyu Shimpo published an impassioned editorial of their own on September 9.*

### **Okinawan people's mass rally to reject Osprey deployment Protect the sanctity of human life and become a cornerstone of peace**

Original [here](#)

For the people of Okinawa, today is the day of an historic mass rally. In this rally the young and the old, men and women and people of all walks of like will participate to express their opposition to the deployment of the MV-22 Osprey vertical take-off and landing transport aircraft to U.S. Marine Corps Air Station Futenma. People who value the spirit of democracy and the democratic process are filled with a sense of impending crisis. This thoroughly bipartisan rally will be the first motion that will culminate in a huge wave of opposition. The Okinawan people will not accept the "inherently defective aircraft" that threatens their lives, property, safety and security. Washington and Tokyo are advised to take this situation seriously, because people are standing up to take up action over the sanctity of life – the Government needs to understand that this rally is a committed cry of the people. Okinawans have applied themselves many times in various ways in an attempt to resolve base-related issues since the end of the war. Now, resentment towards the military-first policy that the governments of Japan and the United States have foisted upon them has built up to a broader and deeper extent than ever before.

### **Military hides MV-22s accident report**

The U.S. Marine Corps has confirmed that since 2006, among the aircraft it operates, a total of 31 accidents involving the Osprey have occurred. However, despite the House Committee demanding in 2009 that records be divulged, the Marine Corps has continually refused to provide details of the status of its MV-22 fleet, including aircraft damaged and destroyed in accidents. Some experts even speculate that the Marines are intentionally hiding the MV-22's accident reports. If we count the accidents involving the CV-22 type Osprey aircraft belonging to the Air Force the number of accidents doubles.

On July 1, at his meeting with Defense Minister Morimoto Satoshi who was on a visit to Okinawa, Governor Nakaima Hirokazu criticized the Status of Forces Agreement with its inequalities that allow the U.S. military to exercise extra-territorial rights when its personnel on active duty cause accidents or incidents. The governor also spoke of his concern about the deployment of the MV-22 squadrons, saying, "All U.S. bases will be closed immediately if the government quotes the Status of Forces Agreement in order to operate dangerous equipment in densely populated areas."

In Okinawa, U.S. military bases are located very close to residential areas, so a crash could cause a catastrophe at any time. The MV-22 squadrons will operate in an area that includes at least 25 cities, towns and villages. The wrath of residents would know no bounds if a crash were to occur that results in the loss of life.

A former chief analyst at the Institute for Defense Analyses who has in-depth knowledge on the performance of the Osprey, and experts belonging to an independent non-profit organization, the Project On Government Oversight, have pointed out the safety issues of the aircraft, and there is ongoing comment from people involved in Osprey crashes about organizational cover-ups and the downplaying of the crashes.

Tokyo continues to blindly emphasize the merits of deploying the Osprey to Japan despite ongoing problems with its safety. The Japanese Government follows the lead of the United States Government without question, as though it were a tributary nation of the United States, rather than an independent nation.

After the war, Okinawa faced many difficulties because the U.S. military forces seized Okinawan people's land at the point of a bayonet and bulldozed everything in its path to construct military bases. To add insult to injury, U.S. military personnel further trampled on Okinawan people's human rights by raping Okinawan women. In 1959, a military aircraft crashed into Miyamori Elementary School in Ishikawa, killing 18 pupils.

The deployment of the Osprey to Futenma essentially represents an "indiscriminate attack" on the Okinawan people among the many inhumane acts perpetrated in Okinawa by the U.S. military forces. If the Japanese and the U.S. government force the deployment of the Osprey aircraft on the prefecture, the Okinawan people will undoubtedly come to oppose not only the U.S. Marine Corps but all four arms of the U.S. military.

#### Suicide of a Democracy

There are 20 airspaces and 28 water areas used for training under the U.S. military administration around the islands of Okinawa Prefecture. Local people are not allowed to freely use the land, sea and sky that belong to Okinawa. Taking advantage of the Status of Forces Agreement, which grants privileges to the U.S. forces in Japan, U.S. forces exert extra-territorial rights to an inordinate extent. Does the U.S. government think that Okinawa is an American colony?

Since Okinawa's reversion to Japanese sovereignty, there have been 522 accidents, including U.S. military aircraft crashing, or making emergency landings. Up until the end of December 2011 those accidents had caused 34 casualties with another 24 people missing. The fiery explosion of a U.S. Marine helicopter that crashed onto the campus of Okinawa International University in the summer of 2004 is still fresh in our minds.

There has been nationwide protest against the plan for the MV-22 squadrons to be deployed to Futenma. It is safe to say that the Osprey would be nothing less than an "unwelcome guest." If the U.S. government ignores the will of the Okinawan people, and protects the vested interests of the U.S. Marine Corps, that stance would be tantamount to the suicide of national democracy.

Before the relationship between Japan and the United States falls apart at the seams, the Japanese and the U.S. governments should abandon the deployment of this flawed aircraft to Futenma, and the planned low-altitude Osprey flight-training over the main islands of Japan. The governments should return to the starting line on the Futenma issue, which is to remove the dangers posed by the base, and seriously consider closing, removing and relocating the facilities at Futenma outside of Japan and Okinawa.

We cannot help but feel that the world is now asking us, the people of Okinawa, about our historical standpoint and our broader viewpoint. Japanese government leaders express rivalry with the emerging China. Should Okinawa play the role of the cornerstone of the Pacific from a military standpoint, or should we play the role of the cornerstone of the Pacific from a peaceful perspective in order to serve as a bridge between Asian nations. We would like the people of Okinawa to think of this rally as the starting point for action that shapes a future of their choice.

*Finally, the New York Times has published an editorial critican of the American base presence in Okinawa. The base situation in Okinawa and the local protests against it are seldom discussed in the Ameircan media so this piece is significant.*

#### Ospreys in Okinawa

Original [here](#)

Tens of thousands of people rallied on Sunday in Okinawa to protest plans to deploy the MV-22 Osprey, the trouble-plagued tilt-rotor aircraft, at the United States Marine Corps base in the city of Ginowan. The Marines want to bring in 24 Ospreys to replace a fleet of Vietnam-era helicopters, but Okinawans, turning out in one of the largest anti-American protests in years, are bristling.

The Osprey has a terrible reputation as a prime example of a hugely expensive, dubiously useful weapons systems. Okinawans don't care about the misspent money. They worry that the plane is prone to crashing. To many residents, who have borne the heavy burden of the American military presence in Japan, deploying the Osprey on the island is rubbing salt into an old wound.

The first dozen Ospreys to reach Japan have been grounded while the Japanese government reviews the plane's safety record. Marine officials insist that the Osprey's notorious defects have been worked out and that it is safe and reliable. But, in April, an Osprey crashed in Morocco, killing two Marines. Another crashed in Florida in June. Though officials blame pilot error for the accidents, that has hardly eased local fears in densely crowded Okinawa, which has seen hundreds of crashes and emergency landings of military jets and helicopters since the 1950s, several of them fatal.

The anger on Sunday was not just about two dozen planes. It reflects frustration over islanders' long-stymied efforts to get the Marines entirely out of Okinawa. Japan and the United States struck a deal in 2006 to close Futenma, move several thousand Marines off the island and shift others to a new base on Okinawa's less-populated northeast coast. But many Okinawans saw this agreement as inadequate, and it went nowhere. A deal reached in April to move 9,000 Marines has also been stalled.

For too long, Okinawans have seen promises but no movement. The United States has an obligation to tread lightly in Okinawa and to listen to the concerns of the residents. It can start by putting the Ospreys someplace else.

*For more coverage of resistance in Okinawa, see Gavan McCormack and Satoko Norimatsu's article "[Ryukyu/Okinawa: From Disposal to Resistance](#)" published on September 17, 2012. This is a chapter of their new book [Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States](#) (Amazon link [here](#)).*

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