



"Okinawa Again" - Okinawa Special Series - A Postscript 再度沖縄 沖縄特集 への追 Dec. 01, 2013

This piece is a postscript to an Asia-Pacific Journal series on the Henoko base controversy and the fraught relationships between Okinawa, the United States, and Japan. Gavan McCormack introduces the series [here](#).

Introduction by Gavan McCormack

The long simmering cauldron of Tokyo-Okinawa relations rises towards the boil. Just one week ago The Asia-Pacific Journal published a series of Okinawa-related short texts, but things move quickly, and dramatically; thus this postscript. Then, we noted that Tokyo – meaning the national government – was applying fierce pressure to secure the submission of Okinawa – meaning Okinawa's local governing institutions – to its will. Since then it has achieved some notable success in that endeavour.

The two key approaching events are the election of a mayor in Nago City (location of the projected Marine Corps Henoko base project) on 19 January and the decision by Okinawan governor Nakaima on the national government's request that he license the reclamation of Oura Bay that would be the first step in construction of the military complex planned for the US Marine Corps. He has promised that decision either late 2013 or early 2014.

The opposition to the Henoko project is formidable. Especially since 2010 it has become an "all-Okinawa" phenomenon such that, at its peak in January 2013, all 41 heads of local administrations (cities, towns, villages) together with the Okinawan representatives in the National Diet and the Prefectural Assembly joined in a delegation to the national government to make three demands: immediate and unconditional reversion of Futenma (without substitution), abandonment of the Henoko project, and withdrawal of the Marines' controversial Osprey vertical takeoff and landing aircraft. No other Japanese region has ever taken exception to national government policies in anything like this frontal, dissenting way.

While the national government has insisted, ever since 1996, that Futenma Marine base would only be returned when a substitute base had been provided and that substitute would have to be in Okinawa, at Henoko, no candidate for representative office in Okinawa has ever stood on such a platform. In January 2010 a candidate explicitly opposing the project was elected mayor of Nago City. Thereafter, all Okinawan candidates for office, including those who stood for conservative parties such as the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), adopted the platform "transfer of Futenma outside of Okinawa" (*kengai isetsu*), even when the national LDP's platform was explicitly for the transfer within Okinawa, i.e. the Henoko project (in 2012 and 2013). Since the national LDP understood that no candidate for Okinawan office could be elected if she or he were to stand for base construction, the gap between the two was bridged by silence: national LDP representatives supported LDP Okinawan candidates by avoiding any reference to this crucial difference.

As the two decisions noted above drew close, however, the national government and LDP national headquarters worked to resolve the contradiction. They achieved considerable success in splitting and weakening the "all-Okinawa" resistance phenomenon and creating a momentum they hope will help push Governor Nakaima to an early decision and take the wind out of the sails of the Nago City election (every survey points to majority support for the present mayor's anti-base stance) by spreading a sense of despair and the uselessness of attempting to resist something on which the national government is determined. At a Tokyo press conference on 25 November summoned by Party Secretary-General Ishiba, all five Okinawan members of the national Diet, threatened with expulsion from the party if they resisted, surrendered and reversed their position (two – Nishime Kosaburo and Shimajiri Aiko – had done so as early as April 2013, but without resolving the gap between prefectural and national parties). Now all five formally renounced their electoral pledges and declared their fealty to party headquarters.



LDP Secretary-General Ishiba with the Five Okinawan Diet Members, 25 November 2013

Immediately afterwards, the LDP's Okinawa Chapter followed suit and formally reversed policy to fall in line with the national and government position.

The Abe government and Ishiba party organization's evident plan – to subdue first the LDP and then to exact the submission of the Governor (who owed his election at least in part to LDP support), most likely before the end of the year and in such a way as to render “irrelevant” the outcome of the Nago mayoral election, seemed to be working smoothly.

Conscious of the popular resolve and of the difficulty of proceeding in the teeth of an “all Okinawa” opposition while pretending to be a democratic polity, the Abe government had used a combination of blandishments and intimidation to secure its way. Many saw the outcome as a repeat of the 1879 “*Ryukyu shobun*” the act of “punishment” by which, uniquely, Okinawa in 1879 had been incorporated in the modern Japanese state, or as an act of *tenko* on the part of elected Okinawan representatives who had renounced the pledges made solemnly to the electorate when faced with threat, as some Japan Communist Party leaders had abandoned their leftist beliefs and adopted emperor-centred nationalism when under Kempeitai interrogation and pressure in the 1930s, or as a *fumie*, the act of stamping on a “holy picture” demanded of seventeenth century Kirishitan (Christians) in order to evade torture and execution by showing that they had renounced their faith and reaffirmed their loyalty to Japanese rulers. All the images were redolent of the deep angst and anger in Okinawa at the perceived betrayal.

While these events passed with little comment (and no outrage) in mainland Japan, and were scarcely reported at all beyond Japan, anger, the sense of betrayal, and the sense that Japanese democracy itself was being trashed, was strong in Okinawa. Adjectives such as tyranny, colonial, unforgivable betrayal, fundamental challenge to democracy, subversion of democratic principle, were repeated. Many insisted that LDP elected representatives who had betrayed the cause on which they had been elected should resign and face the electors.

Former Governor (1990-1998) Ota Masahide quoted the “father” of Okinawa studies, Iha Fuyu (1876-1947) who once referred to the character weakness of Okinawans as a readiness “to sell out friends, teachers, and even country for the sake of an advantage.” His conservative successor, Inamine Keiichi (Governor 1998-2006), by contrast, spoke of the steady strengthening of Okinawan opposition to the base project over the past decade, called on Okinawa to remain united and referred to the Henoko project as “utterly impossible” (*kagirinaku fukano*).^[1]

For those Okinawans who remained true to the now abandoned “all-Okinawa” principle of 2010-2013, the betrayal was a bitter pill. It likely signified a new phase of what could only be called national aggression. The supposedly constitutionally guaranteed rights of electoral democracy and local self-government were swept aside. After 17 years of democratic struggle, Okinawan civil society could expect nothing but continuation, at a new level of intensity, against a government that had abandoned the restraint shown by previous conservative governments and seemed ready to enforce its will regardless of the consequences. It is hard to call to mind any single moment, or any single issue in post-1945 Japanese history, at which decisions by so few (the “Okinawa Five” of 25 November) on matters of such moment were being taken while scarcely registering on the national media or the masses of the Japanese people.

It only remains now to see whether the pressure that managed to “break” the Okinawa chapter of the LDP will likewise “break” Governor Nakaima.

The editorials that follow were published in the two Okinawan daily papers, *Okinawa taimusu* and *Ryukyu shimpo*, on 28 November 2013.

“Acceptance of Henoko Project by LDP Okinawa Chapter a Shameful Betrayal,”^[2]

Editorial, *Okinawa taimusu*, 28 November 2013.

Hard on the heels of the five Okinawa-related LDP Diet members, 15 LDP members of the Prefectural Assembly also brushed aside and revoked their pledge to have Futenma Marine Air Station transferred out of Okinawa (*kengai isetsu*). It was a phenomenon of brazen, avalanche-like collapse, in the spirit of “Nothing to fear if we all cross together.”

What can voters henceforth believe in as they cast their votes? As the maxim “without trust, it cannot stand” puts it, the sticking to one’s word and not lying is the foundation for maintenance of political trust. The responsibility for deceiving voters, and for raising their distrust of politics to the limit, is boundless.

The scene of the meeting with LDP Secretary-General Ishiba at LDP headquarters in Nagatacho made us feel as if we had been spun back in time to 1879, the year of the “Ryukyu punishment” (*Ryukyu shobun*). Secretary-General Ishiba delivering his explanation was the Ryukyu punishment official. Sitting with stern countenance and given no opportunity to speak, the five Diet members were there to pledge their allegiance.

The three Lower House members including Kokuba Tatsunosuke had clung till now to their “outside Okinawa” pledge, but facing the threat of expulsion from the party could resist the pressure from party headquarters no longer. Okinawa party chief Onaga Takeshi convened a plenary of Prefectural Assembly members on 27th and resolved to endorse the transfer of Futenma base to Henoko.

To fill in the ditch from the outside, putting paid to the notion of an “All Okinawa” [opposition], and pressing Governor Nakaima to shift his position because the political situation had changed: this has all along been the Abe government and LDP’s way of dealing with Okinawa.

But, such steps have had the effect of exposing the governing LDP’s reliance on force and compulsion. Let us recall what has happened.

The LDP Okinawa Branch fought the 2010 House of Councillors election and the 2012 House of Representatives election under a banner of "outside Okinawa" different from party headquarters and in all had five members elected. In the June 2012 prefectural assembly elections too, virtually all of the fifteen members elected had pledged either "outside Okinawa" or "outside Okinawa, outside Japan."

In January 2013, representatives of all 41 cities, towns and villages met with Prime Minister Abe and presented the *Kenpakusho* [Statement of Demand] calling for an end to Osprey deployment and abandonment of the idea of Futenma substitution within Okinawa. The LDP's prefectural assembly members took part along with representatives of other parties and groups. Most of today's LDP national Diet and Prefectural Assembly members were elected on the pledge of "transfer outside Okinawa" and bear a political obligation to strive to achieve transfer beyond Okinawa irrespective of party.

If they cannot do that, those members should all resign, make some new pledge on transfer to Henoko, and seek the confidence [of the voters]. That is the royal way in representative democracy.

The Diet members and Prefectural Assembly members give as reason for abandoning their pledge that "it is in order to avoid Futenma becoming permanent."

The insistence on the part of leaders of the governing LDP that "To try to move Futenma base outside Okinawa is to make it permanent" is to shake things up politically in order to secure the abandonment of the pledge to move the base outside the prefecture. It is nothing but a threat, and is best seen as expression of annoyance that things have not been going according to their plan.

The reasons why even within the US military they had to agree to return Futenma [in 1996] were (1) there were too many factors constraining training, (2) it was necessary to get rid of the danger of crashes, and (3) base facilities as a whole had become obsolete.

What in fact does "Futenma becoming permanent" mean? Does it mean going back to the drawing-board with the plan for return? Or that return might be delayed beyond the planned time? If it is that the plan would be delayed, that presumably means that it has already become permanent?

Futenma return cannot be sent back to the drawing-board. The Reorganization of US Forces in Japan, including the planned transfer to Guam, is stalemated because it faces all sorts of difficulties.

Governor Nakaima has criticized statements about Futenma becoming permanent, saying "for bureaucrats to talk simply about becoming permanent is to [confess to] impotence" or "a kind of collapse." How right he is.

The government insists that Henoko is the only choice. In that case, what alternatives has the Abe government considered? It should first explain what problems arose in relation to which plan.

For it, instead, just to press its conclusion is simply for it to be manipulating information.

"LDP Okinawa Chapter's Scrapping of its Pledge a Betrayal of the People, Parliamentary Representatives Should Resign and Face Voters," [\[3\]](#)
editorial, *Ryukyu shimpo*, 28 November 2013.

At a plenary of Prefectural Assembly representatives, the Okinawa chapter of the LDP decided to approve the transfer of the US's Futenma Air Station to Henoko. Since the Assembly members had pledged to transfer it out of the prefecture this was a breach of that pledge. It was a fundamental breach of representative democracy that links electors and candidates by means of pledges.

Not only that, the lightness with which Okinawan politicians treated their public pledges was broadcast to the whole country. The spectacle of adults bowing to intimidation was shown to children. Were they aware of the depth of crime it involved to have threatened the lives and human rights of Okinawan people?

By scrapping Manifesto pledges, they destroyed the relationship of trust with the electorate. Members of the LDP prefectural assembly should all resign their posts and submit to the judgment of the electorate.

The Stain on Modern and Contemporary History

The Okinawan Chapter intends to press forward the content of what has now been agreed with party headquarters and Okinawa-related members of the National Diet. For them to say that they are not breaching their policy pledges because, in order to get rid of the danger posed by Futenma, they do not rule out any choice, including Henoko, is sheer sophistry.

At the prefectural assembly election of June 2012, all 15 of those elected, with the exception of two who did not vote and one who reserved his response, gave public pledges of support for Futenma transfer to "outside Okinawa or "outside Okinawa, outside Japan." Not one called for "within Okinawa." How can anything they pledge from now on be believed?

In February 2010, the Prefectural Assembly unanimously (i.e., including its LDP Members) adopted a statement opposing relocation within the prefecture and calling for relocation outside Japan and outside Okinawa. In June 2013, a supra-party group of prefectural assembly members, together with heads of all 41 cities, towns and villages in Okinawa, presented the government with a "*Kempakusho*" statement of demand, seeking abandonment of the within Okinawa relocation. The decision of the LDP Okinawa chapter now reverses all of this, and is a betrayal of the people's will.

LDP [national] Party headquarters threatened the Okinawans with expulsion from the party. What it amounts to is that the Okinawan members of the national diet and the LDP chapter have sold out Okinawa for the sake of protecting their own skins. It creates an ugly stain on Okinawa's modern and contemporary history.

They refer to the possibility of Futenma becoming permanent as reason for their shift of position. But Kurt Campbell, former Assistant Secretary of State, has said, "if an accident were to happen at Futenma popular support would suffer a fatal blow." John McCain, a core member of the US Senate, cautions the incoming US ambassador of this danger. It signifies that becoming permanent is something the US side itself wants to avoid.

The analytical capacity of those who swallow whole the explanation of those who would foist a base on Okinawa is dubious. House of Representatives member Nishime Kosaburo, saying "I am being frank" as he scraps his public pledge, and Shimajiri Aiko, member of the House of Councillors, who talks of "celebrating the birth of a long-awaited baby," refer naively to their endorsement of Henoko. Their words are insulting.

The Government is the Problem

The two former Assistant Secretaries of State, Kurt Campbell and Rust Deming, point to the need for some choice other than the current plan. Even Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State, who had repeatedly insisted on the current plan, has urged the need for a "Plan B."

As the seriousness of the current fiscal situation deepens, it becomes urgent to reduce military expenditure. It has already been settled that the three Marine Corps divisions should be reduced to two. Even though people do not talk about it, the Marine Corps is in process of withdrawal. And yet, despite this, the matter is not publicly addressed. Isn't this just because the government of Japan blocks it?

It has become clear from public documents in the Australian archives that, in October 1972, after reversion of Okinawa to Japan and when the US Department of Defense was considering withdrawing the Marines from their Okinawa base to merge them into its mainland force, the Government of Japan blocked it. Again in the 2005 Realignment of US forces in Japan, though the US side suggesting transferring forces out of Okinawa, the Japanese side refused to accept the idea.

It is the Government of Japan that constitutes the bottleneck preventing reduction of Okinawa's base burden. The government's real inclination is evident in the words that Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshie let slip, that "any thought of a transfer outside of Okinawa is just absurd."

Henceforth, is the LDP Okinawa chapter, by pressing Governor Nakaima to license the reclamation, to become the vanguard in demanding sacrifice of Okinawa? We trust that members of the Naha City Assembly, who till now have shown some spine in holding fast to "outside Okinawa," will stick to their position. Provided Okinawa itself sticks to its position of refusal, the abandonment of the present plan is just a matter of time. We wish to focus our attention coolly on this perspective.

[1] Ota Masahide and Inamine Keiichi, interviewed, *Ryukyu shimpo*, 26 November 2013.

[2] "'Jimin kenren Henoko yonin' haji subeki uragiri koi da"

[3] "Kenren koyaku tekkai, min-i o uragiru koi da, giin jishoku shi shin o toe."

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