



Okinawa and the Paradox of Public Opinion: Base Politics and Protest in Nago City, 1997-2007

Yasuhiro Miyagi, Miyume TANJI

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Miyagi Yasuhiro

Introduced and translated by Miyume TANJI

Introduction

So much has happened to the Okinawan protest against the Futenma base relocation in the past 10 years: the formal and informal local resistance has been such that the new U.S. military sea base that was to replace Futenma Air Station has not been built. However, the election results in Okinawa continue to produce mayors and governors ready to accept relocation, largely for economic reasons. What explains this contradiction? How democratic have the local political processes regarding the base issue been? Miyagi Yasuhiro addresses these questions in a report, originally written for the research group Okinawa jizokuteki hatten kenkyukai (Sustainable Development in Okinawa Research Group, headed by Miyamoto Ken'ichi), which reflects on the ten years since the Nago referendum of 1997 on relocation of the US Marine Air Station from Futenma. The relocation proposal was rejected by a majority.



Miyagi at work

Miyagi requires no introduction to Japan Focus readers. [1] He is an articulate activist against the relocation. Born in Nago in 1959, he pursued a stage acting career in Tokyo in his youth, returned to Nago in 1995, and thereafter devoted himself to community development issues as consultant and municipal public relations editor. With fellow local citizens he campaigned for the Nago City referendum in 1997, after which he served as a member of the Nago City Assembly until 2006. He also ran for mayor of Nago in 2002 on a platform of opposition to the base construction plan. He is motivated by a love for Nago's natural environment and a sense of responsibility to protect it for future generations.

The report centers on the political economy of US base relocation: the processes whereby economic interests and policies have corrupted the democratic representation of the collective will of Okinawans. It offers not only a local activist's perspective, but also valuable economic and political data and analyses, highlighting the local politics of global US military transformation, of which the relocation of the Futenma base is an important part. The report clarifies the current conjuncture for English-speaking readers interested in the history of Okinawan base politics. (MT)

1. Democracy: Elections and Poll Results

Futenma Air Base Relocation Site: Kadena, White Beach or Nago?

First, it is necessary to review the crucial decisions on base relocation ten years ago. In April 1996, SACO (the Special Action Committee on Okinawa) agreed on the return to Japan of the property occupied by the US Marine Corps Futenma Air Station, on condition that an alternative facility would be constructed within Okinawa. However, it was impossible to find a construction site that the US military, the government of Japan, Okinawa Prefecture and especially, the local population all agreed on. The following locations were proposed:

- 1) The northwest forest area within the Kadena Ammunition Storage Area (cancelled due to local opposition);

- 2) The Kadena Air Force Base, within which the Futenma Air Station facility might have been integrated (stalled due to opposition from the US Air Force and from the three municipalities where Kadena base is located);
- 3) Reclaimed land on a coastal area adjacent to Camp Schwab (proposed by the US side but opposed by the Japanese government because of anticipated local resistance). In September 1996, then Prime Minister Hashimoto proposed construction of a removable 'marine heliport' on Henoko Bay instead;
- 4) The White Beach coastal area (cancelled due to opposition from the Prefecture and local municipal bodies);
- 5) In the end, the U.S and Japanese governments agreed in the SACO final report on a site: the coastal area adjacent to Camp Schwab, without specifying an exact location. Naturally, Nago citizens were alarmed.

Events Leading to the Nago Referendum, December 1997

In April 1996 Nago Mayor Higa Tetsuya, agreed to the Defence Agency's preparatory investigation of the Camp Schwab site, which he had been adamantly refusing. In response, regional trade unions and other citizens' groups initiated a referendum. In June, the Nago Referendum Promotion Committee was formed, with a slogan, 'Important decisions should be made by everyone in the community'.

In June, at the City Assembly, the Mayor called for a consensus formation among citizens without a referendum.

In August, the Okinawa Prefecture agreed to a preliminary geographical survey by the Naha Defense Agency Facility Bureau.

More than half of the eligible voters signed a petition organized by the Nago Referendum Promotion Committee calling for a referendum legislation bill.

Nago City Assembly rejected the original referendum bill, under which voters were simply asked to say 'yes' or 'no' to base construction, and instead passed a bill offering four choices adding the option to choose 'yes' subject to the condition of 'increased environmental protection and economic regeneration' (see Figure 1).

The referendum campaign started, and the competition between supporters and opponents of the new base heated up. The main supporters were those engaged in local construction industry and chambers of commerce, hoping for economic regeneration and increased government subsidies.

The government of Japan actively supported the campaign. For example, according to the local newspaper, *Okinawa Taimusu*, the central government raised the military base-related subsidies to the hosting local communities from 2 billion to 3 billion yen (30 November 1996). It also suggested that new policies for economic rejuvenation of the northern region of Okinawa's main island would be adopted when the new base was formally accepted (5 December 1996). Members of the Self Defense Forces residing in Okinawa received 'personal requests for cooperation' from then Minister of Defense Agency, Kyuma Fumio, and Naha Defence Agency Facility Bureau staff knocked on the doors of local residents.

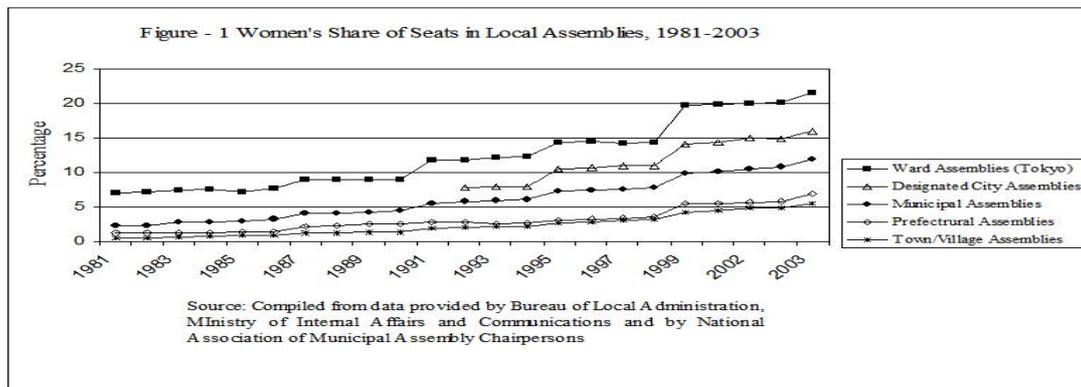


Figure 1. Referendum results (voting rates 82.45%)

Election of the Mayor of Nago City, February 1998

'I hereby accept the heliport construction; at the same time, I am resigning from office and ending my political career.' -----24 December, 1997, former mayor Higa Tetsuya, at Prime Minister's residence.

'The offshore heliport issue will be suspended, until the Governor of Okinawa Prefecture makes a decision.' -----5 January 1998, former deputy mayor Kishimoto Tateo, at a press conference to announce his decision to run for the mayorship of Nago.

Subsequent to Higa's resignation, the base opponents agreed to support Tamaki Yoshikazu, Member of the Prefectural Assembly.

'The focus of this election is to publicly declare our opposition to the marine base, both inside and outside the community.' -----21 January 1998, Tamaki Yoshikazu at the Citizens' Rally, 'Forest of 21st Century' Gymnasium in Nago City.

'I have come to the decision that Okinawa Prefecture refuses the offshore heliport construction.' -----6 February, 1998, two days prior to the mayoral Election, Governor Ota Masahide formally declared his opposition.

Candidates' comments with regard to Governor's opposition to the heliport (as reported in Okinawa Taimusu)

Tamaki:

The purpose of this election is to enable the new mayor and the local residents to stop the construction of a new military base. The referendum showed the opposition of the majority of citizens, but the former mayor went against the citizens' will by accepting the heliport at the prime

minister's residence, then resigning from office. This is outrageous. The government has not given up. Following the Governor's decision to reject the heliport, the most important goal is for Nago City to clearly refuse, and in solidarity, stop the construction. The Okinawan Governor's formal refusal is a major boost for our goal, but victory in the mayoral election will consolidate it.

Kishimoto:

On the offshore heliport issue, I have reiterated, 'I will wait for the Governor's decision.' Now that the Governor has expressed his opposition considering general circumstances in Okinawa, the issue has been resolved. Thus, the offshore military base debate that has deeply divided the community no longer exists. This mayoral election, therefore, is an election as usual; the base is not the issue in this election. Personally, I wish the Governor had taken a stance with us (Mayor of Nago) last year in January, when a decision had to be made whether or not to accept the government's preparatory investigation of the construction site. If he disagreed with the heliport construction at all, it should have been then, when the real pain started for the Nago citizens.

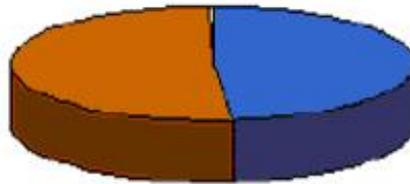


Figure 2. Election result (voting rate 82.35%) : Kishimoto Tateo 51.76% (Brown), Tamaki Yoshikazu 48.10% (Blue), Tsujiyama Kiyoshi 0.14% (Yellow)

Total voters	31,567
Valid votes	31,400
Tamaki Yoshikazu	15,103
Kishimoto Tateo	16,253
Tsujiyama Kiyoshi	44
Invalid votes	167

Many voters who voted against the heliport at the referendum voted for Kishimoto at the mayoral election.

Okinawa Gubernatorial Election, November 1998

In November 1999, Governor Inamine Keiichi, victorious in the 1998 election, declared that the shore off Henoko next to Camp Schwab in Nago was the construction site of the new military 'airport', part of which would be available for local, commercial use. On 27 December, Kishimoto Tateo, Mayor of Nago, conditionally accepted this, and, on the following day, the Cabinet Meeting agreed on the 'Policy on relocation of the Futenma Air Station'. The decisions made at this Cabinet Meeting adjusted to the conditions of acceptance by Nago City and Okinawa Prefecture. It was agreed that the Futenma Air Station replacement facility would be used by both the US military and the local commercial sector; the period of its use would be restricted by a time limit to be agreed between Japan and the US; and a tripartite treaty on the conditions of base operations would have to be agreed between Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture, and the Government of Japan.

In the following year, after the G8 summit in Kyushu and Okinawa, the Futenma Air Station Replacement Facility Committee met frequently. Opponents of the relocation focussed on problems associated with construction, such as the destructive effects on the environment, and campaigned internationally to protect the Okinawa dugong.

In July 2002, the basic plan for the Futenma replacement facility was agreed. In February of the same year, Kishimoto, incumbent mayor of Nago, was re-elected, defeating relocation opponent (this author) by the substantial margin of 9,000 votes (20,356 to 11,148). In November, Governor Inamine was also re-elected by a significant margin, 359,604 votes to Mr Yoshimoto's 148,401, and Mr Aragaki's 46,230.

The 'Public Opinion Paradox': The Election and Poll Result

The conflicting results of the 1997 referendum and the 1998 mayoral election have been referred to as the 'public opinion paradox'. Okinawan voters responded to opinion polls by opposing the new military base construction; but at election times, they placed greatest importance on economic rejuvenation and implicitly accepted construction of the new base.

***Asahi Shinbun* Poll Result: Okinawan Citizens on 2006 Gubernatorial Election**

November 14:

1. 52 per cent chose economic rejuvenation as the priority issue (6 out of 10 of this group preferred Mr Nakaima for the governor's position)
2. 26 per cent chose the base issue (7 out of 10 of this group preferred Ms Itokazu Keiko)
3. 48 per cent opposed relocation of Futenma to any other location in Okinawa
4. 9 per cent approved the relocation
5. 33 per cent disapproved the government's plan, but accepted the relocation of Futenma to somewhere in Okinawa

Election Day (November 19), questioned at the exits of voting booths:

1. 56 per cent regarded economic rejuvenation as the priority issue (67 per cent of this group voted for Nakaima and 32 per cent Itokazu)
2. 26 per cent chose the base issue (among this group, 84 per cent voted for Itokazu and 15% Nakaima)

Asahi poll results

Taking these results into consideration, the parties opposed to the base tried to win by expanding their support base as much as possible. However, they lost both elections in 2006 – Governorship of Okinawa and Mayorship of Nago – partly because of the internecine divisions within the opposition camp.

On Election Day the media reported Ms Itokazu Keiko, the anti-base candidate, was likely to win, according to exit polls. The successor of the former Governor backed up by the LDP-Komeito coalition, Nakaima Hirokazu, nevertheless won, thanks at least in some measure to the absentee votes organized and collected by local companies before the Election Day.

In choosing a candidate for the Nago mayoral election earlier in January 2006, the base opponents (and the progressive party supporters) suffered from the similar split that had plagued the gubernatorial election. For mayor of Nago, the opposition forces endorsed an unusually conservative candidate. Those who disapproved this decision, however, supported another candidate. Because of the inability to unify and concentrate oppositional votes, Mr Shimabukuro Yoshikazu, endorsed by the LDP-Komeito coalition, won the mayoral election. (Mr Kishimoto did not run this time, because of ill health, and he died shortly after the election.)

Just before the mayoral election, the US and Japanese governments proposed a new plan for the replacement of Futenma Air Station. In the context of the overall US military reorganisation in East Asia, the construction site was to be shifted from Henoko to the north, to the coast of Camp Schwab, where an even larger airport would be built, with two runways laid in a V-shape. Mr Shimabukuro, the new mayor, after making a campaign promise not to accept this new plan, after winning the election agreed to it. Similarly, Okinawan Governor Nakaima also promised opposition to the V-shaped replacement facility plan but is currently expected to agree subject to minor adjustments.

Both elections in 2006 raised serious concerns about the integrity of Okinawa's democracy, across the political and ideological spectrum. These concerns involved:

1. Lack of transparency: pre-arranged absentee voting decided the election results.
2. Election promises that were ignored or assigned insufficient weight.

The most basic democratic principles are at stake. Yet the issue is not simply about the Okinawan citizens' public awareness, or about how 'democratic' Okinawans are as a people. It is a question of the pressures inflicted on them by the Japanese government, which seems determined to use any means to achieve its objectives.

Elections and Political Activism

Only the government of Japan can stop the base construction that the citizen activists are demanding. Only the heads of local governments and their parliaments can publicly represent the collective will of the community. Unfortunately, when it comes to selecting mayors and governors, opponents of base construction have repeatedly lost important elections.

In Okinawa (perhaps not just in Okinawa), it cannot be denied that the media plays a conservative role. This is done by exaggerating ideological differences between conservatives and progressives, and by commentaries using arbitrary judgements, deepening divisions among residents and feeding their disgust and apathy.

The 1997 referendum was the expression of collective will of the citizens of Nago. It represented residents' views. Does this indicate the existence of 'civil society'? According to Douglas Lummis, the original definition of 'civil society' is 'a realm separate from the government'. [2] The referendum in 1997 was an activity characteristic of a civil society, namely, not organized by the government. Indeed, it was all the more an act of civil society because the government persistently tried to interfere with it. We need a healthy civil society free from the 'public opinion paradox'. Without it, Nago residents' rejection of the marine base, expressed through the referendum, will never become a reality.

The difficulty is how to cultivate such a civil society, how to negotiate the gap between the politics of election and activism. Unfortunately we have not been able to do this, myself included.

The new base construction could start at any time, even though it has been stalled for a decade since the SACO agreement. Governor Nakaima and Mayor of Nago City Shimabukuro are different from the combination of Inamine and Kishimoto. The latter team were attacked for being irresponsible and non-assertive; but their stance may also be seen as one of passive disobedience against the state from their powerless position as local government officials.

The most urgent task for us is to overcome the gap between citizen activism and election politics.

2. The Political Economy of Okinawan Bases

Following the schoolgirl rape case in 1995, the indignation shown by the Okinawan people rose so as to threaten the Japanese government. The government responded with a series of economic compensation measures for Okinawa, in addition to inventing the SACO program. The subsidies, mainly focused on the construction industry, did not work as hoped at the time of referendum, but things started to change after it.

'Shimada Commission' Projects

In August 1996, a private consultative body was established under the Chief Cabinet Secretary. Formally named 'Commission on Okinawan Cities, Towns and Villages hosting US Bases', commonly it was known as the 'Shimada Commission' after its chair. Its aim was to reduce the local people's frustration about the continuing military presence.

The 'Shimada Commission' provided funding on different terms:

- Projects previously impossible under a partial subsidy system were given 100 per cent government funding;
- The local governments of cities, towns and villages could negotiate directly with the Cabinet and the Defence Facility Bureau;
- Because the projects were not classified as 'public works', public funding would not be given when renovation was required in the future.

From 1997, 38 industrial projects and 47 plans were approved to proceed by stages towards completion in 2007. The total budget to 2006 was 75.54 billion yen, and 34 industrial plans had been completed by the time of the 2005 financial year.

Of municipal grants in the period up until 2005, Nago City had received 8.188 billion yen, second only to the 15.869 billion yen grant received by Kadena Town (which hosts Kadena US Air Base). The largest sum paid to Nago went to the Neo Park International Species Protection Research Center (3.322 billion yen, including land purchase cost and the cost of rescuing an institution then on the brink of bankruptcy).

The Shimada Commission projects were assigned the role of integrating into the market economy public sector industries in municipalities encumbered with military bases. As Chair Shimada Haruo explained, 'Above all, feasibility, competitiveness and self-sufficiency for market survival are required'.^[3]

Shimada's projects differ qualitatively from traditional Okinawan 'public works'. They were used as part of the experiment to drastically alter the nature of governance along neo-liberal lines, as was later exemplified nationally in the privatization of Japan's postal service.

In response to the Okinawans' reaction to the 1995 schoolgirl rape case, Tokyo implemented a variety of schemes designed to placate Okinawans. The Shimada Commission's economic development schemes served only to erode Okinawa's 'self-sufficiency' and 'sustainability'.

Growing Base-related Income Dependence

Since being chosen as the site for base construction, Nago City's economy has shown classic bubble symptoms.

Nago's income originating from military bases includes:

- Rent (asset revenue);
- Supplementary subsidies for cities, towns and villages hosting nationally-owned facilities;
- Projects subsidised by the Law related to the Maintenance of Livelihood Environment (mainly Clause 8: 'Subsidised Projects for Stabilizing Residents' Well-being').

Since 1997 the following have also been added:

- Shimada Commission projects;
- Subsidies and grants to SACO-related projects;
- Public and non-public economic rejuvenation projects for the Northern region of Okinawa's main island.

Base-related income increased two-fold between 1997, the year of referendum, and 1998 (from 2.38 billion to 4.766 billion yen), and then kept growing as the government of Japan and Okinawa Prefecture reached basic agreement in the Replacement Facility Committee, reaching around 9 billion by 2003.

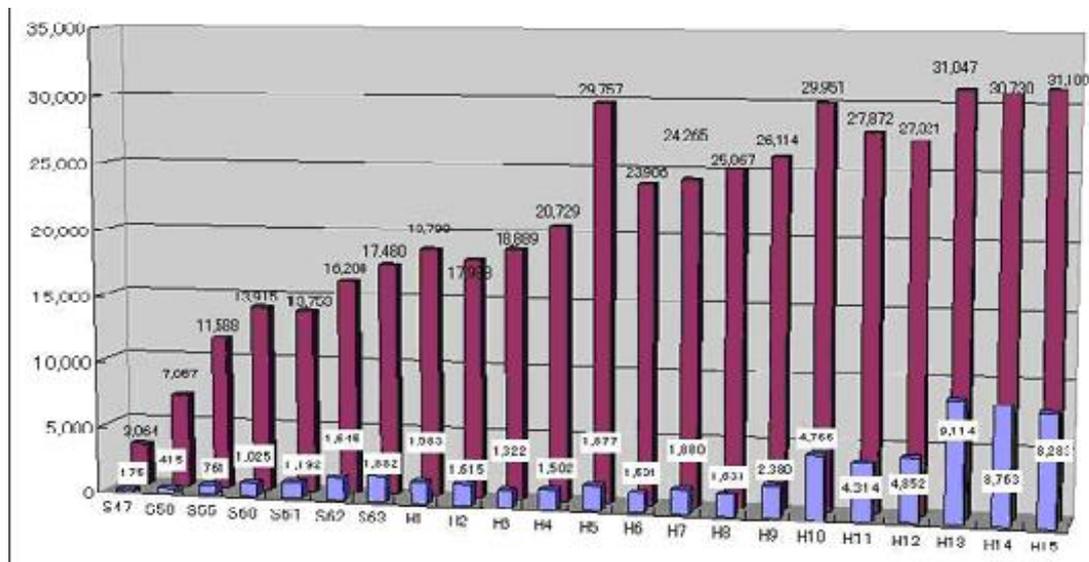


Figure 3. Ratio of Military Base-related Revenues in Nago City's Budgets. Base-related is indicated in blue, the total in purple. H9 indicates Heisei 9, 1997. Source: Nago-shi Kikaku Soumubu Kikaku Zaisei-ka (Financial Planning Section, Nago City Council).

Main projects funded by military base-related subsidies include:

- Shimada Commission projects: facility maintenance of Meio University and the Neo Park International Species Protection Research Center;
- SACO-funded projects: construction of regional facilities such as community center buildings;
- Projects for the economic rejuvenation of the Northern region not classified as public works: i.e. facility maintenance of the 'IT special zone'.

Meio University and the Neo Park Research Center can hardly be considered market-competitive. By taking on these projects, Nago City was accepting the high risk of future expenditure to maintain the facilities once built that would likely far exceed the financial resources of a local government. It was an extremely dangerous path.

Since 1998, the growing share of revenue generated by subsidies linked to military bases has also increased total revenues. However, as the political motive that generated these subsidies ceases to exist, the revenue will disappear, and the quality of public services that residents receive – the most important public goods local government should provide – will deteriorate.

In 2001, with 9.1 billion yen coming from military base-related subsidies, Nago City's current ratio was 87.5%. An adequate current ratio, which indicates financial elasticity and resilience, for urban municipalities is considered around 75 per cent, and a rate of 80 per cent or higher is unhealthy. In 2004, Nago City's current ratio rose to 95 per cent. At this rate, the financial section of Nago City Council estimates it will reach 100 per cent in 2010.

The City Council ostensibly aims at sound financial management, but so long as it pursues the immediate economic effects created by the new base, its financial position will only deteriorate.

Cabinet's 2006 Decision: Determination to keep Okinawa a 'Base Island'

Of the governmental decisions made on Futenma relocation, Cabinet decisions have the greatest weight. On 30 May 2006, the decision made on 'Government Initiatives for Restructuring US Forces in Japan' overrode the 'Government's Policies on re-locating the Futenma Air Station', an earlier decision reached on 28 December 1999. Among others, two important decisions made in 1999 were cancelled:

- 1) the decision that the new Air Station would be partially opened for local commercial use and that a 15-year limit was to be imposed on US military use.
- 2) that a special economic rejuvenation scheme for the northern region was to be implemented.

Former Governor Inamine and Nago Mayor Kishimoto had insisted on the conditions under (1), among others, but now that Inamine has retired and Kishimoto is deceased, current political leaders are unlikely to bring them back to the negotiating table. Regarding (2), in 1999, the cabinet promised the then Governor that special subsidies were to be paid to northern municipalities irrespective of base construction. That promise has since been forgotten or ignored, and, once again, current local government is unlikely to demand subsidies for communities not involved in base relocation.

After 1999, the Cabinet Office promised special developmental support for the northern region. It was the only favourable term Okinawa secured from the government. *Not any more.*

Since the 1995 rape case, the Cabinet Chief has acted as de facto minister of Okinawan affairs, replacing the Okinawa Development Agency. In other words, the Cabinet Office has been in charge of all Okinawan special development projects and schemes, including the Shimada Commission Projects. In 2001, the Okinawa Development Agency was abolished and the new Ministry of Okinawa and Northern Territory Affairs, located within the Cabinet Office, took over. However, it was the Defence Agency that dominated the making of 2006 Cabinet decisions, over the Cabinet Office's head. In January 2007, the Defence Agency was upgraded to become Ministry of Defence.

Historically, the Japanese institution that governs Okinawa has also been transformed from the 'Development Agency' to the 'Cabinet Office', and now to the 'Ministry of Defence'. What does this mean?

Although Okinawan political leaders have been elected, promising economic development first and foremost, the economic development of Okinawa is now controlled by the Ministry of Defence. This fact underpins the government of Japan's determination to maintain the island of Okinawa as a US base island.

3. Henoko's Geopolitical Location

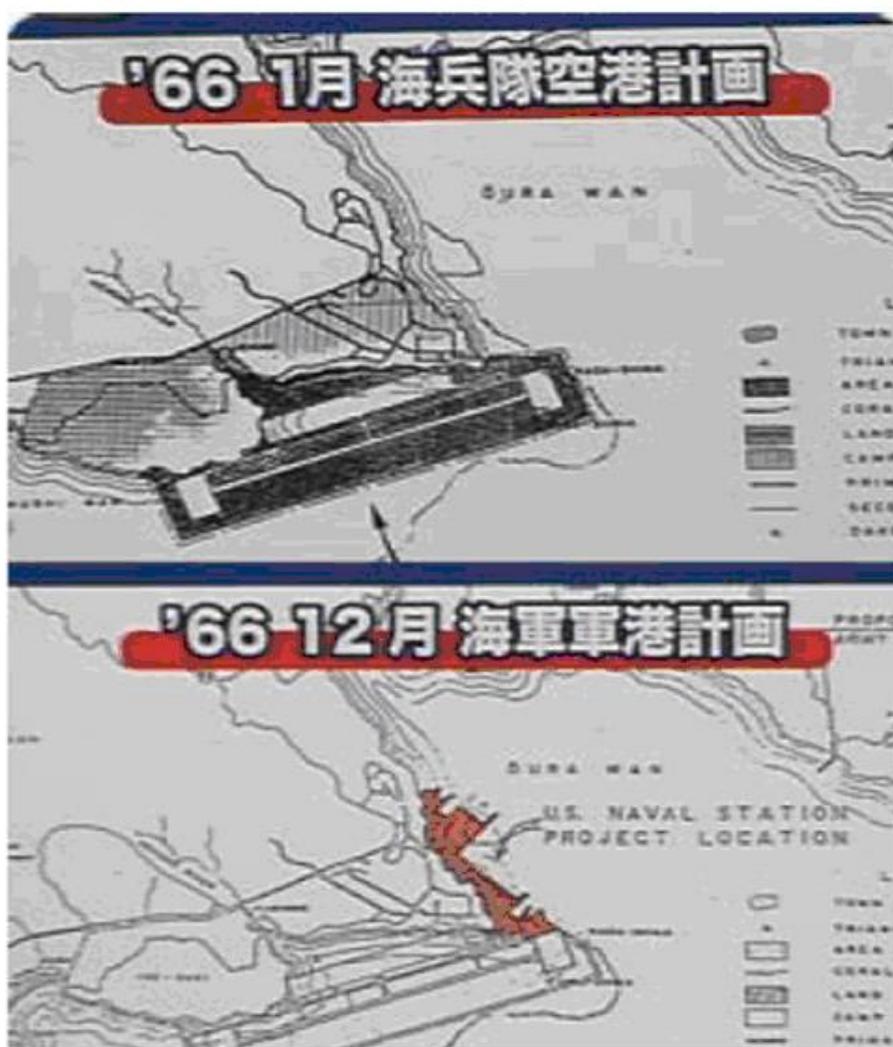
Opposition protest is not the only reason why the construction of a new US base in Henoko has been suspended for 10 years. Throughout, the Mayor of Nago has been strongly opposed to base construction. Nago citizens' disagreement as expressed by the referendum, the conditions of acceptance imposed by the Governor and Mayor, and environmental concerns have all constituted obstacles in the way of new base construction. Despite all these difficulties, why do the US and Japanese governments insist on Henoko as the substitute for Futenma?

What the US Military Wants

The oft-cited myth that Camp Schwab in Henoko is the only base in Okinawa that was built on locals' invitation is groundless. What is closer to the truth is that the local landowners agreed to the terms of lease offered by the US military government, the highest government authority at the time, in order to prevent the loss of landowners' interests and benefits to the community.[4] Any explanation of the reason for selecting this location that underestimates Henoko's political resistance would also be false.

At the time of the Nago referendum in 1997, the new base was going to take the form of a removable marine heliport. In 1999, that was changed to a joint military-civilian 'airport'. In 2006 the new base was further widened to require coastal landfill. In the 10 years of delay, the two governments have exponentially increased the capacity of the substitute air base.

As reported by an Okinawan local TV network QAB, two plans were drawn up by the US Navy and the Marine Corps in 1966 for an airport in Henoko. Both included a berth adjacent to Oura Bay deep enough to accommodate large vessels. The recent US forces realignment council agreed on a plan with a V-shaped runway, and what is called an aircraft parking apron. It is undeniable that this apron would be used as a berth.



Above: reproductions of two plans of an airport in Henoko/Oura Bay prepared by the US Marine Corps and Navy, in January and December, 1966. Source: [QAB homepage](#)

The planned construction site has grown much larger through the 10 years of delay. It is no longer a substitute for Futenma Air Station, but it now appears that Japan is constructing what the US military has wanted to build since the 1960s.[5]

The US and Japanese Governments' Rationale for the Bases

How do the two governments justify the integration and reduction of US forces in Okinawa?

Since the initial SACO agreement of 1996, the US Government's view on integration and reduction has been consistent. The US bases in

Okinawa must stay. However, those in urban areas in the central and southern regions are inconvenient for military operations, and therefore should be moved to rural and sparsely populated areas, or combined with bases in other areas. This is why the benefit of 'packaging' base facilities has been reiterated in the 2006 US military realignment council between the US and Japanese governments.

The overall view held by the government of Japan is not clear, but my understanding is that it hopes to accommodate US demands while appeasing municipal governments.

There are some obstacles to US military realignments in Okinawa that are impossible to avoid:

- 1) any relocation of bases will meet with local resident opposition;
- 2) because the desired sites in the northern region are sparsely populated, relocation there would disturb the environment, including protected wildlife species.

In the absence of some other alternative, Japan seems determined to build a brand new military airbase (plus a military port), aka Futenma substitute, giving in to all US demands. The price we pay will include precious and rare natural resources and many other special qualities of Okinawa.

What are the rationales for constructing the new base here? What are the compelling strategic reasons for limiting the relocation site of Futenma Air Station to Okinawa? Are they good enough to convince the world?

The puzzling thing is that the US does not necessarily seem to agree. During a US and Japanese Vice Ministerial discussion on US realignment in April 2004, the US suggested to Japan:

- transferring 2,600 troops in total (800 artillery soldiers, 900 from the Marine regiment, 700 from transport and supply units, and 200 from supply units) from Okinawa to mainland Japan;
- temporarily relocating the helicopter unit from Futenma to Kadena Air Base within 3 years.

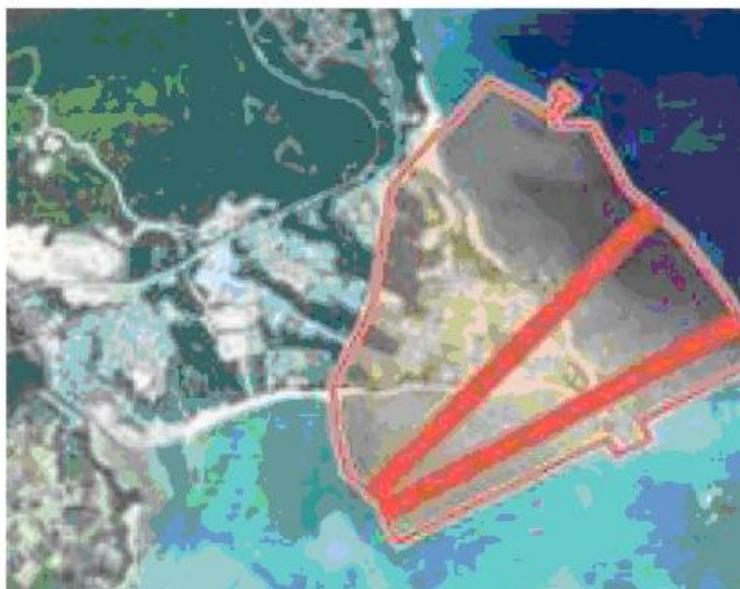
Japan postponed responding to these suggestions, and, in the end ignored them.[6] In November 2006, the then Defence Agency Chief referred to another US suggestion to replace Futenma with a 500-meter long runway within Camp Schwab.

Neither expanding the capacity nor relocating to another Okinawan location is essential to the Futenma closure. Why has there been such a strong push to build an upgraded US air base in Henoko, against all odds?

The answer probably includes many factors – Japan's international security policy, the Japanese Constitution, Okinawa as a colony, the nation's independence and the hypocrisy and wish for peace on the part of the majority of people.

Conclusion: Reasons for Continued Resistance

Finally, let me reflect on future public policy scenarios. The shape of the runway – whether the current V-shape plan is appropriate or not – is currently subject to negotiations between Nago City, Okinawa Prefecture and the Government of Japan. Sooner or later, the current plan will be accepted by local political leaders.



Aerial projection of the V-shaped runway

After agreement is reached by the Prefecture and Nago City, events will unfold in roughly three steps:

- 1) Agreement on basic plan;
- 2) Environmental assessment (following the submission of a methodology report, investigations will be conducted and then a preliminary report will be submitted.)
- 3) Construction.

When the agreement on the basic plan is reached, the government will promptly commence the environmental assessment by issuing a

methodology report. The residents are already familiar with the procedures and necessary action from the previous assessment procedures associated with the then plan for a civilian-military airport.

Environmental assessments in Japan are basically conducted by the industry. Industrial projects may be adjusted in minor ways but are rarely cancelled because of destructive environmental effects.

Yet citizens' groups have built networks that enable the mobilisation of international public opinion. Persistent campaigning and pressure for the cancellation of this project could change the situation. One citizens' group has taken the case of excessive military presence and the abuse of Okinawans' human rights to the UN. Their action may contribute to such change. There are multiple grounds on which citizens can mount public actions.

Thanks to the war against terror, it has become much easier for states to legally conduct themselves in ways that are immoral and authoritarian. It is an illusion that peaceful and free life can be enjoyed without strife.

The drilling investigation of the construction site in Henoko, necessary for environmental assessment, was blocked by determined citizen action. It would be impossible to expect a mass participation by ordinary citizens in another such dangerous blockade. Nevertheless, this kind of direct action is not the only method of civil resistance.

There are many tasks left for those of us who favour a robust civil society: creating multiple forms of resistance to the reckless projects of the government; inventing words that can communicate that such resistance is humanely sensible and reasonable; critically examining municipal and central government policy and formulating alternatives; producing case studies of autonomous economic development and implementing them.

Notes

[1] See, for example, Miyagi Yasuhiro (translated by Gavan McCormack) '[Okinawa - Rising Magma](#)', *Japan Focus*, December 4, 2005.

[2] Kina Shokichi and Charles Douglas Lummis, *Hansen heiwa no techou: anata shika dekinai atarashii koto (Anti-war and peace handbook: new things only you can do)*, 2006, Shuueisha Shinsho, 0334A, p18.

[3] Quoted from Chair's comments from '[The Report on the Advisory Panel's Discussion at Initiating Commission on Okinawan Cities, Towns and Villages hosting US Bases](#)' See my (Miyagi) essay written in 2000, '[Canary's Song in a Coal Mine: A Critique of the Shimada Commission Projects](#)'

[4] Henoko District, *Henokoshi (History and Culture of Henoko)*, 2002, Henoko, Okinawa, p 632

[5] See Makishi Yoshikazu (translated by Miyume Tanji), 'US Dream Come True? The New Henoko Sea Base and Okinawan Resistance', *Japan Focus*, February 12, 2006

[6] Hisae Masahiko, *Beigun Saihen (US Military Re-Alignment)* Koudansha Gendai Shinsho, p 91

Miyagi Yasuhiro, born in Nago in northern Okinawa in 1959, was a central figure in the Nago City Plebiscite Promotion Council (later Council against the Heliport Base) from 1997, and served as a Nago City Councilor from 1998 to 2006. He is also joint representative to the Dugong Protection Campaign Center and author of several works on Okinawa issues and the dugong. Email: miyagi@soleil.ocn.ne.jp

This article was written for Japan Focus. Miyume Tanji is a Research Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Australia, Asia and the Pacific (CASAAP), Curtin University of Technology, Australia and the author of [Myth, Protest and Struggles in Okinawa](#). She translated and introduced this article for Japan Focus.

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