

Anti-Military and Environmental Movements in Okinawa (draft)

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I. Background: The U.S. Military Presence in Okinawa

Okinawa, Japan is a major hub of U.S. Armed Forces in the Pacific. Over 75% of the land area of U.S. bases in Japan is in Okinawa, and over 60% of the U.S. forces deployed to Japan are stationed there. The estimated number of American forces and dependents currently in Okinawa is around 50,000-55,000. Main military bases include Kadena Air Base, the largest U.S. airbase outside of the U.S. and home of the Air Force's 18th Wing, and a number of U.S. Marine Corp bases and training facilities, including Camp Hansen and the adjoining Central Training Area; the controversial Marine Corp Air Station Futenma; and the Jungle Warfare Training Center (formerly the Northern Training Area).

Historically, the people of Okinawa have been rather reluctant hosts to the bases, but have had little say in the matter. The bases on Okinawa originate from World War II, with the first ones being Japanese airstrips and garrisons in places such as Yomitan, in Central Okinawa, and all over the southern part of the island. U.S. control of the island and the presence of the U.S. military in Okinawa dates back to the battle of Okinawa.

The battle of Okinawa, waged from March to June 1945, was the bloodiest of the Pacific War. During the battle more Okinawa civilians were killed than civilian deaths in

either the Hiroshima or Nagasaki atomic bomb attacks. While precise estimates are impossible to accurately verify, most estimates use benchmarks of around 150,000 civilian deaths, some one-quarter of Okinawa's population at the time. The damage done to the natural environment was also staggering. During the eighty day battle an estimated 7.5 million howitzer rounds, over 60,000 naval shells, 20,000 rockets, and almost 400,000 hand grenades were fired just by the American side¹. Beyond the horrors this caused to civilians and combatants alike, the effect was the utter environmental transformation of large sections of the island, especially the south part, where the most intense fighting and bombardments took place. Thus from at least this time onward, the effects of war and the presence of military forces is associated in Okinawa with tremendous environmental degradation.

It is important to recognize the tremendous impacts this battle has had on Okinawan views of war and military, and the influence this has had on contemporary and historical Okinawan opposition to the bases, for as one U.S. Naval officer was quoted as saying, "Of the many places on this globe that were touched by the withering blast of war I doubt if in any the life of the people has been more completely changed than on Okinawa."² Furthermore, some Japanese military historians later admitted that Okinawa was deliberately sacrificed. The leaders of its defense were aware of the impossibility of their victory, but viewed their task as necessary to weaken the enemy before the dreaded invasion of "home soil." For despite being a part of Japan politically since the Meiji era, Okinawa was still viewed as something quite apart from the home islands. Its people were racially, linguistically, and culturally different. This difference in the eyes of the mainlanders ultimately rendered Okinawa as "expendable" in Japanese government eyes;

a pattern which has continued from World War II, some would argue, until the present day. To the continuing anger of many Okinawans, Japan has never issued anything even resembling an apology for the suffering and sacrifices endured by the civilian population of Okinawa during the Pacific War. The Ministry of Education banned the mention of Japanese murders of Okinawan civilians during the battle from textbooks. An understanding of the suffering Okinawans endured and the attitude of the Japanese government towards them is integral to understanding the enduring strength of Okinawan anti-base and peace movements.

After the battle the US began constructing bases in Okinawa, both on former bases and on other available plots of flat land, which more often than not was good agriculture land. Construction projects, whether roads, arsenals, camps, or airfields were designed with no consideration of previous patterns of land use or land ownership. This sowed the seeds of resentment about U.S. land confiscation policies, and this tension continued as U.S. confiscations of land intensified throughout the 1950s and early 1960s.

At the war's end, it was decided that Okinawa and all of the Ryukyu islands south of 30 degrees north latitude would be indefinitely administered by the U.S. As the communists achieved victory in China in 1949, Okinawa became a new strategic locale for U.S. troops. Renewed base construction started in 1950, and quickly expanded as the Korean war broke out in the same year. By the late 1950s all of the U.S.'s ground troops in Japan had been moved to Okinawa.

Base construction, often by land seizure, continued through the 1960s. Eventually, by 1967, the U.S. had 51,586.3 acres of private/municipal property under lease, and 24,147.72 acres of public domain land being used free of charge. This area was 13.8% of

the Ryukyu Islands total land area, and 10.9% of the arable land. At its height, the US had bases on over 25% of Okinawa's land area. For Okinawans, most of whom had only been able to privately own land since 1888, this caused tremendous changes to their lifestyles and livelihoods. Conflicts over land confiscation were the key issue in increasing public opposition to the US bases, although environmental issues, crimes and accidents by military personnel were also factors. Okinawan and Japanese pacifism, were also major issues, especially in light of their opposition to U.S. foreign policy in Southeast Asia. Increased public opposition eventually helped result in the politically strong reversion movement, leading to the U.S.'s decision to grant Okinawa's reversion back to Japanese control in 1972.

After reversion the US bases on Okinawa remained, and although some have been consolidated and others returned, about 18% of Okinawa's land area is still occupied by U.S. bases. This land was generally prime agricultural land, so the U.S. bases have directly impacted Okinawan land use and economic patterns. Agriculture was forced into hillside areas as the U.S. confiscated flat land for bases, and the economy became by stages highly base-dependent, although since reversion this has largely changed to a dependency upon largess from the central government.

Local opposition to the bases has ebbed and flowed. Opposition has tended to coalesce around key events such as the rape of a 12 year-old girl by three servicemen in 1995. This galvanized the anti-U.S. base movement and led to protest assemblies of up to 85,000. Local opposition is also partially dependent upon the stance of the current political leadership of the prefecture. During the rape incident and trial in 1995-1996, the opposition movement was strongly supported by then-Governor Masahide Ota, despite

his prior pro-base stance. The election of pro-business Governor Kenichi Inamine in 1998 and his reelection in 2002 dampened public opposition to the bases, although protests have occasionally gathered steam over particular incidents such as hit and run cases, rape incidents, and the environmental effects of the pending relocation of Futenma, about which more below.

II. Environmental Impacts of the U.S. Bases

It goes without saying that military bases produced environmental degradation of various kinds. In the case of Okinawa, where such large proportion of the surface area of the main island is covered with bases, the bases have had a number of direct environmental impacts. However, they have also indirectly affected Okinawa's environment through their effects upon its political economy, and thus, political ecology.

Direct impacts have included toxic dumping, water pollution, noise pollution, land degradation and soil erosion. Indirectly, the bases have contributed to Okinawa's increasing economic dependence on construction and public works, the damming of Okinawan rivers and the building of large-scale dams, and other actions linked to the peculiar political economy which Okinawa first developed under U.S. occupation. Moreover the bases have taken up valuable farm and urban land, increasing pressures both on marginal uplands as well as on the densely populated urban sprawl of southern Okinawa.³

Land degradation is an especially serious problem. On one of the large bases, the Central Training Area, in Okinawa's north there has been extensive firing of artillery shells. This has led to deforestation, frequent fires, vegetative denudation, and soil

erosion. In addition, the area is now covered with unexploded ordnance. This area may well be the worst case of direct environmental degradation caused by the U.S. military in Okinawa, however cleanup of the area is not the responsibility of the U.S, and the future status of the area has not been discussed by the Japanese and US governments.

On the opposite extreme though is the other large military base in the North, now called the Jungle Warfare Training Center. This area is extremely undeveloped, with only a few facilities, one main road, and a few small helipads. The main use of this area is for jungle warfare training, which involves neither the firing of live bullets nor the use of many vehicles. There therefore have been extremely minimal environmental impacts on this area. In essence, this base is the de facto largest semi-wilderness area in Okinawa, and certainly by far the largest contiguous protected area in the Ryukyu Islands. Recent surveys have found scores of endangered endemic species which are found *only* in this area.⁴

Meanwhile, in similar ecological areas outside of the base, the forests are being cut and the land cleared. This so-called land improvement is supposed to result in increased agriculture land but in reality most fields lie barren. A cynic might refer to these as social welfare projects for Okinawan contractors. In addition, roads with various steep cuts have been built into the forest, expanding human use of it. The roads are virtually unused but the damage remains. These activities have now imperiled the Yanbaru region to the extent that numerous Okinawan NGOs have lobbied for its benefit.

Overall, Okinawa's environmental problems are significant. They include deforestation, soil erosion, coral reef degradation, the depletion of fisheries, ground water depletion, ground water pollution, hazardous waste and toxic dumping, riverine pollution

and siltation, land salinization, the destruction of wetlands and mangroves, coastal erosion, marine pollution, and the depletion of biological diversity. Okinawa suffers especially from a shortage of water, surface water pollution, soil erosion, deforestation, and the degradation of coral environments. All of its terrestrial and aquatic environments are endangered, some catastrophically so. In addition, environmental problems associated with quality of life issues include noise pollution and destruction of the scenic environment. Despite this, Okinawa has never had an environmental movement to rival that of the mainland. This can be attributed to a number of causes, but one is the fact that environmental problems in Okinawa have seldom been associated with immediate hazards to human health. This is ultimately the case because the main culprit in Japan's toxic crises, industry, has a disproportionately small presence in Okinawa. Thus the main catalyst for environmental grassroots movements in Japan has largely been missing from Okinawa.

However, Okinawa does have an obvious target of protest which is less common than the rest of Japan – the U.S. bases. Because of this, anti-military and environmental groups in Okinawa have a symbiotic relationship somewhat different to that elsewhere in Japan. Regardless of the reality of which factors are the main factors causing environmental degradation in Okinawa, for many Okinawans, struggles to protect the environment and struggles to remove the bases or prevent their expansion are inextricably intertwined.

III. Okinawan Peace and Environmental Groups

Okinawa has never had an environmental movement to rival mainland Japan's. This can be attributed to a number of causes, but one is the fact that environmental problems in Okinawa have seldom been associated with immediate hazards to human health. This is ultimately the case because the main culprit in Japan's toxic crises, industry, has a disproportionately small presence in Okinawa. Thus the main catalyst for environmental grassroots movements in Japan has largely been missing from Okinawa.⁵

Rather than discussing the long and complex history of peace movements and environmental movements in Okinawa, I want to just make a few observations about the ongoing coalescence of these groups which exists at present. Currently it is difficult to divorce the peace and anti-base movements in Okinawa from the environmental movement. While this is not a completely recent trend it has been greatly amplified in the last five to ten years, as protests against the bases have increasingly turned to environmentalism for their rationale and local groups have reached out internationally to large environmental organizations for support.

The last few years have seen a flurry of new environmental groups take root in Okinawa, while some of the previously most active groups seem to be dormant. Newer groups include *Dugong Network Okinawa*, *People's Network Against Construction and Strengthening of Military Base*, *Okinawa-Yaeyama-Shiraho Association for the Protection of Sea and Life*, *Dugong Protection Fund Committee*, *Association to Walk in the Nature of Yanbaru*, *No to Heliport Association of 10 Districts north of Futami*, *No to Heliport 10,000 Voices Movement*, *Nago Citizen's Network*, *Okinawa International Forum for People's Security*, *Save the Dugong Foundation*, and many others. Longer established group include the *Okinawa Environmental Network*, *the Okinawa Clean*

Beach Club and its associated group *OCEAN*, and the *Okinawa Citizen's Recycle Movement*, among others.

Two of the main groups exemplifying the coalescence of struggles against the bases and for environmental protection are the Okinawa Environmental Network and the Save the Dugong Foundation. One of the most well-known Okinawan environmental groups currently is the Okinawa Environmental Network, headed by a number of professors associated with Okinawa University, especially Dr. Jun Ui, the “godfather” of environmental studies in Japan. The Okinawa Environmental Network (OEN) was formed in 1997 after the Japan Environmental Conference was organized by Ui in Okinawa.⁶ OEN has been involved with a number of controversial environmental issues in Okinawa: protesting a major land reclamation project currently underway at Awase tidal flats, investigating water pollution caused by livestock breeding in southern Okinawa, and investigating lead pollution from shooting on U.S. Bases. As with most Okinawan environmental groups, currently the main issue OEN is involved with is the pending relocation of Marine Corp Air Station Futenma to Henoko.

OEN has organized two international conferences on environmental issues, the first coinciding with the G8 Summit of 2000 held in Okinawa, the second in March of 2003. These conferences are efforts to both hear the views of other organizations working with military/environment issues from around the world, as well as to further publicize Okinawa’s military/environment issues. Participants thus represent a range of organizations and nations, with an emphasis on Okinawa, Japan, and the Asia-Pacific region. Much attention is focused on the effects of military bases upon the environment. Nonetheless, the OEN does not take a completely adversarial relationship with the U.S.

military on Okinawa itself. In fact, it clearly relishes the opportunity to work with officials from the U.S. military as is evident by the Deputy Environmental officer of Environmental Branch, Marine Corps presentation as part of their 2003 conference, and other environmental officers from the U.S military have told me they have had cordial relationships with OEN.

Despite this, the level of anti-military sentiment expressed by OEN members is quite high. In interviews I conducted with Ui and other main members in June of 2002 it was clear that the military bases were viewed as being a large component of the environmental problems in Okinawa, but also that, irregardless of their environmental implications, there were social and political rationales for opposition to them.

Interestingly however, OEN demonstrates an understanding of the role the military plays in Okinawa's political economy and political ecology and the relationship between military bases and the national government's largesse to construction projects in Okinawa. In fact, many of the scholars associated with OEN were some of the first to make clear the ties between the bases and the government's "bribes" to Okinawa prefecture in the form of public works.

Save the Dugong Foundation (SDF) was established in October of 1999. Although ostensibly directed at the preservation of the dugong, whose northernmost breeding grounds are thought to be in the Pacific east of the administrative district of Nago, the movement was formed around the struggle to prevent the construction of a U.S. Marine Corp heliport near Henoko village in eastern Okinawa. This group is part of a larger movement formed in opposition to this base, which if constructed would also have economic impacts as well as significant impacts upon the quality of life of the people of Henoko.⁷ Attracting the most

international attention however have been environmental issues, especially the fate of the dugong.

In a fashion typical of Japanese grassroots organizations, SDF and other myriad groups with overlapping goals are working together in networks of convenience. In Okinawa, local groups often interface with mainland Japanese groups as well. During the 2000 Nago G-8 Summit, a statement to the press about the impacts of the proposed Henoko heliport was signed not only by SDF but also by Dugong Network Okinawa, Association To Save The Dugongs Of The Northern-most Habitat (from Yokohama), We Mammal (from Kyoto), Supporting Fund for Movements of Saving Dugongs (from Kanagawa), World Wide Fund For Nature Japan (WWF-Japan, based in Tokyo) and twenty other NGOs. In a more recent statement the Save the Dugong Foundation in association with WWF-Japan and a variety of other organizations addressed both the Henoko heliport issue and another military-environment issue in the Jungle Warfare Training Center (JWTC). As discussed, the JWTC is a large base in the lushly forested low mountains of Yanbaru. With only jungle warfare training in this area, no live fire, few roads, and sparse facilities, environmental impacts and development in the area have been minimal. As a consequence, for Okinawa, this is a highly protected area. Controversy arose in 1999 however over the US Marine Corp's plan to build seven new helipads in the area as replacements for helipads included in land that had been previously returned. These helipads appear to be in areas of pristine forest, which are habitat for a number of endangered species including the Okinawa Rail and Okinawa Woodpecker.

Affiliated with SDF is the Save the Dugong Campaign Center, a Tokyo-based group petitioning the Japanese government to take a number of legal measure to protect

dugong in Japanese waters. In April 2002 they began a campaign to collect 200,000 signatures on a petition demanding that the Japanese government implement three measures to protect the endangered dugong from construction of a new U.S. military air base off the shores of Okinawa. These three measures are:

1. To establish conservation areas for the protection of the dugong under the Law for the Conservation of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora. Protected species status would also help protect dugong's natural habitat, which is in Japan is only around the Northeastern section of Okinawa's main island.

2. Perform an Environmental Impact Assessment using internationally accepted standards for the Henoko heliport construction project. SDCC argues that in Japan EIAs are conducted under the assumption that the plan will go forward despite some environmental damage. They call for the possibility of a "zero option" – that the plan itself be shelved should the environmental damage be considered too great. They also call for public input into the EIA process.

3. Measures to control fishing nets by the Japanese government.

SDCC's petition has been endorsed by the World Wide Fund for Nature Japan, and the Nature Conservation Society of Japan. It currently has over 26,000 signatures.⁸

IV. Henoko and the Coalescence of Okinawa's Anti-Military and Environmental Movements

In Okinawa, peace or anti-military groups and environmental organizations have always had a symbiotic relationship, but these tendencies are becoming increasingly stronger, largely over agreement about the continuing issue of the Henoko airport. The controversy over the plan to relocate Futenma Air Station to a large heliport planned offshore of the village of Henoko, near the current location of Camp Schwab is engendering great opposition, especially from environmentalists, because the base would be constructed in an area which is home to the dugong, an endangered sea mammal similar to the manatee. It is also host to one of the few thriving live coral areas on the eastern coast of Okinawa. Given the state of Okinawa's coastline and existing damage to its coral reefs, protecting and preserving this marine environment is viewed as crucial to many, and the plans to relocate the heliport here have run into substantial local, national, and even international opposition.

While the Japanese government has promised enough cash to Northern Okinawa to buy some local support, they have been harder pressed to paint the picture of the development of the base at Henoko as anything other than an unambiguous environmental disaster. Plans call for the construction of this heliport to be directly on top of the Henoko coral reef. This will endanger a large section of relatively pristine coastline, destroy the peace and harmony of the small fishing village of Henoko, drastically affect the ecology of the area, and in all probability hasten the demise of the dugong, whose habitat's northernmost extent coincides almost exactly with the location for the proposed base.

Since the Henoko plan has been proposed the battle lines between environmental and peace activists on the one hand, and the prefectural and national governments along with the US military on the other, have been dramatically drawn. Protest against the Henoko base has already grown from a local area movement within Okinawa to a prefecture-wide movement, to a Japanese national one, and it is also picking up support in the international arena. Groups have already begun to prepare for lawsuits against the U.S. military while others have run full-page ads in the New York Times and other major U.S. newspapers urging Americans to support the removal of troops from Okinawa. This movement will continue to coalesce around the Henoko base construction proposal for the foreseeable future.

In the most recent developments, the decision about Futenma now lies in the hands of the Council for the Construction of the Relocated Facility, a group of 9 representatives of the Japanese government, Okinawa Prefectural Government, and representatives from Okinawan municipalities. This group includes Governor Inamine, Mayor Kishimoto of Nago, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi and Shigeru Ishiba, the Director General of the National Defense Agency. At their first meeting in January 2003 it became apparent that the dispute over the length of time the base will be used as a military airport was unresolved.⁹ Inamine had said from the outset that he wanted a 15-year limit on use of the base, the U.S. refused to agree to this and it appears that the Japanese government now sides with the U.S. The 15 year limit was a major campaign promise of Inamine's 2002 reelection campaign.¹⁰ (Okinawa Times 2002). With Okinawa not receiving the benefit it had expected - a foreseeable ending to military use of the airport - and especially given currently high levels of condemnation

of the U.S.'s invasion of Iraq, the Okinawan peace movement is mobilized. Combined with the international environmental attention Okinawa will most likely receive as construction starts and the battle over the preservation of the dugong heats up, the political mood in Okinawa could turn quite harshly against the U.S. bases in the relatively near-future. It still remains to be seen whether these newly energized anti-military and environmental movements might then be able to finally duplicate some of the same environmental successes as their mainland counterparts.

¹ Feifer, George, *Tennozan: The Battle of Okinawa and the Atomic Bomb*, (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1992), p. 533.

² Karasik, Daniel. Okinawa: A Problem in Administration and Reconstruction. *The Far Eastern Quarterly*, 7(3), 1948. p.254.

³ J. Taylor, *Environmental Change in Okinawa: A Geographic Assessment of the Role of the U.S. Military*, doctoral dissertation, (Department of Geography, University of Kentucky, 2001).

⁴ Y. Ito, "Diversity of Forest Tree Species in Yanbaru, the Northern Part of Okinawa Island", *Plant Ecology* (133, 1997), p. 125-133, and Y. Ito, K. Miyagi, et al. "Imminent Extinction Crisis among the Endemic Species of the Forests of Yanbaru, Okinawa, Japan", *Oryx* 34(4:2000), p. 305-318.

⁵ J. Taylor, "Environmental Security and Environmental Grassroots Movements in Okinawa, Japan." *Regional Development Dialogue*. (23, 2002), p. 122-132.

⁶ Asahi Shimbun, "NGO can help save Okinawa's Environment", March 3, 2003

⁷ J. Taylor, Okinawa on the Eve of the G-8 Summit, *Geographical Review*, (January 2000), p. 123-130.

⁸ From <http://www.sdcc.jp/E/index.html>

⁹ Okinawa Times, 2002. Final Agreement Reached on Futenma Alternative. August 3, 2002.

http://www.okinawatimes.co.jp/eng/20020803.html#no_1

¹⁰ Okinawa Times, 2002. Inamine reelected, pushes 15 years. November 30, 2002.

http://www.okinawatimes.co.jp/eng/20021130.html#no_1